

HOMEWORK AND HOUSEWORK: HOW FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES
AFFECT THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE OF SINGLE MOTHERS

by

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DEDICATION

To Aurora, Jasmine, and Juan—you have been my special source
of support and encouragement,
thank you

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study explores how and to what extent the family responsibilities of single-mother students affect their college experience. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with twelve single-mother students who were enrolled at The University of Texas at Arlington during the spring 2006 semester. Participants consisted of five white women, six black women, and one Mexican American woman, all of whom were upperclassman, varied in academic majors, and ranging from twenty to fifty-eight years of age. In this study, three themes emerged identifying how these students employed creative strategies for balancing their responsibilities, their similar attitudes toward their journey through college and decision to return or attend, and their sources of support, empowerment, and personal growth. These women, despite the difficulties they endured in their journey through college, successfully managed the demands of single-parenthood and college.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Education Statistics' "Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis" reports a trend in the increasing enrollment of non-traditional students who are older than typical students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1996). According to the report, the majority of non-traditional students attend two-year institutions, attend college part-time, work full-time, are less likely to obtain a degree, and are at higher risk of leaving school within the first year (NCES, 1996). It was also reported that "women were significantly more likely than men to persist or attain" although many of the women non-traditional students had the additional responsibility of raising a family (NCES, 1996, p. 50). The nontraditional student population is now estimated to be "forty percent of the total U.S. undergraduate population," and current trends indicate the percentage will rise (Chao & Good, 2004, p. 5). Many of these nontraditional students are women with families, and we can speculate that a many of these women are single mothers. To date, there are no federal systemic data collection procedures to obtain the exact numbers of single mothers enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States.

Higher education is a powerful tool in reducing social and economic inequalities. The journey through college offers students new experiences, personal growth, empowerment through knowledge as well as providing them with improved possibilities for employment and greater earning potential. Zhan and Pandey (2004) suggest that single mothers who

receive a college degree from a four-year university are nearly “twelve times more likely to live above the poverty line than their counterparts without a high school degree” (p. 671). Other studies have also shown that higher education for nontraditional students resulted in more immediate and greater returns of their investment of time and money. For women who are the sole economic providers for their children, obtaining a college degree is a logical investment. And whatever hardships that are endured in their journey through college are worthwhile.

Much research on college students focuses on traditional-aged students, their enrollment, attrition rates, retention, and departure, but little attention is paid to the nontraditional student, and even less attention paid to a single-mother student (SMS). Of the limited research that is conducted on SMS, most focus on those who are welfare recipients and are poor. It is a common argument that a college education can bring women out of welfare and aid in the reduction of the feminization of poverty. However, this argument also propagates the stereotype that SMS are all poor and welfare recipients. This is simply not the case. This study does not aim to refute previous research conducted on welfare recipient SMS; to the contrary, this study will add another dimension of SMS that has not widely been discussed. These women are purposeful agents who actively construct their lives, and despite their economic status, pursue a college education for career goals and personal enrichment.

Very few research projects focus solely on the college experience of these students and how they navigate the academic system and adjust to the campus culture. This study explores the distinct question of how and to what extent family responsibilities of single mothers affect their college experience. Of the twelve SMS who volunteered in this study, not one of them received welfare. I did not purposely seek out participants who did not

receive welfare; this was simply a result of convenient sampling. This project is small and only consists of one interview with each of twelve participants; this can by no means be considered representative of the entire population of SMS. There is a need to study diverse groups of nontraditional students, their enrollment and persistence throughout their journey in order to better understand what factors aid in their persistence and success and also what factors contribute to their departure.

My interest in the college experience of SMS derives from the personal experiences I encountered as a single-mother undergraduate student. My decision to return to school after a ten-year break was for personal fulfillment and a desire to obtain more marketable skills. When my daughter was ten months old and still breastfeeding, I found childcare, a full-time job, and started attending a university full-time. With breast pump in tote, I set out on my journey through college. I participated in many university sponsored activities, academic and social clubs, taking part in these events carrying a baby and a backpack. I felt that because I was at the top of my class and had a 3.5 GPA, I balanced the responsibilities of single-motherhood and college life relatively well. It wasn't magic; it was a very stressful and often painful prioritizing of my academic responsibilities over my family responsibilities.

I often wondered if other SMS experienced college as I had. The inspiration for this study came from my personal interest and experiences as well as my chance meeting with SMS in a class in which I was a teaching assistant. I presented my idea for this project to these women and they received this topic well. I thought, how do these women balance all of their responsibilities, how do they feel about their education and their journey, do they have any support, how do they persist? My previous experiences as SMS gave me special insight into the lives of the women I intended to study and "helped shrink the difference" between

myself as a researcher and these women as participants (Esterberg, 2002, p. 91). The interview process was essentially a personal relationship, and who I was as a person. The similar experiences I shared with the participants enabled me to quickly gain acceptance and to build rapport with this group. The SMS participants viewed me as genuinely concerned with their experiences and often commented that I “was easy to talk to.”

I was interested in what the SMS had to say about how their family responsibilities affected their college experience. Although I could draw on my own personal experiences and formulate hypotheses to test, I chose to downplay what I thought I knew about family responsibilities and the college experience and allow the theories to emerge from the data. Instead of having an idea of what I would find in the data, I utilized an inductive rather than a deductive method of reasoning. Walker and Myrick (2006) state, “Researchers using grounded theory set out to gather data and then systematically develop the theory derived directly from the data” (p. 248).

The qualitative approach to this study was necessary to gain a better understanding of how family responsibilities affect the college experience of these twelve SMS. Although similar data could be retrieved through surveys and questionnaires, the voices and stories of these women painted a more accurate picture of their lived experience. Through the interviews, I aimed to give these women a chance to tell their stories in their own words and to define their own problems and solutions. In doing so, these participants acquired a feeling of mastery of their environment.

This study adds to the body of knowledge about SMS and their college experiences. It does not offer suggestions to reduce attrition rates, increase retention or offer solutions to the problems that SMS face in their journey through college. It does, however; explore the actual

effects family responsibilities have on the college experiences of twelve single mothers who were enrolled at UTA during the spring 2006 semester. This study was essentially created by the women who participated in this research project, and I was simply their narrator. Because this study is about the SMS, it is also written for them. Much of the research conducted on SMS is intended to be read by other academics and often uses technical terms which are unintelligible to the general public. Nevertheless, this project brings forth the methodology, voices of SMS, and findings of this study in a user friendly and easy to understand language for academics as well as for the general public.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was conducted without assumptions about how and to what extent family responsibilities affected the college experience of the twelve participants. The only assumptions carried into this project are assumptions that guide qualitative methodology. It is important to the nature of this type of research that I, the researcher, have no prior assumptions in relation to the SMS and their college experiences. However, my previous experiences as a SMS may have inhibited me from genuinely entering this project without assumptions and this limitation is addressed in the methodology section. The literature that was reviewed for this project offered only background information of SMS and the college experience.

The phenomena of SMS and their journey through college fall under the broader categories of adult reentry college students and nontraditional students. I reviewed only a limited amount of literature from these categories to avoid blending theory into their actual stories. However, it was important to review literature on single mothers and single-mother students, as well as the college experience, to gain a better understanding of the general views about this population.

Single-parent Heads of Households

In 2004 there were nearly 13.5 million single mothers with children living in the same household across the U.S. (Employment Policy Foundation [EPS], 2005). According to the EPS data, single mothers tend to be younger, have less education than mothers in dual parent households, are less likely to be managers, more likely to work for large companies, and less likely to work full time. Tiarnyu and Mitchell (2001) suggest that many women also work in “either low paying or part time jobs” that are typically female dominated (also known as pink collar jobs) (p. 51). The income typically received from these pink collar jobs is often not enough to bring a family out of poverty. Shelton and Firestone (1989) suggest that women also tend to choose jobs that are more flexible but have lower pay, and as confirmed by the findings in this study, SMS choose jobs with flexible schedules that enable them to balance their college and family responsibilities.

Single motherhood is often associated with low income, low education, and limited opportunities (Goldberg & Kremen, 1990). Single motherhood is also often viewed as being a deviation from the traditional nuclear family, and negative stereotypes and images are linked to the single mother. Ruth Sidel (1996) in *Keeping Women and Children Last* asserts that the United States has demonized single-mother heads of households, and these families have been “despised, denigrated, [and] ostracized from main stream society” (p. 1). Society has labeled single mothers as deviant and inadequate but, has yet to address single motherhood as a feasible alternative to traditional families.

Many problems that single-mother heads of households face are due to low economic status and lack of financial resources. Sidel (1996) believes:

Single mothers suffer from other socially constructed disadvantages such as the gross inequality in the American educational system, a lack of decently paid jobs for those who wish to work, and a profound lack of community-based services that are necessary to families with two working parents and even more essential for single parents and their children. (p. 48)

Single mothers are often stigmatized and discriminated against based on their gender, and their single-parent status; this ultimately oppresses their opportunities for advancement. Sidel (1996) argues that we need to recognize that the problems of these families are rooted “in great part in the socioeconomic conditions of American life and that we as a society can change some of those conditions” (p. 50).

Previous literature on single mothers and single motherhood paint a negative picture of single mothers and their economic status. One who reads the literature and has not had any actual experiences in conducting research on, or is not personally acquainted with, or has never been a single mother, may equate the status of single mothers and single motherhood with poverty, welfare, and low educational attainment. In the general sense, many single mothers are poor and have not had the privilege or the resources to obtain a higher level of education. However, general assumptions are simply general and do not account for single mothers who are not poor, do not receive welfare, and have a high level of educational attainment.

The aim of this study is not to disprove previous literature. The aim is to determine how and to what extent family responsibilities affect the college experience of single mothers. Rather than following the lead of previous research of SMS, I chose not to emphasize their economic status, but to add another dimension and another view of single mothers that have previously been neglected. As confirmed by the findings, all SMS interviewed for this study were aware of the negative stereotypes and stigma associated with

their status as single mothers, and many chose to, instead of publicly announce their status, fly under the radar undetected. According to May (2004), the status of single mothers is “usually regarded as a defining identity” that these women are characterized by” (p. 169). May (2004) also suggests that it is not the status of single-motherhood that explains the woman, it is the woman who explains the status of single motherhood, and one should never assume that “the life story and the identity are one in the same” (p. 171).

Single-mother College Students

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000) reports that there are increasing numbers of non-traditional and single-parent students entering, for the first time or reentering, college and universities across the United States. The NCES study reported that in 1999, 26.9% of the college population had dependents and 13.3% were single parents. These statistics tell us very little about the lived college experience of the single parent, more specifically the single-mother college student. The number of single-mother students is also on the rise; however, there has been no attempt to systemically collect data about these students.

Of the limited amount of data on SMS, much of the literature focuses on single-mothers college students who are low income and are welfare recipients. It is assumed because of the already disadvantaged position, the single mother is especially needful of a college education and the “earning potential it represents” (Haleman, 2004, p. 775). Haleman’s (2004) article only focuses on the lives of single-mother college students who are social service recipients. *Shut Out* is an entire book about low income single mothers and higher education (Polakow, Butler, Deprez, & Khan, 2004). Tiarnyu and Mitchell (2001) wrote *Welfare Reform: Can Higher Education Reduce the Feminization of Poverty* and

debated if post secondary education is the answer for the reduction of poverty for women. Tiarniyu and Mitchell (2001) suggest that “income is directly related to education,” but acknowledge that barriers to higher education still exist for many single mothers attempting to return to or attend college for the first time.

The SMS included in this research did not believe in or identify with the stereotypical view of single-mother college students who were poor and received welfare. The SMS believed that their personal experiences may put them in the categories of single mother or poor individuals, but that they should not be lumped into a general category of poor single-mother college student or welfare recipient single-mother college student. On the contrary, only a few of the SMS interviewed described themselves as poor, and none of the SMS who participated reported currently receiving welfare. Chao and Good (2004) suggest that much of the literature on non-traditional students, specifically the single-mother students, “provides an unclear picture” [and many of these students] have been found to perform similarly to their traditional counterparts across several areas (p. 5).

The College Experience

To fully understand the issues of single mothers and their journey through college, one must also examine the college experiences of traditional students, their enrollment, attrition, retention, and departure. Ross (1998) indicates four motivational patterns as to why women return or attend college for the first time. These patterns are related to the age or life experiences of the student. The first motivational pattern is when women want to return to school, but because of certain life events are unable to, called, “women in waiting.” The second pattern, “late bloomers,” is when women discontinue their education but return after a major life event. Third motivational pattern is “change seekers,” women who feel dissatisfied

with their current situation. Fourth, is the motivational pattern Ross calls “reluctant returnees,” women who discontinue school because of family responsibilities and later return because of family responsibilities (1998, p. 116). I suspect that the students who participate in this study will reflect a mix of elements from all four of these motivational patterns.

Non-traditional students have overall low degree completion rates and Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) suggest that prior enrollment facilitates degree completion (p. 912). All SMS interviewed for this study had positive prior college experiences before beginning or continuing their journey at UTA, and those experiences empowered the SMS to be successful as students.

Tinto (1987) suggests that the more the student becomes involved and attached to the university community, the more likely that student will persist and complete their education. Tinto also states that the nontraditional student’s journey through college is similar to what is experienced by minority students, as they are faced with specific problems when attempting to integrate into college life.

Similarly, the educational theory of student involvement is also based on the idea that students’ involvement is connected to their persistence. When students are more physically and psychologically involved in the life of the college, they are more likely to succeed and feel satisfied about the education they are receiving. For example, a student who lives on campus, works on campus, and spends a great deal of time on campus has higher physical involvement than a student who only comes to campus to attend classes, and are more likely to persist in their journey through college. It seems unlikely that many SMS will report this high degree of involvement in college life, so there must be an additional factor that aids in their persistence. How the family responsibilities affect the college experience of twelve

SMS enrolled at UTA, the barriers they come across in their journey, and the factors that motivate their persistence to continue, will be explored in the interview process.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study explores how and to what extent the family responsibilities of twelve single-mother students affected their college experience at The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) during the spring 2006 semester. To gauge how these family responsibilities affected the SMS college experience, I examined:

- the prioritizing and completing of tasks associated with single-handedly raising a family (such as childcare, finances, and housekeeping) and their college responsibilities (such as home work and study time)
- persistence and pressure to attain and continue their education
- barriers and motivation towards fulfillment of their degree
- personal empowerment, growth, and sources of strength and support
- attitudes toward UTA.

The methodology employed was qualitative. In using a qualitative design, I sought rich data about the experiences of single-mother students that could not be attained using a quantitative methodology. This study gives us a composite picture that was previously unavailable of the experiences of single-mother college students attending The University of Texas at Arlington during the spring 2006 semester.

Limitations

In discussing the methodology used in this study, I must bring to the forefront my biases and positionality as a researcher. Since I was the means through which the interviews were conducted and analyzed, I am obligated to describe the position through which I examined single-mother students. Primarily, I was a single-mother undergraduate student and my experience as a SMS has given me intimate knowledge about the population I am studying, and has also influenced my perception of this population. Next, I have conducted this research to fulfill a requirement needed for a master's degree. Lastly, I am biased toward improving the success of the SMS and exposing the lack of support for single mothers and students with children from UTA. If the tuition for a traditional student and the tuition for a student with dependents are identical, why are the resources for these students so different? I remain aware of my positionality and biases throughout the entire research process.

Process of Selecting the Sample

Data for this study were collected from twelve single-mother students enrolled at The University of Texas at Arlington during the spring 2006 semester. Initially, all the participants were to be gathered using a snowball process. Contact with four single-mother students was made during the fall 2005 semester. These SMS knew of the study and were willing to participate in the research and to work as gatekeepers in referring more participants to this study. The gatekeepers were instructed to provide me with the names and contact information of willing participants who met the minimum criteria. The criteria for being considered in this study are that the student must:

1. be a single-mother (unmarried, widowed, or divorced),

2. have primary custody of at least one of her biological children,
3. have at least one of her biological children under the age of eighteen living in the same household,
4. be attending UTA during the spring 2006 semester and take the majority of classes on UTA campus, and
5. have completed at least one semester of college course work.

I chose to include the last requirement of having completed at least one semester of college work because I needed participants who had already experienced having been a college student.

Since SMS do not wear a label to identify that they are single mothers it would be nearly impossible to locate them without assistance. The gatekeeper's role in this research was instrumental in helping me gain access to this hidden population. The use of gatekeepers and the snowball process were the most efficient ways to recruit more interviewees. Because my initial contacts were SMS already enrolled at UTA, I did not foresee any difficulty in locating enough SMS to participate in my study.

My original participant recruitment methodology relied too heavily on gatekeepers, and to insure I would not experience the same obstacle as I did in the beginning of the semester, I asked for help from people in my own personal networks to assist in referring students to this study. These people included faculty, administrators, undergraduate students, graduate students, and friends who were aware of my intention to conduct research on single-mother students for my master's thesis. My need for participants slowly spread through word-of-mouth, the use of campus list serves, and email. Potential participants began contacting me to set up interview times.

To recruit my final three participants a flyer was created and approved by the IRB (see appendix A). This flyer was placed in the lobbies of all the colleges on campus as well as the University Center and Health Center. The flyer proved to be a useful tool in recruiting interested participants. Within two days of placing the flyers throughout campus, I received replies from five SMS wishing to participate. Not wanting to deny any of the five interested SMS from participating, I submitted and received approval for a second modification to protocol form to IRB granting permission to include the additional two participants (see appendix B for first approved application and appendix C for the modified application). These two requests brought my sample size to twelve.

Sample

The limitation to this sampling method is that it produces a nonrandom sample. The University of Texas at Arlington collects limited data on students with dependents and does not differentiate between married and non married, or male or female (B. Lorick, personal communication, March 22, 2006). Although it would be helpful to select a random sample for generalizability and representativeness, the true size and make up of the population of SMS on UTA's campus is unknown, therefore making it impossible to collect a representative sample.

The SMS who participated in this study were a sample of convenience who met predetermined criteria. Luckily, I was able to collect a diverse sample of twelve SMS. The names of the women in this study are as follows: Shelia, Kim, Lucora, Angela, Shannon, Glenda, Christy K, Ali, Audia, Laqueta, Christy C, and Lisa. Out of the twelve participants only one SMS wanted to use a pseudonym.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample

Name	Married/Never Married	Years as Single Mother	Age	Race	Ages/Gender of Children
Ali	Divorced	7	34	Hispanic	3M, 10F, 13F
Audia	Divorced	2	27	Black	7F
Angela	Divorced	8	NR*	White	8 M
Christie K	Divorced	2	30	White	9F, 11F
Christy C	S/NM**	1	21	Black	1M
Glenda	Divorced	14	58	White	16F***
Kim	S/NM	6	30	Black	6 F
Laqueta	S/NM	1	20	Black	1F
Lisa	Divorced	2	28	White	3F
Lucora	S/NM	13	34	Black	7F, 9F, 13 M
Shannon	Divorced	7	35	White	8F
Sheila	Divorced	4	34	Black	9F

*Non-reported

**Single/Never Married

***Older children not living at home

The youngest of the SMS interviewed was Laqueta, who was 20 years old, and Glenda, who was the oldest at 58. The women consisted of six African American, five white, and one Mexican American. The children of the participants ranged in ages from eleven months to sixteen years. Eight of the twelve participants were previously married and four had never been married. All the women were pursuing their first bachelor's degree and had previously attended another college or university before coming to UTA. The SMS grade point average ranged from 1.90 to 3.77 with a mean average of 2.92, half were seniors and half were juniors, two anticipated graduation in 2006, and four wished to continue to graduate school after completing their bachelor's degree. Many of the students expressed career aspirations in helping fields such as nursing, teaching, social work, writing spiritual literature, and counseling.

