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The Academic, Personal And Social Barriers Faced By Low-Income Single Mothers Enrolled In Institutions Of Higher Education And Their Impact On Academic Persistence

Bettina Mason
Seton Hall University

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THE ACADEMIC, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL BARRIERS FACED BY LOW-INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS ENROLLED IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THEIR IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERSISTENCE

by

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Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Seton Hall University
2002
ABSTRACT


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This study explores the experiences of single female college students who are financially disadvantaged and raising children, while pursuing their education. In order fully understand the challenges and barriers faced by these women, it is important to realize their motivation to pursue an education, in spite of these challenges. Because of the importance for single mothers to attain financial independence and self-sufficiency, higher education is a central concept of this study.

The literature of the following disciplines were analyzed: (1) the demographics and profiles of the financially disadvantaged single mother college student, (2) the characteristics and history of adults returning to college, (3) the history of welfare reform, and (4) the sociological research on women’s issues as related to higher education.

Although American society has a long tradition regarding education as a means to achieve material security and social status, access to higher education has been extended to certain disadvantaged and deserving groups, such as minorities and war veterans, to enable them to improve the quality of their lives. Unfortunately, this opportunity has not been readily extended to welfare
recipients. The potential of higher education as a means by which financially disadvantaged women could achieve independence and become productive members of society will be addressed in this study, with the primary focus on academic retention.

The subjects were comprised of 45 low-income single mothers, between the ages of 24 and 40, with at least one dependent child, who are enrolled in an institution of higher education in Northern New Jersey. The study looked at a multitude of social and academic variables that enhanced or interfered with the educational persistence of these women.

For the quantitative portion of the study, four hypotheses were tested to ascertain the level to which social and academic support impacted educational persistence. For the qualitative portion of the study, ten interviews were conducted, enabling the researcher to understand the factors that influence educational persistence.

The findings from the surveys and interviews indicate that regardless of levels of academic and social support or interference, these women were determined to remain enrolled to attain economic self-sufficiency.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The topic of single-parent college women belongs under the umbrella of the phenomenon of the adult college student, which will be the focus of this investigation. In order fully understand the challenges and barriers faced by these single-mother college students, it is important to realize their motivation to pursue an education, in spite of these challenges. Single mothers are accountable for numerous household tasks, family, employment and economic tasks. This study, through in-depth interviews and survey questionnaires, will explore the experiences of single female college students who are financially disadvantaged and raising children, while pursuing their education.

Because of the importance of self-sufficiency and financial independence of single women raising children, higher education is a central concept of this study. The literature of the following disciplines has been analyzed for their contribution to expand the understanding of these issues as they relate to the barriers faced by these women: (1) the demographics and profiles of the financially disadvantaged single mother college student; (2) the characteristics
Although American society has a long tradition regarding education as a means to achieve material security and social status, access to higher education has been extended to certain disadvantaged and deserving groups, such as minorities and war veterans to enable them to improve the quality of their lives. Unfortunately, this opportunity has not been readily extended to welfare recipients. The potential of higher education as a means by which women on welfare could achieve independence and become productive members of society has been overlooked in spite of the federal and state governments providing assistance to other members of society. (Montgomery, 1996).

The term “welfare reform” has received much attention as a political agenda item in the United States over the past two decades. Common themes among the pieces of legislation and other initiatives to overhaul the system include work, family responsibility, education/training, illegitimacy, and spending cuts. The Family Support Act of 1988 gave states the real opportunity for meaningful changes in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program since the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935 (Montgomery, 1996). Yet the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) effectively rescinded access to higher education for low-income parents on welfare. So not only did PRWORA repeal AFDC and replace it with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, it threatened states with tough penalties if they fail to move parents into work and consequently out of education and training (Deprez, Hastedt & Henderson, 1998). Therefore, the notion of education as a central element of the
reform effort was set aside. Instead, two well-worn slogans dominated the debate: work-first and make work pay (Carnevale & Reich, 2000).

Over the past few years, tens of thousands of former welfare recipients have joined the ranks of working Americans, but for most of them, the journey from welfare to work has not helped them leave behind the poverty and isolation that characterized their lives on welfare. Consequently, the average woman leaving welfare is still struggling to support her children with a job that pays less than $7 an hour (Carnevale & Reich, 2000). Furthermore, this struggle is compounded by the need to drop out of college. Although academic researchers aim at making higher education a viable option for all low-income people, U.S. Department of Education statistics indicated that in 1997, seventeen percent of students receiving TANF dropped out of higher education, and this rose to 28 percent in 1998. Likewise, the number of AFDC/TANF families reported as participating in activities that could be postsecondary education or training fell from 172,176 to 58,055 between FY 96 and FY 98, dropping from 3.9% of the caseload to 1.8% of the caseload (Greenberg, Plimpton, & Straw, 2000). The graph in Figure 1 shows the change from FY 92 to FY 98.
Figure 1. Caseload Reduction
Figure 1. Caseload Reduction
The study was designed to investigate, document, describe and analyze the attributes of the single mother college students, and the determinants of their academic persistence.

In the qualitative research process, phenomenologically based interviews were used. Cohen & Manion (1994) define phenomenology as a “theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one sees behavior as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality” (p. 29).

Participants with the desired characteristics were selected from a suburban community college, two urban community colleges, a private liberal arts college, and a public university. The criteria for selecting the single mother college students are detailed in the Methodology section of this dissertation.

The Research Question

How do the academic, personal and social barriers faced by welfare and other low-income single mothers enrolled in an institution of higher education impact their educational persistence?

Subsidiary Questions

1. How has welfare reform affected the academic success, GPA and persistence of the single-mother student?

2. How are low-income single mothers motivated to pursue a college education, and what contributes to their persistence?

3. How do welfare caseworkers influence the single mother college student?
4. How do college administrators and faculty identify and accommodate the special needs of these students?

5. What are the academic barriers faced by low-income single-mother college students, and how do they influence their educational persistence?

6. What are the social obstacles faced by these women, and how they impact on their academic persistence?

7. What are the personal barriers faced by these single mothers, and how do they affect their educational persistence?

Definitions of Terms

Academic barriers – problems due to institutional environment, especially concerning policies and procedures planned for traditional students.

Educational persistence – continuous enrollment in at least one course during spring and fall semesters

Environmental variables – factors over which the institution has little control, but which might contribute to student withdrawal (Bean & Metzer, 1985).

General well being – a 33-item scale measuring respondents’ subjective feelings of well being and distress. (Colbry, 1995).

Hypothesis testing – The process of making statistical inferences about population characteristics by using data obtained from samples of that population (Sproull, 1995).

Longitudinal study – design to survey one group or cohort of subjects at different points in time. (Mertens, 1998).
Low-income single mothers – living below the national poverty guideline (Federal Register v65 (3), 2/15/00)

Negative cases – cases that do not fit within the patterns and trends that have been identified. (Patton, 1990).

Nontraditional student – An adult who returns to school full- or part-time while maintaining responsibilities such as employment, family and others, (Cross, 1981).

Personal and social barriers – effects of life events hindering academic persistence

Phenomenological approach – the attempt to understand a social phenomenon, such as single mother college student, from the subject’s own perspective. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Triangulation – determining the consistency of evidence gathered from different sources of data across time, space, or persons, by different investigators or different research methods (Krathwohl, 1998).

Significance of the Study

This study is based on the premise that higher education is the best method for poor single mothers to regain financial independence for themselves and their children, thus reducing or alleviating the personal and social barriers associated with low income. Because single motherhood is associated with low education, low earning ability and high unemployment, the conceptual framework of this investigation will attempt to defy this association. This will be accomplished by articulating the fact that the relationship between higher education and greater
economic independence is becoming extremely important in our increasing
information and technology-based economy. In the case of welfare mothers, or
more recently identified as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families),
the primary issue was work first, and get off the welfare rolls, regardless of the
fact that many jobs were minimum wage. More specifically, the enactment of the
Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (PRWORA)
effectively rescinded access to higher education for low-income parents on
welfare, of which the majority are women, and therefore perpetuating the
problem, rather than finding a permanent solution (Deprez, Hastedt, &

For poor families, particularly those headed by women, low wages are
more extreme and education is even more crucial. A prime example of this fact
was illustrated in a study conducted by Edward Lazere (1996). In this 1994 survey
of welfare recipients in Maine, 96% were women of whom 22% had less than a
high school education, and only 5% had a college degree. Of the employed
recipients, occupations included cashiers, babysitters, waitresses, chambermaids
and cooks, and their average wage was $5.37 per hour. Similarly, in their 1993
study, Gittell and Covington discovered that low educational attainment places
female-headed families at a greater risk of poverty than it does men. Rich data are
included which in essence reveal that 57 percent of all female highschool
graduates 25 years of age or older had annual incomes under $10,000 in 1987 and
that the median income for full-time women workers with one to three years of
high school was $12,267 in 1986.
Without personally experiencing poverty, it is difficult to understand the lives of these women or to view the world through their eyes. The intent of this dissertation, therefore, is to examine the ways higher education can serve as an important instrumental purpose for single mothers by not only providing an avenue toward economic independence, and help them overcome social and personal hurdles as a result. Additionally, academic barriers may be minimized by the college staff’s awareness of this particular group of enrolled students by offering special services, some of which have been discovered in the literature review.

Although college participation has been studied extensively by prominent academics focusing on nontraditional students’ attrition and retention rates, the main focus of this research project will be on the academic, personal and social barriers faced by low-income single mothers, particularly those on welfare. Tinto’s (1975) widely accepted theoretical model views college participation, as if it were a “rite of passage” where academic and social integration is essential for student persistence. Tinto’s study on dropouts is largely based on Durkheim’s theory of suicide, that is voluntary withdrawals from college. Additionally, forced withdrawal occurs via dismissal, which usually results from poor academic performance. However, other forced dismissal, such as lack of finance, is not included in the models, and may be a third variable critical to student persistence. The model further documents underrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups, but fails to include another underrepresented population, namely single mother welfare students.
Bean and Metzner (1985) concur with Tinto's (1975) model of retention involving social and academic integration; however, they have developed a conceptual model utilizing four sets of variables: academic performance, intent to leave, students’ background, and the outside environment. The model used a variety of behavioral theories which are beyond the scope of the study at hand. However, both Tinto’s and Bean’s models provide an excellent framework for understanding academic persistence of the various non-traditional students who are increasing in number at a rapid rate.

Limitations of the Study

Although a direct correlation exists between income and the level of education in terms of economic self-sufficiency, this simple concept has not been understood by society and policy makers. Since the welfare reform and reauthorization have reported declines in single mother caseloads, the fact that these mothers are still living in poverty has not been addressed. So the primary limitation of this study is the fact that follow-up studies have not been conducted on low-income single mothers who were mandated to leave college due to the welfare bureaucracy. Additional limitations relate to the negative stereotypes associated with welfare; there appears to be a need for liaisons between welfare, higher education and society. Appendix A shows an overview of available information and the gap in the literature.

Organization of the Study

This study is formatted as follows: Chapter I, offers and introduction to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study
and the need to expand our understanding of the challenges faced by the low-income single mother/students.

Chapter II provides the literature review which was divided into four categories, the profiles of the single mothers in college, the history and characteristics of adult students in general, the history of welfare reform and the sociological research on single women’s issues as they relate to higher education and motherhood.

Chapter III, “Methodology,” provides an overview of the study and describes the research procedure, the subjects, the instruments and the rationale for utilizing surveys and interviews. Chapter IV describes the results of the study and Chapter V presents the conclusion and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Though the primary focus of this study is the investigation of academic, social and personal barriers faced by low-income single mothers enrolled in institutions of higher education, certain broad questions about women with dependent children and higher education must be included as a theoretical framework for this investigation. In order to arrive at special themes and concepts, this literature review provides a critique and synthesis of relevant literature in the subject area pertinent to the study. The areas include (1) Demographics and profiles of the single mother college students, particularly those on public assistance, (2) the characteristics and history of adult learners, (3) the history of welfare reform, and (4) the sociological research on single women’s issues as they relate to higher education and motherhood.

Demographics and Profiles of Single Mother College Students

Profiles of the single mother college students receiving public subsidy, have been researched by Stenson (1989), Ross (1992) and Colbry (1995), mostly through questionnaires and interviews. A common characteristic they found concerned the stigma, stereotypes and misconceptions of welfare mothers in general. Raushi (1994) and Scarbrough (1997) discovered that single-parent
households, as well as welfare mothers were often negatively stereotyped. One welfare mother described this stereotype as “society’s classism...it doesn’t matter how much I have accomplished, I am still stereotyped as a welfare mother.” (Scarborough, 1997). Welfare mothers are popularly viewed as passively dependent on their checks and unwilling to work (Gittell & Covington, 1993), but Cheng (1990) found that single mothers enrolled in a small Northeastern college had high achievement strivings along with anxiety over performance. Similarly, Colbry (1995) describes how this dichotomy of high achievement and high anxiety impacts single mothers pursuing a successful academic path while maintaining stability on the domestic front.

An excellent resource, a 40-minute documentary video, was produced by Catholic Charities of New Jersey (2001). The title, “Operation Meet Your Neighbor, Putting a Face on Poverty” actually is a facilitator’s guide for a statewide program to educate the voting public about poverty, and what can be done to end suffering. It is estimated that 37 million people in the United States are living in poverty, of which 22 million are children. For a reference, poverty is categorized as an annual income below $16,000 for a family of four. The video is shot in three different locations in New Jersey: Newark, Paterson and Lakewood, and features three different cases of people in poverty. The common experiences of the three welfare recipients include constant struggle with the bureaucracies who insult and demean the persons, struggling with working more than one low-paying job in order to remain off welfare and the expense of childcare.
In addition to exploring the lives of these documented people living in poverty, the video focuses on ways that Welfare Reform has stigmatized the recipients as “deadbeats” who do not want to work. On the contrary, the general consensus of the recipients is the desire and will to leave public assistance and stay off. However, without a skill or education, this is unlikely and therefore the cycle will continue. Consequently, the low-income for the people in poverty forces them back into the welfare life cycle.

This documentary (Catholic Charities of New Jersey, 2001) attempts to inform the viewer about the myths of welfare reform by explaining that statistically, welfare rolls are down, but that the cycle of poverty, homelessness and dependency are up, and that an advocate to change can and must take place. So, as the empirical research on welfare reform concludes that education and training will improve the chances of economic self-sufficiency on a long term basis, rather than taking low-paying immediate jobs, this video documentary reveals that poverty perpetuates without the availability of skills to secure any type of meaningful employment for this population.

The welfare mother in college is often of minority origin, obviously of low socioeconomic status. She tends to be older than the traditional college population and her academic and financial deficiencies are compounded by her responsibilities of caring for a family.

Several authors examined the various misconceptions, myths and stigma of welfare recipients. Rank (1994) and Bane and Elwood (1994) found that the majority of the recipients did not prefer to depend on assistance, but rather loathe
being on welfare, and wish they could get off and be independent; and most are aware of the stigma attached to being on welfare. Similarly, there is a misconception that women receiving public assistance have many children and continue to do so. In actuality, however, the most typical family size is a mother with one child and the birthrate among women receiving welfare is lower than that in the rest of the population (NJCC Social Issues Council).

Single mothers living in poverty are popularly viewed as passively dependent on their checks and averse to work, and many people regard the term “public aid” and “welfare” to be synonymous with laziness, immortality, poverty and the undeserving. (Rice, 1993). Therefore reformers across the political spectrum advocate moving these women off the welfare rolls and into the labor force as the solution to their problems; however, Edin & Lein (1997) offered a dramatic different conclusion that in the present labor market, unskilled single mothers who hold jobs are frequently worse off than those on welfare, and neither welfare nor low-wage employment alone will support a family at subsistence level. The authors surveyed 379 single mothers in four U.S. cities and included average expenditures for specific consumption categories. The results were compared to a study conducted by Renwick (1998) which focused on basic needs budgets (BNB) for single parent families. In comparing the two studies, it is important to note many variables that are not specific to the study at hand. The variables include food, housing, clothing, health care, childcare, etc. Numbers of children also fit into the formula in comparing the studies. Since education was not included in the basic needs categories, it is understandable that academics do
not fit into the scope of many researchers studying the challenges and stresses of single mothers in general.

The History of Adult Learners

A significant amount of research has been conducted on returning adult students in general, and returning women students in particular (Tittle & Denker, 1980). This population is generally defined as students over the age of 24, and enrolled in a college or university.

Adults have been marginalized in academic institutions because of the persistence of a deeply rooted culture bias. Quinlan (1997) analyzed the current state of the adult student experience in higher education, exploring the interpersonal and instructional barriers that adult face in reaching their educational goals. The adult education literature generally supports the idea that teaching adults should be approached in a different way than teaching traditional students in higher education. The assumption that teachers of adults should use a different style of teaching is based on a widely espoused theory of andragogy, which suggests that: “adults expect learning-centered settings where they can set their own goals and organize their own learning around their present like needs” (Donaldson, & Ross-Gordon, 1991, p. 15). However, even in the field of adult education, debate occurs about the efficacy of a separate approach of teaching adults. Some believe that adult education is essentially the same process as educating generally, and therefore does not require a separate teaching approach, i.e. all good teaching, whether for adults or children, should be responsive in nature (Cross, 1981).
The enrollment of adult students, or non-traditional students, in has been increasing rapidly over the last several years, creating their own special needs such as:

1. Choosing or changing a career.
2. Improving decision-making skills.
3. Improving communication skills.
4. Improving assertion skills.
5. Identifying occupational and job trends.
6. Identifying personal aptitudes, attitudes, and interests.
7. Coping with stress.
8. Coping with fear of academic failure.

In order to distinguish adult learners from the traditional college students, some of the characteristics found them to:

1. Depend upon themselves for material support and life management.
2. Perceive themselves to be doers - using previous learning to achieve success as workers, parents, members of communities.
3. Learn best when perceiving the outcome of the learning process as valuable—contributing to their own development, work success, etc.
4. Have a broad, rich experience base to which to relate new learning.
5. Be more concerned about the immediate applicability of learning.
6. Be more often internally motivated (by the potential for feelings of worth, self-esteem, achievement, etc.) (Benshoff, 1993)
The History of Welfare Reform

The subject of welfare reform, public assistance and numerous other vernacular are continually researched and analyzed by politicians, academics, social scientists and others. Goldberg and Collins (2001) examined the history of the nation's major relief program for women and children, AFDC commonly known as "welfare reform" – from its inception in the Social Security Act of 1935 through its repeal by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 (PRWORA) and the first two years of "welfare reform." The authors argue that this legislation offers neither "work opportunity" nor real reform, and that two years after the passage of PRWORA, the nation's policy elites have declared welfare "reform" a resounding success. As evidence the report significant reduction in welfare caseloads and increased numbers of welfare recipients taking new jobs. However, the missing pieces in the the equation revealed the following:


2. Between 1996 and 1997, over 400,000 more children were living in extreme poverty – below one-half of the poverty line.

