Factors Contributing to the Educational Success of Single-mother Welfare Recipients at an Urban Southwestern Community College: Case Studies of Six Success Stories

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS
OF SINGLE-MOTHER WELFARE RECIPIENTS AT AN
URBAN SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CASE STUDIES OF SIX SUCCESS STORIES

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OF SINGLE-MOTHER WELFARE RECIPIENTS AT AN URBAN SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CASE STUDIES OF SIX SUCCESS STORIES

by

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This study gave voice to the issues, needs, and concerns of economically disadvantaged single mothers and determined the motivational and institutional factors that helped lead them to their successful completion of a community college degree or certificate program while at the same time coping with the challenges of financially surviving on meager public welfare assistance, raising their children, and meeting welfare-mandated work activity requirements. While American society has a long tradition of regarding higher education as a means of achieving long-term financial security and self-sufficiency, current welfare policy unfortunately adds additional obstacles for welfare recipients who may be motivated to rise above the low-wage welfare-to-work employment opportunities that only promote continued dependence on social welfare programs despite full-time employment.

The potential of higher education as a means by which financially disadvantaged single mothers may achieve independence and become productive members of society was addressed in this study along with the study’s primary focus of determining the
major influences and motivations in the lives of single mothers receiving public assistance that led to their success in completing their higher education and/or training as well as determining characteristics of the institutional programs that helped lead to the educational success of these women. Literature encompassing an historic review of public welfare policy, the prevalence of poverty in the United States, and the value of higher education provided the background premises for this study, while critical feminist constructivist theory provided the theoretical framework helping to explain the societal contexts wherein women are caught in a conflictual relationship between capitalism (the work ethic) and patriarchy (the family ethic) and how welfare policy has evolved within the confines of societal norms and values.

This study’s research design was qualitative, consisting of six in-depth case studies utilizing an open-ended interview approach delving into the early developmental, educational, and social experiences of the single-mother participants in addition to their recent welfare program, work, family, and community college experiences. Concentration was placed on ascertaining the underlying motivational and enabling factors that led to their successful completion of their community college educational program.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The path to my doctorial dissertation was long and winding, obstructed by a multitude of personal snags and deterrents. Throughout my coursework and the first stages of this dissertation, Drs. Bob Ackerman and Mario Martinez both lent a helpful ear and provided much needed and greatly appreciated support, guidance, and encouragement. In professing their confidence in me and my academic abilities, I likewise came to believe in myself, my talents, and my ability to persevere.

Dr. Vicki Rosser came to my rescue much later in the process, after a major delay in my progress, but with no less enthusiasm for my research and honest belief in my talents and abilities. Despite an overwhelming workload amid major changes in her academic department, Dr. Rosser graciously and unselfishly accepted chairmanship of my dissertation committee and became my mentor and advisor upon our first meeting. It is, without a doubt, because of Dr. Rosser’s selflessness, compassion, encouragement, and academic intensity that I resolved to complete my doctorial journey. Each and every meeting with Dr. Rosser marked a memorable milestone along my path to success.

Also most memorable in my coursework was Dr. Lori Olafson’s qualitative research methods class. Her devoted passion and unparalleled enthusiasm for qualitative research methods piqued my interest and ignited my desire to perform qualitative research. It was with Dr. Olafson’s advice and guidance that I chose the topic of my research, higher education for single-mother welfare recipients.

Drs. Doris Watson and Shannon Smith both graciously joined my committee while I was stumbling along the winding path, both affirming a genuine interest in my research topic and both lending helpful direction and guidance along the way. I was truly
blessed with paramount professors, advisors, and scholars who guided my journey and paved my winding path. Thank you to all of you.

I am also deeply indebted to my colleagues and superiors, Cassie Gentry, Peggy Perkins-Arnot, Linda Symonds, Kelly Wuest, Dr. Hyla Winters, and Dr. Randy Insley for their enduring support, encouragement, words of wisdom, and prodding when I needed it most. I am especially grateful to Dr. Hyla Winters, my long-time professional mentor and role model, for providing an unsurpassable internship experience, allowing me to help prepare for a college-wide regional accreditation site visit. I truly learned first-hand the essential tenets of higher educational leadership under your tireless and compassionate tutelage.