The women who participated in this study all contributed unique personalities and life experiences. Although all of the women studied shared the common elements of being a

single mother and attending UTA, no two women experienced college in exactly the same way. These women come from different walks of life, are different ages and races, have different majors and career aspirations, and come to UTA for different reasons and from different locations. Shannon came to UTA to be closer to her brother and father who both attend UTA. Angela, who was previously a Texas resident, returned after fleeing an abusive husband. After her divorce, Ali relocated from California. Christy C evacuated from New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina and without delay enrolled at UTA. The diversity of the SMS in this sample adds another dimension to this study.

Data Collection

Scheduling the interviews was the biggest problem to the data collection. All of the SMS were under time constraints due to work, family, and school responsibilities. Sheila, Christy C, Audia, and Lisa were straightforward and scheduled their interviews during the initial contact. Multiple contacts were made through telephone and email with the remainder of the SMS participants to set interview times. On the way to an interview with Lucora, I received a call from her that she could not make it due to her son getting in trouble at school. I had to reschedule my interview with Glenda as her first big test was on the same day as our interview and she stated that she “will be all wound up and needing to study.” Angela and I had a miscommunication as to the time and place, and we had to reschedule for a later date. Shannon and Christie K were constantly busy; it took a month for me to get a commitment to an interview date. And the remainder of the participants were late to their scheduled interview.

The data for this study were collected using a questionnaire (see appendix D), one in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interview, emails, and conversations before and after the

interview. The questionnaire efficiently required basic information such as age, number of children, college major, and academic standing. The questionnaire helped break the ice between the SMS and me and assisted in building rapport. The SMS was able to situate herself comfortably and fill out the questionnaire before beginning the interview.

A semi-structured interview approach was selected “to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 87). An interview schedule was developed to gather information pertaining to the SMS previous and current college experiences, status as a single mother, their work, and family responsibilities. The in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted during a single encounter with the SMS. Ideally, I would have liked to have conducted every interview in study rooms at the library on campus. However, due to scheduling conflicts, unavailability of rooms, and for convenience, I conducted the interviews in such varied settings as study rooms, an empty classroom (at the SMS request), an empty office in University Hall, a SMS’s home, and room 415 in University hall. These locations are all quiet places and easy to find. Lucora requested that we meet in an empty classroom on campus as she wanted to be near her next class and did not want to have to rush the interview. Shannon asked me to come to her home for the interview because she took classes at night and could spare some time while the children she babysat took their naps. Kim was running late to the interview so I had to utilize room 415 University Hall to free up the empty office for another graduate student conducting interviews. The remainder of the SMS met me either in the empty office in University Hall or in a study room at the library.

The location of the interview did not seem as important as I had initially anticipated. Aside from the interview with Shannon, there were few distractions to the interview and the

SMS were candid with their answers. The digital recorder was very small and was not a concern; two SMS did not even realize it was a digital recording device. Before the digital recorder was activated, I took time to explain the interview process to the SMS and reminded them that they could stop at anytime without penalty. I also reminded the SMS that I was willing to answer any questions they had of me at the end of the interview and that I would be available to them by phone, email, or in person should they need to discuss the interview with me.

An interview guide was followed that contained sixty-four questions and allowed the SMS to speak freely within the topic (see appendix E). The interview ranged in length from forty minutes to one hour and twenty minutes. The questions, which were broken into sections, asked about previous college experience, the decision to attend UTA, their single-mother status, current college experience, and work and family responsibilities. Because some of the questions asked were retrospective, it is difficult to gauge the reliability of the SMS's answers. I had reservations about the SMS's ability to recall exact circumstances and answer accurately some of the questions regarding their single-parent status and past college experiences. Although I asked retrospective questions about the SMS's single-mother status and prior college experiences, I did so to gain insight into the subject's experiences and did not depend strongly on these answers. I relied more heavily on the answers provided for the current situation of the student. All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed by myself.

It is logical to believe that the family responsibilities of SMS has some effect on her college experience, therefore: this study has face validity. The interview poses a wide array of questions pertaining to the SMS's attitudes, feelings, and perceptions about her family

responsibilities and her college experience. This interview covered the range of meanings included within this topic.

Ethical Considerations

Before sample selection began, I applied for and received permission to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board for the use of human subjects at The University of Texas at Arlington (see appendix B). All SMS who participated in this study were required to sign a consent form (see appendix D) before completing the questionnaire and beginning the interview process. The consent form informed the student that she could refuse to participate in this study, stop, or pause this interview without any penalty. Along with having the SMS read and sign the consent form, I went over it with them and highlighted my contact information on their copy of the consent form. I also informed the SMS that their participation in this study was purely voluntary and they would not benefit in anyway from their involvement. I assured the SMS of the highest level of confidentiality and informed them that the transcribed interviews would be kept in a locked file cabinet separate from their audio recorded interviews. I also guaranteed the student that if she wished to remain anonymous, all identifying information about her would be changed in the final thesis product.

Conducting the in-depth interviews was a long and intimate process. Even though I did not initiate friendship with any of the participants, I chose not to deny the friendship that some SMS offered to me. The SMS who participated in my research voluntarily allowed me access to their lives as women, single mothers, and college students; without them, there would be no study. After the interview, I answered all the questions that the SMS had about my own personal experience as a single-mother college student.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and sent to the SMS for comments and suggestions. I viewed this research as a relationship and the SMS as a partner, and it was important for me to give them the opportunity to be involved in the process. By listening to their stories, receiving their knowledge, and writing a thesis about single-mother college students, I felt this could be empowering for them (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). All SMS received a copy of the transcribed interview but only four of the twelve participants chose to send back additional comments. The comments were mostly to change misspellings of names, correct wrong times, semesters, and years. There were no major changes that altered the integrity of the interviews.

The next step in the analysis was the process, “getting intimate with the data” (Esterberg 2002, p. 157). I already had familiarity with the data, because I was the interviewer and transcriber of the interviews. I listened to the interviews while following along with the transcription. I also scrutinized the emails and field notes for groups of meanings.

The process of open coding came next. This is where I looked at my transcribed interviews, line by line, identifying potential categories and themes. Basically, I read and reread the interviews, wrote notes in the margins and highlighted elements of interest. After I completed the open coding, I went to my computer to copy and paste quotes relevant to that theme/category into separate word documents. These quotes were accompanied with line number, page, and participant’s name. I compared the groups of meanings within the word document and identified important recurring themes. I have titled these themes, *The Act of Balancing, the Journey, and Sources of Support, Empowerment and Personal Growth*.

The first theme, *The Act of Balancing*, identifies how the SMS cope with negative stereotypes about single-motherhood and how they utilize creative strategies for balancing their multiple responsibilities as well as manage spheres such as their work schedules and managing childcare. The second theme, *The Journey*, examines the barriers and motivators that the SMS face in pursuing their education and their attitudes towards the university and the education they are receiving. The last theme, *Sources of Support, Empowerment, and Growth*, explores the personal growth that these women experience, their empowerment as women, mothers, and students, as well as their sources of support.

CHAPTER IV

THE ACT OF BALANCING

The SMS participants in this study are performing the act of balancing. They meticulously balance the tasks of being a single-mother, college student, and oftentimes full-time employee. Through the words of the SMS participants we hear how they articulate their status of single mother and how they painstakingly create a balance between the requirements of a college university and the needs of rearing and maintaining a family. We also hear of the creative ways these SMS use to manage the separate spheres, such as their work schedules and managing childcare. This chapter explores how these women express their single-mother status by coping with the negative stereotypes and stigma associated with single-motherhood, how they balance, prioritize, and complete the tasks necessary for raising a family and completing a degree, and the creative ways they have kept it all together.

I Don't Tell

The two-parent family has traditionally been the norm. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number single-parent families (Schmitz & Tebb, 1999). However, there has not been a change in the perception of the traditional two-parent family; this type of family is still considered to be “the only healthy model” (Schmitz & Tebb, 1999, p. 16). Single-parent families, more specifically families with a single-mother head of household, have been stereotyped as fragile and problematic, labeled deviant and inadequate, and have yet to be accepted as a viable alternative to the traditional family. It is no wonder why, to cope with

negative stereotypes, many of the SMS in this study choose not to tell that they are single mothers, particularly in a university setting. The choice not to disclose or disclose upfront their status as single-mother students is one of the spheres these women managed and used to cope with the multiple responsibilities associated with their status. The SMS often put their children's needs first and "all identified themselves primarily as parents" (Boyer, 1999, p. 105).

When asked how she felt about returning to school as a single mother, Shelia replied:

I was excited about returning to school, but it was scary because I was older and I had a child. So. . .and I felt. . .I would never tell my professors; I never have said anything about it because, in the workplace, single-parents are treated differently and so I've never disclosed that information in the workplace. And for some. . .don't even know why I felt like I had to hide it at school, as well. I felt like I may be treated differently. So um, that was just sad to even be feeling that way.

For Sheila, her choice not to disclose that she was a single mother served as her safeguard against being treated differently from other students. Although Sheila chose not to disclose her single-mother status in the classroom, with professors, and administrators, she did not hide it from everyone. Shelia is an active member of a single-mother group on campus. I asked Sheila if she knew of single mothers in any of her classes and her response to me was:

Not in my classes, no. I mean, I've met single mothers through the group, through the single mother's group, but not in my classes. They're probably just not saying anything like I don't say anything, though.

The youngest SMS interviewed, Laqueta, attended UTA during her entire pregnancy (until her eighth month), but like Sheila she chose not to disclose that she was a single mother. When asked if any of her professors knew she was a parent, her response to me was, "If something happens, I let them know that I have a child and that is the reason I missed, but other than that, I walk in the classroom like any other student."

Another student, Christie K, stated that she did not feel comfortable enough to divulge that she was a single mom and said, “They really don’t give you that type of atmosphere,” when referring to professors and administrators. These SMS, through the act of “not telling” are attempting to avoid the stigma associated with the label of single mother. According to Kissman and Allen (1993), “A common source of environmental stress that many mother-headed families share has to do with the negative attitudes they encounter in many quarters of the larger society” (p. 42).

All the SMS, with the exceptions of Sheila, who chose not to disclose and Shannon who disclosed up front, expressed that they only disclosed that they were parents if something came up and they had to miss a class for family reasons. Christy C remembers first coming to UTA after evacuating from New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina and experiencing the difficulty and frustration of securing a reliable baby sitter. Christy C recalls how she told her professors she had to miss an entire week of classes:

I emailed most of them. I think the email said, I really don’t want a pity party but want you to understand my situation, but don’t pity me, that’s just me, you know I am from New Orleans and I really don’t know anybody and that I don’t have a baby sitter for this time and please excuse me for missing my assignments and readings that I have missed. When I came to class, my genetics teacher, he never really talks to anyone; he just is in and out. My history teacher tapped me on my desk and said, “I understand and don’t worry about it.” My other teachers are like try to get here when you can, the other teacher told me that my presence matters, and I was like oops doomed. But he did not scold me; he allowed me the work and the notes, so I was OK.

The email Christy C wrote to her professors mentioned the circumstances surrounding her missing classes, but did not disclose her single-mother status. Like Christy C, all of the SMS in this study “are well aware of negative images of single motherhood” and how these negative images may influence others’ opinion of them as students (Haleman, 2004, p. 770). By choosing not to disclose their single-mother status in the college setting, in effect

“walk[ing] in the classroom like any other student,” they are alleviating themselves from the potential stressors and challenges many other single mothers face in society.

On the other hand, Shannon copes with the negative stereotypes of single-motherhood in a different way. Shannon describes her first semester at UTA when she had to miss several days of school:

I took the children’s literature class, the very last week of class my daughter got really sick. Severely ill. I don’t know if it was the flu or what, this was in June and that was really weird. She had a fever for three days and I just emailed my professor the 1st day and the rest of the days to let her know, and I was so scared that this would affect my grade, cause class participation was a big part of the grade and I was not there to participate. The professor was like just let me know if you can make it Thursday for the final or we can make other arrangements. I just, every day, emailed her and when I was in class I showed her the doctor’s note and emergency room papers and stuff like that. After that experience with that professor being so understanding, I figured most of my professors I wouldn’t have a problem with

Shannon has learned through personal experience that some professors are fair and sympathetic to those students who have extra responsibilities. Shannon talks about how she discloses she is a single mother during her first encounter with a new professor:

I made it a habit that on the 1st day of class, I let my professors know that, its not an excuse but I am a single-parent and there are times when she [her daughter] may have to come to class with me cause either school is out or for some other reason, and I may miss some classes cause, she has severe asthma and I tell them that so there may be some days that I may not be able to be here. But I will make sure that I email you or call or do something to let you what that situation is. I have missed two days so far this semester because she [her daughter] was sick. I haven’t had a problem with any of my professors but I have heard stories, other people had told me that they had problems.

As the previous passage shows, Shannon chose to tell up front that she is a single mother. For Shannon, her choice in telling that she is a single mother was not to invoke leniency or special treatment from her professors. Shannon states:

I don’t think the professors that I have had have been any more difficult or unfair with me than any other student or more lenient with me. It’s like I can’t walk into my math class,

and tell my professor, you know what, I did not get my work done cause my child was sick.

Sarcastically Shannon adds, “Ah poor me, I am a single mom. Can you make my work load less?” Shannon knows her responsibilities as a single mother are not an excuse for poor performance as a student. She knows that regardless of what she must do at home, she still must complete what is required for her classes.

From the previous quotes, we can see how SMS balance their status as a single mother and a college student by choosing not to tell or telling up front. For the SMS, their “educational experiences often provide an opportunity for disrupting negative expectations directed towards them” (Haleman, 2004, p. 770).

By choosing not to tell that they are single mothers, the SMS believe it prevented them from being negatively stereotyped, therefore, equalized the classroom setting and reduced their environmental stressors. I originally anticipated that SMS would disclose their single-mother status upfront, as Shannon did. However, I was pleasantly surprised to learn it was just the opposite. This demonstrated to me the authentic diversity within SMS and how they coped with negative stereotypes and articulated their single-mother college student status.

Flexible Scheduling

The interviews revealed that SMS coped with the act of balancing college, family, and work responsibilities with careful planning and scheduling of their time, cutting back on housework and school work, and utilizing different means of childcare. Balancing all their responsibilities was no small feat. Many SMS informed me that the demands of college and

work often conflicted with the demands of the family. The SMS expressed a feeling of being pulled in all different directions.

Though she was not employed at the time of this interview, Christie K's statement about her act of balancing college and family responsibilities encompasses the time constraints and sacrifices felt by all the SMS interviewed in this study. Christie K states:

When you get home you have dinner to make and laundry to do and your homework doesn't get done until midnight and you don't go to bed until one or two A.M. And you have to get up at six. There is just not enough time to be a good mom, and I won't shrink on being a mom so I will stay up all night and do what I have to do.

All women reported they felt like there was just not enough time to get everything done and declared that cutting corners with their children was not an option; their children were the priority.

The scheduling of college classes and work was important in creating the balance between college, family, and work. Many SMS choose to schedule their classes around the needs of their children and repeatedly choose jobs that have flexible work schedules. Shelton and Firestone (1989) suggest that women "may choose occupations that allow flexible scheduling or relatively few hours per week but that pay low wages" (p. 112). Glenda worked as a substitute teacher and when asked about her schedule she replied:

I go to school Tuesdays and Thursdays from nine A.M. to nine-thirty P.M. and the other three days I hoped I could work, but I am so burned out, so worn out that I can't. I am really having a hard time getting in some hours at work. It is so intense, and so hard to recuperate. But I am more available to my daughter so I can keep an eye on her and I am more in the home arena, so it's healthier for her, so I only have to worry about her two nights a week.

Glenda pulled along a black carryall that contained food, snacks, and coffee that would sustain her for the day. Glenda needed to take a full course load and not wanting to

leave her sixteen-year-old daughter home alone too many nights, and having to work, Glenda crowded all of her fourteen credit hours into a two-day period.

Lucora, who worked as a substitute teacher, took a mix of day and evening classes and worked around her school schedule to be available to her children. When asked why her schedule was like this, Lucora responded:

My kids. Because my one daughter gets out at 2:15, my other daughter is supposed to get out at 3:15, but by her being in a tutoring program, she doesn't get out till 4:30 and I just don't like not being there all those days, you know say Monday. To get the kids to and from school safely.

Angela also created a schedule around her family and work needs. When I asked Angela about her class schedule this semester, she was happy to report that she only had to take classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays which gave her “two days out of the week to work and to volunteer at her son's school on Fridays.” Furthermore, Kim's schedule was designed around her family and work responsibilities:

I work. . .my work schedule is. . .I take all day Tuesday and Thursday, if I'm not studying. If I don't have anything major going on. I work during the evening and I work all of my schedules around picking my daughter up from school and her ballet. My schedule gets built around her schedule.

Kim had the luxury of being able to work from home and have her daughter with her while she worked. When asked how she managed working at home with her daughter present she replied:

It's so funny because if I'm working on poetry, or you know, if I'm helping my mom, we're doing a cookbook, so if I'm editing something for her, my daughter will come and bring her Barbie Laptop, and work right next to me. . .right next to me.

Although having a job where you could work from home, like Kim, was not an option for the majority of SMS in this study, other SMS found different ways to have a flexible work schedule. Working on campus was Laqueta and Audia's answer to balancing college,

family, and work. For Laqueta, working on campus was ideal since she did not have a car and lived on campus. When asked about her schedule, Laqueta replied:

I only had Tuesday and Thursday classes at first because that is all I wanted; I had to change my schedule because I wanted my daughter to go to the YWCA. Since UTA pays a portion of the daycare, and the only way they pay it is if I go to school Monday through Friday. It's very hard to get in and UTA pays, I only pay \$56 a week and its like \$180, UTA pays the rest.

Laqueta opted to spread her classes throughout the week to be eligible for a child-care assistance program that she had waited ten months to get into. The child-care assistance and mandatory schedule imposed by the program enabled Laqueta the flexibility to work. Without a car, however, Laqueta chose to work on campus in the work-study program. Although work-study was convenient it only offered Laqueta sixteen hours a week of work.

Laqueta states:

They only give me fifteen-hundred-dollars of work study, so that lasts from August to December and that's like only three-hundred a month. When you have to buy food and pampers and all those things to consider, it is not enough. Plus electric and phone and all those things. And when it runs out, it runs out. It's ridiculous, so if I work a lot and use up those fifteen-hundred-dollars before December, then I won't have any left.

Even though working on campus made finances tight, it allowed Laqueta more time to spend with her daughter. Laqueta was able to put her daughter to bed every night and be there when she woke every morning.

Audia also spread her classes out through out the week. "Mondays I go to class from 10:00 A.M. to 11:50. I have two classes that are on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Tuesdays and Thursdays I am here from 8:00 to 12:20. Basically every day." She also worked on campus sixteen hours a week. When I asked Audia about her work-study, she replied:

I work sixteen hours. But the thing is I am just here cause its convenient and the pay is not bad. I come here and do my four hours or my eight hours depending on what day it is, and then I am out. Simple as that.

According to research conducted by Debord, Fanning, and Kerpleman (2002), the scheduling of “work hours were important factors [and] having flexible, convenient hours permitted parents to spend more time with their children” (p. 314).

Full-time Work Schedules

In stark contrast to the SMS who reported flexible work schedules that enabled them to be more available to their children, Christy C, Shannon, and Ali worked a full-time schedule during the day, took classes at night, and were less available to their children. Their rigorous work and school schedule caused constant conflict between the needs of their family and their school and work responsibilities. The act of balancing the multiple responsibilities of single handedly raising a family and attending a college university was amplified by the need for these three women to work full-time. Campbell and Moen (1992) suggest that “the strains single mothers perceive in balancing work and family demands may be influenced, in part, by the amount of time spend working” (p. 205).

After Evacuating from Hurricane Katrina, Christy C took the first full-time job that was offered to her. Christy C needed to work out of necessity and stated:

It was the hook up when I first got out here. A lot of the churches were adopting families and this guy he was like you have a car; you can work. He said I will give you directions and so when I went, the 1st day they were like here let me show you what to do, so I am a bill collector. So that’s how I got my job.