3. 81 percent of 34 cities surveyed reported significant increases in requests for food assistance and emergency shelter.

Several organizations and institutions are very actively surveying and analyzing the welfare issues on a daily basis. The Center for Women Policy Studies, the Urban Institute, the Brookings Institute, the Institute for Women's
Policy Research, are only four, which agree that welfare reform must provide women receiving subsidy an effective and permanent route out of poverty: postsecondary education.

For much of its history, AFDC failed to provide funds that were above the federal poverty level, forcing most of those who did manage to get on the rolls either to cycle in and out of the welfare system or to supplement their meager welfare income to work in either above or underground economy (Edin & Lein, 1997). So the connection between poverty and education is well documented, the remedy remains to be seen. Former President Clinton remarked on the importance of postsecondary education:

A good education is key to unlocking the promise of today’s economy in the 21st century. Without it, people are at an ever-increasing risk of falling behind...that’s why I have been fighting furiously since the day I took office to expand educational opportunity, to give all Americans a chance to grab the key to a prosperous future. (emphasis added) (Clinton, 1995)

We must make two years of college - the 13th and 14th years of education - as universal for young Americans as the 12 are today. And we must make college affordable to all Americans (emphasis added) (Clinton, 1997).

Despite these policy announcements, our nation has not yet extended this commitment to educational opportunity to low income women and their children although they are ready, and willing and able to attend college.
The Sociological Research

In an effort to understand the social phenomenon of educating women on welfare, several studies lead to questions about why a long-term commitment by the government to educating this segment of the population has rarely been considered as a means to moving them from welfare to self-sufficiency (Carnevale & Reich, 2000; Montgomery, 1996; Gittell & Covington, 1993). Although the welfare rolls have dropped 22 percent between 1995 and 1997, poverty among single mother-headed households have dropped only 5 percent during the same period, indicating that, to a large degree, welfare has been replaced by working poverty (Carnevale & Reich, 2000).

Although research findings frequently go unheeded in policy formulation, studies of previous work/welfare programs did discuss the passage of FSA/JOBS (Greenberg & Mandell, 1991; Thompson, 1994). Extensive research was conducted over two decades prior to passage of FSA on the effects of state job training and education demonstrations (Burghardt & Gordon, 1988). Reviews of these programs were mixed, as some showed modest gains in income for AFDC recipients who participated in education and training activities, while others made little difference in either income level or AFDC dependency. Women who appeared to benefit most were those who ranked in the mid-range of prior employment experience and educational attainment. Although JOBS provided a range of education and training opportunities, access to higher education was designated a voluntary state option, but did not discuss the criteria for enrollment.
This longitudinal study provides an overview of the educational programs offered to welfare recipients but fails to elaborate on higher education and its benefits.

A survey conducted in 1987 at the University of Wisconsin System Institutions was designed to help decision makers determine how many women students were on welfare and to find out the interaction between welfare and student financial aid in relation to expenses incurred in higher education (Nash, 1988). The survey asked questions concerning demographic data such as institution of attendance, student status, and approximate annual educational expenses. The findings showed that women who took jobs or obtained grants to pay for their education had less money for food and expenses than women who did not. They also found that programs such as JOBS, takes these women away from higher education in order to take minimum wage employment and keeping them on the welfare rolls. This finding is also supported by Gittell and Covington (1993) discussing the battle at the city level in New York, to encourage the AFDC departments to create workfare sites on college campuses to allow recipients to continue their college education while they are at work. Additionally, Gittell feels that it is crucial to educate the welfare bureaucracy, specifically the caseworkers, about the desirability of education for AFDC recipients, and to make the information available the recipients themselves, to facilitate their going to school. Her research has also established that given the option, women opt for a college education than other training. On the downside, at the time when the educational option in welfare was under attack, there was very little support for the women recipients from the labor unions, women’s groups and higher education groups.
The Nash (1988) and Gittell and Covington (1997) studies are extremely relevant to this literature review as they stress the need for further research for access to higher education for the low-income single mothers, as opposed to short-term training within certain vocations. Additionally, Gittell (1993) discovered that a huge lack of cooperation exists between social service departments and higher education institutions, and that the states’ data tracking system are severely inadequate. This means that the states are unaware of how many of their welfare recipients enrolled in postsecondary education programs, are enrolled in certificate programs, degree programs or non-traditional training programs. They are thus unable to determine what types of training programs have the most successful employment outcomes or whether their welfare-to-work programs seek to contradict or reinforce race and sex-based occupational segregation.

The term, feminization of poverty is described differently by Cheng (1990) and Huff & Thorpe (1997). The former studied the single mother raising her family on ADFC and receiving attention by welfare reform initiatives, but found the programs involved have been severely criticized for their failures to address the underlying needs of this population. Huff & Thorp (1997) supplied statistics specific to this population, which revealed that the poverty rate for single mothers has increased by 150% during the past two decades. In addition to low wages and occupational discrimination, single mothers are not receiving child support necessary to avoid financial crisis. It is evident that “feminization of
poverty” comprises a plethora of issues, which was discovered in both of these qualitative studies which will be detailed in the dissertation.

A longitudinal study conducted by Cheng (1990) followed twelve single mothers, with an average age of 34 through their academic paths at a small liberal arts college, however, “average” was not specified as mean, median or mode. A battery of tests was given to the women to determine their motivation, personality, attitude, and cognitive styles, and a life history was obtained from each woman. Although the sample size is relatively small, the author hoped that this research would have implications for further insights for the institutions working with high-risk groups.

Little is known about the general well being of women who head single parent families and at the same time trying to improve their family situation. Colbry (1995) conducted an empirical study to examine whether socioeconomic (SES), social support systems, self-esteem, family environment and length of time as a single parent were associated with the general well being of 51 female single parent college students (aged 21-56). Significant relationships were found; however, the author hopes that it will encourage further research and the formation of public policies in the university setting to help single parents with their endeavors in school.

Women living in poverty are largely “invisible” in policy debates on access to higher education, even for those educators and policymakers who are concerned with expanding access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students (Kates, 1993). This invisibility is further underscored by
the lack of data on the women who are already enrolled in college and who educationally qualified to enroll. For example, several descriptions of short term job training and education programs, as well as other national data show that up to 50 percent are participants who are AFDC recipients in some areas of the country already have a high school diploma and some even have some college experience (Burghardt & Gordon, 1998). Thus, while there is evidence from a number of evaluations to show how little some women benefit from short term education and training programs, the same options continue to be developed, while others – such as higher education – continue to be largely ignored (Burghardt & Gordon, 1988). It is important for institutions of higher education to be concerned about this “invisible” population and to emphasize the importance serving them.

As in the case of Tinto’s (1975) model targeting the social integration for academic persistence, and Bean and Metzner (1985) articulating the fact that little research has been devoted to non-traditional students beyond a simple tabulation of drop-out rates, Van Stone (1994) concurs with the fact that little or no information is available on the views of the factors that influence the academic success of the poor single-mother college student. She conducted a study utilizing interviews to allow students to discuss the factors in their own terms. The value of this type of interview, Van Stone claims, is that the interview can capture general patterns among sociological and psychological belief factors that may be missed in a quantitative study.

The four major themes that have repeatedly emerged from the empirical literature can be categorized into: (1) the direct relationship between education,
employment and poverty (2) the barriers to higher education, (3) the role of
government, particularly at the state level; and (4) the problems and concerns of
college administrators, counselors and case workers serving low-income single
mother students.

Finally, the review of the relevant research continues to demonstrate that families leaving welfare for low-paying employment are not leaving poverty and consequently will not attain economic independence. As indicated in the Literature Review Appendix A, the lack of information about attrition of welfare mothers needs to be addressed in this study. Since no evidence exists that the Welfare to Work legislation 1996 was successful, in terms of getting former welfare recipients out of poverty, and how a college education will have extensive human benefits, it is the intent of this study to demonstrate that the welfare reform, as we know it, has proven to be counterproductive. Therefore the picture we see here is the fact that without education, and real meaningful training, welfare reform may get people off welfare, but not out of poverty and off subsidies altogether.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Framework

This study looked at a multitude of variables that may enhance or interfere with the educational persistence of low-income single mothers enrolled in college. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of analyses were employed. Both of these methods should provide an understanding about the different challenges experienced by these students, and what influences keeps them enrolled.

The topic of college retention and attrition has been examined in depth for the last four decades by various researchers. Because of the scarcity of theory on the research topic, this study is of phenomenological nature, partially based on the attrition model by Bean and Metzner (1985) and that of Tinto (1975), which utilize four sets of variables to understand academic persistence in adult college students (1) academic performance, measurable via GPAs, (2) background including high school performance, educational goals, enrollment status, age, and ethnicity (3) environmental variables including family and employment responsibilities, and (4) intent to leave. Bean and Metzner (1985) contends that drop out should be differentiated from stop out, meaning that the former relates to noncompletion of a degree or course of study, and the latter relates to transfer or leave of absent. In sum, all of these social integration variables are useful in
analyzing how the single other low-income college student persists in higher education.

Phenomenological research focuses on "the meaning of events and interactions of ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.43). In the Tinto (1975) model, students' social interactions with other members of the campus community is emphasized as an important element, whereas the social variables from the outside environment are expected to be of greater importance than college social integration (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Variables leading to eventual drop out are specified in the modified conceptual drop-out schema based on Tinto and Bean's models of attrition (see Figure 2). Clearly, the primary variables in both Tinto and Bean's models are (1) background, (2) academic, (3) environmental and (4) social integration. However, Tinto focuses primarily on academic and institutional goals whereas Bean includes psychological outcomes. Additionally, in terms of utility, Bean contends that students' perceptions of the usefulness of their college education will impact employment and personal development. So in order to understand what factors influence educational persistence by low-income single mothers, this study looks at three different sets of variables: (1) descriptive/demographic information which includes family background, prior education, number of dependent children, and marital status; (2) social influences/barriers/supports, and (3) academic support, and their impact on educational persistence. These variable sets are further explained in Appendix B. Based on these variables, a grid was developed to address the subsidiary questions utilizing the questionnaire survey. (See Appendix
C). So the modified Drop-Out Schema attempts to illustrate how the interaction of these variables affects the academic persistence of the students participating in this study, and serves as a tool for the hypothesis testing on the retention/withdrawal continuum. Tinto (1975) claims that withdrawal may be voluntary or forced by academic failure, and Bean (1985) contends that no study is available on the retention of part-time adult students.
Figure 2. Drop-Out Schema
Hypothesis

Based on the Bean and Metzner (1985) and Tinto (1975) models on academic withdrawal, the research hypotheses for this study on academic persistence to be tested are: Hypothesis #1 -- when the social and academic supports are high, students should remain in school. Hypothesis #2 -- when social support is high, and academic support is low, students would be expected to remain enrolled, mainly because the social positive support would compensate for low grades or other academic difficulties.

Additionally, students who receive positive support and encouragement from family or employers are more likely to remain enrolled, despite poor academic advising or weak academic support. (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Hypothesis #3 -- when academic support is high, but social support is low, students should leave school, and the positive impact of the academic variables will not be seen. For example, when the student/mother cannot find adequate childcare or transportation, or adjust her work schedule, she is not likely to remain enrolled regardless of academic support. Hypothesis #4 -- when both academic and social influences are poor, students should leave. So for this population of students, social support should compensate for weak academic support, but positive academic support will not compensate for weak social support. In order to understand the academic persistence of low-income single mothers in spite of the financial challenges or mandated withdrawal by recent welfare reform, both sets of variables (social and academic) will contribute to the conceptual framework of this research.
Sample

The subjects for this study consisted of 45 low-income single mothers, between the ages of 24 and 40, with dependent children, who were enrolled in institutions of higher education. In order to test the hypotheses in conjunction with answering the research questions, the following variables were the focus for this investigation: (1) the social influences (barriers and support), including environmental and social integration, such as peer interaction and employment, education and (2) academic variables, such as study habits, degree aspirations, and influence of faculty and academic administrators, and institutional support. Additionally, descriptive demographic data were included to enable the reader to capture the profiles of the participants. Appendix B describes the variables.

Access of Samples and Recruitment

Since the researcher needed to contact the potential participants to be interviewed, “gatekeepers” were contacted initially. Seidman (1998) contends that gatekeepers control the access to the people to be interviewed, and for this study, the primary function for the gatekeepers (directors of EOF) was to protect the anonymity of the prospective subjects.

Data Collection Procedures

Initially, the executive director of EOF at the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education in Trenton was contacted by telephone and a personal meeting was established. Pursuant to meeting with the director and his research staff, a printout of the listing of low-income students across New Jersey campuses was provided. Based on those aggregate data, five campuses were selected in Northern
New Jersey as potential study sites. These institutions were selected based on the following institutional characteristics: one urban community college, one suburban community college, two public urban universities, and one private college. This diversity of institutions allowed for a broad scope of study participants who are low-income single mothers.

Next, letters were sent to the Directors of EOF of those five campuses (see Appendix C) to describe the research and to invite their participation.

Once the EOF directors agreed to participate in writing (see Appendix D), an invitation/letter was sent to all EOF students on their campuses, asking them if they were willing to be contacted about participation in the study (Appendix E). Based on those responses, an information meeting about the study was held by the researcher at the respective EOF offices. The researcher explained the study requirements and benefits, and provided a copy of a student letter (see Appendix F) which further explained the study. Students had the opportunity to ask questions and make a considered decision on whether or not to actually participate. Those who decided at the end of the information session to participate, received a copy of the survey (see Appendix H), a consent form describing anonymity and confidentiality (see Appendix G) and instruction for return of the surveys. The consent form specifies the purpose of the study, the procedure and potential risks and benefits as well as assuring confidentiality. Students also were advised of the opportunity to be interviewed as part of the study and those survey participants who agreed, were asked to fill out a tear-off from the survey cover sheet which supplied a telephone contact number. The tear-
offs were collected immediately by the researcher and kept separate from the surveys. This ensured that the surveys were not contaminated by potentially identifying information on the subjects. Completed surveys were returned anonymously to a box in the EOF office. The researcher then took possession of the returned survey forms by the deadline date, March 31, 2002. The identity of individual survey respondents was not known to the researcher directly.

Once bulk returns of surveys were received from the EOF directors and obtained by the researcher, responses were coded and data were entered into an SPSS file and analyzed to determine the impact of two sets of variables, social and academic barriers/support, and the degree of the impact on the educational persistence. The third variable, the demographic data were used for descriptive purposes.

A qualitative analysis was conducted to further illuminate the findings from the quantitative data. In order to develop a case study which would define and tell the unique story of each respondent, and which would allow for comparisons among and between groups, codes were assigned according to themes, pattern, similarities, contrasts or paradoxes which emerged in the interview process.

Instruments

A survey/questionnaire was designed (see Appendix H), which includes ten demographic questions, 19 general questions, seven questions about external variables (social life) and 15 questions about educational goals. Two experts examined the questionnaire to ensure content validity, one professor of sociology
and one qualitative research professor. A few minor adjustments were made accordingly. In order to identify and analyze discrepant data and negative cases, triangulation techniques were utilized. The data obtained from the survey questionnaires were utilized to perform parametric statistical analyses, such as t-tests on the independent variables, as well as frequencies for the descriptive data. The surveys were supplemented by standardized, open-ended interviews and field notes. In order to facilitate the interviewing portion of the triangulation technique, students were invited to be interviewed and consent forms were furnished (see Appendix I). The interview serves as a primary source of information with the intent to obtain valid and reliable information in order to capture general patterns. The researcher looked for consistency across the sources to determine if any causal relationships surfaced based on these interviews.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument for data collection. He or she decides which questions to ask and in what order, what to observe and what to write down. So in essence, much of the interest focused upon comes from the beliefs and values of the researcher and monitoring them as they progress through the study (Mertens, 1998).

The interview protocol (see Appendix I) was developed as a guide for asking questions based on two sets of variables, social and academic influences on educational persistence. These two sets of variables were further categorized into subgroups, such as external influences and stress and coping issues, to elaborate on the social variables, and educational attributes, career and academic goals to enrich the academic variables. General questions about life as a single
mother-student were also included, to find patterns about decisions to remain enrolled. Appendix K categorizes the types of questions and how they relate to specific themes. As Patton (1990) states, "the interview guide provides a framework within which the interviewer would develop questions, sequence those questions, and make decisions about which information to pursue in great depth." (p.284) Patton (1990) categorizes four variations of interview instrumentation, of which the standardized open-ended interview is described: "The exact wording and sequence of questions are determined in advance. All interviewees are asked the same basic questions in the same order. Questions are worded in a completely open-ended format." (p.289). The advantage of this type of interview, Patton contends, is the fact that respondents answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of responses. Also, data are complete for each person on the topics addressed in the interviews.

The criteria for choosing these questions were derived from the literature review in terms of the historical and sociological perspective, as well as Patton's recommendations for question selections. These should include knowledge questions that will help the interviewer determine what factual information the subject actually has. Feeling questions help to understand the emotional responses of people to their thoughts and experiences, and opinion/value questions, which focus on what the person thinks about the topic and the values she may have as it relates to it (Patton, 1990).

The interviewing process started with an introduction of the researcher and a brief description of the purpose of the study. Questions about educational
attributes were asked to seek patterns about reasons to enroll in higher education. Questions about stress and coping were asked to find patterns about adaptation to higher education. Other questions included external influences and academic and career aspirations. All of the responses were coded to assimilate with the related variables to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses.

Methods of Analysis

This study employs both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to describe the retention and behaviors of the single mothers in college who happen to be low-income as well. The method of triangulation of data was used. Cohen & Manion (1994) contend that triangulation techniques attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data (p. 233).

A questionnaire was designed to elicit data criteria for the variables for the quantitative data analysis. This questionnaire served as a primary instrument in collecting quantifiable data to measure the academic and social factors (barriers or supports) and how these factors influence educational persistence. Twelve structural barriers were identified and used to conduct the independent t-tests. In order to measure the impact of social barriers as they relate to academic persistence, a total of five survey questions were employed (#20 to 24), which were converted into dichotomous ratings (low and high). An independent t-test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in how low and high social support groups experienced the barriers. Similarly, five
questions (#35, 37, 38, 39 and 41) relating to academic influences (barriers and support) were also indexed into dichotomous data. Another independent t-test was conducted, which tested the low academic support group with the high academic support group, and how those groups of subjects perceived the twelve structural barriers. In order to understand the educational persistence with regard to the identified barriers, another independent t-test was performed. This test examined the difference between groups in how they experienced twelve barriers. A dichotomous index was constructed based on the amount of hours spent on schoolwork. For the purpose of this study, the statistical significance level was set at 0.05. Additionally, trends are identified from .051 to and including .100. A Reliability Analysis was conducted which is presented in Appendix L. This test ensured that the data are free from measurement error, or how precise, consistent or stable the survey test scores are.