On top of working a full forty-hour work week, Christy C managed to take sixteen credit hours and care for her one-year-old son. Christy describes her class schedule:

Monday five-thirty to six-fifty, Tuesday five-thirty to six fifty then seven to eight-thirty, Wednesday five-thirty to six-fifty, then seven to nine-fifty, Thursday is the same as Tuesday and the internet class just whenever; I just printed out my syllabus.

Christy C desired to be able to spend more time with her son, but describes how she sets aside a quality playtime ritual to make up for the times when she is not home,

I work and go to school and we have play time that we do no matter what at 9:00 P.M. I don't care what I am doing at that time, we don't negotiate. It is our intimate time together. By ten he is bathed and in bed. I just rip that out of the day, I don't care what is going on.

Like Christy C, Shannon worked during the day as an in-home childcare provider and took her classes at night. Her schedule was tough; she worked all day, saw her daughter after school for a few hours, and then went on to class. Shannon expressed her concern to me about being less available to her daughter this semester as compared to last semester. When asked if she thought she spent enough time with her daughter, Shannon replied:

No, I don't. Especially this semester and taking the night classes. I think that is why she is having some behavior issues at school and stuff. On Mondays, Tuesday and Thursdays I pick her up and get home like at four, I have class at five-thirty and get home at six-fifty and she has to take her bath at seven and get ready to go to bed and she is in bed by eight o'clock. Thursdays, I have bible study that I usually go to unless she has something at school and then I don't get home until like nine or ten.

To compensate for her absence during the week, Shannon devotes a large chunk of time on the weekend to spend with her daughter; doing the things they enjoy. Shannon told me:

For me it's a really fine balance, where do I balance out what I have to do, cause we have to live, but you are still important enough. Ya know what this weekend is just me and you. And I am not doing anything else, just me and you and we are going to hang out and watch family movies together, make cookies together, that kinda stuff.

A study conducted by Winslow (2005) suggests that "there is a cultural ideology of intensive motherhood, which is labor intensive and child centered" (p. 732). To make up for her lack of availability to her daughter, Shannon conducted intense mothering on the weekends.

Ali was in the same situation as Christy C and Shannon. Ali worked all day at a local school and took all of her classes at night. Ali revealed to me that she was unhappy with her work situation and explained the reason why she continued to work there: “That is why I stay working [there]. I am able to take them to school, drop them off and I am off at 3:10 and they get off at 3:20, and I can pick them up everyday.”

Ali felt “stressed out” by being bound to her work schedule. In addition to her full-time schedule, her employer also required her to attend meetings that were typically scheduled in conflict with her classes and her children’s sports activities. Ali made a trade-off. In order to spend time with her children, she remained in a demanding job that offered virtually no benefits nor advancement opportunities. Campbell and Moen (1992) propose that “single-parent mothers most at risk of job/family strain are those who work long hours, have little control over scheduling those hours, [and] are not satisfied with their work” (p. 208).

At the time these interviews were conducted, all the SMS either worked or were looking for work with the exception of Sheila. These eleven women were doing more than double duty; they were simultaneously balancing their work as single mothers, students, and employees.

Cutting Back on Schoolwork

In order to balance college, family, and work responsibilities, SMS interviewed in this study regularly cut back on the amount of time spent studying and completing homework. Several SMS reported that they felt they did not spend enough time studying and were sometimes not prepared for class. To get some studying time in, SMS reported studying late at night after their children went to bed, wherever and whenever they could, and studying

very little but relying on memory. Homework was occasionally not completed and often extra credit assignments were never attempted.

Glenda who had a 3.7 GPA, one of the highest GPA of the SMS interviewed, felt that, with all of her other responsibilities, she did not have enough time to study. Glenda is very dedicated to her college education and is a self-proclaimed “over-achiever.” When I asked her how many hours a week she studied, she replied:

You would not believe. I have to study more than most people because I am really. . . a little bit older. Let’s see, every chance I get I am in front of the books, more than twenty hours a week. I live school. I eat sleep and drink it. Even on the weekends.

Glenda wished she could have another day to get more study time in so she could get “A’s.” Over many years Glenda has been attempting to complete her degree. She completed two associates degrees at local community college and she stated, “This time, I am doing it right.”

Compared to other SMS in this study, Glenda is an anomaly. Although Glenda stated she did not have enough time to study, her GPA showed that she was doing well in school. On the other hand, we find the majority of SMS struggling with their school work. Lisa with a 2.8 GPA reports:

I find that I am struggling a bit more, but I think that is because I don’t get to study as much. I have to take care of my daughter; she is with me most of the time. If I had more time to study, like in the evenings. When my parents helped out, it wasn’t an issue; I could come up here and study. But now they don’t watch her as much.

Christie K and Angela both report only being able to study after their children went to bed and similar to Lisa and Glenda, they report not having enough time. Ali who has a 1.9 GPA and is currently on academic probation stated that she only gets to spend eight to ten hours a week studying and feels like she is not prepared for her classes. When I asked Ali what the

reason was she felt so unprepared for class, she replied, “My kids, when one gets sick the other one does, soccer practice, I am always run run running with the kids.”

Lucora, like Ali, also has a 1.9 GPA, attempts to study wherever and whenever she can. She let me know that she studies nearly twenty hours a week and when I mentioned I thought “that was a good bit of time,” she replied:

Yeah, I try to anyway. In the car, because I’m counting in the car, in the grocery store, the new habits that I’ve picked up, you know. Sitting in the bathroom, I keep some note cards there and by my desk, you know just different subjects, you know.

In contrast to those SMS who felt that they were not studying enough, Laqueta, who has a 3.0 GPA, chose to do only a minimal amount of studying. When I asked Laqueta about her study habits, she told me, “Whoo, I don’t really study.” Out of curiosity, how she had a 3.0 GPA and did not study, I asked her, “How do you prepare for class?” Laqueta replied:

Like I have a test today, I will probably look over that after I leave here and that will be it. I have never been a good studier but I get good grades. I am a lecture person. I can understand everything you have said and repeat it. Cause I can hear it. And that is how I take my test, I remember everything you said. Like I will remember this whole conversation, and like the last test in my adulthood and aging class, I got an 85 on my last test. I did not look over the work. I would not even say how many times I went to that class before the test. This class is a really simple. It’s not like my college algebra test; I go to that class, regularly.

Right after the interview, Laqueta crammed for her exam. On a similar note, Kim, who is an extremely articulate and intelligent business woman skimps on assignments but does the minimum required to maintain her 2.8 GPA. When I asked Kim if she turned in all her assignments on time, she said “no” and went on to explain:

Being a mother and coming from an entrepreneurial family. . .although I made a decision to come back to school and I said I had two years to, you know financially get things going, opportunities presented themselves and I took them. You know, and it did kind of make me look at some homework assignments and say okay, that’s not gonna happen. This isn’t going to happen. And I do understand consequences in that.

Laqueta and Kim are going through the motions of what Pope (2001) calls “doing school” to complete the requirement for their degree. Because these students are single working-mothers feeling the constraints of time, they are “focusing on managing their workloads and cutting corners. They memorize the facts and figures just long enough to ace the exams and then move on to the next set of tasks” (Pope & Richard, 2005). Although the GPA of the SMS was mentioned in this study, I do not believe that their GPA is an accurate measure of their ability as college students or a conclusive measurement of their intelligence. There is a lot behind a GPA, and Kim states:

I put in right about a 2.8 work, that’s backfiring in a number of ways. Because at [the community college], my overall average is 3.7. But there are some choices that “okay, Kim, just study for the test, take the test,” and that’s it. That’s very difficult. That is so difficult. So there’s a lot behind that 2.8 GPA.

A majority of SMS expressed experiencing a lack in study time. And although children were occasionally mentioned as an obstacle in getting study time in, none of the SMS mentioned wanting to cut back on child care responsibilities. Having children present when they needed to study only presented to be a minor issue.

Cutting Back on Housework

The act of balancing college, family, and work responsibilities is an essential component in the everyday lives of the SMS interviewed in this study. SMS utilize the strategy of “cutting back on effort or on the basic idea of ‘what needs to be done’ to maintain the act of balancing” (Hochschild, 1989, p. 196). Contrary to my original expectation, the completion of housework was not reported as a major concern to the SMS in this study and only mildly affected their college experience. My personal experience as a SMS and my obsession to have a clean house led me to believe that other SMS also worried about

housework as much as I had. I was completely wrong. Through my conversations with the SMS, I discovered, to them, housework was simply a task that had to be completed without a sense of urgency and that completing the tasks were slightly irritating. All SMS cut back on the amount of time spent on household chores and employed strategies for housework such as planning ahead, delegating responsibilities to children, completing tasks with children, and putting off for another time.

Sheila is a very well-organized person and completes her housework as soon as she gets home from school. Sheila describes to me how she organizes her housework: “When I get home, I normally clean. That’s the first thing I do, I clean, and then I get my daughter’s things ready for the next day, and I get my own things ready for the next day.” Typically getting home before her daughter gets out of school, Sheila makes sure to be finished with housework so that she and her daughter can spend quality time together.

On the other hand, Lucora’s philosophy toward housework was more like the remainder of SMS in this study. Lucora believes that “when you have kids, you don’t have to clean up.” Lucora delegated the housework to her children; her daughters cleaned their room and her son cleaned the rest of the house. I asked Lucora to explain her philosophy to me and she replied:

You teach them responsibilities now. And now that my son has been acting up in school, I don’t have to clean up anything. I used to have to clean my room and the kitchen and my bathroom. But now that my son is acting up, he has his room, my room, the front room, and my bathroom.

Lucora expressed to me that she was not using housework as a punishment for her son “acting up in school,” but as an activity to keep him occupied.

Similar to Lucora, Christie K believes in doing the housework together but also delegates specific responsibilities to her daughters. Christie K describes her daughters to me:

They are 11 and 9, which is a really good age cause they can help around the house. They are really great kids. They are very self sufficient. And I raised them that way. Having a single parent, cause my mom was a single mom, I learned through her how to be independent.

Christie K, by giving her children specific responsibilities around the house is maintaining her act of balancing and fostering a sense of independence in her daughters. Angela also believes in teaching her son how to be independent and believes in sharing the housework. Angela whose son is eight told me about what she has taught her son to do:

My son is taught to use the vacuum, he knew how to separate lights and darks when he was two and so I would say bring me the lights or darks when he got a lot older and he would bring me that basket. Um, so we do a lot more of the sharing of responsibilities.

Likewise, Audia who has a seven-year-old daughter, has taught her daughter how to “clean the tub out when she gets through.” By listening to the stories of Lucora, Christie K, Angela, and Audia it is evident that delegating and sharing housework responsibilities with their children is an important factor in the maintenance of their household. As will be discussed later, some children of SMS do more than just household labor; they also provide childcare for their younger siblings.

Unlike SMS previously mentioned, Kim puts off housework until she has extra time to complete the tasks and even then she cannot complete everything that needs to be done. Kim explained to me how she organizes her housework:

I would love to say. I look at my mother as like super-woman. Because I remember every Saturday morning at about five o'clock [in the morning], the vacuum cleaner is starting and she'd start on the living room and work her way around the whole house and the whole house was clean by noon.

[Wow that is fast.]

Yeah, that's so not me. Um, between the cell phone ringing, the house phone ringing, an email popping up, my daughter waking up, she doesn't want pop-tarts, no she wants grits, she wants sausage, but she wants turkey sausage. You know it's just one thing after another. So now I'm negotiating with a six-year-old on why turkey sausage really isn't that important. You know, so, it's a little bit of, lets see. My room right now looks like a tornado hit it and I know I'll get to it probably sometime midnight on Friday night, one or two maybe. It looks like a hot-mess; can I say hot-mess?

[Yeah, you can say hot mess.]

It looks ridiculous. But I just got the kitchen clean, you know, I have a load of clothes in the washer. It's just a little bit of everything.

Kim has also stated that there are some household tasks that she has just given up on. She is not trying to emulate keeping an immaculate house liker her mother; she is just trying to keep their home habitable. Ali conducts spot cleaning on a daily basis and puts off what she cannot do during the week until Friday night. Ali stated:

I use lots of paper plates and clean everyday, the visible areas. And I close doors on the kids mess. Friday night I will clean the house, wash, and we clean up so Saturday afternoon we have for us, and Sunday we go to church.

Ali along with Shannon utilized items like, paper disposable plates to make cleaning up the house easier. All SMS reported that they did not like to do housework and felt like it was just something that needed to be done to maintain their home.

Managing Childcare

One of the most important issues facing the SMS in this study and the most difficult parent responsibility to balance was childcare. Although the lack of accessible and affordable childcare is a major concern for many parents, not just single mothers, in this section I choose not to illuminate their problem of childcare but rather discuss the creative ways SMS in this study have chosen to cope with this issue. Some SMS have scheduled their classes and work around the care needs of their children while others have utilized family and fictive kin

as child care providers, hired baby-sitters, and placed their children in childcare centers. Some SMS have had to take their children to class with them, leave their children alone at home, and have had to use older children to baby-sit their younger children. Whatever method these SMS use for childcare, it is so that they may maintain the balance between their college, family, and work responsibilities.

Sheila and Christie K do not work and are home to care for their children after they arrive home from school and these women have a resource of relatives, friends, and neighbors who can watch their children. Kim works from home and is able to be with her daughter and accommodate her needs and also has a local support network of family that can provide child care. Audia takes her classes when her daughter is in school; since they live with Audia's parents. When Audia cannot be there, her daughter "is surrounded by people who love her." However, there have been occasions that family was not available to watch Audia's daughter and Audia has had to take her daughter to class with her. Shannon relies on her roommate to watch her daughter when she takes classes at night. But Shannon did not have any arrangements last semester; for her night class; she had to take her daughter with her to class every time.

Stated in an earlier section, Shannon disclosed that she is a single mother "up-front" and that she has never had any problems with any of her professors. Shannon described a circumstance last semester: "I have never had a problem with taking her to class with me. I took a night class Monday and Wednesday and she went to every single class with me." Shannon could not find anyone to watch her daughter during the time of her night class and could not afford to put her in a drop in center, so she regretfully brought her to class. I asked Shannon how she felt about bringing her daughter to class with her and she stated:

Ya know I really wish I did not have to take her to class with me and at times it can be a distraction. Like ya know, "I'm cold, I'm hot, I'm bored, I have to pee." And ya know I said this before, I know she has to be a distraction to other students, cause she is a distraction to me. I be sitting there listening to the teacher and taking notes and I am looking at her to see what she is doing. What is she doing? And if I had someplace else I could take her, but I have to take these night classes, that my Monday and Wednesday class doesn't get out until 8:20 P.M., and there is no where I can take her that is a daycare until 8:20.

[What about those late night or twenty-four hour daycare centers?]

Oh they are expensive. I mean she is pretty good in class, she doesn't disturb or anything. She is quiet, she just brings some toys and quietly plays or colors or her leap pad with her headphones. But she umm, I just would rather not.

[What do you do?]

I let my professors know up front, I have an eight-year-old and most of the professors say as long as she is not a disruption to the class, they don't have a problem bringing her. And if there are enough seats. I did take a class where there would have been no way I could have taken her; there were just not enough seats she would have had to sit on the floor somewhere.

Parker (1998) suggests that bringing children to class is an option; she also offers suggestions, to ensure academic success for single mothers, to "be up front" about being a single mother and "know the rules" about children in the classroom.

Similar to Shannon, on occasion, Audia has also had to bring her daughter to class.

Audia explained:

When I brought her to [local community college], they said kids are not allowed. But when I brought her here to UTA they did not, I made sure that she had her coloring books and most of the teachers spoke to her, "Oh, we have a young student," stuff like that. I never had a teacher say you can't bring your kid to class. I have never had that so that is good.

Both Shannon's and Audia's decision to bring their children to class was tough; neither wanted to miss class but had no other resources for childcare. What does one do when faced with conflicting responsibilities? These two women merged their need for childcare with their need to go to class and from their stories; this has been an arrangement that has worked

for them. Neither Shannon's nor Audia's professors portrayed any ill feelings toward their students bringing their children to class, therefore, reinforcing the idea that bringing your child to class is a practical alternative to missing class for them. Bringing your child to class is only an option if the professor permits it; the child is well behaved and older. This would not be an option to those SMS who had small children or children who were unruly.

Glenda's sixteen-year-old daughter is home alone two nights a week while Glenda is in her night classes. Although she is a teenager, Glenda still worries about her daughter's safety. Glenda justifies taking her classes all day Tuesday and Thursday stating that she is home more days and only has to "worry about her [daughter] two nights a week." Glenda expressed to me, "I worry about her so much, since she is a girl, and she is 16." When I asked Glenda where her daughter was when she was in class, she replied:

Sometimes she is at cheerleading practice, sometimes she is with her boyfriend. Which is bothersome. But at least she is not out with a lot of her peers partying and drinking, and they do a lot of stuff. She is quite often at his house with his mom and dad. If she is not there, she is active with cheerleading; she was in a play last semester which kept her busy a lot of the nights. She has another girlfriend who she works out with at a very posh place so she doesn't feel so left out financially. Because she is with someone privileged that enables her to not feel so deprived.

Glenda has even used the internet to keep track of her daughter. She regularly checked blog Web sites like Xanga to see what her daughter and her friends were up to. Glenda continued:

I have followed her on Xanga. Oh that really upsets her. And that has saved me so many times. I checked all of her friends and checked her out on their sites, and if she lied to me, I could catch it. If it hadn't been for Xanga and my knowing how to get around in there, I might have had some terrible experiences with her. But I have spent that kind of time tracking her.

Glenda is constantly worried about her daughter when she is home alone those two nights, but feels that this is something she must do to maintain the balance of her college, family, and work responsibilities. A few weeks after the interview, Glenda told me that her

daughter eventually either stopped writing in her blogs or censored them so Glenda could not get in. But Glenda stated, “That does not stop a concerned mother from checking out what all their kids’ friends are doing.”

Lucora and Ali not only leave their children at home alone, they also rely on their older children to provide care for their younger siblings. Both women have three children so bringing their children to class was not an option. Lucora’s oldest son, who is thirteen, is responsible for his nine-year-old and seven-year-old sisters. When I asked Lucora how she felt about leaving her children alone while she was in class, she replied, “pretty cool.” Lucora leaves her children at home alone a few hours each week. She states that it is a pretty good arrangement, but she does think about them when she is in class. Lucora wonders, “What are they doing? They had better be doing what they’re supposed to be doing. If I go home and that house is not clean, they will be in trouble.” Similar to Lucora, Ali also relies on her oldest daughter to care for her two younger children. Ali’s oldest daughter, who is also thirteen, is responsible for providing care for her ten-year-old brother and three-year-old sister. Ali expressed how her oldest daughter is having difficulty dealing with the current situation:

Since I started this, my daughter is going into a depression. She says she lost her daddy and now doesn’t see me at all; there are days that I want to quit to stay with them. That would send them a wrong message, to quit! I don’t want to do that.

[How do you feel about your oldest daughter watching the two other children?]

I am scared and I call her constantly every half an hour, and she is very mature. She has done that this year and last year so, she is pretty good about it.

Ali sees no other choice but to leave her children at home when she is in class; she works all day and in order for her to complete her degree she must take classes at night. Regretfully,

Ali sees this as the only way to complete her degree; and believes this will benefit everyone in the long run. Caring for their younger siblings was a big responsibility to give these two thirteen-year-old children, but the SMS saw no other option. In this case, the SMS sacrificed the needs of the oldest for the sake of the younger children.

Hochschild (1989) mentions in *The Second Shift* that women often feel more “responsible for home and children” (p. 7), but the women in this study feel even more that way. Since they *are* the primary caretakers of their children, they are more responsible for them. They simultaneously perform the act of balancing their responsibilities as college students, single mothers, and employees, often feeling conflicted about the decisions they are making.

Although many of these SMS chose not to disclose their status as single mothers, they viewed themselves, not primarily as students, but primarily as mothers. These women also used creative methods to manage the separate spheres of their work schedules and childcare. Many women reported taking part-time jobs despite the low pay but for the perceived flexibility, and women having to manage full time schedules also reported having more difficulty in their college experience. Some SMS manage the responsibilities of homework and housework by scaling back and postponing completion. To these SMS the tasks of homework and housework were not always issues that needed their immediate attention.

Although completing the goal of obtaining their college degree is very important to them, many SMS feel guilty about being away from or putting too many responsibilities on their children. As we have seen, the act of balancing is a difficult task; however, despite the difficulty; these SMS are keeping it all together and with persistence are motivated to continue.

CHAPTER V

THE JOURNEY

We delve deeper into the college experience of the SMS participants and through their stories; we discover how they adjust to the campus culture and navigate through the academic system. From these voices we discover that their college experience is a journey that all have already traveled, and the decision to attend, return, or continue their education at UTA is a fresh start; another beginning. Furthermore we hear SMS talk about their first days at UTA, the barriers and motivation they have experienced along the way, and their feelings about their classmates, professors, and their university in general.

For these SMS their decision to return to school “has significant effects on personal values as well as relationships with family and friends” (Doutlick, 1982, p. 2). We hear how these SMS place importance on their education and on obtaining their degree, while also placing priority on the needs and future needs of their children when making their decision to return/attend/continue their journey at UTA.

It is expected that these SMS, because of their family and work responsibilities, experience challenges to becoming successful students and obtaining their degrees. As Tinto (1987) suggests, the adult learner’s demands of home and employment “serve to constrain persistence” (p. 67). Tinto’s theory of student departure also suggests that the higher the student’s integration to the “life of the campus,” the more likely the student is to persist (p. 68). In the section *My University*, it becomes apparent that SMS who live on campus, spend

more time on campus, or are involved in on-campus activities report feeling more connected to the university, whereas those SMS who spend limited time on campus report feelings of isolation.

The Decision

All of the women who participated in this study have attended another college or university before enrolling at UTA. Their previous college experiences influence their expectations, perceptions and persistence of their journey throughout college. Three of the twelve SMS have only experienced college as single mothers. Seven SMS first experienced college as traditional students, and since returning they now experience college as single mothers. One SMS was married at the beginning of her experience and returned after her divorce; another SMS began as a traditional student, became pregnant while attending, and continues her college experience without having taken a break. Furthermore, none of the SMS interviewed have both parents who obtained degrees from a four-year institution of higher learning, and ten of the SMS would, by UTA standards, be classified as first generation college students.

These SMS are guided to school for different reasons and by different life circumstances, but regardless of the difference; they have all decided to return or continue their journey at UTA. Ross (1998) indicates four motivational patterns for women's decisions to return to or attend college for the first time. These patterns are typically related to the age or life experiences of the student. While many SMS fit the motivational pattern of *Change Seeker* and *Reluctant Returnee*, other SMS exhibit a combination of elements from all four of these motivational patterns.

Lisa, who previously attended UTA before she had a child, recalled her decision to return to UTA:

I would say, in December of 2004 I decided to come back and finish up my degree. I would say, that when I think about it [returning to college], to get out of the sedentary life that I was in. I wasn't going anywhere and felt that I was in a dead end in my life and my relationship. And I felt my daughter needed her mother to get a degree and be a better person. And be able to take care of her. Self improvement.

[Please explain self improvement.]

I was getting depressed again. Because I had not finished my degree yet, and I felt like I was behind everybody else, especially at my age. So I wanted to go ahead. I worked in the hospital and did not get paid a lot, I worked there full time in their nutrition services, but I just felt like I wasn't getting anywhere.

For Lisa, the dissatisfaction of her job, just coming out of an unhappy marriage, and wanting to be able to provide for her daughter were the motivating factors that propelled her decision to seek change by returning to college. Similar to Lisa, Angela was frustrated with her inability to find suitable employment, she made the decision to return to college and pursue her degree. Angela described her decision:

That was when I had looked for work as a single-mom with a two-year-old and had a great résumé, great background, didn't ever question my ability to get a job, and couldn't get a job and a lot of times, I couldn't even get an interview. And I had a girlfriend who lived in another state that said, "You know, you've never been more poor than you are now. There's got to be all kinds' help. Go get your degree." Cause that was what was stopping me from getting into just interviews. Because when I was in the work-force before, I had number one, momentum, contacts, but I was in a different state, lost the momentum and now that was like eight years. Well at that point it wasn't, but anyway, that was a few years before and I was never asked if I had a degree. But now, just to get an interview, I was asked if I had a degree. And this girlfriend said, "Go to school". And thank goodness, I did it three days later, I was in school with my books and my credit card charged to the hilt.

Angela's need for change and her friends' suggestion to "go to school," inspired her decision to return. Another aspect of Angela's decision was the notion that a college degree would not

only be beneficial in the workplace but would also show accomplishment should there be any more court proceedings with her ex-husband.

Similar to Lisa and Angela, Audia's decision to attend college for the first time was a result of her desire to change her life. Audia was in an abusive relationship with her daughter's father and reported previous extensive marijuana use. Audia described the environment she was in prior to returning home to live with her parents permanently:

I have to get out of this. He sold drugs, you know. When I was at his apartment, and there was drugs selling going on, guns knives. It was not a healthy environment, and my mom was just like "leave her here," if you go up there on the weekend, you can leave her here. Because they knew, I was honest with my parents. They knew what he was doing; they knew what was going on. Cause lies can get you in more trouble than anything else. And at least they knew what was going on."

Both of Audia's parents are ministers, and she reported being raised in the church. Since leaving her ex-boyfriend (who was killed in a gun battle with local police) and returning to school Audia has proclaimed that she has "gotten back into church and gave [sic] my life back to God." Audia explained the beginning of her journey:

I needed to do something with my life; I was twenty-two and up until that point I hadn't done anything so, I was a mom. I became a mom right after high school. I became pregnant.

Audia also explained how her decision to return to college was put on hold to care for her daughter:

When she was a couple of months old, I tried to take the TASPS test, its called something else now but back then it was the TASPS test you had to take in order to go to college, to see if you have to take remedial classes I failed the math so I had to take remedial. So to make a long story short, I decided, she cried the whole time I was taking the test. I was breastfeeding and she was very attached. I had to put off going to college for a couple of years.

[Where was she when you were taking the test?]

My sister kept her and said she cried. The test is four hours long so she cried the whole time. When my dad picked me up she was hooting and hollering in the back seat. So you know. She was pretty attached to her mommy. That let me know that I could not go yet. She wasn't ready.

These three women motivated by a pattern Ross (1998) calls "change seekers," expressed needing change in their life, and "they viewed college as the way to accomplish that goal" (Mohney & Anderson, 1988, p. 272). Mohney and Anderson also suggest that women often place priority on relationships when making the decision to enroll, and as we heard from Lisa and Audia's stories; they considered the needs of their children before beginning their journey. Lisa was driven to enroll because she "felt my daughter needed her mother to get a degree and be a better person," and Audia postponed her enrollment because her daughter "wasn't ready."

Another motivational pattern identified by Ross (1998) is the "reluctant returnee." These women discontinued their journey through college because of family responsibilities, but found themselves returning because of family responsibilities. Glenda, as mentioned previously, did not "like going to school right now," but saw her goal of obtaining a college degree as the pinnacle for securing a better future. Many students are motivated to return or attend college for a multiplicity of reasons, however, most admit returning to college for "personal self-satisfaction and career-related goals" (Mohney & Anderson, 1988, p. 271).

Glenda explains her decision to return:

I have always wanted to do it but, when I got financially strapped to the point where I realized that I was never going to get ahead again, I decided to go back to school, cause you can't get ahead without a four-year degree. You can't make any money; generate any money to pay for a lifestyle as one person.

[When did you begin?]

I was single; I was very young, when I started my college education. I have been at this for many years trying to get it done and family came along. I adopted three children whose mothers deceased, and I just stopped everything and got off and raised those children and had a baby and back on again. I have never felt like a whole person because I never finished the educational process, and I will still not be satisfied with a BA, I will still have the drive to go on, until I can't get anything else. So there [it] is, I love, I love, I love education. I love to learn. And I feel I am in my element when I am in school.

[How did you get to UTA?]

Well my first taste of the campus was when I came to a cheerleading camp with my daughter. Was last summer. I thought to myself that I can do this; it is close enough, I can pull this off and I could have a life and take care of my daughter and take care of my responsibilities. I wish I had done this in the first place cause when my daughter was little I wouldn't leave her in my city by herself so I went to the jr college and got two two-year degrees rather than committing to the four-year degree. and leaving town and driving to Arlington, which turns out is probably the same distance. But I, it was like, wow I should have done this in the first place.

Glenda had always dreamed of returning to school but the responsibilities of raising a family kept her from returning. When her three adopted children became adults and left home to begin families of their own, Glenda stayed home to care for her youngest biological child. Another halt to Glenda's college education was the presence of her grandchildren. Although happy that there will be an addition to the family, Glenda is still conflicted between her responsibilities as a mother and grandmother and her desire to finish her education. Glenda talked about her grandchildren and her need to finish her degree:

For along time I had my grandbabies here in town and I watched them and I wouldn't go to school because they had to have either mom or dad or grandma with them until they were eighteen months old. And that took four years of my life; that is another reason why there is a gap in my education. I stopped for my two grandbabies, and another one is coming, another one is coming.

My daughter will be eighteen in two years, my social security will end; I have no way of taking care of myself. The end. So I know I have two years to jump into and if I did not do it forget it, never do it again. You either jump in and swim or die.

Glenda is reluctant to continue because of family responsibilities but pressured to continue because she must be self-sufficient. Glenda continues her education at UTA in earnest. Tinto (1978) suggests, "The very decision to reenter education is indicative of a commitment to education which entails the acceptance of hardships that younger persons might not be willing to endure" (p. 73).

Kim began her journey as a traditional college student with a scholarship and reluctantly attended to pacify her parents. Kim described her first college experience:

I left school the first time; I told him [dad] that I didn't want to go. I really went away to school to appease my parents. Um, they felt that was the next logical step. I wanted to work. "

[What made you decide to return to school?]

I had made a decision to go back to school because my father had passed away and I promised him I would do it. So, when I left Chicago, I started looking at universities I could attend.

This was an emotional portion of Kim's interview; at times I watched her looking into space recalling details of past events. With her eyes slightly filled with tears she continued to tell me about the promise she gave to her father and her decision to return to school.

Kim stated:

When my father had a stroke, he said some things to me and one of the main things was, "I know you're working for the family business. I know you didn't want to work there. I know you wanted to find your own way. Well, I'm asking you to get your BA and find out what it is you want to do. Don't do it because I'm asking you to do it, but because. Once again don't fall into that, don't fall into what you've been doing." In the sense of, okay, I didn't want to go away to school, but I did anyway. I didn't, there was a time when I didn't want to work for the family business, but I did anyway. Um, and then my father had a stroke, and that's what he was trying to explain to me. So those, that was one of the main things was to come back to school and figure out what it is "Kim" wanted to do.

This time, Kim was returning to school for herself. Kim explained to me how initially she was pressured by her family to attend college, and now how a promise to her father and the quest to find herself, motivated her return.

The stories of Lisa, a mother who found herself the sole provider of her young daughter after divorce; Angela, a mother who wanted to provide a better future for her son; Audia, a young mother who got pregnant out of high school; Glenda, who adopted three children and had one biological child; and Kim, who left her family business in search of what she wanted to do in life; represent many students interviewed in this study. These stories paint a picture of their very personal decisions to return to school and the motivating factors that contributed to their decisions. From these stories, we hear how the decision to enroll or return to college is related to family issue or responsibilities that in turn are related to being single mothers. But unlike the stories of the SMS previously discussed, one student has experienced both being a traditional student as well as a non-traditional, single-mother student without having taken a break between the two statuses during her journey.

Laqueta's college journey began right after high school, when she enrolled at a local university as a traditional student. She left that university to attend one semester at a local community college, and during the summer of 2004 enrolled at UTA. While at UTA, Laqueta became pregnant. Deciding not to take a break while pregnant, Laqueta related her difficulty attending classes while pregnant:

When I was pregnant, I was sick a whole lot; I finished the semester but was very sick. One of my teachers had her son when she was an undergrad, so we could talk, we exchanged numbers. She said it was hard but you could do it. She was getting her masters too. But it could be done. I was sick, really really sick. And they did a lot of, vomiting in the hospital sick, she was only five pounds, she made me so sick. The teachers were like, my music teacher let me do an outside project to replace a test, and they helped a lot. I was there at eight in the morning, I did not feel good but I was there.

Continuing her college journey while feeling the pains and morning sickness of pregnancy, Laqueta was proving her dedication to her education. Laqueta had her baby at the end of the spring 2005 semester and continued taking classes during Summer I and Summer II. Laqueta had the help of her daughter's father for the first part of her summer semester, but he soon left them and offered no more support. Laqueta remembers:

I went to summer school. At first it was like he was still around and, well I went to work first, I had my six weeks and I went to work and I took summer classes. I had not seen him; he only helped like once after I had her in June. In July he was already gone and I was in Summer II and I was trying to figure that out by myself.

Although Laqueta expressed difficulty in attending her classes, she made the decision to continue pursuing her goal of a college education regardless of the barriers that were placed in front of her. Like Laqueta, All SMS interviewed for this study expressed dedication to the decision of returning or attending college even though at times, which will be discussed later in this chapter, they felt a simultaneous push/pull to continue and discontinue their education at UTA.

The First Days

The prior college experiences of the SMS influenced the perceptions and expectations of their journey through college at UTA (see table 2). The majority of SMS interviewed had prior experiences at universities; two SMS previously attended major state universities, two SMS previously attended UTA, and four SMS previously attended smaller universities, two of which were private. The remainder of the SMS transferred to UTA from local community colleges. With the exception of Laqueta, who began as a traditional student and continued throughout her pregnancy and birth of her daughter, all SMS expressed a mixture of feelings about returning or attending college as single mothers. They expressed feelings of fear,

Table 2. Educational Characteristics

Name	Academic Classification	GPA	Major/Minor	Previous College Experiences
Ali	Junior	1.99	Interdiscip Studies / Women's Studies	Smaller state university
Audia	Senior	3.27	History/Journalism	Community college
Angela	Senior	3.50	Speech/No minor	Community college
Christie K	Junior	3.20	Social Work/Psychology	UTA, community college
Christy C	Junior	2.41	Biology/No minor	Private smaller university
Glenda	Senior	3.77	Interdiscip Studies/No minor	Community college
Kim	Senior	2.80	Sociology/History	Private smaller university
Laqueta	Junior	3.00	Education/ No minor	Smaller state university
Lisa	Junior	2.75	Sociology/No minor	UTA, major state university
Lucora	Junior	1.90	Nursing/Health Admin	Community college
Shannon	Senior	2.80	Education/No minor	Community college
Sheila	Junior	3.77	Political Science/German	Major State U, community coll.

anxiety, joy, and excitement about their first days at UTA. SMS reported fear of being at a large university for the first time, the anxiety of being able to handle the pressures of college as well as their families and jobs, joy of finally being able to attend, and excitement about the new experiences they would soon encounter.

SMS like Shannon, Christie K, and Audia decided to begin their college journey at UTA during the summer semester. These women felt that the summer semester was an ideal opportunity to allow them a taste of university life without becoming overwhelmed. The summer classes offered smaller class sizes and, although a lot of information was taught in only a few weeks, the setting was slower in pace. Christie K described her decision to attend during the summer:

I started [local community college] three years ago and I was just gonna bridge over in two years and come to the nursing program here that is why I started at [local community college] and took baby steps to come over here. So that I could handle the demands of a four year university.

Christie K described how she cautiously took classes at the local community college to prepare for what would be required of her at UTA. Christie K became acclimated to the university by taking the guided tour and taking classes during the summer semester, but she was not prepared for the enormous class size that awaited her the following semester.

Christie K recalled her first nursing class:

I was very overwhelmed. I started. I was at [local community college] for two years, then switched over here. I was overwhelmed cause there were so many kids in that class. It was a nursing course. There were two-hundred plus students in each of those classes. It was over in the physical sciences building where they have that auditorium seating. It was very overwhelming

[Were you overwhelmed because of the class size?]

There was a large amount of students and a graduate student who was trying to become a professor. It was just overwhelming.”

Having only the experience of a local community college for reference, Christie K was familiar with a small class size and hands-on professors and administration. Christie K expressed anxiety over her ability to succeed at a four-year university and feared the demands of college and balancing a family may be too much for her. I asked Christie K:

[Have you ever felt that professors, students, or administrators have ever paid special attention to you because you are a single-mom?]

I definitely feel that way at [local community college], I mean I know this is about me here at UTA but at [local community college] some of the professors are very, “this is a heavy caseload are you going to be ok,” or “don’t get behind or you will get in trouble,” and then coming over here when I met with the nursing advisors, was like you need to be careful going into nursing school, there won’t be time for anything. He prepared me. He was like you have kids, you are a single mom, and this is going to be very difficult for you.

Christie K was warned about the demands of the nursing program she was trying to get into and felt like she might have already been set up for failure before she even began. The

advisor made no offers to help; Christie K was not offered tutoring or resources for childcare or support of any kind. Christie K eventually switched her major from nursing to social work.

Like Christie K, Shannon transferred from a community college and also began her college experience at UTA during the summer semester. I asked Shannon to describe to me how she felt being at UTA for the first time:

Ya know you are excited, cause it's something different, it's something new, it's also something kinda scary cause I was like am I going to fit in with anybody, cause I am much, a lot older then everybody here, ya know cause when I was in school before it was all kids nineteen, twenty, twenty-one and umm and I just didn't know. That was one of my biggest concerns was if I was going to fit in with everybody, am I gonna have any friends. Ya know that kinda stuff. I came here in the summer, my friend actually paid for my daughter to go to the YWCA everyday so I made sure my classes could be at the times when she could be at the Y for summer camp and I found, I guess cause I started in the summer it wasn't too overwhelming cause you just take that one class for six weeks and I took something that I would enjoy. I took children's literature which was very, very fun. And I don't remember what I took summer II. I think I took prep, tasks prep for math, I took it online.

Luckily Shannon's father, also a UTA student, was able to show her around and assist her in navigating the campus. Shannon described her experience in the fall and how she knew where things were on campus,

In the fall I jumped into the twelve hours and I had my dad here, that helped me out a lot and he had already been here for a full semester and like he helped me out with a lot of stuff I needed to do, so I actually had someone be that mentor for me. I was like a lost fish. We would eat lunch every Friday at the UC in the cafeteria and ya know and stuff like that and I live across the street from university. . .apartments, and that was pretty cool cause I lived on the first floor so [my daughter] could just go outside and ride her bike and stuff and I could take her to the library and I got to do things with her too in the summer."

[Did you know about the services offered on campus?]

Yeah I knew about that because my dad was here, and he was part of the SOAR program that helped with free tutoring and grants and stuff. And because of him and him telling me I knew they had the health center, free tutoring and I also got some grants and scholarships, so I knew they had all this stuff set up .They have mentor/mentee program but, they have a section for transfer students but not all mentors can tell their mentees

about programs cause they themselves do not know. A lot of students that go here don't know that they have these things on campus."

Tinto (1987) compares older students like the majority of students in this study, to minority students who often "face distinct problems in seeking to become integrated into the life of the institution" (p. 162). However, Shannon's early introduction to UTA through her summer classes, her father's presence and assistance, and her residence on campus assisted in integrating her into university life and made the transition from community college to UTA much easier. Shannon, as will be further explored later, has strong ties to the university community from her involvement in campus activities, organizations, and a sorority.

Similar to Christie K and Shannon, Audia also transferred to UTA from a local community college and was first enrolled in the summer. Audia was able to attend an orientation seminar:

I took an orientation class; yeah I took the tour too, not that it helped. Luckily, my classes were basically in the same buildings in the beginning. In the math building, for my first two semesters I was in the math building and the activities building. So that made it easier for me. There are still buildings on campus that I have never been. I basically just go where I have to go. Look for it on the map and just go.