For the hypothesis analysis, a matrix was constructed to group the variables to answer the four hypotheses. Four respondent subgroups were identified as low and high academic support (1 = low and 2 = high), and low and high social support. The hypothesis coding corresponds with the hypothesis number (H 1 = Hypothesis #1) The matrix is shown below in Table 1.
Table 1

**Hypothesis Analysis Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC</th>
<th>SUPPORT</th>
<th>SOCIAL SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H 4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since hypotheses #3 and #4 were based on attrition and not testable for this study, the researcher needed to rely on the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. As Mertens (1998) contends, “working hypotheses can be revised on the discovery of cases that do not fit” (p. 182). So in the study at hand, only subject who remained enrolled could be tested.

For the qualitative portion of the analysis, the information from the transcribed taped interviews were coded and arranged into categories linking the described variables to establish comparisons of data within and between these categories, which aided in the testing of the hypotheses as well as answering the research questions. A vertical bar graph was created to display the frequency of the interview responses as they relate to the corresponding variable categories. One distinct advantage of qualitative research methods for analysis is the fact that it “describes complex personal and interpersonal phenomena that would be
impossible to portray with quantitative research’s single dimension scales”

(Krathwohl, 1997, p. 229).
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the specific empirical study and relate them to the conceptual framework described in chapter three, the methodology chapter. The results of this research were formulated from the quantitative and qualitative data described in the methodology section. This chapter is divided into four parts. Section I is of descriptive demographic nature focusing on the findings related to the ages of the respondents, their marital status, i.e. the means by which they became single mothers, their educational background, the number of dependent children, the type of institution of higher education they are currently attending, and the highest educational degree they are pursuing. Frequency tables for all these data are exhibited, showing the amount and percentages for each group.

Section II explains the analytical methods used for identifying barriers by addressing the 19 general factors interfering with schoolwork. Of these interferences, twelve were identified as barriers and treated as dependent variables. The social and academic support groups were grouped into high and low, based on the data from questionnaires relating to them. Once these groups were categorized as high and low social and high and low academic support, the
researcher examined the differences between groups and how they experienced the twelve barriers. A comparison of high social and high academic support with perceived barriers is described; and a comparison of low social and low academic support with perceived is presented.

Section II includes two sub-groups, Section IIa - social factors, (barriers or support) and Section IIb - academic factors (barriers or support) as they impact schoolwork and ultimately persistence. Three statistical tables are presented which show the frequency of socializing with friends, the number of friends, and the frequency of interacting with neighbors. Additionally, an independent t-test was performed to determine whether there were significant differences in how low or high social support groups experienced the barriers. Another independent t-test was performed to determine whether there were significant differences in how low or high academic support groups experienced the barriers. Another way to measure the relationship between the twelve identified barriers and time spent on schoolwork, an independent t-test was conducted to determine whether tow groups differed significantly in study time.

Section III describes the four hypotheses and how they were tested. They comprise four sets of variables, (1) high academic and high social support, (2) low academic and high social support (3) high academic and low social support, and (4) low academic and low social support. The low and high categories were derived from the related survey questions. The coding method for categorizing the data into these four hypotheses groups is included.
Section IV deals with the qualitative portion of the study. The primary function of the qualitative data is to enrich the findings from the surveys as well as providing information that enabled the researcher to answer hypotheses #3 and #4, i.e. students who remained enrolled in spite of low social support. The interview protocol, used as a research tool, was structured in a way to find themes, similarities and differences among and between the subjects. As Cohen & Manion (1994) suggest, the structured interview is one in which the content and procedures are organized in advance (p.273).

The qualitative portion of this study summarizes the ten case studies based on the transcribed interviews. The interview questions were structured by categories (see Appendix K) to seek common patterns as they relate to the corresponding variables.

Results of Quantitative Information

This section analyzes the collective data from the surveys and interviews. This study addresses the academic, social and personal barriers faced by low-income single mothers and their impact on educational persistence. In order to fully understand these barriers, it is also important to realize the motivation to pursue a college degree, in spite of these challenges. The surveys, as well as the interview protocol, were categorized into four subgroups — (1) demographic information, (2) general interference with studying, (3) social support/barriers, and (4) academic support.
Section I – Descriptive/Demographic Information

Respondents were asked several questions that provide demographic information. A total of 16 (36.4%) women were between the ages of 28 and 31, and 13 (29.5%) were between the ages of 36 and 40. Table 2 shows the age groups of the respondents.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Respondents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 to 27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 to 31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 to 35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another question which provided demographic information was means by which these students were unmarried. Table 3 shows that the largest portion, 60% of the participants were never married and 31.1% were divorced.
Table 3

Marital Status of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(never married)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another question to provide demographic information was to indicate the number of dependent children. Table 4 indicates that 46.7 percent (21) of the respondents have one child and 33.3 percent (15) have two children. So these data confirm the statement about the public misconception that women receiving public assistance have many children and continue to do so. When in reality, the most typical family size is a mother and one child, (Catholic Charities of New Jersey, 2000) as is evident in this table. As the literature reveals, the birthrate among women receiving public funds is lower than the rest of the population. As the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics (2002) reports:

Women in the United States are having more children than at any time in almost 30 years, according to the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) birth statistics released today by HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson. In 2000, the average number of children born to
women over a lifetime was 2.1, according to the new CDC report, "Births, Final Data for 2000." (2.1 is considered the population's replacement level). (p. 1)

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Dependent Children</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the demographic section of the questionnaire, three items were related to academic information. (a) the institution currently attended, (b) previous education, and (c) type of degree pursuing. Table 5 shows that 48.9% (22) subjects are currently attending a community college, and 33.3% (15) are attending a public four-year institution.
Table 5

College Respondent Currently Attending

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public 4-year</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private 4-year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When subjects were asked about their previous education, a total of 68.9% (31) have earned a high school diploma and 20% (9) hold a GED (see Table 6).

Table 6

Previous Education of Respondent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G.E.D.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to understand their educational aspiration, subjects were asked to indicate the highest academic degree they intend to obtain. It is interesting to note (see Table 7) that 35.6% aspire to obtain a masters degree and 31.1% a baccalaureate degree, even though a large percent (65.9) indicated as finance being a major interference and juggling tasks (62.2%) as the second major interference (see Figure 3).

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Educational Degree Pursuing</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational certificate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. General Interferences

- Managing finances: 85.9%
- Juggling tasks: 62.2%
- Needs of children: 43.2%
- Stress from College: 43.2%
- Recreation: 40.0%
- Performing household tasks: 40.0%
- Dealing with children's father: 35.0%
- Decision about job: 34.8%
- Dating: 27.3%
- Lack of academic support: 26.7%
- Lack of emotional support: 26.7%
- Forming close relationships: 24.4%
- Finding affordable housing: 23.3%
- Too many demands from people: 22.2%
- Dealing with children's schools: 22.2%
- Dealing with children's arguments: 18.2%
- Dealing with welfare managers: 17.8%
- Medical care: 15.5%
- Transportation: 11.1%
The social and personal barriers, the effects of life events, faced by the subjects in this study were measured in terms of how they relate to academic persistence. These life events, whether problems or challenges, impact the persistence factor as being successful in college. Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional undergraduate attrition examined background, environmental factors, academic performance and intent to leave. The single mothers who participated in this study came from diverse occupational and educational backgrounds that were addressed in the qualitative findings from the interviews. So to fully understand the social and personal hindrances faced by these mothers, the interferences are addressed.

Section II - General Factors Interfering With Schoolwork

In order to identify the general factors that interfered with schoolwork, the questions 1 to 19 of the survey were presented in a likert scale, where 1 indicated not at all, and 3 indicated a great deal. A frequency chart (Figure 3) shows the responses indicated “a great deal” in a horizontal bar chart format in descending percentiles.

Since all of the respondents are of low-income status, it is not surprising that the barrier rated the highest (65.9%) relates to managing family finances. The next highest barrier refers to juggling tasks for work, children, home and college (62.2%). Understandably, these single mothers need to maintain all of their outside responsibilities while pursuing their education. The personal interviews corroborate this challenge of multi-tasking. As one of these multiple outside responsibilities includes meeting the needs of children, 43.2 percent of the
respondents indicated that this interferes “a great deal” with their schoolwork. Transportation posed the lowest interference with studying.

In order to identify the structural barriers, as opposed to minor interferences, the following items were measured – Questions #1, #4 to #13, and #19. This was to differentiate modifiable variables such as dating or recreation, which may create interference but not necessarily qualify as a structural barrier.

Section IIa - social factors (barriers or support) impacting schoolwork.

In order to understand the social factors that may interfere with academic responsibilities, five questions were asked about interactions with friends or neighbors. These questions are detailed later, when elaborating on the t-test methodology.

Respondents were asked to provide information about the amount of time spent on socializing with friends. The section of the questionnaire specifically addressed this interaction as a method of coping with life stresses and obligations, which aided the researcher in understanding social and personal barriers. Clearly, Table 8 indicates that a total of 46.6 percent have socialized with friends within the past two weeks.
Table 8

Length of Time Since Socializing with Friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six months or more</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two to five months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three weeks to a month</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to two weeks</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the past week</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked to provide information about the number of close friends they have living near by or out of the area. Again, the purpose of this type of question was to identify this factor as a coping method, and was so stated in the questionnaire. Table 9 shows a substantial percentage (46.7) of subjects have one or two close friends, and 40.1 percent have three to five friends.
Table 9

**Number of Close Friends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to two</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to five</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six to nine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten or more</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanswered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When respondents were asked to provide information about their interactions with neighbors, Table 10 shows that 46.7 percent never visit or chat with neighbors, and 26.7 percent of respondents rarely visit or chat with neighbors.
Table 10

**Frequency of Visits or Chat With Neighbors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very often</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, the two tables reveal that 46.6% subjects have socialized with friends over the past two weeks, as a means of coping with stresses and life obligations, (Table 8), and also show that 46.7% never interact with neighbors (Table 10). So neighbor interaction was not viewed as an important coping factor, however friendships are. These data enabled the researcher to understand the social and personal barriers as they relate to academic persistence.

In order to measure the degree of social barriers as they relate to academic persistence, a total of five questions were used (#20 to #24). These variables were described as structural barriers in the section headed “General Factors interfering with Schoolwork.” A dichotomous index was constructed based on the two sets of scores, indicating 1 for low (score of 5 – 10) and 2 for high (score 11 – 25). These scores were formulated from the five questions on social influences, (survey questions #20 to #24).
Two questions were asked about socializing with friends, and number of friends, and three questions concerned the number of neighbors, and frequency of their interactions with these neighbors. The responses were scaled 1 to 5, as 1 for none or never, to 5 as the highest (converted from A to F). The aggregate sums for social impact, therefore, had a range of 5 to 25. The scores were then indexed into two categories, 1 for low and 2 for high. The total scores of 5 – 10 were categorized as low, and 11 – 25 were categorized as high. These data constituted a dichotomous group statistic enabling the researcher to perform an independent t-test to compare the mean scores of those subjects with low social support and those subjects with high social support. These were tested against the degree to which the barriers were problematic as interference with schoolwork. Table 11 shows two trends in the area of social factors that interfere with schoolwork. Barrier #12, dealing with welfare caseworkers was found to be statistically significant with a t-test value of 2.414 and a p-value of .020. Low social interaction had a mean of 1.47 and a high social interaction had a mean of .71. These statistics indicate that those students with low social support considered dealing with caseworkers somewhat a barrier, whereas those with high social support rated this as not a barrier at all.
Table 11. Social Support and Perceived Barriers to School Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>(LOW)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>(HIGH)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>(TOTAL)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>t-test</td>
<td>p value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Transportation</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>.916</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Performing household tasks</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1.671</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Juggling tasks</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>1.445</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Needs of children</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.346</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dealing with children's schools</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.408</td>
<td>.685</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dealing with children's arguments</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-1.032</td>
<td>.308</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dealing with children's father</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>-0.518</td>
<td>.607</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Medical care</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>.735</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Managing finances</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1.343</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Finding affordable housing</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>.963</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Too many demands from people</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.758</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Dealing with welfare managers</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>2.414</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 1: 2 tailed t-test was performed with p < .05
Note 2: n(TOTAL) variance due to non-responses
household tasks, revealed a trend with a p-value of .069. Thus, the students with low social support indicated strongly that they found performing household tasks as a high barrier. Of the remaining ten barriers, the high support groups responded that the barriers were problematic than the low support group, with the exceptions of barriers #6 and #7. Table 11 also demonstrates that students with low social support rated ten structural barriers as high, (social support group 1) and two structural barriers, #6 dealing with children’s arguments and #7 dealing with children’s father, (social support group 2) as low. These data therefore show that those students with low social support rate 10 out of 12 structural barriers as higher interferences with schoolwork than those with high social support, that is the level of social support mediates the effect of structural barriers. The two barriers that take exception are #6, dealing with children’s arguments, and #7, dealing with children’s father. In those cases, the mean scores for high social support are higher than the mean scores for low social support. Thus, those students who experienced high social support rated dealing with children’s arguments and dealing with children’s father as a high barrier, whereas these same subjects rated all other ten barriers as low. However, these differences did not prove to be of statistical significance. Table 11 shows the results of this t-test.

Section IIb - Academic factors (barriers or support) impacting schoolwork.

Similar to categorizing the social influences into dichotomous data, the grouping for academic support were categorized into high and low based on these criteria: Of the five questions relating to availability of academic service, respondents who indicated three or more available services were coded as high,
and those below three were coded as low. Questions #37 to #41 addressed availability of tutoring and counseling centers in the evening, of adult students orientation programs, of special interest items in the school newspaper, of peer support for new adults, and for minimizing on-campus transportation problems.

An independent t-test was performed, which tested the difference in experience of barriers with low and high academic support. As can be seen in Table 12, the results of the t-test showed no statistical significance across the twelve barriers. However, for those students whose academic services were predominantly in place, meeting the needs of children was considered somewhat a barrier and those with less academic support, rated it as moderately high.

Table 12 also presents the mean ratings of individual barriers for respondent groups reporting low and high academic support. These data show that those respondents who had low academic support had higher mean rating for the structural barriers with the exception of four variables, #2 performing household tasks, #7 dealing with children’s father, #8 medical care, and #12 dealing with welfare caseworkers. Overall, the highest mean score was 2.65 which represents that of those students who had low academic support rated barrier question #3, juggling tasks, as a high structural barrier as interference with schoolwork. Total mean scores are also included.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>(LOW)</th>
<th>(HIGH)</th>
<th>(TOTAL)</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Transportation</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Performing household tasks</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Juggling tasks</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Needs of children</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dealing with children's schools</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dealing with children's arguments</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dealing with children's father</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Medical care</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Managing finances</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Finding affordable housing</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Too many demands from people</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Dealing with welfare managers</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 2 tailed t-test was performed with p < .05
In an attempt to understand the educational goals and aspirations, students were asked how many hours a week they spend on schoolwork. The responses were ranged from less than two hours of study time to more than six hours. In order to conduct an independent t-test, a dichotomous table of low (four hours or less), and high (more than four hours) was created, to determine whether the two groups differed significantly in how they experienced the twelve barriers. Table 13 details the results, which show that those groups studying more than four hours found eight out of twelve barriers somewhat higher than those groups studying four hours or less. Barrier #7, 8, 9, and 11 showed a lower mean score. So for those groups who studied four or less hours per week found barriers #7, dealing with children’s father, #8, dealing with medical care, #9, managing finances and #11, too many demands from people, more problematic than the groups studying more than four hours. However the differences between the low and high study time groups showed no statistical significance.
Table 13. Study Time and Perceived Barriers to School Work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>(LOW)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>t-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Transportation</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Performing household tasks</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>-0.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Juggling tasks</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Needs of children</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>-0.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dealing with children's schools</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>-0.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dealing with children's arguments</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-1.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dealing with children's father</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Medical care</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-0.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Managing finances</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>-1.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Finding affordable housing</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>-0.632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Too many demands from people</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Dealing with welfare managers</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-0.396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 2 tailed t-test was performed with p < .05
Note 2: n(TOTAL) variance due to non-responses
Test reliability.

A reliability analysis was performed which is presented in Appendix L. The procedure provides a large number of reliability coefficients from multiple-item scales. Reliability is the degree a test is free from measurement error or how precise, consistent, or stable a participant’s test score is over different testing forms and time spans. Reliabilities are correlation coefficients where the range of scores in from 0 (no reliability) to +1 (perfect reliability). Reliabilities around .9 are considered excellent: reliabilities below .6 are considered marginal. (Abrami, et al. 2000). In general, the concept of reliability refers to how accurate, on the average, the estimate of the true score is in a population of objects to be measured. (George, & Mallery, 2001).

Comparisons of social and academic supports and barriers.

In order to compare the two values of low social and low academic support with the mean scores of the barriers, Figure 4 indicates a substantial higher value on the social measure, particularly performing household tasks, managing finances and dealing with welfare managers. These data show that of those students who received low social support rated those barriers substantially higher than those students who received low academic support.

Conversely, when comparing the two values of high social and high academic support with the mean scores of the barriers, Figure 5 shows a substantially higher value on the academic measure, particularly dealing with welfare, performing household tasks and managing finances. These data,
therefore, indicate that those students who receive high academic support, rated those barriers higher that those who received high social support.

Section III - Hypotheses Testing

Four hypotheses underlying this study were as follows:

Hypothesis 1.
When the academic and social supports are high, students will remain enrolled.

Hypothesis 2.
When social support is high and academic support is low, students will remain enrolled.

Hypothesis 3.
When academic support is high, but social support is low, students will leave.

Hypothesis 4.
When both social and academic support are low, students will leave.
Figure 4. Comparison of High Social and High Academic Support with Barriers

[Bar chart showing comparison of high social and high academic support with barriers]
Figure 5. Comparison of Low Social and Low Academic Support with Barriers

- Social Lo
- Academic Lo
A matrix was constructed to group the variables to answer the research hypotheses. Four respondent subgroups were identified based on these criteria: The social support group used a collective score for each respondent resulting from questions #20 to #24, dealing with socializing with friends, and interactions with neighbors. Question #20 dealt with frequency of socializing with friends. Question #21 asked about the number of friends. Questions #22 to 24 asked about number of neighbors and frequencies of visits and/or exchanges of favors. The responses were scaled low to high (1 to 5). Of the five questions relating to socializing, possible scores would be between 5 and 25. Thus, total scores of 5 – 10 were categorized as low, and 11 – 25 were categorized as high.