[Can you tell me how you felt coming to UTA for the first time?]

I am telling you! College, College! Oh I was excited. I was like yes! Ya know. I had had a bad relationship with my daughter's father. I mean I had to do something with my life, I was twenty-two and look up and it would be ten years later and don't have anything to show for it. So, just because I made wrong decisions doesn't mean that I still can't do something now. And I want to be a good example for my daughter and let her know, no matter what you do, you can still accomplish your goals. I had wanted to go to college but I got pregnant right out of high school, like an idiot. So I had to put it off. So I was excited, I only took, I wanted to take it slow so I opted for the summer to make the transition easier, because I did not want to get in there one semester and ya know feel overwhelmed and then decide that I can't do it and quit. So I took a weight training class and the TASPS preparation course, ya know something really and easier for me. I was just excited. Ah man, I am in college.

The stories of the first days at UTA tell us how these SMS utilized the summer semester as a trial run before the main event; the fall semester. They purposely attended college during a time when enrollment was low and they would receive personalized attention. Those SMS whose first days at UTA were in the spring or fall semesters found other methods of preparing themselves for their journey through college. Angela recalls her first experience as a SMS attending UTA:

I was enthralled. I was so proud of myself for making it this far because the struggle to be in school as a single-mom was more than I had ever envisioned and if I had known what I was getting into, I probably wouldn't have done it, so I'm glad I did. I'm glad I went into it ignorant of the ramifications financially. And I was so excited to be taking this step toward the bachelor's degree now. I finished the associates and I came to campus early and I drove around and picked out parking spaces, walked to my classes to get an idea of where they were, because I had this feeling that I wasn't a kid anymore and that for me to be late to class wasn't acceptable anymore.

Angela's driving around and picking out parking spaces prepared her for the experience of being a college student at a large university during the fall semester, when enrollment is at its highest. Angela also utilized campus maps and asked fellow students where to go and what to do. Similar to Angela, Lucora was also excited about her first days at UTA, canvassed the campus; she explained:

I just walked around myself. I came up one afternoon after they had already closed and you know, there weren't a lot of people, and me and my kids kinda just like surveyed the building and trying to find the buildings that are around.

[How did you feel coming to UTA for the first time?]

I just knew I had to do it. You know what I'm saying? I was, I don't want to say I was scared, I just was nervous. What if I didn't succeed? So I had to not think like that. So I didn't even think. Cause it was big. It was like the desks were smaller because we had little desks like that; you know when you can have your own little space or whatever. The teacher, you know, that's another thing, teacher/professor, they're not teachers, they're professors here. They correct you with that and. . . Doctor.

[How did you get here to UTA?]

Cause I was right down the street. I had just moved and plenty of days, I looked down here and I'm like, maybe I should go to that big school there, but then I was afraid of the big university, because they said it was all super hard, it was five-hundred, you know what I'm saying, students to a class and I just was afraid to come down here. I just wanted to finish staying at the bottom.

Lucora, like other SMS who had only the experience of community college as a reference, expressed fear of the size of the university and the difficulty of the classes. Before even experiencing the university for herself, Lucora's first days were riddled with anxiety over her ability as a student and fear of the size university. When I asked her how she felt now, Lucora replied, "I don't want to say superior, but it does feel good."

All but one of the SMS interviewed express some type of pre preparation before actually experiencing their first days UTA. Ali, a transfer student from an out of state university, expressed feeling thrown into the university with no time to prepare. Ali lost forty credit hours when she transferred to UTA. Ali explained:

I tried to get into education, but they would not transfer all of my hours. I had one hundred hours transferring in from [out of state university]. They only wanted to take in forty, interdisciplinary accepted sixty of them.

[How did you feel coming to UTA for the first time?]

I feel lost, this is a way bigger than [out of state university], much bigger.

[Did you take the tour?]

No, I did not take a tour; I did not even know there was a tour.

[Did you come to preview day?]

No. When I went to interdisciplinary studies to see if I could get in, they signed me in and they told me when to start and was just thrown in.

[Were you aware of the services that UTA offers?]

Nothing. I was calling everywhere and was redirected everywhere and nothing like that. At [out of state university] I knew where everything was, my advisors would tell me, oh, you can go here and there. But here nothing. I tried and tried.

Ali repeatedly compared her previous college experience to her current experience at UTA.

Ali expected the universities to be similar and found that UTA was much larger and students are expected to manage their journey more independently. She expressed anger that she could not transfer in all her credit hours and frustration that she did not know where anything was.

Ali described a circumstance during her first days at UTA:

Look, from the first day, I had to go park at Greek row, yes across the street, because I did not even know where to park. One of the teachers told me that I could park here after five or over there. I did not know where anything was and was not used to anything here.

It should be noted that Greek Row is located on the opposite side of campus from where Ali took her classes, and the walk from where she parked to her classes took nearly fifteen minutes. Upon further conversation, I find Ali totally dissatisfied with her experience at UTA. Not only is Ali having difficulty maintaining her balance between family, and work responsibilities, she feels “lost” in her journey through college at UTA, and being placed on academic probation, she is at risk of dismissal from the university.

All of these SMS are transfer students who have only had minimal assistance from UTA to ease the transition. Most of the SMS experienced some difficulty in adjusting to UTA. Since these SMS bring with them previous experiences of college to UTA, they also bring expectations of themselves as students. Many students also reported mixed emotions about their first days at UTA and, through their journey, they learned that these mixed emotions were part of expected first day jitters. The majority of SMS have learned to navigate the academic system and adjust to the campus culture, and the remainder of SMS are learning as they continue on their journey through college at UTA.

Barriers along the Way

It is generally assumed, because of the multiple responsibilities that single mothers carry, their journey through college will be filled with barriers that obstruct and delay their progress towards the degree. Not all SMS in this study reported having experienced any barriers to their education. The SMS who reported experiencing barriers to their education reported time constraints, family issues, personal characteristics, and the institution as their barriers. Surprisingly, contrary to previous literature on barriers to nontraditional women, none of the students reported “financial issues” as a barrier (Bradshaw, Hager, Knott, & Seay, 2006, p. 23). Some SMS reported a lack of finances in paying for extracurricular activities for their children and some SMS said that money was sometimes tight, but not one of the SMS interviewed perceived a lack of finances as a barrier to their education. What I assumed would be the most widely reported barrier, finances, was not mentioned once.

Barriers “are also fluid in nature: barriers that are initially overcome. . .may reemerge later for renegotiation” (Bradshaw et al., 2006, p. 23). It is probable that these SMS have yet to experience financial issues as a barrier to their education. However, since all of the SMS have previously attended another college or university and are upper classmen, it is more likely that they have learned the necessary coping mechanisms to overcome this barrier from their previous experiences. I must also take into consideration that, as mentioned in chapter 4, many SMS are aware of the stigma associated with single-motherhood, and in their attempt to reduce negative stereotypes may have intended not to mention finances as a barrier. Nevertheless, the barriers or the lack thereof were reported by SMS during the interview and were taken at face value.

Kim and Sheila were the only two SMS who reported neither seeing nor experiencing any barriers to their education. I asked Kim:

[Do you see, or have you experienced any barriers to your education?]

I don't see any barriers. I make choices with everything that I have at the moment and I have made a lot of sacrifices, but a barrier to me is saying that it's blocking it. And nothing, nothing blocks me.

When asked the identical question, Sheila replied "no." For Kim and Sheila, the idea of a barrier "blocking" their journey through college and their goal of a degree was an obstacle they mentally did not want to acknowledge. Throughout the interview process, these two women constantly exerted a determined attitude toward their education. They were not letting anything get in the way of their goals.

The remaining ten participants all reported time constraints as being one of the barriers they had experienced in their journey through college. As mentioned previously, SMS reported lack of time to complete homework and studying, and being bound by their schedules. When I asked Angela if she saw or experienced any barriers to her education, she replied:

Yes, oh absolutely! The stress and time. Two barriers, stress involved with everything being on one person and the time constraints. I need forty-eight hours in one day. And then I think of people like Winston Churchill and how much he accomplished.

Angela also reported:

Yeah, and that's a whole other thing, I don't know if it's being a single-mom or if it's just my physical thing, but I definitely need eight hours' sleep and I really wish I didn't need them. I could get a lot more accomplished.

Many SMS reported experiencing stress from being the sole caregiver for their children; however, Angela was the only SMS to identify this stress as a barrier to her education.

Although time constraints were reported as a barrier by the majority of SMS in this study, it was not a substantial one. As previously reported, SMS maintained the act of balancing their college, family, and work responsibilities by budgeting their time and prioritizing their responsibilities. The interviews also revealed that these SMS, although reporting time constraints as a barrier, have overcome this barrier by sacrificing personal needs and coping with their time limitations.

Of the ten SMS who reported seeing or experiencing barriers to their education, five SMS reported family issues as a barrier. These family issues were separate from what the SMS described as their family responsibilities. Family issues were not described as tasks to complete but rather the emotional sentiment of responsibility, being a good mother, loving their children, and guilt. These family issues were distractions to the SMS's journey through college and obtaining their goal of a college degree. Christy C decided to modify her dream of becoming a doctor after the birth of her son. Christy explained, "When I had my son, I had to get more realistic." For Christy C the demands of medical school seemed unrealistic for a single-mom who wanted to be a good mother to her son. Similar to Christy C, Laqueta also changed her career goal from wanting to become a nurse to becoming a teacher, as she believed becoming a nurse would strain her relationship with her daughter. Not only did Christy C and Laqueta feel the need to make career adjustments for family issues, they stated that these family issues were also barriers to their education. Christy C expressed that her son was not a barrier, but being a mother to him was the barrier to her education. As Christy C explained, she loved and cared for her son very much but the duties involved with being a mother to him were oftentimes consuming and laborious.

Glenda also believed that family issues were a barrier for her. When I asked Glenda if she had seen or experienced any barriers to her education, she replied:

Yes. Having a child and loving her dearly and she is very popular and very active and I need to get her where she needs to go, she is a whole person and I have had to cut back with her. It's been to her detriment somewhat other than she is learning that everything is not handed to her on a silver platter; she may have to work for some money. And it has been some good character building for her during this time in her life. As she has had everything handed to her, and like she is God's gift to me, which she was and is and I adore her.

Although Glenda stated family issues as a barrier, she justified overcoming this barrier by finding comfort in the fact that she is teaching her daughter independence and responsibility. Similar to Glenda, Audia also viewed family issues as her barrier. Audia described her barrier:

The only barriers that I have experienced are barriers that I have because I am a parent. Sometimes you feel guilty, you are in a class and not with your child and you have to do this and that.

These women felt that their sentiment of responsibility of being good mothers and the love they have for their children were barriers in their journey through college. The five SMS who reported family issues as barriers to their education also reported a sense of guilt in doing something that took focus away from their children. As will be discussed later in this chapter, these same women who reported family issues as barriers to their education also reported family issues as what motivated them to continue.

Another barrier discovered during this interview process was the barrier of personal characteristics. I had not anticipated this type of barrier and when this issue arose in the interview, I adjusted my questioning to elicit more information from the SMS. As seen from Angela's response, she did not know if her need for sleep was because she had many responsibilities as a single mother or a personal characteristic. Angela was one of the first

SMS interviewed and regretfully, I overlooked her personal characteristics as a potential barrier to her education. However, when this issue arose with Lucora and Ali, I was prepared to draw out more information about this barrier.

Lucora mentioned her personal characteristic as a barrier early in the interview. Our conversation begins,

[Do you find the majority of your classes easy, difficult, of just right for you?]

Nothing is easy. Nothing is just right. I don't know yet, until the end of this semester. It's a challenge. Especially being diagnosed with dyslexia at thirty-three.

[I remember you telling me that]

So that was like a big hill to kinda come over. I'm like, "well, hey." cause I wanted to think like, well, that's why I can't do it, and you know and then like, but I just had to keep on searching until I find the means of making the information stick.

Dyslexia was a huge barrier to Lucora's education. In addition to her multiple responsibilities as a single mother to three children and working, she had to exert more time comprehending her reading material and studying. Lucora told me, when she was young, her mother would always read the assignment to her and just recently her mother admitted knowing Lucora had dyslexia since she was a child. Lucora continued:

My mom told me at thirty-three that I was dyslexic because I was having problems with remembering, and I'm like, "Wait a minute, I know I studied, how can a person that comes to class everyday, take notes, read, try to read, and participate." It's just that when I come to the test, on top test anxiety, what I know gets lost.

Lucora stated that her dyslexia was and is a huge barrier for her, but with proper studying techniques she feels that this barrier can be overcome. Ali also reported that aside from feeling lost within the university, a personal characteristic, her ethnicity as a Latina and learning as a second language student were barriers to her education. Ali discussed her accent:

Verbally I do have an accent, but on my papers you can't tell. One of my professors pointed out that "some of you who are second language may not make it in this class." This was in interdisciplinary, it brought me down. That has nothing to do, whatever race I am has nothing to do with it. Maybe other professors see it that way too. Even if I do well they may not give me the credit, just because. There is no way of really knowing.

This was the first time within the interview process that the issue of race and ethnicity was brought up. Ali felt lost and isolated; she reported that the comment made by one of her professors made her feel even more disconnected from the university. Ali perceived her accent as a barrier, which to her translated to her race being the barrier. Watson, Terrell, and Wright (2002) suggest that minority students or students of color often perceive the campus culture differently from white students and, "Issues of alienation, isolation and tokenism become important factors when one considers their weight on academic and social success and educational outcomes for students of color" (p. 108). Ali, having transferred to UTA from a smaller state university where the Hispanic undergraduate population is the second largest ethnic population at that university, was comfortable in her collegiate surroundings and confident in her abilities to succeed. However, Ali now finds herself struggling with feelings of isolation and loneliness at UTA.

The institution itself was viewed as a barrier by Lisa and Shannon. Lisa reported that the university did not offer classes that she was interested in taking, required classes, often filled up quickly, and she argued were not offered at a variety of times. "I feel like I have to work around other people's schedules, and a lot of times you have to. But it cuts into my time to do schoolwork."

Lisa saw the scheduling of classes as confining and as "other people's schedules" and UTA's lack of available classes as a barrier to her education. Lisa believed that if office

hours and the curriculum were more flexible, she would have an easier time completing her degree.

Shannon, who also sees the institution as a barrier, does not find UTA to be a family friendly university. Shannon views the institution as inflexible and offering no support to those students who are parents. Shannon described this barrier,

I think umm one of the barriers to my education, here for example, I went to study at the library one night and it ended up being after midnight and I had to take my daughter with me because my roommate wasn't home that evening, and that doesn't happen very often but I had to go and do some stuff. So I put her on the couch with a blanket and a pillow and the security guard came around and was trying to wake her up and I said, "excuse me that's my child" and he was like, granted my daughter is five-foot tall and I said "that is my child" and then he asked me if she had a student ID. Because it was after midnight and they check for student IDs. He was telling me that as soon as I was finished, as soon as you can you need to leave because my child did not have a student ID card. But she is a child. Ya know! Once it turns midnight they check everybody's ID card because they don't want people hanging out in the library. That was my point, ok I was frustrated and I know he was like "try and finish your work". I went and complained at the lady at the front desk and wanted to know who I could write a letter and complain to because I think, I do understand a policy is a policy and you have to ID card me after midnight, but she is a minor and she is under my authority and the lady told me if we make an exception for you, we'll have to do it for everybody. People will say like he is my boyfriend and he is my ride home. Um but we are not talking about another adult here, she is a dependent.

[Did you complain to someone?]

I actually sent out an email to the president of UTA, when he sent out that little thing about their strategic plan and stuff. Like we want students to have the full benefit and we want students to excel in their academics and I wrote them and I told them that I was a single parent and I too want to excel in academics.

[Did he write you back?]

Well it was like a mass email. I wanted to experience the full college experience too but my difference is that I have a child that I have to take care of and the university doesn't support students with children on this campus in any way. The only way is the professors being understanding when you bring your child to class, but out side of that, ya know some of the organizations do, like I went to Excel and said "hey you show free movies during the summertime could you possibly show like one family movie during that summer series, Instead of all rated R or PG-13 movies?" and they did. The university as a

whole, I personally don't feel like they do support not just single parents but parents' period. Ya know.

Dorris (1995) suggests that "these single mothers had to 'fit' themselves into the existing academic and social milieu if they were to succeed" (p. 94). Shannon took a proactive approach to her barrier. Writing an email to the president of the university stating her desire to be supported as a single-mother student and insisting that an organization show a movie appropriate for children was Shannon's attempt to remove her barrier. Although many barriers, like the institution's lack of support for students with children and personal characteristics such as a learning disability or one's accent may never be overcome; these SMS discover how to navigate the academic system around these barriers

Motivation and Persistence

What motivates these SMS to continue their journey through college? What factors have enabled them to persist in their journey despite the difficulties of managing their very busy lives and the barriers they have experienced? Through my conversations with all twelve SMS, I discovered two distinct sources of their motivation and persistence. First, all SMS interviewed for this study had prior positive college or university experiences that gave them the feeling that they could endure their journey as SMS at UTA. Second, all SMS acknowledged that family issues such as "being a good example (role model)" for their children and being able to secure better opportunities in the future were the two most important aspects of their persistence through college.

The sample interviewed for this study was unique: all SMS had previously attended another college or university and were upperclassmen. Prior positive college experiences conditioned these women to believe that they were prepared to endure their journey as SMS

at UTA. Because all SMS had already experienced the difficulties of raising their children single-handedly and also experienced the demands of a college education, they knew what to expect of their journey through UTA, and were prepared to continue their education regardless of what crisis they might have faced. Donohue and Wong (1997) suggest that these types of students are tougher than other students “due to the general life experiences and life differences” (p. 237). Furthermore, the overall maturity displayed by the women in this sample is an attribute that contributes to their persistence. Though many SMS were considered nontraditional age students, age was not a factor in determining the maturity level of the SMS in this study. Younger SMS also reported feeling more mature than their traditional student counterparts, and attributed their success as students to their maturity.

Five SMS previously identified family issues as a barrier to their education, these women recognized the importance that these same family issues had on their persistence through college. For example, Glenda expressed a feeling of being pulled. She said, “I don’t like going to school right now while she is sixteen, because I feel like I could be with her more, shopping and leisurely spending time with her a lot.” When I asked Glenda if she ever felt pressured to continue her education, Glenda expressed the feeling of being pushed, stating, “Well, absolutely it makes me want to be more than what I am, for her sake. Even as a testimony that you can be all you can be, I want to, I want to walk the walk not just talk the talk.”

These women experienced a feeling of being simultaneously pushed to continue their education for the sake of their children and being pulled back by their sentiment of responsibility for their children. The women who experienced the push/pull effect reported feeling conflicted about their college journey, guilt from being away from their children, and

doubt. Yet, these women persisted in their journey through college despite their conflicted feelings. These SMS derive strength from their role as mothers, which “enables them to withstand the difficulties typically faced in adjusting to the academic and social demands of college life” (Tinto, 1987, p. 124). As mentioned earlier, some SMS experienced the duality of their status of single mother as both an obstacle and motivation.

Ali was the most at risk for leaving UTA because of difficulties managing her college, family, and work responsibilities, her inability to find her niche at UTA, and her placement on academic probation. Yet she expressed that the love she has for her children and her desire to offer them a better life has motivated her to persist through this difficult journey. Ali also reported, “That would send them a wrong message, to quit! I don’t want to do that.”

Setting a good example for children was mentioned by every SMS interviewed in this study. Similarly, research conducted by Kirby, Biever, Martinez, and Gomez (2004), concluded that “attending school interferes with family time or events” [and] setting a good example for family was mentioned. . .most frequently by those [students] with children” (p. 73). Not only did these SMS believe the benefits of having a college degree would allow them to secure a better future for their children, they also believed that their journey itself, their persistence despite unaccommodating circumstances, would set a good example for their children.

Christie K explained how wanting to set a good example for her children motivated her to continue her journey:

My mom dropped out and nobody in my family that I knew or was around valued education. So, I wanted the girls to have a different life than I did. So it’s really scary being in college but I feel really really proud. I know that one day they will look back and

say, it's an option to just finish high school but I can also go to college and do what I want to do. I want them to have the role model that I did not have.

Audia, also wanting her daughter to learn persistence through her example, expressed that the poor choices made when she was younger were not going to inhibit her growth and success as a person. SMS repeatedly mentioned a desire to provide a better life for their children as a motivating factor in their persistence. Lucora presented her desire to be able to provide material goods for her children. When I asked Lucora if she felt pressured to continue her education, she replied:

Yes, because like last semester or this semester when my son got to acting up. I let him know, "Dude, you gotta chill because I have to get this, because if I don't get this, we won't have anything." And you know and they all like gym shoes and this, that, and the other and I'm telling them, like when they get older, in high school and stuff, your gonna want a car, you're gonna want to senior swing out, you're gonna want to see your dudes, you're gonna wanna go, you wanna go there. But if I don't get it now, how are we gonna get it then? So they're kind of understanding of that.

Lucora felt that obtaining her degree would enable her to get a "good" paying job that would allow her children to have access to the material comforts of life. However this "better life" did not always mean more material goods. For some SMS, this better life meant being able to afford a more financially comfortable lifestyle, for others, a better life meant teaching their children values and building character.

Upon having numerous conversations with these SMS about family issues as their primary motivating factor in their persistence, a follow-up email from Shannon sums up the sentiment of all of the SMS. Shannon sent an email wishing me a Happy Easter and wanted to further articulate her motivation and persistence through this journey. Shannon wrote:

Having my daughter and my dad encouraging me to come to school, I decided that it would be in the best interest of my family for me to finish my college education. So I came back to school. Being a mom and a student is very difficult (you know that). When the new school year comes around and I can't get her new school clothes, I think if I was

working full time I would be able to do these things. Many times because of her I think I should leave school, but then I look at her and what future I want her to have, what future I want me to have, for us to have together and I know that I, she, and we cannot have that future if I don't complete school. How can I expect her to go to college when she knows that I quit, and how can I teach her that it is important to finish what you start, if I quit. Because of her I want to leave, give up, quit and because of her I don't leave, I won't give up, and will never quit.

My University

The attitudes that SMS have about the education they are receiving at UTA, the teaching faculty, classmates, and the university in general are significant components to this study. Tinto (1987) suggests, the more the student is integrated into the life of the university, the more likely that student is to persist in her journey through college and succeed in obtaining their goal of a college degree. The theory of student involvement is also based on the premise that “the more the students are committed to their educational experience, both psychologically and physically, the more likely they will succeed in and be satisfied with their college experience” (Richmond, 1986, p. 92). Since the motivational elements of SMS decision to attend or return to UTA and the factors that aid in motivation and persistence of their journey have already been discussed, it is imperative to end this chapter with a discussion of the degree of involvement and feelings these SMS have toward their university.

For many SMS, integration into the university is difficult to accomplish. These students, because of family and work responsibilities, do not have the leisure time to participate in on-campus activities, organizations, and social events. Six SMS were actively involved in on-campus organizations and the remainder of SMS reported a desire to join an organization or participate in on-campus activities. Of the six SMS who were active in organizations, two resided on campus. Ten of the twelve SMS interviewed reported positive feelings towards UTA and happiness about being part of the university community. Only two

SMS viewed their campus as simply a space that housed the classes that they were required to take. Furthermore, the SMS whose interview revealed that she experienced the most difficult time in her journey through college was the SMS who also reported feelings of isolation and disconnection from UTA.

The SMS who reported being members of on-campus activities had more attachment to the university community than those students who were not members. I asked Angela, who has graduated from UTA since her interview, if she was a member of any organizations on campus, she replied:

I have been, I'm not this semester. I was in the starting of the Sociology Club and the starting of the Entrepreneur Club. I have not been very involved in, I would have loved to have been more involved, in fact with the Entrepreneur Society, I had to step back and it was, I really didn't want to, but I had to for the school work. I couldn't do it all.

Angela also went on to describe how she enjoyed being a member of the two clubs and how this membership made her feel like a part of the university. Angela's experience was typical of the other SMS who were involved in on-campus organizations. These SMS expressed that membership to an organization made them feel more comfortable and connected to their university but that their membership did consume a lot of time.

Shannon who lived on campus is the president of an on-campus organization for students with children and is involved in a sorority. Although Shannon expressed that the organizations were time consuming, she sees her involvement as an important component to her college experience. Shannon was initially concerned with "fitting in" at the university and expressed that even though she is an active member in two organizations she did not make friends in any of her classes. Shannon stated:

I am not really friends with any of my classmates. Like last semester, like my sorority sister we have taken a few classes together, but we chose to take those classes together.

Me and [my friend], we had Spanish together and our daughters went to school together and then we chose to take Spanish II together, but then she graduated. I don't really feel like I have friends here at UTA, I have, well like [my friend] she is like the only one in my sorority that is like my friend, I mean they are all my sisters, but she is the one that comes over and hangs out with me.

Because she lived on campus, participated in on-campus activities and organizations, utilized all of the university services from tutoring to the health center, Shannon is highly integrated into the life of the college. As previous research indicates, because of this integration and involvement in the campus community, it is likely that Shannon will continue to persist in her journey through college.

All of the SMS, with the exception of Ali, were pleased with the teaching faculty at this university. Lisa, whose major is sociology, described her experiences with professors:

I am satisfied with the education I am receiving. Even to the point of being more than satisfied with it, the professors in the specific departments, like sociology, since that is there main focus, I find that they are very well qualified and knowledgeable in their field.

Lisa also utilized many university services and also participated in on-campus activities. She expressed a desire to join an on-campus organization, but stated she did not have time during this semester. Similar to Lisa, Audia also reported being satisfied with UTA's teaching faculty. When I asked Audia to describe to me how she felt about UTA thus far, she replied:

I felt like I got a good education. I feel that I have learned a lot of stuff. Not all of my teachers are great but the majority of them are pretty good teachers, they brought stuff out of me that I was not aware was in me. And even with, I don't hang out with anyone outside of UTA when I come to school, come to a class, I have friends, we sit together and we may email each other and talk on the phone, I figured I got as much into it, I got as much out of it as I put into it. Some of the classes are, well to me that question it depends on the person. Some classes are easy to me because I was interested in it and I am pretty good at picking up knowledge, but some other classes I had to put more effort into it. Like Comm graphics, that was my hardest class ever. That's because I am not computer like, so I tried to get outside help with that one, it was difficult for me because of who I am. But the teacher, she was helpful. And by me getting outside help, in the end I got an A in the class. To me even if the class is difficult, if you put forth the effort, then

you, I mean I put extra effort into that, I came here on the weekends and everything. You will get rewarded for it. You really do.

Due to Audia's employment on campus and her involvement in an on-campus honorary society, she reported feeling not only a commitment to her education but also to the university community. Audia reported that not all of her teachers were "great," however she reported being generally satisfied with her learning experiences and the education she had received. Another SMS, Laqueta, who is the youngest SMS interviewed for this study, also reported high satisfaction with her learning experience and her entire college experience. Our conversation begins:

[How do you feel about your college experience at UTA, thus far?]

[In an enthusiastic voice] "GREAT!! GREAT. I love UTA, there is nothing really to do but as far as education, I like my teachers. I like UTA I think my classes are just right.

Because Laqueta worked on campus, lived on campus, and utilized all the university amenities, she was well-connected to the university and assimilated into the campus culture. Further conversation with Laqueta revealed that she, although a single mother, very much felt like "just a college student." Laqueta experienced the full college experience, shared this experience with her daughter, and expressed her desire to pledge a sorority during the fall 2006 semester.

Feelings towards classmates also affected the way these SMS felt about the university. All SMS felt they did not have much in common with their classmates and many reported not making friends with any of their classmates. Lucora had some very interesting things to say about her classmates. I asked Lucora how she felt about her classmates and she reported:

Ooh! Where do you want me to start? I got good classmates, this semester with my evening classes. I like it better besides the youngsters. I don't want to be discriminatory, but I don't like how they dress. I don't like the nakedness, I don't like the talking while the professors talking, because I'm a substitute teacher and I think that's real rude to talk while the professor is talking.

Lucora, being a mother and substitute teacher, had high regard for those in the teaching profession, but she found that many of her younger classmates were rude in the classroom and acted immature. Feelings were mixed about classmates but most SMS expressed getting along with the majority of students in their classes.

In general, with the exception of Ali and Christy C, the SMS were pleased with the quality of education received at UTA; felt connected and involved in the university community, and expressed satisfaction with their entire college experience. These ten SMS also reported spending time on campus for reasons other than attending their classes and felt comfortable in their surroundings.

Ali and Christy C were the only two SMS who expressed not being completely satisfied with their educational experience and the climate of the campus. Ali explained her feeling about UTA:

Well. I don't think I am getting my money's worth. The teachers are not patient enough with us; they are not geared for the family. I am taking night classes, they are frustrated, and I guess with the kids, I don't want to say kids, other students from the morning classes that are just out of high school. They are not around to explain or, they will assume that you know that thing. So um I don't think, they are lecturing. There are not enough, not every body learns the same way. I need to see it to be able to see it to understand it; most of the teachers do not go by the book."

Similar to Ali, Christy C also felt that the teaching faculty were not patient and compared the education she received at UTA to the Historically Black College or University (HBCU) she attended in New Orleans. Christy C explained her feelings about UTA:

Um its quick, ya know it's like there is a lot of information. I don't know if it is because I am taking freshman level classes so they are more general, but it is a lot of information almost unrealistic. [The HBCU university she attended] is smaller and um I guess one of the reasons I mentioned about the amount of information, at [HBCU] we covered like ten chapters in one semester but we knew those ten chapters, but here we are, in some of my classes are at 17 chapters. Like what were the first three chapters about, I have found myself learning for the moment, what I need to know for the test.

Christy C also described feelings about her classmates:

I was hoping for a different atmosphere here. I guess when I came here, my high school was you know racial, mixed, there were Asians and Hispanics and I was in honors. I graduated in the top ten percent of my class, so when I got to [HBCU] you were not in a click if you did not dress a certain way. And I don't care how I look too much, you know once I get home from in front of the mirror, if it wasn't together when I left home it won't be together when I hit the streets, so that was me. So when I came to UTA I said ok this is gonna be like high school, its going to be more diverse and people are going to be more friendly. But it is not like that.

Christy C reported only coming to campus to take her classes. "I go from Maverick Parking to University Hall or the Life Center, that's it." Ali and Christy C had only experienced attending night classes at UTA. Having never taken a class during the day, these women did not have the opportunity to fully interact with teaching faculty and other students, and their perception of UTA was biased. Ali and Christy C previously experienced college at smaller universities where they attended classes during the day, were involved in on-campus activities, and felt connected to that university.

The stories of the SMS show a connection between their involvement and attachment to the university community and the level of satisfaction of their overall college experience. Those SMS who were more physically connected to the university also reported greater feelings of satisfaction with their learning experience and the campus environment. Unfortunately, Ali and Christy C had no connections to the university and reported being dissatisfied with their college experience at UTA. Because of work schedules, it is unlikely

that Ali and Christy C will ever encounter similar satisfactory experiences to those experienced by the SMS who take their classes during the day. It is unfortunate that because they must work full-time during the day to single-handedly support their families that Ali and Christy are denied the full college experience.

For the SMS in this study, the journey through college was a journey filled with many mixed emotions. Because all SMS had previously attended another college or university, their decision to attend UTA marked a new beginning in their journey. These women, motivated to return or attend college for different reasons, described the circumstances that led to their decision and the strategies used to prepare themselves for their journey at UTA. Some SMS told of the decision to postpone their education for their children's sake while others described their children as the main motivation to persevere their degree.

All SMS expressed family issues such as being a "good role model" and being a good mother were important aspects in their persistence through college. The SMS also told stories of the difficulties they faced in trying to navigate the academic system and adjust to the campus culture. Not all SMS experienced barriers to their education and those SMS who did experience barriers reported how they overcame those barriers. It became apparent that the majority of SMS had positive feelings toward their university and are highly satisfied with their entire college experience. These SMS are purposeful agents who are actively constructing their college experience; they exert control over their external environments and contribute to the university community. The journey through college posed many challenges and barriers for the SMS in this study, however as the words of the SMS revealed, these women are prepared to endure whatever hardship they must in order to obtain their goal of a college degree.

CHAPTER VI

SOURCES OF SUPPORT, EMPOWERMENT, AND GROWTH

These twelve SMS are not alone in their journey through college at UTA. However, because these women are single-handedly raising their children and are often the only source of income, it is important to ascertain the impact that support or lack of support had on their college experience. The lack of finances was not reported as a barrier to their education, rather instrumental help such as financial assistance was a widely mentioned source of support to the SMS. Financial aid through grants and loans was a major source of financial assistance. Occasional funding came from friends and family but rarely from the fathers of their children. Only two of the twelve SMS reported receiving child support regularly while two SMS reported receiving child support sporadically. Also, two SMS children's fathers were deceased, six SMS received no child support and four of the six SMS previously mentioned do not know the whereabouts of their children's fathers.

In addition to financial support, the SMS expressed the impact social support from their family and friends had on their college experience. Originally, I anticipated this sample to have little familial help, but the interviews revealed an overwhelming majority reported receiving substantial emotional support from their family, and many SMS chose to attend UTA for its proximity to family members. All but one SMS lived within a thirty-minute drive from a family member. As can be expected, because of the SMS journey, the barriers to overcome, and the motivation they have received while attending UTA, these SMS reported

experiencing many personal changes. SMS also reported feeling empowered at creating their own destiny as well gaining personal growth.

Financial Aid and Social Support

All SMS reported they received financial support in the form of federal student aid. All SMS received the federal Pell grant that paid for their tuition, and all but one of the SMS took out student loans to offset the cost of their college education. SMS did mention that the amount of debt they accrued while in college would have a negative impact on their ability to support themselves as well as pay back their loans after graduation. The majority of SMS were employed and with the combination of their paycheck and the federal student aid, it was evident that they received an adequate amount of money to support their families. The lack of finances was not perceived as a barrier to their education; however, these same students revealed that if not for the federal aid they were receiving, they would not have been able to afford the cost a college education.

When I asked Christie K if she received financial aid for college she replied:

Pell grants and I get my Phi Beta Kappa scholarship and the loans, need based.

[Do you feel you are receiving an adequate amount student aid?]

It pays for school and books and helps with some living expenses. It is gonna be tough to pay back when I get out. Um with the loans it is adequate right now, but it sure is an overwhelming amount of debt, so we will see.”

Christie K is one of only two students who received child support on a regular basis. She reported that her ex-husband saw his daughters on occasion and is now making up back child support as well as paying current child support. The fathers of the children of these SMS should take care of their responsibilities as parents by offering child support, but unfortunately, Christie K and Lisa were the only two SMS who reported reliable child

support and involvement by these fathers. The main reason given for the fathers' absence in the lives of their children was that the fathers did not want to be involved in the lives of the children if there was no intimate relationship with the children's mothers.

Shelia, who lived with and shared a vehicle with her sister (also a SMS at UTA), expressed satisfaction at the amount of financial aid she received for her education. Sheila knew, because of her family responsibilities, that her education would be a struggle and admitted that without the financial support of the Pell grant and her student loans, she would never have been able to attempt college as a single-mom. I asked Sheila if she believed her financial aid was an adequate amount and she described:

Yes, actually I do. Yes. It is an adequate amount. I use it to basically get things we need with the extra money that's left. Um, I get clothes for my daughter, pay utility bills, and buy toiletries, things like that. I try to stock up when it's financial aid time.

Sheila and her sister lived together and shared much of the cost of raising a family. They pooled their resources, shared one vehicle, and watched each other's children when necessary. The combination of resources and the tendency to lean on family members for support, other than financial, was a common occurrence in the lives of the SMS.

All SMS agreed that without the financial support from federal student aid they would not have been able to attend UTA. Not all SMS agreed that the amount received was adequate. Audia expressed how she felt about the sum she received:

It pays for tuition, books, and living expenses. It's not enough. But you know. If I am supposed to be a full time student which means I am not supposed to work, it is no where near adequate. So that is why I still have to work. Honestly, if I had an apartment where I had to pay full rent and all of that, I would not be able to do it. I would have to cut back on the hours I was taking, simple as that. Before they raised the tuition, the Pell grant covered the entire tuition, and then you have the loans which only comes to three thousand, so you mean to tell me, I am supposed to pay rent, eat, electric, all that, car insurance take care of my kid and myself, personal items all for three thousand for four months? Really to me that is not possible. That's really just rent, that's about it.

Audia moved back in with her parents when she made the decision to return to college, and the support she received both financially from federal student aid and financial and emotional support from her family played a vital role in her ability to continue her journey through college as a single mother.

Lucora worked part-time as a substitute teacher and reported being on a tight budget, but believed the amount of financial aid she received from the federal government was an adequate amount and she appreciated every penny that she received. I asked Lucora if she believed her financial aid was adequate and she replied:

Yes I do. Yes. Thank you FASSA. Yes. I've been doing pretty good. Yeah, I just hope that when I get through getting all this that I can get a job that's gonna help pay that back. Because it is a loan.

Many SMS expressed concern with paying back the money they borrowed, but all SMS (except Ali, who did not take out a student loan) saw the necessity of borrowing money to fund their education. Tinto (1987) suggests that "finances do not appear to be a long-term factor in persistence" (p. 82). Finances are, however, an important source of support that enables these SMS to continue their journey through college.

These SMS realized that raising their children single-handedly would be more difficult when they added the additional responsibilities of a college education. However, these women also knew that they did not have to be completely alone in their college experience as they had family and friends locally that they could depend on.

Many SMS reported choosing to attend UTA specifically because of its close proximity to family members. Four of the SMS had relatives who were also UTA students. Audia reported that her brother attended, Laqueta's sister was a student, Sheila's sister was a student, and both Shannon's brother and father were also students at UTA. These women

were able to tap enough family and friend support to surmount any crisis they faced while they continued the act of balancing their college, family, and work responsibilities.

Glenda described how she received social support from her family as well as her community,

My children and my church community are my support system. I have some very good friends in the school district also. The church family. My point is that I have been in the community since 1982 and my same neighborhood for about twenty-five years, so I have cultivated lots of relationships.

Glenda had a wide array of friends and family locally that supported her decision to continue her journey through UTA and offered emotional support when she needed it. Glenda, having been in her community for many years, reported having friends she has had since her daughter was in kindergarten and, “I can go out to eat with and such.” These SMS relied on friends and family for emotional support, and all but one of the SMS interviewed reported having a strong support system.

Crompton and Tan (2002) suggest that when SMS encounter “greater emotional support and instrumental support,” the negative consequences associated with the multiple roles of being a single mother, a college student, and employee are reduced (p. 141). Social support from family and friends was repeatedly reported as an important part of the college experiences of these SMS. Not only did these SMS rely on their family and friends for instrumental support such as childcare, transportation, and finances, they also relied on them for emotional support. I asked Lisa, if she had a support system and she replied:

My support system is my mother and my sister and a couple of really good friends; they really push me on and help me out when they can. And my ex-husband’s mother has been supportive and helps take care of my daughter and in any way that she can. She really doesn’t like to say no to her granddaughter.

Many SMS also viewed the support of their friends and family as a driving force in their education, often reporting that their friends and family “push them” to continue. Christy C also reported being able to lean on her family and friends “when things got tough.” Although Christy C reported her main source of support for her college education was “Me, me, me,” she also described how her family supported her throughout her journey. Christy C explained:

Keep going to school, if I stop going its like my air supply will be cut off, that’s how they act. That has always been my thing; I am the dandelion in the grass with my family. They are like oh you say you were going to go to school, you gotta go to school.