For the academic support group, question #35 was used for academic advising, #37 to #41 were used for services at the college. Questions #37 to #41 addressed availability of tutoring and counseling centers in the evening, of adult students orientation programs, of special interest items in the school newspaper, of peer support for new adults, and for minimizing on-campus transportation problems. Of the five questions relating to availability of academic service, respondents who indicated they used three or more services were coded as high, and those below three were coded as low.

The hypothesis coding is shown to correspond with the hypotheses.

Academic or Social support: Low=1, High=2, \( H_1 = \text{Hypothesis 1}, \)
\( H_2 = \text{Hypothesis 2}, \quad H_3 = \text{Hypothesis 3}, \quad H_4 = \text{Hypothesis 4}. \)
Table 14

**Academic and Social Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC SUPPORT</th>
<th>SOCIAL SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15 reflects the sample distribution with regard to the four possible hypotheses described in chapter III, the methodology portion of the study.

Table 15

**Dichotomous Sample Sub-Groups (Academic & Social Support)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: High Academic &amp; High Social</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Low Academic &amp; High Social</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: High Academic &amp; Low Social</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Low Academic &amp; Low Social</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Academic Group-utilizing 3 or more services = High, less than 3 = Low Social Group-scores 5-10 = Low, 11=25 = High

By categorizing students in this sample according to the criteria for the hypotheses groups, a total of 11.6 percent (5) show a combination of high academic and high social support. Hypothesis 1, therefore, supports the statement
that students would remain enrolled when receiving high academic and high social support. Additionally, 44.2 percent (19), indicate low academic and high social support. So hypothesis #2 corresponds with the prediction that students who receive positive support and encouragement from family, friends or employers are more likely to remain enrolled, despite poor academic advising or weak academic support. (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Data results did not, however, provide support for hypotheses 3 and 4, dealing with low social support. So in terms of hypothesis 3, students who received high academic and low social support, (13.3%), and hypothesis 4, students receiving low academic and low social support (28.9%), perhaps the qualitative data obtained from the interviews will provide insight into the phenomenon that students should withdraw, but in this study, persisted, even though the model predicted they would leave.

Results of Qualitative Information

Section IV-Qualitative Findings

In addition to interviewing ten subjects, the questionnaire provided some qualitative data. One open-ended question on the survey asks: Please indicate any factors or individuals not listed, that may have influenced your decision to remain enrolled in college (see Tables 16 and 17). Surveys were numbered by the researcher for data manageability. Common factors emerged from the open-ended question, with survey numbers indicated. As one would suspect, the dominant factors are financial and career related. Additionally, eight respondents indicated that one or more individual impacted their decisions to remain enrolled.
Table 16
Common Factors Which Influenced Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Survey Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obtain a career</td>
<td>019, 020, 021, 022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to support self and kids</td>
<td>002, 005, 032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn more money</td>
<td>003, 014, 043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of financial aid</td>
<td>024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve life, improve self</td>
<td>009, 018, 039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase self-confidence</td>
<td>003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a good role model</td>
<td>013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student life involvement</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17
Persons Who Influenced Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Survey Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment counselor</td>
<td>006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child/ren</td>
<td>006, 020, 038, 039, 041, 045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church members</td>
<td>006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>036, 037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend/s</td>
<td>026, 036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor/s</td>
<td>026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/s</td>
<td>026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 45 surveys returned, 25 addressed the open-ended question. Three respondents indicated multiple influences. Responses and survey numbers are shown below.

002 My children's father died 5 years ago, leaving me with no career or means to support myself & I do not want to get caught in this position again so I feel I need to be able to support myself & be able to support my kids & send them to college.

003 Main reason attending college would be to increase my self-confidence. The second reason would be to earn more money for the future when my children attend college. Third would be because of the connection I am making with my children.

005 My determination to finish what I started, The future of my children and myself.

006 Employment counselor, my daughter, church members

009 Eager to better myself and improve

013 Being a single mom with four children. Want to be good role mode.

014 $$$$ Want to buy a house of my own

015 The diploma

018 Desire to improve my life and lives of my children

019 I don’t want to be a bartender when I’m 40.

020 My son. I want him to have a good life therefore I have to have a good paying job and the only way to get one of those is to have a college degree.
Need for a degree to get a job that will pay enough to support my daughter and me.

It is my personal goal. I have to raise my son on my own so I feel it’s something I have to finish in order to maintain a decent paying job.

Financial aid available is phenomenal. My first semester back was rough, but I fell in step.

Baby sitting service during study and me in school and out of school.

I think that my institution should have a program for people with kids. Just the help of my advisors, teachers and friends.

My dream to become a child psychologist. Also I want to give my son a better life.

I am lucky that I and my daughter live at home with my mother and father. This has enabled me to enroll in school full time and not be constantly worried about my child.

My counselor, mentor, friend, sister

Student life has made it easy for me to meet people and enjoy going to college. Student life, i.e. club involvement with Black Student Union, Habitat for Humanities, Student Government Council, and the many help of counselors.

My children help to influence me and so do some of their teachers

The fact that I am a single mother has pushed me back into school. My child is my drawing force to better myself.
The need to get a higher paying position

My three daughters

Child

Interview Participants' Profiles

Hilda.

Hilda is a 37-year-old, divorced mother of two teen-agers living in a subsidized housing project in the inner city. Although Hilda is faced with financial challenges, particularly from the welfare bureaucracy, she is very motivated and determined to finish her associate degree. Prior to her enrollment in the community college, Hilda served in the military after finishing high school, followed by a management trainee position in a large department store. Apparently she was overworked and underpaid, consequently she decided to pursue a college education. Although she is faced with extensive stress, mainly financial, as well as her concern about her 16-year-old daughter, Hilda is maintaining “honor roll” grades.

Hilda’s description of her interaction with the welfare agency is extremely meaningful for this study. Although she is maintaining a 4.0 grade point average, Hilda feels as the welfare caseworkers treat her as “one of the other people that they are supporting who are just sitting at home doing nothing.” Sometimes they make her sit for hours, waiting for “stupid” things. Since Hilda is a full-time student as well as an employee at the college, this time could be better spent more productively.
Hilda’s family background and current living situation can be described as violent and economically challenged at best. Her parents died when she was ten, leaving her to be raised by other family members. Her mother only had a third grade education and her father was a hospital administrator with a high school education. Hilda was married for a total of eleven years, however she separated as a survivor of domestic violence. She lived in a domestic violence shelter for a few months. Her goal is to graduate within two months, pursue a career, better housing and a car.

Doris

Doris, a 36-year-old divorced mother of two, has found it hard to support her children on just a high school education and a low-paying job in accounting. She admits to having relied on food stamps in the past, but now wishes to become “a good role model for the kids” and find more financial rewards in the workplace. With the support of her boyfriend and children and the relief of financial aid, she is currently pursuing a college degree in accounting.

The discouragement from her parents—themselves only high school graduates—as well as her children’s schedules and occasional tension at work have been her main obstacles as a student. However, Doris says that despite the difficulties of being a single mother, she is focused, has her stress under control, and is eager to pursue a “higher status in life, better pay, and self worth.” She hopes to one day move into a position of management, and she is determined to see her children off to college some day, as well.
Carla.

Carla is a 37-year-old divorced mother of two teenage boys, who currently live with their father. She is now attempting to work and attend college full-time.

Carla had finished her high school education and had learned some English by the time she moved to the United States from Colombia, South America. Then 16 years old, she had always dreamed of attending an American college to improve herself and brighten her future, although her own parents had not finished high school and had never encouraged her to do so. At 19, after receiving her GED in the U.S. and beginning paralegal studies, Carla married and started her family. After a few years, she was divorced. Until the children moved in with their father, Carla found it difficult to juggle work, school, and time with her boys. In addition, because she was receiving some child support, she was denied public assistance to help defray the cost of her education. Now that the boys are no longer living with her, Carla says that she has more time to devote to schoolwork, but feels sad and guilty that she is not with them. However, she is extremely motivated, hopes to attend law school after college, and looks forward to the day her sons return to her.

Joan.

Joan is a single, 40-year-old high school graduate with one son. She is currently working at a diner full-time, but wants to better herself and is attending college part-time. She says that she used to be on food stamps and has sought financial aid for school.
Joan’s major obstacle has been her teen-age son, because she “needed to take a lot of time in dealing with some of his personal issues.” She says that he thinks she is too old for school and that he doesn’t like it himself. In addition, Joan has trouble managing her time and never seems to have enough for herself. In spite of these obstacles, Joan’s college-educated parents have been very supportive, and she is looking forward to graduating with a degree in psychology.

Kathleen.

At 27 years of age, Kathleen—a high-school educated, single mother—is determined to finish college and make a better life for herself and her daughter. After a stint in the military, Kathleen took a job in the private sector. However, she was let go last year because her “daughter was always sick.” She then went on unemployment, which, she says, gave her the opportunity to attend college. In spite of the financial stress and lack of time for a social life, Kathleen cites several positive reasons to continue with her schoolwork: supportive professors, a scholarship, a sister who is a role model, and a friend who, in turn, looks up to her as a role model.

Obviously intelligent and motivated, Kathleen is excited about how her current educational experiences are helping her to mature, develop leadership qualities, and boost her confidence.

Megan.

Megan is a 34-year-old widow with two children. She is a high-school graduate and was employed as a secretary, but she says that it didn’t pay well enough to support a family, and “it wasn’t what I wanted to do the rest of my
life.” Megan relies on her late husband’s social security checks, a part-time job, and financial aid from the college to defray costs. She acknowledges the support of her family and the help of her fiancé, who watches the children while she studies.

Although money and the responsibilities of studying, raising children, working part-time, and doing housework are obstacles, she says that she is handling stress well and looks forward to becoming a nurse.

Theresa.

A former nursing assistant and single mother of two children, 27-year-old Theresa is determined to finish her college studies in social work. Apparently, Theresa has had no family support for her ambitions. In fact, the father of her children, whom she never married and who recently died, never wanted her to attend college. Theresa admits to once relying on public assistance for a year and a half, and says that this time in her life is “stressful.” She laments that the babysitting arrangement she has with her busy grandmother is an obstacle and, although counselors at school listen to her problems, she believes that academic administrators “look down” on her.

Theresa is extremely motivated about getting a better-paying job, and she wants to set a good example for her children so that they, too, will want to go to college one day. She says, “If I can prove I can do it, then they have no excuses.”

Claire.

Claire works full-time at the college she attends as a full-time student. The 24 year old is divorced and has a young son, who is enrolled in the childcare
program at the school. In addition to this help, she says that her ex-husband and academic administrators are also supportive. Her parents, however, played no part in influencing her decision to go to college, except "maybe just seeing how they struggled" without a higher education.

Claire finds it "very stressful" being both a mother and a student, but she keeps "looking toward the light" and wants to move up to a better position at the college once she gets her degree.

Yvette.

Yvette is a single mother of one small son. She says that she wanted to go to college and make more money so that she doesn't "always have to struggle" working in a shoe store. Yvette says that college is not at all stressful for her and that she is on the honor roll. Although it is occasionally difficult being a mother and a college student, she has help from her father, who watches her son, and a child psychologist at the school, who encourages her.

Yvette sees this time in her life as being good. She says that "being single is wonderful" because she doesn't "have to worry about taking care of a husband." She wants to help kids some day and hopes to go into the field of child psychology.

Sally.

Sally is 27 years old, single, and the mother of an eight-year-old boy. She currently works for a doctor and wants to someday take up nursing. She says her parents and her son's father have given her the help she needs to pursue her goals.
In addition, her boss and her academic administrators have been understanding and helpful.

Despite childcare issues and feeling overwhelmed at times, Sally remains motivated. She says that she considers her college education a priority, regardless of the time, stress, and money required. Says Sally, “I just have it in me that I want to succeed in life.”

Qualitative Findings from Interviews

The participants who agreed to be interviewed for this study shared their stories with the interviewer on a personal level. They were able to discuss their challenges and frustrations relating to single motherhood as well as hope, aspirations and accomplishments. The interviews contributed in answering the primary research question: How do the academic, personal and social barriers faced by low-income single mothers enrolled in institutions of higher education impact their educational persistence?

Thematic Analysis from the Interview Data

Educational attributes.

In order to seek patterns about their reasons for enrollment in higher education, the majority of the interviewees indicated that it was a financial motivator. Only one of the mothers responded that her reason to enroll was the fact that she wanted to be able to help her children with their schoolwork. Evidently she felt inadequate in that department.
**Personal attributes.**

In order to seek patterns about their adaptation to higher education as they relate to stress and coping, questions were asked about primary obstacles faced by these women. Three respondents indicated that the primary obstacle is financial. Kathleen, for example, lost her job as a result of frequent illnesses her daughter experienced. This caused Kathleen to miss work and consequently her employment was terminated.

Hilda’s financial situation was self-inflicted. Prior to enrolling in the community college, as a management trainee in a major department store, Hilda was told by her supervisor, that a degree in business would result in a major increase in her salary. However, prior enrolling in college, Hilda took a computer course, which she feels was a major stepping stone for her decision to enroll. Her college counselor was very supportive and encouraging, and as a 34 year old single mother, Hilda resigned from her employment to attend college full-time. Ultimately, she was hired by the college on a part-time basis, which enabled her to continue her studies, devoid of any transportation or scheduling problems.

Three respondents had problems with childcare, when occasionally they had to bring their children to class. Although this was not acceptable to some professors, these women had to make the decision to either miss class, or bring their children. They also expressed a feeling of worry about their children, whether they would be picked up from school and if they are safe.
Joan's major obstacle was her teen-age son with his many personal issues, on which she did not elaborate. However, in spite of dealing with these problems, and working full-time as a waitress, Joan was able to maintain a 3.9 GPA.

One interviewee indicated that a major obstacle was a feeling of guilt. Because Carla worked full-time and attended college full-time, she had very little time to spend with her two sons. Her continuous feeling of guilt caused her to blame herself, when her sons spent summer vacation with their father and ultimately never returned.

External influences.

In order to seek patterns about their support systems, respondents were asked about major influences in their academic life. In terms of helpful persons, three indicated that professors, colleagues and counselors at school provided positive influences in the educational and social domain. Two respondents reported a positive influence from their parents, and another from her father, who would frequently baby-sit to enable Yvette to attend classes. Two others claimed that either a boyfriend or fiancé was helpful and another received positive support from the father of her child. Contrary to receiving positive parental support, Doris' parents discourage her to enroll in college, with the attitude that she would be unable to handle her various responsibilities, and that taking classes would increase in her burden.

Receiving public assistance such as food stamps, housing or medical assistance, was a humiliating experience for two of the respondents. Hilda felt that
the welfare counselors purposely delayed their weekly meetings, oftentimes as long as three hours. She states:

They put you through a lot of stress. They need attendance every two weeks; if I mess up, they close my case. I am an A student and I’m trying to get somewhere in life. They treat me like I’m one of the other people that they are supporting and just sitting at home doing nothing. I have a lot on my plate and if I don’t give them my grades or attendance on time, they close my case.

Another respondent revealed that she stopped using food stamps, as she felt embarrassed in the stores where she shopped using these stamps.

When asked about transportation challenges, four of the interviewees owned cars, which would occasionally require costly repair. Carla indicated that on many occasions she had extensive costly car repair. Other respondents would depend on public transportation, or walk to school.

Education and career goals.

In order to seek patterns about educational goals, three of the interviewees aspired to earn at least a baccalaureate degree and Carla plans on earning a master’s degree. In terms of career goals, all of the respondents expressed the desire to obtain a meaningful position that would ensure economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their children. Their goal is to pursue a career, not just a job.

Three of the women indicated the need to pursue a better life than their parents had, in terms of education and employment. As Yvette shared, “Seeing my mom and dad struggle to support us”, was a major motivator to pursue a
college education. A breakdown of parental educational and occupational background is shown in Appendix M. Three of the parents had a college education, two mothers and one father. Hilda’s mother had only a third grade education and Carla’s mother completed ninth grade. One father had some high school and two parents completed a GED. The ages of the subjects are also included.

Summary

The survey instrument was categorized into four sections. The general questions were used to understand the interferences as they relate to academic persistence. They were further identified as dependent variable, of which 12 were considered actual barriers. Another section of the survey was used to measure and analyze the social factors as they relate to coping with life stresses and obligations that may impact academic persistence. Another section dealt with academic influences and educational goals. These questions also served as a way to measure this impact. The social and academic data were instrumental in constructing the matrix to facilitate the frequency table to assess the four hypotheses underlying this study. As Table 15 (p.59) indicates, 11.6% support hypothesis #1, and 44.2% support hypothesis #2.

The descriptive/demographic information of the survey was used to enable the researcher to understand the profiles of the subjects, including their ages, their marital status, and number of dependent children, the educational background and the type of institution they are currently attending.

Table 15 also indicated that a total of 19 subjects remained enrolled, despite receiving low social support. So in order to reject hypotheses #3 and #4, an
analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews was conducted, to understand
the reasons why the subjects remained enrolled.

Data from Interviews

The information from the transcribed taped interviews were coded and
arranged into categories linking the described variables to the frequencies of
responses (see Figure 6). The variables are described in Appendix B.

The interview questions focused on the various academic and social
impacts as they relate to academic persistence. Clearly, as Figure 6 indicates, the
highest number of responses relates to family characteristics. This descriptive data
includes the education of subjects’ parents as well as the number and ages of
subjects’ children. So in order to understand the phenomenon of academic
persistence, in spite of low social support, three interviewees indicated that they
wanted a better life than their parents had, in terms of educational and economic
status.
Figure 6: Frequency of Interview Responses
Interestingly, the second highest response rate was of a psychological nature, i.e. self-satisfaction. This phenomenon corroborates with the open-ended questions on the surveys, which addressed factors influencing educational persistence. Of those 25 subjects who responded to the question, four indicated that a major factor included increase self-confidence, improve life and improve self (survey #003, 009, 018, 039).

The next three variables from the interview responses related goal commitment, i.e. the level of importance that students place on obtaining a college education, which ultimately affects employment opportunity and personal development.

Interestingly, interviewees did not indicate financial need as a major impact relating to educational persistence, whereas the survey respondents rated economic self-sufficiency as a major influence. This information emerged during the interview process, as subjects were able to elaborate on their various academic and social influences. Although subjects indicated that economic constraints were viewed as a major factor, the in-depth interviews revealed that self-development as well as career opportunities were the direct result of financial stability. Thus it can be assumed that the convenience sample of ten interviewees did not necessarily represent the total population of 45 respondents, with respect to finance as a barrier. Overall, in terms of hypothesis 3 and 4, the interview responses and survey data demonstrated that obtaining a college education was a high priority, regardless of social or academic support.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Through the research for this study, it became apparent that low-income single mothers who are enrolled in colleges and universities face numerous challenges in their personal lives, which ultimately impact their academic persistence. Even though the subjects in this study faced various academic barriers, (policies and procedures of the institution, or lack of academic services) and social and personal barriers, (life events hindering educational persistence), these women were determined to remain enrolled, regardless of the severity of these barriers. Apparently the projected long-term benefit of a college education was the primary motivator.

In an attempt to address the research question: -- How do the academic, personal and social barriers faced by welfare and other low-income single mothers enrolled in an institution of higher education impact their educational persistence? --- this study revealed very pertinent and meaningful factors that impacted the educational persistence of the women who participated in this study. The surveys and the interviews contributed to answering this question.

Almost all of the literature reviewed for this study revealed that the primary purpose for a college education for poor single mothers was the need and desire for economic self-sufficiency, thereby reducing or alleviating the personal
and social barriers associated with low income. However, society and policy
makers repeatedly fail to understand that education, over and above job training,
is the key to self-sufficiency. (Carnevale & Reich, 2000; Goldberg & Collins,
2001; Gittell & Covington, 1993; Gittell, 1997).

In order to shed light on the major research question, the subsidiary
questions are addressed.

Subsidiary Question 1

How has welfare reform affected the academic success and persistence of the
single-mother student?

The term “welfare reform” has and still is receiving much attention as a
political item, but generally speaking, the United States has overlooked the
potential of education as a means by which women on welfare can achieve
independence and become productive members of society (Gittel & Covington,
1993). For this reason, several organizations and institutions are very active in
surveying and analyzing welfare issues. As discussed in the literature review, the
data indicate that while the number welfare recipients have dropped significantly
since 1996, 28% of students who were receiving TANF dropped out in 1998 (up
from 17% in 1997). Consequently, the average woman leaving higher education
and welfare is still struggling to support her children with a job that pays less than
$7 an hour (Carnevale & Reich, 2000). So to answer the question, how does
welfare reform affect the academic success and persistence of these single
mothers, it is evident that it “perpetuates” continuous poverty while mandating the
“welfare to work” initiative.
Subsidiary Question 2

How are low-income single mothers motivated to pursue a college education, and what contributes to their persistence?

The qualitative data for this study provided the information on motivation and persistence. Common factors emerging from the open-ended questions were mostly financial and career related, ultimately improving their lives and the lives of their children. The interviews however also revealed that personal development was a major motivator for pursuing a college education.

Subsidiary Question 3

How do welfare caseworkers influence the single mother college student?

In terms of understanding the phenomenon of welfare caseworkers’ interaction with the subjects, the survey questions stated: To what extent has dealing with welfare casemanagers interfered with schoolwork. The survey statistics revealed that those student who received low social support considered that dealing with welfare caseworkers a barrier to schoolwork and almost 30% of all respondents viewed this interaction as an interference, either a great deal or somewhat.

Furthermore, one interviewee elaborated in detail her experience with the welfare caseworker. She stated that the experience was extremely stressful and demeaning. Two other interviewees indicated that they stopped using food stamps due to the stigma attached.
Overall, as Gitell & Covington (1993) discovered, there is a huge lack of cooperation between social service departments and higher education institutions, and that states' data tracking systems are extremely inadequate.

Subsidiary Question 4

How do college administrators and faculty identify and accommodate the special needs of these students?

Although the researcher did not personally interview any college administrators or faculty for this study, the literature indicates that little is known about this "invisible population." (Kates, 1993). The lack of data on women who are already enrolled and who are educationally qualified, as well as the low-income women who withdrew due financial reasons, continue to be overlooked. However, when subjects in this study were asked about persons who impacted their decisions to remain enrolled, four out of twenty-five respondents indicated that teachers, mentors, advisors and counselors influenced and encouraged them.

Subsidiary Question 5

What are the academic barriers faced by low-income single-mother college students, and how do they influence their educational persistence?

As the literature reveals, adult students, including single mothers, have specific needs not necessarily experienced by the traditional college students, and these needs are not always met. Oftentimes the students are unaware of certain academic services, such as counseling, tutoring, and advising and therefore do not feel a social connection to the college as in Tinto's (1975) model. Furthermore, the low-income single mother has many other priorities that require attention.
Subsidiary Question 6

What are the social obstacles faced by these women, and how they impact on their academic persistence?

Overall, the surveys and the interviews corroborated the fact that lack of time was a major social obstacle. Although 46.8% of the respondents had one or two close friends, 31.1% indicated that it was at least three weeks to a month that they have socialized with friends. Thus, socializing was not a factor as a method of coping with life stresses and obligations, especially when dealing with schoolwork. Two of the interviewees reported that they “have no social life whatsoever.” And that all of their spare time is spent on schoolwork.

Subsidiary Question 7

What are the personal barriers faced by these single mothers, and how do they affect their educational persistence?

Receiving public assistance and the stigma of welfare proved to be an embarrassment to three of the interviewees. Another interviewee indicated that her low self-esteem impacted her desire to pursue a degree. Furthermore, the survey asked about lack of emotional support, and 26.7% of a total of 45 respondents indicated that this a great deal and 20% somewhat.

Summary and Conclusions

This study showed that there were several important factors that influenced the educational persistence of low-income single mothers. Those factors are (a) demographic, including the age of the subject, her socio-economic background, previous education, and the age of her children (b) the social support
as they affect how barriers are experienced, and (c), the academic support and barriers. Factors (b) and (c) were considered as variables which in turn were analyzed to test the four hypotheses—(1) high social support, high academic support; (2) low academic support, high social support; (3) high academic support and low social support, and (4) low academic and low social support and the differential impact on persistence. Clearly, the participants who completed the survey rated the importance of social support higher than academic support. Thus, when testing for hypothesis #1 and #2, a total of 24 (55.8%) responses were included in the high social support groups. Similarly, when comparing low and high social support groups with low and high academic support groups, and how they perceived the twelve barriers, the group with the low social support rated most of the barriers substantially higher than those students with low academic support. However, when comparing the two high groups, (social and academic), students who received high academic support rated the barriers higher than those receiving high social support did. So the data show repeatedly, that low-income single mothers in college place a higher value on social support than on academic support, in order to remain enrolled. Contrary to Tinto’s (1975) model where academic and social integration are essential for educational persistence, which would be included in the hypothesis #1 group (high academic and high social) of this study, the hypotheses #2 group, (low academic and high social support) actually comprised 44.2%, the highest frequency. The study results therefore indicated that high social support indeed, was a major factor for remaining enrolled, even in conjunction with low academic support. Thus, the quantitative
data from the surveys support both hypothesis #1 and #2. However, study results failed to provide support for hypotheses #3 and #4, dealing with low social support. In both of these cases, students persisted, even though the model predicted they would leave.

What is significant to note is that in spite of the low social support, a total of 19 students did remain enrolled. This constituted another 44.2% of the 45 subjects who should have left due to low social support. To understand this finding, the qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed.

The ten case studies from the interviews were analyzed and categorized into common themes, thereby enabling the researcher to understand the factors that influence educational persistence, even when social support is low. Overall, the interviewees' main concerns include self-sufficiency as well as personal development, mainly increased self-esteem, regardless of external influences. In other words, whether or not the subjects received any support whatsoever, whether from family, friends, neighbors, or the institution in which they were enrolled, they were determined to pursue that college degree. Additionally, two subjects felt that earning a college degree was likely to influence their children to attend college, to participate in civic activities and to contribute to society at large. The responses in this study parallel with responses of students from other studies (Huff & Thorpe, 1997; Kates, 1995; Rice, 1993; Ross, 1992).

Recommendations for Further Research and Policy Improvements

It is apparent that low-income single mothers in higher education face many challenges while maintaining their educational pursuit. It also is clear, from
this study and the many earlier studies that these special students, at least the ones who persisted, are extremely motivated and dedicated to their academic, personal, maternal, social and employment life.

However, the data from the research also reveal that large portions of former welfare recipients are now employed, but they are unfortunately still living in poverty (Carnevale & Reich, 2000). This fact is well documented in all the assessments of the “Work First” program in New Jersey, intending to end lifetime entitlements by assisting recipients in finding employment. However, the word “on the street” was that welfare workers’ main goal was simply to push clients off the program. (Liu, Gold, and Srivastava, 2000).

Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the major limitation of this study, where the focus is on the students who remain enrolled, future studies might focus on:

1. Conducting a research study on the single mothers who withdrew from college due to financial difficulties.
   a. under what circumstances did they withdraw?
   b. what was their academic standing, including GPA?
   c. What is their current financial situation?

2. Conducting a longitudinal case study on single mothers who are withdrawing.
   a. include GPA and academic standing
   b. examine reason for leaving
   c. include course load and chosen major, to ascertain if a trend exists
3. Information about higher education and financial aid is critical. How can colleges reach low-income single mothers with this information to recruit and retain them?

4. How can colleges create effective support systems to reach the single mothers?

**Recommendations for Policy Improvements**

1. Educate the welfare bureaucracy about the importance of education for recipients of subsidies. Focus on higher education and make clear the difference between “training” and education, i.e. short-term job specific training as opposed to long-term higher education, specifically earning an academic degree. Also make this information available to the recipients themselves. Focus on community colleges of a point of educational access for low-income students.

2. Initiate a liaison between higher education and departments of social services. This non-biased person should be trained in most aspects of the welfare system, as well as the higher education functions.

3. Educate the welfare caseworkers to enable them to relate to the student/mother in a compassionate matter, rather than in demeaning or discriminatory fashion. Decrease the required work hours for welfare obligations to include schoolwork. In other words, if a welfare recipient is enrolled in education, count education as a work activity to fulfill the requirement. Thus the problem of time management would be more “student friendly.”

4. Involve higher education participation in government welfare policy issues. This participation might involve the development of a database connecting
higher education with welfare. Additionally, dispel the myth that getting a degree while on welfare is a “freebie” or “double-dipping.” Advocacy groups might be the solution.

5. **Develop a demographic profile of all adult students in order to reach the specific group to offer special services, such as affordable child care, sufficient financial aid, special support groups by educating staff, administrators and faculty about this special population.**

6. **Develop a policy at the state level that would create incentives for public assistant recipients to enroll in higher education. This could include subsidized childcare and travel expenses.**

In the case of welfare reform, neither education nor social services alone can solve this huge problem. A change must occur—a change that would address women’s needs such as adult academic orientation, assistance with childcare, social and academic interactions, and time management. Efforts must be made to bring single mothers into the mainstream of the college community rather than allowing them to exist on the edge of campus.

During an interview with Vincent Tinto, Spann (1990) asked about essential characteristics of successful retention programs. Tinto summarized three main characteristics. First, staff and faculty at the institution must “have an enduring commitment to students.” Second, “the institution must have unwavering commitment to the social and intellectual growth of students.” Finally, effective retention is one of “involvement and community.” (p.19). Thus, based on Tinto’s characteristics, colleges must examine their commitment to the
education of all students, including single parents. The "enduring" commitment to all students must be the awareness of the special needs and the attempt to accommodate them.


www.centerwomanpolicy.org. html


1988 annual meeting paper. Paper presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), St. Louis, MO.


Appendices
Appendix A

Literature Review Appendix
## LITERATURE REVIEW APPENDIX

The only remedy to complete abandonment from the welfare system is education ("ex-welfare mother, 1997 Center for Women Policy Studies (July, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AVAILABLE INFORMATION</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>GAP IN LITERATURE / LACK OF INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw data of enrollment of referenced population in selected institutions</td>
<td>NJ Commission on Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw Data and/or percentages of welfare caseloads</td>
<td>Carnivale, Gittell, &amp; Greenberg Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare reform has influenced academic withdrawal</td>
<td>Decline in enrollments Carnivale, Gittell, &amp; Greenberg Studies</td>
<td>What does it mean? Under what circumstances did they withdraw? What was their academic standing? What is their financial situation? There is no evidence that &quot;Welfare to Work&quot; gets former recipients out of poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A direct correlation exists between income and level of education (economic self-sufficiency)</td>
<td>Center for Women Policy Studies</td>
<td>How can this simple concept be understood by society and policy makers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative stereotypes, stigma and humiliation associated with welfare</td>
<td>Jillyn Stevens, others</td>
<td>There appears to be a need for liaisons between welfare, higher education and society i.e. advocacy groups or task force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers who accept jobs at or slightly above minimum wage with few of no benefits will not become self-sufficient</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility &amp; Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (H.R.3734)</td>
<td>What is the human impact (socio. &amp; psycho)? How do higher wages contribute to the economy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional benefits of a college education (increase in self esteem, in children's educational ambition, improved relationship with children)</td>
<td>Center for Women Policy Studies Gittell, Gross &amp; Holiday (1993)</td>
<td>How can access for low-income single mothers be facilitated in N.J. (possibly a longitudinal study)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Description of Variables
DROP-OUT SCHEMA VARIABLES
(Descriptions and samples of categories)
based combination of models
Bean & Metzner (1985) & Tinto (1975)

A: BACKGROUND

1. Family: demographic characteristics (age of mother/student, number and ages of children, ethnicity, education of parents) Quality of relationship with family (Tinto)

2. Individual attributes: socioeconomic status, motivation, educational expectations

3. Pre-college: type of schooling prior to college (high-school graduate, G.E.D., secondary school grades, ability, and outside activities)

4. Age: of mother/student, and of her dependent children

5. Enrollment Status: the number of academic credits for which a student is enrolled, academic standing, and the type of institution where student is enrolled.

6. Ethnicity: includes cultural background, also relates to integration and diversity

B: ACADEMIC VARIABLES

1. Grades and Intellectual Development: Voluntary withdrawals from higher education tend to exhibit higher levels of intellectual development than do the average persisters. Conversely, academic dismissals tend to exhibit both lower aptitude and levels of intellectual development and to be of somewhat lower social status (Tinto, 1975).

2. Study habits: Students who possess poor study habits and study skills are more likely to drop out of college (Bean 1985)

3. Academic Advising, Absenteeism and Courses: The literature reveals that together with study habits and study skills, academic advising, absenteeism, major certainty and course availability are expected to have indirect effects on dropout through GPA, through the psychological outcome variables, especially satisfaction, and through the intent to leave. (Bean, 1985)
C: ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES/SOCIAL SYSTEMS

1. Peer group interaction: This variable overlaps with academic and social variables since peer groups are included in academics, family, and employment. At the institution, the integration into the academic and social system of the college is directly related to continuance in that college. (Tinto, 1975).

2. Finance: In attrition research, students' ability to finance their college education has been measured by various indicators (parents' SES, students' income or their perceptions about their finances), and the degree of financial concern. This variable is crucial to the study at hand (low-income, welfare).

3. Employment: The literature indicates that the extent of students' employment per week was negatively related to their persistence in college.

4. Family Responsibility: Research shows that subgroups comprise this variable, such as number of children, ages of children, household chores family members and family obligations.

D: PSYCHOLOGICAL OUTCOME

1. Utility: This variable measures the students' perceptions of the usefulness of their college education for employment opportunities and personal development. (Bean, 1985)

2. Goal Commitment: This variable refers to the level of importance students place on obtaining a college education.

3. Stress: This variable measures the extent to which students believe that they experience stress from factors that are not related to college attendance as well as amount of time and energy required for college study. In other words, balance between the academic and personal lives.

4. Satisfaction: See academic variable B3

E: ACADEMIC OUTCOME (INTEGRATION)

1. Grades and GPA: See academic variable B3
Appendix C

Letter to EOF Director
Letter draft to EOF Directors from Bettina Mason

Dear ........

This letter is a request for your assistance with my dissertation research. I am a doctoral candidate at Seton Hall University in the College of Education and Human Services. The topic of my research is the academic, personal and social barriers faced by low-income single mothers enrolled in institutions of higher education, and how those barriers affect academic persistence.

Initially, participation in this study would require that you distribute a letter (see attached) to all EOF students describing the research and asking if they would be willing to be contacted to discuss their possible participation. The letter ONLY seeks permission from students to be contacted about the study. Once you have identified students who are willing to be contacted about participation, I will ask you to convene those students at your office, where I will meet with them to describe participation requirements and answer questions. If possible, I would ask that you be available at that time to help students weigh the benefits vs. costs of participation individually and/or in small groups.

For those students who decide to participate in the study at the end of the introductory session, I will be available to distribute and collect the informed consent form and provide instructions to students on returning the survey devoid of any identifying information to a box in the EOF Office. I will leave additional copies of the survey and the informed consent form with you for those students who need more time to decide on whether they want to participate.

I will also alert students to the survey cover page, which contains a tear-off where students can indicate whether or not they are willing to be interviewed later by the researcher to elaborate on their academic experiences. Those who are willing will be asked to provide an evening contact telephone number on the tear-off. I will collect the tear-offs at the end of the introductory session and place them in a sealed envelope (separate from the Informed Consent forms and from the surveys) so that no one who knows the subjects will be able to identify who has expressed a willingness to be interviewed and so that interview transcripts cannot be directly linked to any identifying information on the subjects.

Your participation will be greatly appreciated and I look forward to your reply.

Very truly yours,

Bettina Mason
Appendix D

Letter from EOF Director
November 2, 2001

Bettina Mason
175 Hiawatha Boulevard
Oakland, New Jersey 07436

Dear Ms. Mason:

This letter is written in response to your request for assistance with your dissertation research. I confirm that I will gladly participate by providing access to a potential student pool for your data collection needs from among the student population of the Educational Opportunity Fund Program at County College of Morris. I look forward to implementing your instructions to put you in touch with the students, to distribute, and to collect information for the writing of your dissertation.

I wish you the best as you continue to pursue the challenges as a doctoral candidate. I anticipate hearing from you in the near future.

With regards,

Judith A. Dickerson, Director
Educational Opportunity Fund
Appendix E

Invitation to Students from EOF
Invitation

To:   All students  
From: EOF  
Date: .................  
Subject: Educational Research Study  

Dear Student:

You are cordially invited to participate in a research study about various stresses, challenges and barriers faced by single mothers enrolled in college.

If you are a single mother between 24 and 40, have at least one dependent child, and are interested in learning more about this research, please contact Valarie Redman in Room A255, or phone 973-684-6105.

Sincerely,

EOF Director
Appendix F

Letter to Student Explaining Study
Dear Student:

You have indicated your willingness to be contacted about participating in a research project conducted by Bettina Mason, a doctoral student at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services. The purpose of the study is to understand the academic, personal and social problems faced by single mothers enrolled in college.