Christy C’s family is proud of her accomplishments, and they believe she will be the first person in their family to obtain a college degree. In addition to her family and friends as support, Christy C also sought the support of her pastor, who after Hurricane Katrina, relocated to Chicago; she stated she called him when she “needed to talk to someone.” Similar to Christy C, Lucora also reported her family as a source of support, but when I asked who her main source of support was, she replied, “Jesus, God Almighty, and my kids, too.” Contrary to previous literature on single-mother students, spirituality or one’s reliance on the perceived support of God, was mentioned only a few times as a source of support.

The support of friends and family was an important substitute for the absent parent. Many SMS mentioned that they relied on these supportive individuals and without their help their journey through college would be “harder than it already is.” Siblings, parents, and close friends were often who the SMS turned to when they felt they had no one else.

Friends and family were not always available to provide support. Angela who reported that her mother was supportive but often busy “with her own life,” created her own network of support in addition to her familial support. When I asked Angela who her main

source of support was, she replied, “The counselor I am seeing.” Angela felt comfortable in seeking support from a professional counselor on campus; to her, seeing a counselor was a convenient way to receive emotional support. Some SMS also did not want to lean too heavily on family for support and relied on support networks they created at UTA. Laqueta reported that although her mother was simply a thirty-minute drive or a phone call away, she did not always want to burden her with “petty stuff.” Laqueta, similar to traditional students, relied more on her friend for emotional and instrumental support and childcare.

The only SMS who reported not having a strong support network was Ali. Ali transferred from an out-of-state university and moved to Texas where she reported having no relatives or friends. Understanding the difficulty that she must be facing without the presence of family or friends, I asked her about her support,

I have a really good friend in California that I can call if I need to talk; I don’t have anybody out here. I can call her up; if it is a big thing I call her up, most of the time she helps me out. I also keep a journal.

Despite the lack of local support, Ali found support from a friend via telephone and writing in her personal journal. In times of emotional distress, Ali would call on her friend to lean on as well write passages in her journal. Ali’s journal contained her feelings about the situations she was facing as well as possible outcomes. Ali stated that she would often read old entries to see what she has overcome; that sometimes gave her the push she needed.

Weissbound and Kagan (1989) suggest that single-mother students have become increasingly mobile, and typically face a lack of social support when traveling in their journey through college. Ali was the only SMS who left her home state to move to Texas and reported having no local support. However, in general, the SMS in this study chose to attend a university that was close to their families. The presence of strong support from family and

friends was another important dynamic in this study that had not been previously reported. The support received financially and socially, in addition to the strategies used to balance college, family, and work responsibilities, aided in the success and reduction of attrition of the SMS attending UTA. As stated previously, this sample of SMS, because of their prior college experiences and their junior and senior academic standings, was unique to this study and common themes that emerged from the data can not be viewed as representative of all single-mother students.

Empowerment and Personal Growth

Sir Francis Bacon was quoted as saying, “Knowledge is power.” Empowerment occurs when women become educated, acquire productive skills, and gain confidence. For the twelve SMS interviewed for this study, their personal sacrifices and perseverance despite unaccommodating circumstances in their journey through UTA, empower them with knowledge and the ability to create and control their own future. The empowerment that these women gain from their journey through college is the “capacity to make the best of their own lives” (Longwe, 1998, p. 22). The study revealed that these SMS became empowered through their learning, overcoming barriers, and enduring the entire experience of college. The interviews also became a tool of empowerment for the SMS by encouraging them to “name their own experience rather than have their experiences defined through labels” (Kissman & Allen, 1993, p. 25).

Glenda, “loves, loves, loves education” and feels that she is in her element when she is in the classroom. She also stated that she felt like a powerful person being a college student. Having what Glenda called a “compromised leg,” she continued to endure long hours at school for the sake of her education; she stated:

I have that leg problem and it swells when I am under stress. And I have to get compromised and so I just don't have the physical endurance, but I have a lot more than you would think. I am amazed at what I am pulling.

Glenda even amazed herself at her physical and mental endurance. In our conversation after the interview, we had a lengthy discussion about the math requirements of UTA. I disclosed to Glenda the difficulty I experienced with my undergraduate algebra classes, and she shared her experience with me. Glenda also disclosed how important it was to her to learn a subject. She said, "When you get it, isn't it great! That your brain has conquered whatever it was you were trying to learn!" For Glenda and many SMS like her, leaning and conquering the material set forth by professors enabled them to gain the confidence in themselves that they never had before.

Some of the SMS in this study reported that inner strength aided in their empowerment and enabled them to become self confident about their role as student. Christy C felt that I had not touched deeply the issue of inner strength and at the end of the interview she had this to add:

[Christy, is there anything you would like to add?]

I guess maybe to even tie in mentality, I don't know. If I am weak or if I am not a really strong person, if you are not ambitious, then you know. I guess to ask questions about the person,s endurance or how strong they are.

[OK, so tell me, how strong are you?]

Oh I am very strong, I am an ox, and I can take a lot. People lean on me, and it's just like I am the pillar of the building. That's me, that is what I am. I see that I have friends that are in the same situation as me, they crumble. I am like what is wrong with you, get up. That is not the worst that can happen.

[So, do you feel inner strength is necessary for single-mother students?]

They don't have to be as strong as me, no, because I think I am a bit supernatural. Sometimes I think why did I not cry, I wanted to cry. I did not break down when I wanted to break down. You just need to have strength somewhere.

In the interviews, I never posed direct questions regarding inner strength as Christy C had suggested; the study was created to reveal how family responsibilities affected the college experience, not necessarily how personality affected the college experience of SMS. However, the women showed their strength and their feelings of empowerment without having to be led by a question. The issue of empowerment through education and feelings of personal change revealed itself throughout the conversations.

Kim felt that her journey made her a stronger person. She reported:

I'm ready for the undergraduate part to be over with. Um, a little bit more excited about going to graduate school and getting more, further my writing career and just making myself just a stronger person. So I know I'll have to like, take some classes to boost my GPA up. That type of thing. But I'm still, I'm ready for it.

Kim's journey through college at the undergraduate level was a strengthening exercise that was preparing her for her next journey through graduate school. Kim reported feeling empowered by her education and a new found enlightenment about racial and social issues in society. Astin and Antonio (2004) suggest that the college experience has a significant effect on the character development of women, and these students tend to "exhibit a higher level of civic and social values" (p. 59). Kim, who was a sociology major, became aware and concerned about the lack of minority faculty in the department; she described a class she took:

There is a choice of material that the professors can choose to cover, well, and let me see if I can articulate it further. Classes that you're taking such as minorities that are telling you these facts of minorities, but not necessarily telling you the reason why these numbers are the way they are. The reason why we have minorities, single women, single mothers in minorities, it's not necessarily going back to the root of where the problem lies.

Kim believed if there had been an ethnic minority or a woman teaching the minorities class, more information about the plight of minorities and their contributions to society in the United States would have been more convincingly conveyed in the class. The empowerment Kim has gained from her experience at UTA enabled her to question the very authority that has taught her. Not only is she learning material from the classes that she is taking, she is leaning to think for herself and formulate her own opinions. Since the interview, Kim and I have had many discussions about material covered in introductory sociology classes at UTA, and we both share the same vision for the future of academic sociology.

The stories told by Glenda, Christy C, and Kim represent many stories told by other SMS in this interview. The words strong, strength, pride, and power, were the adjectives used by the SMS to describe their feelings of being empowered by their education and their ability to cope with the demands of life and higher education. Many SMS also mentioned the productive skills they learned by being in the classroom as a source of empowerment and personal growth.

Angela, who fled from an abusive husband, claimed her journey as a SMS made her a strong person, and because of what she has endured, she has the confidence to go back into the work place. In addition to returning to the workforce and “being a contributing member to society,” Angela also reported wanting to create a political lobbying group for women victims of domestic violence. Angela explained her plan:

What I wanted to do is, more of a political and lobbying group that would give us a voice, so that we don't get laws that don't work in our favor. Politicians like to make laws that seem like, and I'm sure their intentions, a lot of their intentions are very well, but they are trying to help the life of a single parent. But do those laws work? Are they applied? Are they followed?

[A watch dog of sorts?]

Right. If we say that child support is a certain amount because a child requires this amount to live in a decent manner in America, then is it happening? Or are judges arbitrarily throwing out, and why would a woman who gives birth to a child, whose father is in the top 1% economic level. Why would that woman and that child need to be on Medicaid or any other government assistance? If the father of that child, whether married or not, is basically making a few million every few years, 300,000 a year, 25,000 a month. Why is the government having to be responsible for any of that child's welfare? And why is the man, to me, it's not the child and the mother living off the government, it's the man whose living off the government.

Angela wanted to utilize her experiences of being a victim of domestic violence and her struggle as a single mother to help other women in similar situations. Angela also stated that she had learned how to be a better public speaker and felt that these skills would “open doors” for her in the future. Similar to Angela, Lisa also reported learning a new skill in the classroom that would help her in the future. Lisa reported that her presence among people of different races, ages, and religions has taught her how to interact with and accept diversity. Lisa also feels proud to be a college student and believes that her opportunity to obtain a college degree is a “privilege.”

Shannon, like Kim and Angela, also reported being empowered and enlightened by her education. Many of the SMS who reported wanting careers in the helping fields mentioned wanting to share their knowledge and empower other women. Shannon who wants to become a teacher described her career goals:

I have two goals and I don't know which will happen. I either want to teach first or second grade in a low income area or in a women's prison. Elementary or teach women in the women's prison. The average grade for people in prison in Texas is 3rd grade.

[What would you teach in a women's prison?]

Like GED preparation. I think once my daughter gets into high school, I wouldn't mind teaching like PE or something.

Shannon was cognizant of the fact that many of the prisoners in the Texas Prison System only had minimal education, and she believed if women in prisons were better educated they would be less likely “to commit crimes and be on drugs.” As a result of this new found knowledge, Shannon wants to invest what she has learned in her college experience with people she finds less fortunate than herself. Lucora also expressed how her college education has made her feel like a powerful person; her desire is to help people she perceived less fortunate than her.

Lucora stated she would like to utilize what she has learned in college. She reported:

My long term goal is to someday own my own sixty-bed nursing home facility or forty-room housing for young teens and mothers.

[What exactly would these facilities do?]

To take full care of kids that are on the fence and their mothers can’t get out cause there’s no, you know, licensed personnel around to keep them, or was in a car accident and they need someone to be able to take care of them, to be sufficient. Cause a lot of those people that either have drug, you know.

[Like a halfway house?]

Like housing and education, cause now they are fixed or whatever and where do they go?

Lucora’s vision is to create a nursing home for women and their children. The center would be for women who have been in medical distress and are in need of rehabilitation and for the children they are responsible for; as she explained it, like a “family halfway house.” Lucora also explained that this type of center would “give them an opportunity for a better life that may not have been available to them before.” Lucora sees her experiences at UTA as her opportunity to create a better life for her and her children, and believes that she should, when able, offer assistance to other women and their children.

Not only do many of the SMS express feeling empowered by their education and wanting to give back to other women and their community, they expressed how being a college student and having the capacity to maintain their balancing act has given them the ability to exert control over their future. These SMS made the decision to attend and persist in their journey. The university and educators do not cause what happens to them nor do they enable them to continue or feel empowered. These SMS are perfectly able to continue their education without the assistance of the university and they also find empowerment through their personal experiences through college.

Many SMS see their education as a gateway to a better future. From their interaction with professors, administrators, and classmates these SMS are exposed to new experiences and from their success as SMS they are optimistic about their future. All SMS interviewed expressed that they felt different about their current college experience from their college experiences of the past. Glenda reported that this time through college she was “doing it right.” Sheila said, “I was already older, and I felt like it was kind of a benefit that I was older because I was more focused and I knew exactly what I wanted to do.”

Sheila discussed how much she now enjoyed coming to classes while remembering how attending classes before UTA was a chore. Although many women reported feeling challenged by UTA, they also felt a sense of accomplishment to even be enrolled in a four-year university the size of UTA. Sheila reported being more focused and took more interest in her daily college activities than she had before, and expressed a sense of personal growth and maturity. Similarly Christie K attributed her success as a college student to her maturity and being focused. Christie K stated:

I feel that some of the classes are fairly easy, I do think that some of them, I guess that I am ten years older. I think it's a lot easier than ten years ago when I was taking classes, well I don't know maybe it's that the classes got easier or I just got smarter as I got older.

Despite the difficulties managing their act of balance between their multiple responsibilities, these SMS “described many positive aspects of undertaking [their college experience at UTA], and they also shared a better understanding of themselves and their goals in life (Kevern & Webb, 2004, p. 302). Personal growth was attained through their self confidence, assertiveness, and the ability to exert control over their environment and their future. Many SMS described how, because of their experiences as college students, they have more confidence in themselves. Also some SMS have specifically chosen classes for the sake of knowledge rather than college requirement or perceived ease of the course. Angela reported:

There were classes I wanted to take because I wanted that knowledge. I knew exactly the four I wanted and that is one of the reasons it is taking me so long to get this degree, because I don't get the classes that I want.

Although all SMS reported a desire to “get it done” and “get out of here,” Angela wanted to enrich her knowledge with specific classes, and instead of taking other courses to fill her schedule, she waited until she was able to take four specific classes. For Angela, choosing the specific courses for enrichment rather than requirements was her way of exerting control over her future. The four classes that Angela waited to take were classes she believed would better prepare her for her reentry into the workforce and broaden her knowledge base. Similarly, other SMS expressed a desire to take courses for a better understanding of the subject rather than take classes to fit into their schedule. Because all of the SMS in this sample already had previous college experiences, their college experience at UTA is just another extension of their personal growth and development.

All SMS in this study reported receiving some type of financial student aid that paid for their tuition at UTA. These women also agreed that without the presence of financial support from their grants and student loans their journey through college would not have been possible. The majority of SMS reported receiving substantial instrumental and emotional support from friends and family who lived locally. Ali was the only SMS who reported having no local support. Many of the SMS who returned to college also expressed how they chose to attend UTA for its convenient location and proximity to family members. Eleven SMS were able to tap enough family and friends support to aid them in overcoming any crisis that occurred.

These SMS have gained more self confidence, are able to utilize productive skills learned in the classroom, and to exert some control over their environment and their future. Many SMS reported the desire to give back to the community and help other women to become empowered as well. These twelve women share, despite the barriers and hardships they have endured, a feeling of personal growth and empowerment from the education they are receiving at UTA. Many SMS are surrounded by people who love and support them in the decision to continue their education. These supportive networks of local friends and family have been mentioned to “push” the SMS when they needed it. Compared to the colleges and universities they had previously attended, all SMS reported feeling different about their experience at UTA. Personal growth and maturity were factors in this difference. These SMS reported feeling more focused and dedicated to their education at UTA, and felt that because of the support they received and their feelings of empowerment, nothing could stand in the way of graduation. Education fostered personal changes and discoveries of self

and the world. These SMS are getting more than just a college degree from their journey; they are also developing a better appreciation of themselves (Houghton, 2001).

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This study used a qualitative research methodology to explore how and to what extent family responsibilities affect the college experiences of the twelve SMS who participated in this research. The findings suggest that the twelve SMS shared an overwhelming sense of responsibility to their families as well as a dedication and commitment to their education that often conflicted with one another. These women saw themselves first, as mothers and second, as students. The primary role of sole caregiver to their children affected their college experience more than any other family responsibility. Many women reported feeling a simultaneous push to continue their education in order to provide a better life for their children and a pull back to quit their education to be more available to their children. These women were often conflicted about their decision to continue their education but they viewed obtaining their degree as the best way to secure a better future for their families.

Wanting to do well in both separate spheres of their lives, SMS repeatedly chose to sacrifice their personal needs as well as their educational needs for the sake of their families. Many SMS revealed that they did not have time to study, and some reported that homework did not always get completed. This study revealed the resiliency in these women's quest for education and resulted in the specific themes of balancing their responsibilities, enduring the college experience, and identifying their sources of support and empowerment.

Being a college student is difficult. Being a single mother is difficult. Combining both the roles of student and single mother, as well as the role of employee, is even more difficult, but not impossible. Winslow (2005) indicates that in the last decade the level of work and family conflict has risen, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to balance work and family demands, especially for single mothers. However, contrary to literature about the difficulty of balancing multiple responsibilities, the SMS in this study did an astonishing job of balancing their family, college, and work responsibilities, in spite of the barriers they encountered. This study contributes another dimension to the existing body of literature on single-mother higher education. The study does not focus on the economic wellbeing of the single-mother participants as other literature has previously done, but rather illuminates their strengths and the creative methods utilized to meet the demands of their multiple roles and responsibilities.

To the SMS, the act of balancing their multiple roles and responsibilities is not an illusion, it is fact; it is their lives. This study demonstrates that when something such as childcare goes awry, the SMS found creative ways to deal with their current situation. They did not throw their hands in the air and give up; they persisted despite whatever crisis they faced. Although at times the creative methods used by these SMS to overcome a crisis such as a lack of childcare, may seem uncommon and even unconventional, it is a method that suits the current need of the SMS and aids in maintaining their balance. For example, Ali and Lucora chose the method of sibling child care so that they could attend classes at night. While using older children to care for younger children is typically associated with minorities and poverty, Brandon (1992) suggests that there is evidence to suggest that self care or sibling care is more common in higher income families than lower income families.

The first theme that emerged from the data, *The Act of Balance*, reveals how these SMS balance their college, family, and work responsibilities and the creative methods they chose to manage the spheres within their responsibilities. First, we discover how SMS cope with negative stereotypes and stigma associated with single-motherhood, by choosing not to divulge their SMS status in many situations. Similar to the study conducted by Boyer (1999) these SMS reported feeling like mothers first, but did not want to be treated differently because they were single mothers; they wanted to be treated and be offered the same opportunities as traditional students.

The majority of SMS worked part-time, therefore scheduling their college and family responsibilities was not reported as a major issue. Shelton and Firestone (1989) suggest that women “may choose occupations that allow flexible scheduling or relatively few hours per week but that pay low wages,” and many of the SMS in this study demonstrated their preference for jobs with lower wages but greater flexibility over jobs with higher pay and inflexible schedules (p. 112). SMS who reported working full-time reported more difficulty in navigating the academic system and adjusting to the campus culture. Full-time employees, college student, and single mothers like Ali and Christy C reported having the most difficulty in their college experience and felt no connection to their college community. Tinto’s (1987) theory of student departure suggests that students who are less involved and less integrated into the life of the college will often have a more difficult college experience and are at greater risk for departure. Campbell and Moen (1992) suggest these women experience more strain in the balancing of college, family and work responsibilities due to the amount of time spent working.

In this study, it was also discovered that SMS utilized what Hochschild (1989) called “cutting back” or “scaling back” homework and housework duties due to time constraints and parenting responsibilities. Household tasks such as food preparation, cleaning, and laundry did not affect the college experience of the SMS as much as their childcare responsibilities did. Hochschild (1989) also suggests that because women are “more responsible for home and children” caring for their children and making sure their basic needs were met was the most difficult sphere to manage (p. 7). However, the women interviewed in this study may have a reduced amount of difficulty in their childcare needs due to their close proximity and utilization of friends and family. The college experience of these SMS was sometimes filled with feelings of guilt about leaving their children in the care of others and not being able to spend more time with them. Regardless of the feeling the SMS reported, they did not opt to quit their pursuit of education; they persisted.

Van Stone, Nelson, and Niemann (1994) argue that the academic success of SMS “is dependent upon the support of a wide variety of individuals” (p. 572), and as we heard from the stories of the SMS, all with the exception Ali, received a substantial amount of support from family and friends who lived locally. Many SMS reported the use of friends and family members for childcare while they attended school or went to work. The availability and utilization of familial and friend support set these participants apart from their counterparts studied in other research. Research on SMS rarely mentions the utilization of friends and family for support and the use of friends and family for support is one of the most important components to success for the twelve SMS in this study.

The Two SMS reported the use of their oldest children to care for their younger siblings while they attended night classes, and one SMS reported taking her child to class

with her when her regular provider was unavailable. One SMS reported regret in relying too heavily on her thirteen-year-old daughter for childcare; she knew this was too much for her daughter to handle. However, these SMS reported they sacrificed the needs of their oldest children for the needs of the younger children. While this seems like an unconventional method of childcare, these SMS saw this as a temporary solution that would enable them to get their college degree and be able to better care for their families.