Let me explain what I would like to do. First, I want to invite you to meet with me at the EOF Offices on [insert date and time] to receive more detailed information about what the study will require of you and how it might benefit you. Once I have answered any questions you have, I will ask you in discussions with your EOF Director to decide on whether or not to participate. (If you are undecided after our session, you will be given the opportunity to think further about your participation and will be asked again in one week)

If you decide to participate, I will distribute an Informed Consent form that will explain the study, how the research will maintain your anonymity and preserve your rights to confidentiality. Once you have signed the Informed Consent form, I will distribute a copy of the survey to you together with instructions for returning it to the EOF Office. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes for you to fill out and, if you wish, your participation in the study ends here.

However, the survey form includes a cover page that asks whether you are willing to be interviewed by the researcher about your experiences in college. Please understand that an interview is NOT required for participation in this study, but is entirely voluntary. If you are willing to be interviewed (it will take 45 minutes and will be held at a time and place convenient to you), you will be asked to provide an evening telephone number at which you can be reached. I will then ask you to “tear off” the cover page and I will collect it immediately. In this way, no one other than myself will be aware of your willingness to be interviewed and any identifying information (such as a telephone number) will not be associated with your survey responses. If you are not willing to be interviewed, of course, you should simply leave the contact information on the cover sheet of the questionnaire blank and return the otherwise completed questionnaire to the designated box in the EOF office.

Should you agree to an interview, we will set an appointment at your convenience. At our scheduled meeting, I will ask you further questions about your educational experiences, stress and coping issues, about external influences and about your academic and career goals Our conversation will
be tape-recorded and transcribed; however no other person will have access to the tape or transcript.

I want to assure you that all of the information you give me will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Names of participants, or other identifying information, will not be connected with the survey form or the interview transcripts.

Please understand that you may participate in this study simply by completing the questionnaire and returning it to the EOF office. The interview is entirely optional. Please be sure to return the completed questionnaires to the marked box in the EOF office, which will be checked daily until the deadline.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and Research Services. The telephone number of this Office is (973) 275-2974.

Thank you.

Bettina Mason
Appendix G

Informed Consent Form (Survey)
Informed Consent Form
Questionnaire/Survey

1. Researcher's Affiliation
   The researcher, Bettina Mason, is a doctoral student at Seton Hall University in
   the College of Education and Human Services, Department of Higher Education
   Administration.

2. Purpose of the Research
   The purpose of this research study is to gather information about the various
   problems, barriers and challenges faced by low-income single mothers enrolled in college
   in New Jersey. Completing the questionnaire should take no more than 15 minutes. The
   study is designed to investigate, document, describe and analyze the data collected from
   the questionnaires.

3. Procedure for this Research
   Respondent has agreed to participate in a research study involving an anonymous
   survey questionnaire. This document will ask questions about academic, personal and
   social challenges while attending college.

4. Voluntary Nature of the Project
   Participation in this study is totally voluntary. Subject can refuse to participate or
   discontinue participation at any time with no penalty or ill effect.

5. Anonymity
   In order to provide anonymity, names of respondents will not be used. Completed
   survey questionnaires will be returned to the Office of Educational Opportunity Fund
   (E.O.F.). Survey Questionnaire forms will have no information that can be used to
   identify individuals (name, social security number).

6. Security of Data
   Completed questionnaires will be returned to the Office of E.O.F. and collected
daily by the researcher. Once collected, they will be kept in a locked cabinet.

7. Confidentiality of Records
   The researcher facilitating this study is the only person who will have access to the
   research records.

8. Potential Risks for Discomfort
   The nature of this research does not involve any present or potential risk to any
   participant.
9. Potential Benefits to the subjects or others
   The results from study will hold potential benefits to the entire higher education community in that it will add to the emerging body of literature and research on the educational needs of low-income single mothers in college and how colleges can help them.

10. This research does not involve more than minimal risk.

   No alternative procedures apply to this study.

12. Contact Information
   The primary researcher in this study is Bettina Mason at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department Educational Administration and Supervision, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, New Jersey 07079. The telephone number is 973-761-9397.

13. Audio-tapes
   Not applicable

14. Seton Hall Approval
   This project has been reviewed and approved by Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and Research Services. The telephone number of this Office is (973) 275-2974.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Subject or Authorized Representative

Date

APPROVED
DEC 06 2001
IRB
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
Appendix H

Survey / Questionnaire
Single mothers in college - Questionnaire

The purpose of this study is to identify the academic, personal and social barriers faced by single mothers enrolled in college. Because of the importance of self-sufficiency and financial independence to single women raising children, higher education is a central concept of this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and all your answers will be kept strictly confidential. To help maintain confidentiality, please do not put your name anywhere on this questionnaire. The data collected will form the basis for a doctoral dissertation at Seton Hall University.

If you (1) are female and between the ages of 24 and 40, (2) have at least one dependent child at home, (3) have been single for more than two years, and (4) are currently enrolled in a college or university, check here and complete the survey

___ Yes, I meet ALL those conditions

If you do not meet all of these four conditions, please do NOT complete the survey and simply destroy it.

If you are willing to be interviewed for about 45 minutes in addition to completing the survey, please indicate your telephone number on the tear-off section below:

The questionnaire (survey) alone will be greatly appreciated. The interview is strictly optional.

For questions or other concerns, please contact the researcher, Bettina Mason at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, 973-761-9397

___________________________________________________________________________

___ Yes, I am willing to be interviewed, My evening phone number is ____________

___ No, I am not willing to be interviewed.
**General Information:**
To what extent have each of the following factors interfered with your schoolwork in the last two weeks? Please indicate by circling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Great Deal</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Transportation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Stress from college (tests, studying, presentations)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Decision about present job or trying to find a different one</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Performing household tasks (cooking, feeding, cleaning, laundry)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Juggling tasks for work, children, home and college</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Meeting the needs of the children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Dealing with the children’s schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Dealing with children’s arguments</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>9. Dealing with children’s father</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>10. Medical care for you and/or children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>11. Managing family finances</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>12. Finding affordable housing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>13. Too many demands from people outside of immediate family</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>14. Forming close friendships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>15. Recreation or free time activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Dating (going out with someone)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Lack of emotional support (from family, friends, others)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Lack of support from academic administrators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Dealing with welfare case managers</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

The next questions relate to your contact with friends, relatives, and neighbors who often are important factors in coping with life stresses and obligations

20. How long has it been since you went out with friends to a movie, restaurant, mall or other social occasion? (Circle one)
   A. SIX MONTHS OR MORE  
   B. TWO TO FIVE MONTHS  
   C. THREE WEEKS TO A MONTH  
   D. ONE TO TWO WEEKS  
   E. WITHIN THE PAST WEEK
21. How many close friends do you have, either living near by or out of the area?
   A. NONE
   B. ONE OR TWO
   C. THREE TO FIVE
   D. SIX TO NINE
   E. TEN OR MORE

22. How many neighbors do you know well enough to invite into your home for a visit?
   A. NONE
   B. ONE OR TWO
   C. THREE OR FOUR
   D. FIVE OR SIX
   E. SEVEN OR MORE

23. How often do you chat or visit with neighbors?
   A. NEVER
   B. RARELY (at least once a month)
   C. OCCASIONALLY (at least twice a month)
   D. FREQUENTLY (at least once a week)
   E. VERY OFTEN (daily or every other day)

24. How often do you exchange favors and/or services with neighbors?
   A. NEVER
   B. RARELY (at least once a month)
   C. OCCASIONALLY (at least twice a month)
   D. FREQUENTLY (at least once a week)
   E. VERY OFTEN (daily or every other day)

25. Do you participate in any organized religion? (church, synagogue, other)

26. Do you belong to or participate in any community group/club?

The next questions relate to your educational goals, those aspirations you are seeking to fulfill through your college attendance:

27. How many college credits are you currently taking?
   A. no credits
   B. 1-6
   C. 7-12
   D. more than 12

28. How much time did you spend on schoolwork during the last week?
   A. LESS THAN 2 HOURS
   B. 2 - 4 HOURS
   C. 4 - 6 HOURS
   D. MORE THAN 6 HOURS
29. Where do you study most of the time? (Circle one)
   A. AT HOME
   B. AT THE COLLEGE LIBRARY
   C. OTHER (specify)

30. With whom do you study most of the time? (Circle one)
   A. ALONE
   B. WITH ONE OTHER PERSON
   C. WITH A GROUP

31. How frequently do your household responsibilities interfere with your out-of-class study? (example: cleaning, cooking, feeding, shopping)
   A. NEVER
   B. RARELY (at least once a month)
   C. OCCASIONALLY (at least twice a month)
   D. FREQUENTLY (at least once a week)
   E. VERY OFTEN (daily or every other day)

32. How frequently do your maternal responsibilities interfere with your out-of-class study? (example: helping child with homework, attending PTA meeting, driving child)
   A. NEVER
   B. RARELY (at least once a month)
   C. OCCASIONALLY (at least twice a month)
   D. FREQUENTLY (at least once a week)
   E. VERY OFTEN (daily or every other day)

33. How much influence does the father of your children have on your educational progress?
   A. NONE
   B. VERY LITTLE
   C. SOME
   D. A LOT

34. How many times have you missed two consecutive classes in any course during the past month? _____
   Reason: ____________________________________________________________

35. During this current semester, how helpful has your academic advisor, or faculty advisor, been in course selections?
   A. VERY HELPFUL
   B. SOMewhat HELPFUL
   C. NOT AT ALL HELPFUL
   D. DID NOT KNOW ABOUT AN ACADEMIC ADVISOR
Please answer the following questions by indicating: Y = or N = NA = or don’t know

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Not Applicable or Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>37. Have administrative offices, tutoring and counseling centers been available to you during evening and weekend hours?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>38. Does your institution offer non-traditional/adult student orientation programs?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>39. Does the student newspaper at your institution include items about and interest to their non-traditional/adult students?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Does your college offer peer support programs to help nervous “newcomers” during transition for family life to the academic life?</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Does your campus help in minimizing on-campus transportation problems by clustering classrooms, offices and other facilities</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
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</table>

42. Comments:

Please indicate any factors or individuals not listed, that may have influenced your decision to remain enrolled in college:

Demographic Information


College: community college: ___  public 4-year: ___  private 4-year: ___

Previous education (choose) G.E.D.: ___  High School: ___  Other: ___

What is the highest academic degree that you intend to obtain at any institution? (Choose one). None: ___  Vocational certificate: ___  Associate degree (A.A. or equivalent): ___  Bachelor’s degree (B.A., B.S. etc.): ___  Master’s degree (M.A., M.S., etc.): ___  Other: ___

5
Marital status: (choose) Single: _____ Separated: _____ Divorced: _____ Widowed: _____

In what year did you become a single mother? __________________________

In what year did you enroll in your present college? ________________

Please list other colleges/universities you have attended prior to the present one (include year/s):
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

What is your major (chosen field of study), if any? ______________________

Children: Number: ______________ Ages: __________________________________

Beside yourself, who else resides in your household? Please indicate first name, gender and age (include stepchildren and stepparents):

Child/ren: ___________________________________________________________

Mother: ______________ Father: ______________ Grandmother: __________

Grandfather: __________ Aunt: ______________ Uncle: _________________

Cousin(s): ______________ Significant Other: __________________________

Other (please specify): __________________________________________________________________________________

Do you or did you receive any of the following subsidies (please indicate time period):

TANF: ______  AFDC: ______ Food stamps: ______ School lunch: ______

Childcare: ______ Housing: ______ Healthcare: ______ Other: __________

What is your current living situation: Apartment (multi-family building): ______

Private home: (one or two family house) ______ Group home (shelter, dormitory, halfway house, rooming house): ______ Condominium: ______

Townhouse: ______________ Other: (please specify) ______________________

Please return the Questionnaire to the designated box in the E.O.F. Office.
Thank you.
Appendix I

Informed Consent Form (Interview)
Informed Consent Form
(Taped Interview)

1. Researcher’s Affiliation
   The researcher, Bettina Mason, is a doctoral student at Seton Hall University in the College of Education and Human Services, Department of Higher Education Administration.

2. Purpose of the Research
   The purpose of this research study is to gather information about the various problems, barriers and challenges faced by low-income single mothers enrolled in college in New Jersey. The study is designed to describe and analyze the data collected from interviews (approximately 45 minutes) of those questionnaire respondents who volunteered.

3. Procedure for this Research
   Respondent has agreed to be interviewed by providing her contact telephone number to the researcher on a tear-off form. Respondent has been contacted by the researcher to determine a mutual time and place to meet. These interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed at a later date. Each participant may request that the researcher provide a copy of the interview transcript for approval. Participants may request that certain comments made during the interview be omitted from the record. If the participant does not wish to be tape-recorded, the interview will not take place.

4. Voluntary Nature of the Project
   Participation in this interview is totally voluntary. Respondent can refuse to participate or discontinue participation in this interview at any time with no penalty or ill effect.

5. Anonymity
   Subject completed a tear-off with a phone number that as used to contact her to set up this interview. Interview results will NOT be linkable to either the completed survey or any other college or government record.

6. Security of Data
   Transcripts from the interview recording will be kept by the researcher.

7. Confidentiality of Records.
   The researcher facilitating this study is the only person who will have access to the research records.

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Educational Administration and Supervision
Tel. 973.761.9397
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685
8. **Potential Risks for Discomfort**

The nature of this research does not involve any present or potential risk to any participant. The actual taped interviews will not result in an undue imposition on the personal or professional time of any participant. The average time for each interview is estimated to be around forty-five minutes. Should any participant wish to discontinue the interview at any time, she may do so without any pressure or consequence. Should any participant complete the interview and later wish part or all of its content deleted, she may do so by contacting the researcher.

9. **Potential Benefits to the subjects or others**

The results from study will hold potential benefits to the entire higher education community in that it will add to the emerging body of literature and research on the educational needs of low-income single mothers in college and how colleges can help them.

10. **This research does not involve more than minimal risk.**

11. **Disclosure of alternative procedures.**

No alternative procedures apply to this study.

12. **Contact Information**

The primary researcher in this study is Bettina Mason at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Higher Education, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, New Jersey 07079. The telephone number is 973-761-9397.

13. **Audio-tapes**

The researcher will ask permission to tape-record the interview and the subject has the right to all portions of the tape or request to have it destroyed.

14. **Seton Hall Approval**

This project has been reviewed and approved by Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and Research Services. The telephone number of this Office is (973) 275-2974.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the activity, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

---

**Subject or Authorized Representative**

[Stamp: APPROVED

DEC 06 2001

IRB
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY]
Appendix J

Interview Protocol
Interview protocol

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Case Study

Questions about educational attributes:

- What event triggered you to enroll?
- Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll?
- Who is most helpful to you now?
- Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
- Did anything in your occupational background influence your decision to enroll?
- Has the educational and/or occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll?
- Why did you choose to attend college when you consider the time, stress and money involved?

Questions about stress and coping issues:

- What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
- Who or what is the primary obstacle to you as a student/mother?
- How do you view this time in your life?
- Do you think your life experiences will help you in college?
- How does your current marital status impact on your academic pursuit?

Questions about external influences:

- Have you utilized any social services for support?
- What impact have academic administrators had on your persistence?
- How has being on public assistance affected you?
- Have you had any problems with transportation?
- How do your children view you as a student?
- Is childcare a challenge for you? Please explain.

Questions about career and academic goals:

- What is the most likely outcome of your decision to return to school?
- Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of your returning to school?
- What is your career aspiration at this time?
- What adjustments did you have to make to facilitate your goals?

General

Tell me about your life as a student, as a woman, and as a single mother.
You may start anywhere. Try to think of your life as a book with chapters that have not been completed yet. These chapters may be marked by high points or low points or turning points or transition. So please, as you speak, tell me when you are entering a new chapter.

Would you please summarize for me who are/were the most important people and events in your life?

Have you learned anything new today about yourself while telling me your story?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

**General Information**

Your age: ____________________________ Phone: ____________________________

College type: ____________________________

Previous education (choose) G.E.D. _____ High School _____ Other ______

Educational/occupational goals: ____________________________

Marital status: (choose) Single: _____ Separated: _____ Divorced: _____ Widowed: _____

Children: Number: ______________ Ages: ____________________________

Their educational plans: ____________________________

How long on public assistance? ____________________________

Other pertinent information about you as a student/mother: ____________________________

What is your current residence arrangement? Group home _______ Rent _______

Share with others _______ Other _______

**Background:**

Father’s education: __________________ Occupation: __________________

Mother’s education: __________________ Occupation: __________________

Extended family members: ____________________________
Appendix K

Interview Categories
INTERVIEW CATEGORIES

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ACADEMIC, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL BARRIERS FACED BY LOW-INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS ENROLLED IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: CASE STUDIES

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions about educational attributes</th>
<th>Seek to find patterns about.....</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enrollment persistence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decision to enroll</td>
<td>Economic self-sufficiency</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Adaptation to higher education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary obstacles</td>
<td>Academic and maternal roles</td>
<td>C3, C4</td>
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<td>Life experiences</td>
<td>Effects on persistence</td>
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<td>Needs for support</td>
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<td>Influence of academic administrators</td>
<td>Needs for support</td>
<td>B3</td>
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<tr>
<td>The effects of public assistance</td>
<td>Personal factors, self-concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare problems</td>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
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<td>Transportation problems</td>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
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<th>Questions about academic/career goals</th>
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<td>Most likely outcome of re-enrollment</td>
<td>Educational environment</td>
<td>B1, B2, B3</td>
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<td>Seeking higher status in life</td>
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<td>Career aspirations</td>
<td>Career decision making</td>
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<td>Adjustments made</td>
<td>Personal factors</td>
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<td>Motherhood and adaptation to higher education</td>
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<td>Negative experiences as mother/student</td>
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Appendix L

Reliability Test
Reliability Test

****** Method 2 (covariance matrix) will be used for this analysis
******

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS - SCALE (ALPHA)

Correlation Matrix

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N of Cases = 40.0

Reliability Coefficients 12 items

Alpha = .7084  Standardized item alpha = .7492

This alpha is considered reliable, as it falls between .6 and .9 (Abrami, et al, 2001).
Reliability Analysis

Procedure for evaluating multiple-item additive scales. The procedure provides a large number of reliability coefficients for multiple-item scales. Its subcommands encompass many different approaches to reliability definition and estimation. In general, the concept of reliability refers to how accurate, on the average, the estimate of the true score is in a population of objects to be measured. (SPSS v. 10, 1999)
Appendix M

Interviewees' Data
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mother's Education</th>
<th>Father's Education</th>
<th>Mother's Occupation</th>
<th>Father's Occupation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>FIELD SUPV</td>
<td>ENGINEER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
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<td>HIGH SCHOOL</td>
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<td>HOSPITAL ADMIN</td>
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<td>HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>SECRETARY</td>
<td>UTILITIES TECH</td>
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<td>TRUCK DRIVER</td>
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<td>CONTRACTOR</td>
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</table>

Did not know  *
Did not answer **
Appendix N

Transcriptions of Interviews
Claire

*Educational Attributes:*

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
   I wanted to be able to help my children in school.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
   Yes, the president of the school. I work here and the people I work with helped me. They told me you’re here why not.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
   My son’s father helped me. The school has a childcare program and that was a great help.

Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
   No. I am the second person to attend college in my family.

Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to enroll into college?
   No.

How has the education of occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll into college?
   They didn’t influence me at all, maybe just seeing how they struggled.

*Stress and coping issues:*

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?
   It’s very stressful. I have to be a mother and student. But I keep looking towards the light.

What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
   I’m motivated to finish. In the beginning I felt it would take too long to finish, but I try to get out quicker.

Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a mother?
   Being a mother and not having enough rest. I work full time, and I am a full time student.

How do you view this time in your life?
   Stressful.
How does your current marital status interfere with your academic pursuit?
I am divorced. My ex husband is support full though.

External influences.

Have you utilized any social services for support?
No

What impact have academic administrators had on your persistence?
They were always there for me.

How are your grades?
I have a 3.5 average.

Have you had any problem with transportation?
I don’t have a car, but I live close and I take a bus.

How does your son view you as a student?
He is 4 years old and he just understands I have homework.

Career and academic goals

What is the most likely outcome in you decision to come to school?
I want to stay working in the college, and once I receive my degree I want to move into a different position here.

May I ask you what is age?
I am 24.

Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
Diploma

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
Divorced.

How many children do you have?
One

Do you have any educational plans for your son?
Yes, he is going to college.

What is your father’s educational background?
I don’t know.

What is your mother’s educational background?
My mom went to 9th grade.

What is your father's occupation?
My father died when I was in high school.

What is your mother's occupation?
An office worker.

(The interview terminated due to lack of time allotted)
Doris

_Educational attributes:_

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
I found myself in a position where I’m not able to support my children and I wanted to be a good role model for the kids because I want them to go further in their life with a degree.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
No, they discouraged me; they felt like I wouldn’t be able to handle it. My mother felt like my plate was too full. They don’t even ask me about school.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
My boyfriend, even though there are times when he feels neglected, he still helps me out the most.

Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
No, college was never spoken to me. Right out of high school my father took me job hunting. He never considered college for me.

Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to enroll into college?
Yes, in high school I took accounting. After high school I got a job in accounting and now I’m going to school for accounting.

How has the education or occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll into college? If that even applies?
No.

_Stress and coping issues:_

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?
Because I never invested the time and money into myself. I always did for everyone else even though I’m still here for the children; I am here for myself too.

What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
I want to succeed; if I don’t do well, my financial aid won’t help and I don’t want to look bad.

Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a student?
The children's schedule, and because I'm now going to college it's causing tension in the office.

**How do you view this time in your life?**
I feel focused and my stress is under control. I always make school my first priority.

**How do you think your life experiences will help you in college?**
Life hasn't been easy for me. I have learned to work at what I want, but on the other hand I have the fear of failing.

**How does your current marital status impact on your academic pursuit?**
Since I'm single I get a lot of financial help so it makes it easier for me.

**External influences:**

**Have you utilized any social services for support?**
Yes, in the past I was on food stamps. I stopped using them because I was embarrassed.

**Have you had any problems with transportation?**
Not now, however in the past I didn't have a car and I had to rely on rides for my transportation.

**How do your children view you as a student; do they understand what you're doing?**
They are proud of me. They ask me how I did on a test or how was school today.

**Career and academic goals:**

**What is the most likely outcome in your decision to come to school?**
I want a higher status in life, better pay and self worth.

**What is your career aspiration?**
I would like to move on into a position in management.

**Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of you returning to school?**
Yes.

**What adjustments did you have to make in order for you to facilitate your goals?**
My family is affected by me not being able to be there all the time for them.

**May I ask you what is your age?**
36
Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
Yes, high school diploma.

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
Divorced.

How many children do you have?
Two. Ages ten and thirteen.

Do you have any educational plans for them?
They are going to college.

What is your type of residence?
I rent a one family house.

What is your father’s educational background?
High school.

What is your mother’s educational background?
High school.

What is your father’s occupation?
PSE&G technician. (Public Service Electric & Gas Company)

What is your mother’s occupation?
Secretary.

Who do you reside with at home?
My children and boyfriend.

Tell me about your life as a student, as a mother and as a single mother. You may start anywhere. Try to think of your life as a book with chapters that have not been completed yet. These chapters may be marked by high points, low points, or turning points or transition. Please as you speak, tell me when you’re entering a new chapter.

I think it’s hard because everyone depends on the woman. The children, husband or boyfriend, it’s very demanding being a single mother. It’s hard financially. Society treats woman differently with pay scales and all.
Joan

Educational Attributes:

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
I was tired of working in a diner and I wanted a job that paid more money. I needed a job with benefits. I also wanted to better myself too.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
Yes, my mom and dad. They offered to help me financially in the beginning.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
My parents are very supporting.

Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
I wanted to go to college when I graduated from high school. But then I decided to go to work to make money right away.

Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to enroll into college?
Yes; working at the diner.

How has the education of occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll into college?
Yes, both my parents graduated college.

Stress and coping issues:

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?
Because I like to learn, read and better myself.

Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a mother?
My son is an obstacle because I needed to take a lot of time to help in dealing with some of his personal issues.

How do you view this time in your life?
It’s relaxed now because I’m only taking one class this semester. It can be stressful with school, my son and work.

Do you think your life experiences will help you in college?
Yes.
How does your current marital status interfere with your academic pursuit?

I'm single. It really doesn't matter.

External influences.

Have you utilized any social services for support?
Yes.

What impact have academic administrators had on you persistence?
When I went to the community college, there was a counselor that was very helpful with financial aid.

How has being on public assistance affected you?
I don't have public assistance. I used to be on food stamps.

Have you had any problem with transportation?
No. I have a car. Sometimes it breaks down and can be very expensive to repair.

How does your son view you as a student?
He thinks I'm too old. But he sees me going and that's what matters.

Career and academic goals

What is the most likely outcome in your decision to come to school?
I hope to graduate with a degree in psychology.

Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of you returning to school?
Yes.

What adjustments did you have to make in order for you to facilitate your goals?
The time, fitting classes into my schedule. When you have a child everything goes around them and work.

Tell me about your life as a student, mother and as a single mother. You may start anywhere. Try to think of your life as a book with chapters that have not been completed yet. The chapters may be marked by high points, low points, or turning points or transition. Please as you speak, tell me when you're entering a new chapter.

As a student I enjoy school, learning and friends. As a mother it's very difficult. I never have time to myself and I always need to be there for him.

May I ask you what is age?
Yes, 40.

Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
Yes. A high school diploma.

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
   I'm single.

How many children do you have?
   One, a son.

Do you have any educational plans for your son?
   He doesn’t like school.

What is your type of residence?
   I rent a single-family house.

What is your father’s educational background?
   College.

What is your mother’s educational background?
   College.

What is your father’s occupation?
   A general manager.

What is your mother’s occupation?
   Taught special education.

Who do you reside with at home?
   Just my son and me.
Hiida

Educational attributes:

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
I worked as management trainee at Macy's and I was being over worked and under paid. I was told if I had a degree in business that would make a difference in my paycheck. It helps you succeed in the ladder of success. So I decided that I would come back to school.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
Before I came to PCCC I took a computer class and the teacher told me to take a look at going to college. He was the first stepping stone for me to go to college. Once I got here Mr. Casey, a counselor, had a lot to do with me staying here. He gave me a lot of courage and support in the beginning when I needed it the most. I was overwhelmed coming back to school at thirty-four years old, and in college.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
All my colleagues that surround me. I work in the college. They all encourage me. When I feel down, they pick me up.

Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
No, my parents aren't college educated. My brother went to college, but he never used his degree in his work. I didn't have too much encouragement to come to college. I went into high school then into the navy and didn't like that. I was married for eleven years. I became separated and raised my family alone and now I'm in college.

Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to enroll into college?
No

Stress and coping issues:

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?
My children are teenagers now and I needed to make a future for myself and for them. My daughter is sixteen years old, and a lot of upbringing is what you show them.

What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
Determination, the light at the end of the tunnel.
Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a student?
Financially it's hard for me. Money is a real stress on me.

How do you think your life experiences will help you in college?
Definitely, if I went to college as a child I wouldn't have taken it seriously. As an adult student I take it much more seriously. I dedicate more time to it, and I can see the outcome.

How does your current marital status impact on your academic pursuit?
It's a plus because I don't have to worry about having to spend my time doing the necessary chores involved in a marriage. Being a single parent is hard but it gives me more time to focus on my kids and on my studies.

External influences:

Have you utilized any social services for support?
Public assistance and section eight for housing.

How has being on public assistance affected you, if at all?
Since 1999, when I started going to school. They put you through a lot of stress. They need attendance every two weeks; if I mess up they close my case. I am an A student and I'm trying to get somewhere in life. They treat me like I'm one of the other people that they are supporting and just sitting at home doing nothing. I have a lot on my plate and if I don't give them my grades or attendance on time they close my case. If they see a person trying to change their life, they don't try to help, they keep it stressful. When I have to go there they make me sit there for hours for stupid things. The people that work there are ignorant. For an example; I graduate May 23rd and by June 2nd I must have employment or I have to work in their agency for my welfare check. How am I suppose to find a job if I'm working for them? They would only pay me $424.00 a month. They are so unfair. As soon as you get a job they stop your pay. They should give us a chance to start a job and get on our feet. What if the job doesn't work out? They give men that come out of jail money; they don't have kids. They should help the mothers with children first.

Have you had any problems with transportation?
No, I walk.

How do your children view you as a student? Do they understand what you're doing?
My daughter had a rough time in high school. The high schools around here are very rough and I almost lost my daughter to the streets. But now she's interested in going to school like me. They came to my awards ceremony, and see that I worked hard to get here and I got what I came for.
How are your grades?
Great, I'm on the honor roll.

Career and academic goals:

What is the most likely outcome in your decision to come to school?
Work and hopefully get my bachelors over time.

Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of you returning to school?
Yes.

What adjustments did you have to make in order for you to facilitate your goals?
Financial adjustment. I made more money working at Macys then what I make now. I had to live off of less money in order to go to school. But this is what I needed to do to go to school.

May I ask you what is your age?
36

Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
Diploma

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
Single

How many children do you have?
Two.

Do you have any educational plans for them?
Yes, they are going to college.

How long have you been on public assistance?
Since 1999.

What is your father's educational background?
High school.

What is your mother's educational background?
3rd grade.

What is your father's occupation?
Hospital administrator in the Bronx.
What is your mother's occupation?
I lost both my parents at the age of ten.

Who do you reside with at home?
Just my children and me.

Is there anything you would like to add or say that you think is important for me or anyone else to know; once this research is out there?
I am also a survivor of domestic violence.
I was in a domestic violence shelter in West Milford.
Kathleen

Educational attributes:

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
I decided that I would go back to college after I left the military. Having my daughter was a motivation for me because I want to offer her something better in life.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
No, not at all.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
Two professors that I had in college. They helped me by motivating me to stay and stick it out.

Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
After high school I wanted to go to college. I always wanted to go to college.

Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to enroll into college?
I lost my job this past April and I just wanted something better.

How has the education or occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll into college? If that even applies?
No, not at all.

Stress and coping issues:

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?
I knew I wanted to do it for myself and for my daughter.

What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
I got a scholarship last semester and it made me feel I am capable of doing anything. The better I did in school the more I wanted to keep going. My sister is a big influence. She is my role model. Also, one of my girlfriends said I was a motivator for her to go into school. She said if I could do it with a child, then she can do it without a child. So, that makes me want to stay in school. I don't want to let her down.

Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a student?
My finances are an obstacle. I always live on the edge. Not knowing how I'm going to pay the rent and bills. I lost my job because my daughter was always sick and I went on unemployment. Not that I want to be on unemployment. Unemployment gave me the opportunity right now to go to school. I don't know what I'm going to do when the unemployment runs out.

**How do you view this time in your life?**
I have mixed emotions of fear, excitement, and I'm scared. I think I won't make it; it will take me time to finish. But I'm excited because I'm maturing, and I'm realizing I could do it. I just went to a conference in the Catskills, a leadership seminar. We learned how to be team workers, how to communicate, and listen. It boosted my confidence. I worry about my grades a lot also.

**How does your current marital status impact on your academic pursuit?**
I have never been married.

**External influences:**

**Have you utilized any social services for support?**
Yes. Food Stamps.

**What impact have academic administrators had on your persistence?**
Just the professors I said helped me before. They have been there for me. Even just to cry on. They always say positive things to me. They have been great.

**How has being on public assistance affected you, if at all?**
Right now, it is helping me by allowing me to go to school.

**Have you had any problems with transportation?**
No, I have a car. Sometimes my car breaks down and I have to take a bus.

**Career and academic goals:**

**Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of you returning to school?**
I would hope so.

**What adjustments did you have to make in order for you to facilitate your goals?**
I don't have a social life. All my time is spent in the books, or with my daughter.

**May I ask you what is your age?**
Yes, 27.

**Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?**
I went to high school.

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
   Single

How many children do you have?
   One.

Do you have any educational plans for her?
   Yes, to follow in my footsteps.

What is your type of residence?
   I rent an apartment. I live in a two family house.

What is your father's educational background?
   I'm not sure; I don't really know him that well.

What is your mother's educational background?
   I don't have a mother, I have a stepmother.

What is your father's occupation?
   I'm not sure; I think he's an aircraft engineer.

What is your mother's occupation?
   She is a field supervisor for a cleaning company.

Who do you reside with at home?
   Just my daughter and me.

Tell me about your life as a student, as a mother and as a single mother. You may start anywhere. Try to think of your life as a book with chapters that have not been completed yet. These chapters may be marked by high points, low points, or turning points or transition. Please as you speak, tell me when you're entering a new chapter.

I never took school seriously when I was younger. So I went into the military for a couple of years, because I wanted to fulfill someone else's dream. It wasn't for me. I got out of the military and moved to Virginia. That's when I got pregnant with my daughter. Then I realized I needed to be with my family and moved back here. Then I decided that I needed to go to school.

As a student I see that I am maturing, I know where my priorities are now. I'm on a mission and I have to keep going. I want to provide a better life for my daughter. Things I didn't have I want to give to her. I'm 27 now; I wish I had my priorities when I was younger.
As a mother. I love being a mother but sometimes I need to have time to myself and it's hard with my daughter. One time I had a panic attack and my sister was there to help me.
Megan

*Educational Attributes:*

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
   The death of my husband. I needed to support my children.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
   Yes. My family was very supportive. They thought it would be a good idea for
   me to go to college.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
   My fiancé helps me a lot. He watches the children for me when I need to study.

Did any thing in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend
   college?
   No.

Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to
   enroll into college?
   Yes, I was a secretary and I didn’t like it. It didn’t pay enough and it wasn’t what
   I wanted to do the rest of my life.

How has the educational or occupational background of your parents influenced
   your decision to enroll into college?
   It didn’t influence me at all.

*Stress and coping issues:*

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and
   money involved?
   I made the time. It is stressful and my husband’s social security check pays for
   school. I also do side work for a friend of mine, doing electrical wiring.

What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
   I go to the gym and that relieves a lot of stress for me. My children are ten and
   twelve and I have learned to study around all of their interruptions and noise.

Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a student?
   Money is the primary obstacle. Money has always been an issue for me.

Do you think your life experiences will help you in college?
   Yes. Definitely. Life has given me a lot of experiences.

*External influences:*

Have you utilized any social services for support?
I just used financial aid from the college.

What impact have academic administrators had on your persistence?
They were always there for me.

How are your grades?
I have a 3.0 GPA.

Have you had any problem with transportation?
Yes. I totaled my car. I didn’t have the money to get another one. So, I had to rely on the bus.

How does your children view you as a student?
They think it’s funny. They make fun of me because I have homework.

Career and academic goals:

What is the most likely outcome in your decision to come to college?
Becoming a nurse and making more money.

Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of you going to college?
Yes.

What adjustment did you have to make in order for you to facilitate your goals?
I had to find a job to accommodate my school. I had to make the time with my children and school. Cleaning the house and cooking also needs to be done.

Can you tell me about your life as a student, mother and as a single mother?
Life as a student is nice because I can learn. A mother going to school is hard because I have all the responsibility of the children, house and financial matters.

May I ask your age?
Yes, I am 34.

Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
I have a diploma from high school.

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
I am a widow.

How many children do you have?
Two.
Do you have any educational plans for your children?
   Yes. They are going to college.

What is your father’s educational background?
   High school.

What is your mother’s educational background?
   My mother started college, but never finished.

What is your father’s occupation?
   Truck driver.

What is your mother’s occupation?
   She does payroll for the board of education.

Is there anything else you would like to add?
   No.
Sally

**Educational attributes:**

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
No, no event happened. I just wanted to go back to school.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
Yes, my parents were.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
My parents. They gave me the help I needed. I was a kid having a kid. I have grown up a lot. My son’s father is there to help me also.

Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
No.

Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to enroll into college?
Yes, I have worked for a doctor for the past four years and so its something I have wanted to do. I like the medical field and that’s why I decided to take up nursing.

How has the education or occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll into college? If that even applies?
No, that wouldn’t apply.

**Stress and coping issues:**

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?
It’s something I had to do. I kept putting it off and putting it off, and I didn’t want to keep putting it off. So regardless of time, stress and money, I made it a priority.

What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
I have it in me, that I want to succeed. I want to have a good life. I want to be comfortable. I just have it in me that I want to succeed in life.

Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a student?
Childcare, is my primary obstacle; finding someone to pick my son up, worrying if he is ok, if he got picked up.
May I ask you what is your age?
Yes, 27

Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
I have a high school diploma

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
Single.

How many children do you have?
One, boy age 8

Do you have any educational plans for him?
I have plans for him to go to college.

How long have you been on public assistance?
I have never been on public assistance.

What is your type of residence?
I rent a two family home.

What is your father’s educational background?
High school.

What is your mother’s educational background?
High school.

What is your father’s occupation?
A contractor.

What is your mother’s occupation?
She is a supervisor for a homecare agency.

Who do you reside with at home?
It’s just my son and me.

Is there anything you would like to add or say that you think is important for me or anyone else to know; once this research is out there?
Well, I would definitely say; if anyone wants to go to school, don’t let anything hold you back, it might be hard at first but it will be worth it in the long run.
Theresa

**Educational Attributes:**

What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?
I was working as a nursing assistant at the hospital and I didn’t like it. I didn’t like working with the patients, bathing them and all.

Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?
No.

Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?
The counselors at the school help me a lot. If I want to talk to them about anything, I can.

Did any thing in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?
No. I did go to college for one year after high school but I didn’t take it seriously.

How has the educational or occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll into college?
It didn’t.

**Stress and coping issues:**

Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?
My daughter was two when I started and I knew it would pay off at the end.

What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?
My children. I wanted to be able to tell them to go to college when they got older. I knew if I didn’t go, then I wouldn’t be showing them a good example. More education can get better paying jobs. If I can prove I can do it, then they have no excuses.

Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a student?
Baby sitting is a big obstacle. My grandmother babysits for me a lot but my grandmother wants to go to church every night and the children have to do homework and go to bed early and they can’t do that if she is bringing them to church with her.

How do you view this time in your life?
Stressful.

How does your current marital status interfere with your academic pursuit?
My children's father just died two months ago. I was never married to him but he was in my life. He never wanted me to go to college.

External influences:

Have you utilized any social services for support?
Yes.

What impact have the caseworker had on your persistence?
They don't help us. They look down at me. I couldn't take it anymore so I closed my case. They were upset that I enrolled in school without asking them first. I didn't think I had to because I was already in school before.

How long were you on public assistance?
I was on it for one in a half years.

How are your grades?
My grades are good now, but I had some challenges. I had another child and I couldn't finish my classes. I am completing them now.

Have you had any problem with transportation?
I use the bus. It's never a problem because I live on the main avenue so its always running.

How do your children view you as a student?
They only understand I go to school.

Career and academic goals:

What is the most likely outcome in your decision to come to college?
I'm going for my bachelors in social work.

Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of you going to college?
Yes.

May I ask your age?
Yes. I am 27.

Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
I have a diploma.

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
Single.

How many children do you have?
Two.

Do you have any educational plans for your children?
Yes. I want them to go to college.

What is your father's educational background?
I don't know.

What is your mother's educational background?
My mother graduated from college.

What is your father's occupation?
I don't know.

What is your mother's occupation?
She is a respiratory therapist.

Do you have any siblings?
I have one sister.

Is there anything else you would like to add that we did not discuss?
No.

Thank you for your time.
Yvette

**Educational attributes:**

**What event if anything triggered you to enroll in college?**
I wanted to go to college. I want to make more money so I don’t always have to struggle.

**Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll in college?**
No. It was just my decision.

**Who is most helpful to you now, if anybody?**
My dad watches my son for me.

**Did anything in your early educational experiences encourage you to attend college?**
I always thought about going to college.

**Did anything in your occupational background influence you in your decision to enroll into college?**
Yes, I don’t want to work in a shoe store for the rest of my life.

**How has the education or occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll into college? If that even applies?**
Seeing my mom and dad struggle to support us.

**Stress and coping issues:**

**Why did you choose to attend college, when you consider the time, stress, and money involved?**
College wasn’t stressful at all. Working is stressful.

**What personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student?**
My son. I want to tell him I finished school and be a good influence on him. I want him to know that no matter what, anyone can go to college.

**Who or what is a primary obstacle to you as a student?**
My son had to go to school with me sometimes. So if my dad didn’t watch him I had to bring him.

**How do you view this time in your life?**
Good.

**How do you think your life experiences will help you in college?**
I take college seriously now. I don’t want to spend time to party like the other students that are younger.
How does your current marital status impact on your academic pursuit?
   Being single is wonderful, I don’t have to worry about taking care of a husband.

External influences:

Have you utilized any social services for support?
   Only for health insurance.

What impact have academic administrators had on your persistence?
   I have a college person that is a child psychologist that helps me to keep going.
   She is always there to help me.

Have you had any problems with transportation?
   Yes, I have to walk.

How does your child view you as a student, does he understand what your doing?
   He is still small and he doesn’t understand.

How are your grades?
   Great, I’m on the honor roll.

Career and academic goals:

What is your career aspiration?
   To go into child psychology. I want to help kids.

Do you seek a higher status in life as a result of you returning to school?
   Yes.

What adjustments did you have to make in order for you to facilitate your goals?
   I gave up a social life.

Had you previously had a high school diploma or GED?
   Diploma

Are you single, married, separated or divorced?
   Single

How many children do you have?
   One

Do you have any educational plans for him?
   Yes, college.
What is your father’s educational background?
GED

What is your mother’s educational background?
GED

What is your father’s occupation?
My father is a carpenter.

What is your mother’s occupation?
My mom works for a factory.

Who do you reside with at home?
Me, my son, sister, and grandmother.

Tell me about your life as a student, as a mother and as a single mother. You may start anywhere. Try to think of your life as a book with chapters that have not been completed yet. These chapters may be marked by high points, low points, or turning points or transition. Please as you speak, tell me when you're entering a new chapter.

I loved going to school. It wasn’t stressful. It’s hard at times to be a mother and college student.
Carla

Educational attributes:

Carla, thank you for meeting me. I’m going to ask you a few questions, and the first set is about your educational attributes; and if you don’t want to answer them, that’s ok. This is just a guide. Ok, the first question. What event triggered you to enroll in college, if any?

I always knew that education is very important, that without education, you can’t go ahead in life and support kids. At that time, I married when I was only 19 years old and of course I didn’t complete my education. I had high school and also I have some paralegal instructions that I didn’t even finish when I got married; and it was only after that, I had my two kids and after that I got separated and divorced and realized that these two kids were my responsibility and I knew that I wasn’t able to go further without a degree.

That’s terrific. Were any friends or relatives influential in your decision to enroll?

No, not really, just myself.

And who, if anybody, is most helpful to you now?

Nobody.

Did anything in your early educational experience encourage you to attend college?

Yes, I always wanted to finish and master psychology, or something like that. But, when I came to this country, I didn’t have good orientation, I came to this country when I was only 16 and I have finished high school there, and I came with all this dreams to come to school and college and have a better future and all this you picture when you are in another country that is not as advanced as this one. So when I came with my father, unfortunately, he was ignorant in reference to college education and what to do and where to go and get enrolled and all that, and I didn’t have support of him. So but since when I was in my country, that was always my dream.

And what country was that?

Colombia

And then you came here you lived with your father?

Yes.
How about anything in your occupational background that would influence your decision to enroll in college?

Well, I always, a 16 year old, I didn’t have a job or anything there, but when I came here and I didn’t speak fluent English, I had to take courses there, the basic things and grammar and all that. I could write it, probably perfectly, but I had a problem communicating. That was something that I needed to improve and I knew that I had to do something if I wanted to find a decent job, not a factory job.

Good for you, good for you. Ok, now I think you already answered this, but have the educational and/or occupational background of your parents influenced your decision to enroll?

no

Stress and coping issues:

Here’s one that might be a little difficult to answer but why did you choose to attend college when you consider the time, stress and money involved?

I think it’s a need. It’s a must. I believe that education is not a luxury, it’s a necessity if you want to better yourself and get money, decent money to raise your family.

That covers the educational attributes. Now we want to talk a little bit about the stress and coping issues, which are obviously involved, when you are a mother/student. Ok, what personal attributes do you feel are helping you to persist as a student, I mean you are obviously organized and you are obviously motivated.

I always want to improve myself to better myself, not to settle for mediocrity, because if I give value to myself, I don’t see it like to help others or it’s for my kids because its something real personal and it gives me value. Like a need that I feel.

Ok, here’s another one. Now remember you don’t have to answer if you choose not to. Ok, who or what are the primary obstacles to you as a student/mother? Is there anybody or anything interfering with your pursuit?

No, I don’t feel I have any obstacles. In some ways, when I used to have my kids with me, it was a little bit stressful to run home from work to cook, and make sure that they were ready with all the homework, and running back to school, I could feel a little bit of guilt for not spending as much as I would like to have with my kids. I think that’s the only obstacle but it’s all with myself within me feeling guilty. But I knew it would not be forever, that it was a need, that it was beneficial not just for me but for my kids. So they understood that and they helped me a lot, having things ready and all that.

They obviously got some great traits from you.
Yes. They are not just wasting time.

Good for you and good for them. That’s great. Ok, now this one you can answer any way you want. How do you view this time in your life? I mean, I know that you said that your kids are not with you right now, but.

Well, in certain ways I can say that it’s very sad because I don’t have them with me and I’m not used to that. It’s like my life is upside down right now because before I had, like a meaning, a strong meaning of what to do things and why. Right now I don’t have my kids with me and it’s a thorough change but on the other side I keep going to school. It’s for myself; it’s to better myself. It certainly very stressful, not having control over my boys like I used to have before. And I mean, it may sound like weird, but since they left I went back to school full time, because I didn’t want to have too much time to think and to miss them and to be around the house while they weren’t there, so I decided to go full-time.

And with your full time job

Yes, but it keeps me busy and it keeps me focused and you know, but next semester I decided to go back part time because this is too much.

So how many credits will you take?

Next semester I’m gonna take nine.

That’s a lot, for a full-time worker

Currently I was taking 12.

With full time job. That’s two full time issues here.

Yeah

OK, do you think your life experiences will help you in college? I mean, I think they already have, that’s for sure.

Well, yes, in a way, because I take it seriously. I know that the time is very important, and if I’m there for a purpose, not to pass time like sometimes I see teenagers that they just go there to meet a girl or because they have to, but they don’t need to because their families take care of them and they are young, and sometimes the young people don’t have the experience, and I know how important education is, and I’m not that young anymore so I know that I have to take things seriously.
OK, now... how does your current marital status impact on your academic pursuit?

I’m not married now, have been divorced for 10 years, so there is no impact.

*External influences:*

**Have you utilized any social services for support, anything at all?**

No, I only have child support through probation but that’s not a social service. It’s just an agency that enforce that he pay. You know, out of his...garnish, his salary was garnished.

Oh! So then he had no choice.

Yeah, I mean it was real hard times, when he escaped, he went to another state and it was real hard to find him, I mean I persisted in finding him through probation but it was real hard. Its very hard to deal with these people, they have so much to do.

**So are you getting child support now?**

No, my boys moved back with their father, this summer, so I’m paying child support. But it’s not through probation, but it’s something I wanted to. It’s not much. I’m not rich or anything like that, I live check by check and have to pay the mortgage, but this is something I want to do. It makes me feel good inside, to be responsible.

Yes, you’re a responsible mother, and you know something, they will appreciate it, even if it’s not now.

I hope some day they will.

**The article said that you are strict with your sons...**

Yeah, and I know somehow they got fed up with that, and in the summer they went with their father and I feel bad now because I don’t have control over them and God knows what’s gonna happen to them. And that’s very scary. When your life is all over your kids, and then one-day they are gone, and you have no power because you’re so far away.

**But they will come back, they always do, whether you’re strict or not, you are always their mother.**

And it will never be the same, it’s a six-month gap, it really hurts. It seems they took advantage of all the sacrifices. I was their mom, their father, Santa Claus, the Easter bunny, the everything, cleaning lady, cooking lady taxi driver, coach,
teacher, everything I was while working full time and provider, and now they moved back with him.

Is he married, does he have a wife?

Yes,

That hurts, that now you think that she’s raising them?

Yes, and now there’s the stepmother.

What would happen if you said, no, you can’t move.

I tried. I didn’t make it easy for them, my boys, they used to go every summer there, for vacation and I expected them back. But they decided not to come back… so I had to hire a lawyer and the lawyer said to give up everything, because they are 12 years old, and are entitled to decide which parent they can go to, so it would have been a waste of money $2000 there, and then I went to a psychologist. And the psychologist told me that to let them go, that I couldn’t hold them here because that would be held against me some day. That they would throw it in my face that I never let them experience the father/son relationship. But it was real, real hard for me to let go.

Like you felt a hole in your heart?

Yes, so when I see kids their age, or things they used to like, I get sad, and I call them about 3 or 4 times a week. But now they don’t call,

Do you think the stepmother is influencing them against you?

No, I don’t think it would be the issue because they are grown up now and they are intelligent and they know what kind of life we had, and the bond we have is real love. I thought that it was real strong and that’s why it hurts even more, that everything we had was taken for granted. It’s just that they now have a beautiful new house and all the things I wasn’t able to provide for them. I think he’s doing very good, they both work and bought a beautiful new house with five bedrooms and each of them have a bedroom, and here they had just one bedroom, you know and all this things were changed, all the love and care that I gave them

Not that I’m a psychologist or anything, but do you think that this is all nice for a while, but eventually…..

That’s what everyone always says, it’s been six long months.

That is a long time, but things will probably change
Even though that I love them so much, and miss them so much, I’m hurt inside. I feel they betrayed me. That’s how I feel; I don’t know if that’s the right way to feel, but that’s how I feel.

You can’t help how you feel. It’s a shame, but I don’t think it will stay that way.

OK, how about the next question? What impact have academic administrators had on your persistence, I mean you’re still there,

No, none really. That’s one of the things I wish I could know more, because I just go to school, to the classroom then I go and do my things, I don’t know exactly what opportunities, what services or support groups they have, and stuff like that. I’m not aware of those, and if I had more time to look then I’m sure that I could take advantage of that.

That’s right. And the whole purpose of my study is that I want administrators, and faculty and everyone to know that we do have single mother and they are trying to better themselves, and they need help, and there’s many ways, that they could offer, but they have to know.

That’s right. How are you supposed to know if nobody tells you? They don’t send much, like newsletters, I think that would be helpful if they send you a magazine or something, about what’s new.

What’s new and what services are offered and sometimes, like childcare services or anything.

And a lot of school don’t offer that. Sometimes I had to take my kids to school because I had no babysitter and it was hard. They never had babysitters at school. I find that they have it at the gyms, but not at school. I think that would be something good for single mothers with young kids.

Sure, that would be very helpful. Some colleges have it for a low fee and they all should.

And not only daytime but also nighttime.

Sometimes even more so.

Daytime, mothers are supposed to work, this is for their kids, and then at night you want to go to school for a few hours, little by little, to get a degree or something, and I find I didn’t get that support, when I was at the Community College, I didn’t see any day care or nothing.

B. no I don’t think — Community College has it, maybe they do. But, they could help with that, and they could also arrange for having, not necessarily on campus,
but off campus. I mean when you go home and you do homework, someone could be there to help so you can focus on your academics.

I got so used to it, that I made my kids go to sleep at 9 o’clock because they had to go to school. And then after that, that was my time to study. Sometimes I fall asleep on my books. But it’s worth it. I’d rather go to school than to sit and watch TV, because I feel like I’m wasting my time I’m wasting my energy and I’m neglecting myself to improve myself. I mean it’s nice to watch TV but I see people come home from work and watch TV until 9 or 10 and they sit there like couch potatoes.

I see that you really do have a plan and a goal; this is wonderful. Now the next question probably doesn’t apply to you. How does public assistance, you haven’t been on public assistance...

No, thank God! I tired once but was rejected, but I was told that I was getting too much child support.

Oh, that’s another problem, it’s supposed to be for the child, but...

Yes, and I wasn’t even getting the money, but the court said I was supposed to get a certain amount, but I didn’t get any money. Not from him, from nobody. But somehow I’m glad that I didn’t get it because sometimes when you get help from public assistance, you get comfortable, you get too comfortable, and you don’t push yourself. In my case, I was pushed by reality because I didn’t have any other choice. Nobody was gonna give nothing for my kids, so I had to go out there and make sure I get something for my kids every day.

Have you had any problems with transportation?

Oh, I had many, many times; I had my car broken many times, and paid a lot of mechanics, but thank God I got a new car, but since I got a new car, I’ve had less problems.

Well, that’s a problem when you’re a single mother. How do your children view you as a student? I think we already discussed this a little.

They admire me, they always admire me, and they always say that they know for sure that I will finish the semester.

I know you will to, you are very motivated.
Now this may not apply anymore, but at one time it may have. Was childcare a challenge for you? At any time, was there a lack of availability or lack of funds?
Oh yeah, I had to find babysitters and sometimes my sister would help me or my mom would, a few time I had to bring my kids to class, I didn’t want to leave them alone, you know.

How did they react to that? They were OK?

Yes, they would sit in the corner, and did some coloring and the teachers didn’t mind.
Sometimes the babysitter came late and I had to fire them.

I guess you had to, right? You’re in school, it not that you’re going dancing.

Career and academic goals:

OK. A few more questions. These are about career and academic goals. But I think you already explained this. You’re in a dual program, right?

Yes. And I’m planning on finishing and possibly go to law school. But I’m 37 years old and have one or two more years to study; so I’ll be almost 40.

I know people your age or older who started law school.

Really?

Oh yeah, when you think. You are so motivated; you want to work probably until your 60 or 70, so why would age 40 be old? You’ll probably just keep going.

I guess so.

What adjustments did you have to make to facilitate your goals?

Well, you neglect yourself a lot of ways right? Time is number one. You can go, you cannot take time to be watching TV, to be partying with your friends, spending a lot of money and things, like you don’t need, because you need to buy books, you need to manage your time better, in order to be able to be a mother, to give attention to your kids, and also to study. Time management is very important.

Now we just have some general questions, but you answered some of them already. Your age you already told me and the college type is a four-year private university. Your previous education, high school or GED?

I have a high school in my country and I have a GED here.

Your educational and occupational goal we already discussed and your children, you have two, their ages?
c. 15 and 13

And they already have issues of their own, in a general way.

c. yes.

And what are their educational plans? Do you know what they are?

Yeah my son is taking right now, on Saturdays, credits for college. I think he likes drafting, and he said he’s thinking about being an architect.

Wow! And he’ll probably do it too. But he’s more into sports, so I don’t know. He plays football, baseball, and he spends a lot of time on that. Do you know if his father is supportive academically?

c. I have no idea, because when he left, they were real small. They were four and six, and from that age I did all the work.

Is there any other information that you think would help in a study like this?

No, not really.

What about your father’s education?

My father lives in Columbia; he never even finished high school. I didn’t have support and if it was for him, I would be working in a factory.

What is his occupation?

c. He’s retired now and used to work in a factory. He was here 32 years and went back to Columbia. My mother is here, they are divorced, and she went to the ninth grade. She doesn’t speak English, she doesn’t drive, and you always see her with a book, English, but she doesn’t speak, she’s scared of what people will say. She’s not motivated to learn.

It’s amazing how you turned out, considering your background.

You know why? Because in this country, you are forced, either you’re a winner or you’re a loser, it’s all up to me, it’s not up to my mom or up to my father, or up to my kids, it’s up to me of what I will become.

Yea, exactly.

And nobody is going to help you. And you have to make sacrifices and you have to know what you have to do, I mean no one is going to do it for you, and you have to pay a price.
And you don’t have any extended family members living with you or did you ever?

No

Well, thank you so much, Carla, you have been very helpful.

If you need anything, you can reach me here at work.

I really appreciate it.