Throughout the interviews, the women continually attributed the pursuit of their college degree to wanting to secure a better future for their children. Essentially, their college degree was for their children. Many SMS realized that a college education was not a panacea, but that it would eventually benefit them by allowing them access to more resources. In general, the family was the driving force that both motivated the SMS to enroll and continue their education and simultaneously made their college experience difficult.

The second theme, *The Journey*, SMS reported mixed emotions about their decision to return to college and attend UTA. Although all SMS reported positive previous college experiences they reported anxiety over the expectations of this university. The majority of women who participated in this study reported being motivated by a pattern that Ross (1998) called Change Seekers and Reluctant Returnees. Change Seekers reported wanting change from unsatisfying jobs, abusive relationships, and a better quality of life, while the Reluctant Returnee previously attended college but quit because of family issues. They now found themselves pressured to return because of family issues. To prepare themselves for their journey at UTA all but one SMS reported some type of preparation before their first days at UTA. Some SMS took the guided tours while others took classes during the summer semester to acclimate themselves to the campus.

Tinto (1987) suggests that because the adult student has a multiplicity of responsibilities and limitation of time, it is more difficult for that student to become fully integrated into the life of the university which leads to a greater likelihood of departure. Surprisingly, the majority of SMS felt an attachment to the university community and reported utilizing the amenities offered by the university. Many of the students reported that they “loved UTA” and felt camaraderie to their campus as well as fellow students. Two of the SMS lived on campus, three SMS worked on campus and the majority reported spending time outside of class on the campus. It can also be ascertained from the interviews of the twelve SMS that the more attachment felt to the community, the higher the satisfaction of their college experience. Overall the SMS were satisfied with their education and the university in general.

I originally anticipated that all of the SMS would report experiencing barriers to their education, and ten SMS did reported experiencing some types of barriers to their education. Contrary to the findings of Bradshaw et al. (2006), the SMS who participated in this study never reported a lack of finances as a barrier to their education. However, similar to the study conducted by Campbell and Moen (2002), all SMS experience the constraints of time as a major barrier to their education. SMS also reported family issues such as the sentiment of responsibility to their children, personal characteristics such as an accent and learning disability, and the institution itself as barriers to their education. These barriers, although not always overcome, were often navigated around. These SMS found their way around their perceived barriers and persisted in their journey through college.

Tinto (1987) suggests, “External support [from family] may be instrumental in enabling individuals to withstand the difficulties typically faced in adjusting to the social

demands of college life” (p. 124). Similar to Tinto’s findings the SMS interviews in this study reported that their family was their main source of support and main motivating factor to the SMS continuance through their journey. These SMS expressed wanting to be role models to their children and set a good example. Many SMS expressed wanting to complete their college degree so their children would be more likely to attend and complete college. Because all the SMS had prior positive college experiences, they had already experienced the difficulty of balancing college, family, and work responsibilities and believed they were capable of replicating their positive experiences at UTA.

This study also discovered the degree of involvement the SMS had in the college community. Braxton (2000) suggests involvement “emphasizes the importance of behavior rather than perception, and of student-initiated rather than institution- or class initiated activity” (p. 186). These SMS were more involved in their college community than I had originally anticipated. SMS were involved in a variety of on-campus organizations from a sorority to honorary societies to social clubs. The majority of SMS also reported that they were aware of and used many of the amenities and services the campus had to offer. The counseling and health center were frequently mentioned as being utilized by SMS. Although the SMS reported not having made many friends in any of their classes, they reported making friends elsewhere on campus. Two SMS reported feelings of isolation and disconnect from the university. These students, however, only took classes at night and had limited interaction with administration, teaching faculty, and other students. Furthermore, those SMS who were not involved in any on-campus organizations expressed a desire to join in the future. Unfortunately, the college journey ended for Ali this semester. Unable to find her niche on

campus coupled with feelings of isolation and disconnection and family troubles, Ali was not able to bring her GPA up above a 1.9, and was dismissed from the university.

The last theme that emerges from the data, *Sources of Support, Empowerment, and Personal Growth*, describes how the SMS derived support from friends and family, became empowered from their experience at UTA, and how they grew as individuals. Interestingly, all but one of the SMS reported having local support from friends and family. Many of these SMS revealed that they chose to attend UTA for its close proximity to family members. These SMS also reported substantial instrumental and emotional support from friends and family which aided in college retention. Having close friends and family to lean on for support and encouragement was a vital component to the success of SMS college experience. In addition, all SMS received some type of federal student aid and reported that without the financial aid, their journey through college would not be possible.

As the SMS continued their journey through college, they gained a better appreciation of themselves and felt pride in their accomplishments. They observed that their experience at UTA was quite different from their previous college experience. These SMS expressed feeling more powerful being a college student and having a greater sense of self confidence. Consequently, many of these women reported a feeling of duty to help and empower other women in similar situations and give back to their community. There was also a sense of maturity and responsibility among all participants in this study, despite the range of ages.

These SMS are a unique group. When recruiting the participants for this study, I had not anticipated that all of them would have previous college experiences and substantial familial support; these characteristics revealed themselves in the interviews. I had also not expected to feel so personally connected to every one of my research participants. This

project has been one of the most powerful experiences of my life. I was able to meet twelve fantastic women, who in turn offered me a slice of their life and entrusted me to tell their stories.

APPENDIX A
RECRUITING FLYER

Single-Mother Undergraduate Students Needed

Sociology Graduate Student Needs Single-Mother UTA Undergraduate Students to
Participate in a Study about Family and College Responsibilities

The criteria for being considered for this study are that the student must:

1. Be a single-mother (unmarried, widowed, or divorced) undergraduate student.
2. Have primary custody of at least one of her biological children.
3. Currently have at least one of her children under the age of 18 living in the same household.
4. Must be attending UTA during the spring 2006 semester and take the majority of her classes on UTA campus.
5. Have at least completed one semester of college course work.

Should you wish to participate please contact

Mary Gatmaitan
Email mjgatmaitan@sbcglobal.net
817-468-4405 or
817-372-5073



APPROVED FOR POSTING
ST. GOVERNANCE OFFICE

APR. 20. 2006
Approved
2-10-06

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PERMISSION LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

January 31, 2006

Mary J Gatmaitan
Beth Anne Shelton, PhD
Sociology
19599

RE: Expedited Approval of Protocol

Title: *Homework and Housework: How Family Responsibilities Affect the College Experience of Single-Mothers*

IRB No.: 06.126s

The University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board (UTA IRB) has determined that this research is eligible for expedited review in accordance with Title 45 CFR 46.110(a)-(b)(1), 63 FR 60364 and 63 FR 60353. The IRB Chairman (or designee) approved the protocol effective January 30, 2006. IRB approval for the research shall continue until January 29, 2007. In order for the research to continue beyond the first year, Annual (continuing) Review must be completed within the month preceding the date of expiration indicated above. A reminder notice will be forwarded to the attention of the Principal Investigator (PI) at that time.

The approved subject sample size is 10 subjects.

Important Note: The IRB approved and stamped informed consent document (ICD), showing the approval and expiration date of the article must be used when prospectively enrolling volunteer participants into the study. The use of a copy of any consent form on which the IRB-stamped approval and expiration dates are not visible, or are replaced by typescript or handwriting is prohibited. The signed consent forms must be securely maintained on the UTA campus for the duration of the study plus three years. The complete study record is subject to inspection and/or audit during this time period by entities including but not limited to the UTA IRB, Research Compliance staff, OHRP and by study sponsors (if the study is funded).

Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to this office within 24 hours. In addition, pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, “promptly report to the IRB any proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, are **not initiated without prior IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject.”

All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented *Human Subjects Involved in Research (Tier II) Training* or *CITI Training* on file with this office.

If applicable, approval by the appropriate authority at a collaborating facility is required prior to subject enrollment. If the collaborating facility is *engaged in the research*, an OHRP approved Federalwide Assurance (FWA) may be required for the facility (prior to their participation in research-related activities). To determine whether the collaborating facility is engaged in research, go to:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/assurance/engage.htm>

The UTA Office of Research Integrity and Compliance appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human research subjects. Should you have questions or require further assistance, please contact this office by calling (817) 272-2775 or (817) 272-3723.

Sincerely,



Dr. Roger Mellgren
Professor
UTA IRB Chair

Encl (if applicable):

- Consent Form(s)
- Questionnaire(s) or Survey(s)
- Recruitment Advertisement
- Project Summary

KV/RM

APPENDIX C
MODIFIED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
PERMISSION LETTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

April 17, 2006

Mary Jane Gatmaitan
Beth Anne Shelton, PhD
Sociology
Box 19599

Re: Modification Approval

TITLE: *Homework and Housework: How Family Responsibilities Affect the College Experience of Single Mothers*

IRB No.: 06.126s

The UTA Institutional Review Board (UTA IRB) Chair (or designee) reviewed and approved the modification(s) to this protocol on **April 17, 2006**, in accordance with Title 45 CFR 46.110(b)(2). The modification(s), indicated below, was deemed minor and appropriate for expedited review.

- The protocol was modified to include two additional participants for a total of twelve participants.

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, “promptly report to the IRB any proposed changes in the research activity, and ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, **are not initiated without IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject.”

The modification approval will additionally be presented to the convened board on April 18, 2006, for full IRB acknowledgment [45 CFR 46.110(c)]. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented *Human Subjects Involved in Research (Tier II) Training* on file with the UTA Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (ORIC).

The UTA Office of Research Integrity and Compliance appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human research subjects. Should you have questions or require further assistance, please contact this office by calling (817) 272-2775 or (817) 272-3723.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Roger Mellgren
Professor
IRB Chair

APPENDIX D
CONSENT FORM



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
AT ARLINGTON

JAN 30 2006

INFORMED CONSENT

APPROVED BY THE UTA - IRB
The IRB approval for this consent
Document will expire on

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mary Jane Gatmaitan

JAN 29 2007

TITLE OF PROJECT: Homework and Housework: How Family responsibilities Affect the College Experience of Single-Mothers

This Informed Consent will explain about being a research subject in an experiment. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to explore how family responsibilities such as (but not limited to) child care, cooking, laundry, and cleaning affect college experience of single-mothers who attend UTA. This study will explore the lives of single-mothers and how they balance their family responsibilities with their responsibilities as a college student. The result of this study will be analyzed and used in a Master's thesis.

DURATION

There will be two interviews. Each interview will last one hour. The total time for both interviews is two hours. The interviews will be conducted during two separate sessions. Both parts of the interview can be given to you in one session if you wish. Ten single-mother students who attend UTA will be interviewed.

PROCEDURES

You will be given a short questionnaire that asks you basic demographic information as well as the age of your children, your race, colleges you have attended, employment, and your parent's educational attainment. The questionnaire will efficiently answer questions about basic information and also help you get acquainted with the research process.

You will be given two interviews. These interviews will be conducted face to face in one of the study rooms of UTA's main library. If you prefer, the interview can be conducted in another location. The interview will be audio recorded with a digital recorder. Your responses to the questions will be transcribed from the audio recording to a word document. After I have analyzed all the interviews, your audio recording will be destroyed.

In the interview, you will be asked questions about your single-mother status, your status as a student, your family, your children, and your overall college experience. The interview is divided into two sessions each session lasting one hour. However, if you prefer, both parts of the interview can be conducted in one session.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mary Jane Gatmaitan

TITLE OF PROJECT: Homework and Housework: How family Responsibilities Affect the College Experience of Single-mothers

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

Because of the intimate nature of the questions you will be asked in these interviews, you may experience some emotional discomfort. Should you feel the need to pause or stop the interview because it is causing you discomfort, you may do so without any penalty.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefit or compensation for your participation in this study.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES / TREATMENTS

There are no alternative procedures other than the short questionnaire and interview. You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in (The Office of Women's studies University Hall Room 223) for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA IRB, the FDA (if applicable), and personnel particular to this research (individual or department) have access to the study records. Your (e.g., student, medical) records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

FINANCIAL COSTS

There is not financial cost to you for your participation in this study.

JAN 3 0 2006
APPROVED BY THE UTA - IRB
 The IRB approval for this consent
 Document will expire on

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mary Jane Gatmaitan

TITLE OF PROJECT: Homework and Housework: How family Responsibilities Affect the College Experience of Single-mothers

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Mary Jane Gatmaitan at 817-468-4405 or Dr. Shelton at 817-272-3131. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 817/272-1235 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or quit at any time. If you decided not to participate or quit this study, there will be no penalty. You may quit by calling Mary Gatmaitan, whose phone number is 817-468-4405. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been and will continue to be given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator.

You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: _____ DATE _____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER _____ DATE _____

JAN 3 0 2006
 APPROVED BY THE UTA - IRB
 The IRB approval for this consent
 Document will expire on

JAN 2 9 2007

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Schedule

Name (Pseudonym) _____

Part I

I. Retrospective College Information

1. Have you previously attended another college, university or technical school prior to your enrollment here at UTA? If not at UTA when did you attend?
2. When did you decide to pursue your college education, here at UTA?
3. Although you are currently a single-mother student, were you a single-mother when you first began your college education or were you married? If you were married at the beginning of your college education, but are no longer married, please describe to me your previous relationship and if this had any, little, or no affect on your decision to continue or attend UTA or other college/university.
4. What made you choose to come to UTA? Location, curricula, financial reasons, or other?
5. What is your college major, minor? Please tell me a little about your decision to pick that field?
6. What were the circumstances surrounding your decision to return to college or attend for the first time? Did anything happen in particular to motivate you to return?
7. When was your fist semester? Can you tell me about how you felt coming to school for the very first time? Were you happy, sad, nervous, angry, scared, or other?
8. When you began your first semester here at UTA, how did you know where everything was? Did you take a tour? Utilize a campus map or ask students?
9. Were you aware of the services that UTA offered to students, such as health services, tutoring, mental health, and other? If aware, how did you become aware of these services? Have you utilized any of the services and if so which services? If not aware, what services have you heard of?
10. Have you ever received financial aid for college? If yes, please describe to me what type of financial aid you received? If you continue to receive? What does the financial aid pay for? Do you feel this is an adequate amount of aid? If you do not receive financial aid, please explain to me how you feel about this? How do you fund your education?
11. What was your life like before college? What did you do? Did you work? Stay at home with the children or other?

II. Retrospective Single-Mother Status Information

12. How many children do you have? Ages, genders?
13. Have your children always lived with you? Do you share custody? Please explain. If they have not always live with you, where were they living and when?
14. If all of the children do not live with you, where do the other children live?
15. When did you have your first child? How old were you?
16. Were you in a relationship with the children's father at the time of each of their births? Did you elect to have the child without a partner, by artificial insemination, or other?
17. How long have you been a single-mother? Can you describe the circumstances surrounding your single-mother status? Were you divorced? Did the other parent go to jail? Were there irreconcilable differences in your relationship? Please explain
18. Do you have contact with the other parent to your children? What is your relationship like?
19. Do your children have contact with their other parent? And if so, describe to me how much contact? And how do you feel about their relationship? If they do not have contact, please explain to me how you feel about that?
20. Have you ever received child support for any of your children? If so, how much? For how long? Does the other parent continue to pay or have they stopped?

Part II

I. The College Experience

21. How do you feel about the education you are receiving here at UTA? Do you find most of your classes easy, difficult, or just right?
22. Are you getting a lot of homework? How many hours a week would you say you spend on homework alone? Do you get all of your assignments turned in on time?
23. Have you ever missed a class, test or other due to family responsibilities such as a sick child, parent teacher conference.
24. Are you receiving outside of class assignments, for example extra credit for going to lectures or museums? Do these other assignments fit into your schedule? Tell me about that.
25. How many classes are you taking this semester? What classes are you taking? Are all of the classes on campus, or other? What is your class schedule (MWF, TTH)? What is the reason that you choose this schedule (example: to fit with work schedule, really wanted these cases, p/u children, etc.)?
26. What was your last GPA? Do you believe that the GPA is an accurate measure your college work? Please explain.
27. How many hours in a week would you say you study for each class? Where and when do you do the majority of your studying? Do you feel you study enough? Do you feel adequately prepared for class? Why or why not?

28. How do you feel about your classmates in general? Have you made friends with any of them? Do you feel you have much in common with them? Are any of your classmates' single-mothers?
29. Are you involved in any organizations on campus? If so what organizations, and what kinds of campus activities do you do?
30. Are you involved in any University sponsored events? If so what kinds of events?
31. Do you feel the teachers/professors are fair with you? Are they harder or more lenient? Explain any relevant circumstances?
32. Do you ever feel that professors, students, or administration pay special attention to you because you are a single-mother student? For example, a professor who always states you get good grades and you have kids.
33. In the classroom, do you feel compelled to share personal stories that are relevant to the topic being discussed? If so please describe an instance.
34. When you think of getting your degree, what do you think of?
35. How does it make you feel to be a college student? What does your family think?
36. What do you think will change once you have received your degree? What is your goal?
37. Do you see or have you experienced any barriers to your education? If so what are they and how do they affect you? Please explain.
38. Please think of your college experience thus far and describe to me any incidents good or bad that stick out in your memory.

II. Work Responsibilities

39. Are you currently employed? If not, when was the last time you were employed and what kind of work did you do? If employed, what type of work do you do What is your position with the company?
40. Do you feel that the work you do and your capabilities are a good fit?
41. Do you feel that you are paid enough, too much, or not enough?
42. Why did you decide to work for this company?
43. How long have you been with the company? And the company before that? (if self employed have them describe what type of work they do)
44. Approximately how many hours a week do you work? Are you ft/pt?
45. Do you have benefits? If so, what type of benefits do you have?
46. Who takes care of your children when you are at work?
47. When you graduate, do you plan to continue working for this company?
48. What are your long term employment goals?

III. Family Responsibilities

49. Who takes care of your children when you are in class? How many hours a day would you say your children spend in the care of others? How do you feel about that?
50. Do you feel that you spend enough time with your children?
51. Do you feel that your family responsibilities have ever pressured you to continue your education, make you want to quit your education, or have not had any effect either way?
52. Have you ever thought about your family responsibilities while in class? If so, explain to me a circumstance, what were you thinking about? How did you feel?
53. How do you organize your housework tasks? Do you complete your household tasks after your homework, before, instead of? Please explain.
54. What are your least favorite household task and why?
55. What family responsibilities consume the majority of your time? Please describe.
56. Please describe the relationship you have with your children? Parents? Other family members?
57. Do you date? Are you in an intimate relationship? Please describe this relationship.
58. Who do you consider your support system? Friends, family, children, no one? List support system.
59. Do you pay others or for services to complete task associated with family responsibilities other than childcare? For example, fluff and fold laundry services, fast food lunches and dinners, house cleaning from maid service? If so please list what you outsource and how you feel about that.
60. Do you have healthcare insurance? Do your children have healthcare insurance? How are health services obtained?
61. How do your children get to school? Who picks them up?
62. Do your children participate in extra curricular activities? What do they participate in? How much time out of the week are they involved in these activities? How do you feel about their involvement in these activities?
63. Do you volunteer at your children's school? Are you involved in the PTA, room mom, or other? If so how many hours per week/ school year/ quarter?
64. Do you attend your children's school functions? Such as family night, special treats day, special lunches, or other?
65. Is there anything that I have not covered in this interview that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this study. The information you have provided me has been valuable. I appreciate your willingness to discuss these issues with me. Do you have any unanswered questions or comments that you would like me to add before I conclude this interview?

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BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Mary Jane Gatmaitan received her master's degree from The University of Texas at Arlington in 2006. She was graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2003 from Nicholls State University in Thibodeaux, Louisiana. Her research interests are family, gender studies, and stratification. In the future she plans to have more children and begin a doctoral program toward a Ph.D. degree. She hopes to apply her knowledge and expertise in qualitative research on single-mother college students.