Above all, my deepest thanks and gratitude are reserved for my husband, Butch, without whom my winding path and personal hurdles would have become insurmountable. The path that leads to happiness is truly much smoother and immensely more enjoyable when shared with loved ones. To my daughters Haley and Brianna, you have both given me the truest and purest joy and contentment attainable within my life’s journey. I love you all.
DEDICATION

To my Mom, an extraordinary single mother and “motherful” woman.

and

To Monnie Rose, with hope and confidence that your life’s journey

will lead you to peace, happiness, and joyous fulfillment.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Single women and their children represent the largest and fastest growing population of the poor. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of children living in single-mother families increased from 11 percent in 1970, to 23 percent in 2005, and continued upward to 37 percent in 2010. More than two-thirds of all adults living in poverty are women, and the poverty rate for single mothers and their children rose from 32.5 percent in 2009 to 34.2 percent in 2010 (Albelda, 2012). Unfortunately, legislative policies enacted by the United States often serve to perpetuate systems that have promoted the deficiencies of single mothers and their children. Pearce (1978) and other subsequent authors refer to this phenomenon as the “feminization of poverty.” Single women live in the “Other America” and become “disenfranchised, disempowered, and with no civic voice” (Polakow, 1993, p. 172). Similarly, their children experience a marginalized existence and encounter a life of unmet expectations and limited opportunities. These families do not exercise nor fully enjoy the rights and freedoms of our country. Conditions are continuing to worsen for these families as the economic recession continues and wages are declining, government funding is being reduced, and women enter a labor market that is unequal and discriminatory. Additionally, the term single-parent family has become a euphemism for problem family, with single-parent families taking the blame for many social problems (Schmitz, 1995).

One of the many obstacles that single mothers encounter is that they are unable to pursue educational opportunities for which they may possess the prerequisite interest, skills, and talents. Instead of pursuing higher education, they are likely to become members of the working poor, possibly homeless, and a burden upon government
assistance programs (Bolman & Deal, 1995). It has been determined that the educational and skill levels of female welfare recipients as a group are lower than those of the general adult population. In fact, thirty percent of female welfare recipients have basic skills below those of the minimum skill level of all women in the lowest occupational skill levels (Imel, 1995). According to Imel, many of the women on the welfare rolls have experienced unfortunate circumstances such as teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, dropping out of high school, gang membership, and domestic abuse. These women are, therefore, at risk and often cannot enter the workforce because their low skill levels render them unemployable. Bolman and Deal (1995) cautioned that this continual cycle of poverty leads to “disease of the spirit,” which “exacts a high price. Spiritual bankruptcy ultimately leads to economic failure. The deeper cost is a world where everything has a function yet nothing has any meaning” (p. 146).

**Review of Literature**

Federal welfare reform (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996), requiring states to provide welfare-to-work programs, has frequently led many women to temporary low-paying, gender-stereotyped jobs that do not offer a path out of poverty. Quite often, the only type of training provided is that which will afford the recipient a minimum-wage job. According to Imel (1995), these participants need the opportunity to grow personally to eliminate feelings of inadequacy and to prepare themselves to be self-sufficient in the future. Imel suggests that in order to help these women become successful, they need to be engaged in a program tailored for their specific educational, skills, literacy, and personal needs.

According to Bryan and Morse (1995), if this cycle of poverty and welfare dependency is to be broken, the temptation to indulge in “quick-fix” job training that
prepares women for nothing but more poverty must be resisted. They concluded that education as the key to the problem ought to be acknowledged as the best solution, with a strong system that provides welfare recipients with high-quality career preparation in academic and vocational courses. Thus, in order for single, economically disadvantaged mothers to prosper, the cycle of poverty must be broken with education, training, and skills that will enable them to develop a career that will provide a living wage for themselves and their children.

Prior studies have focused on the phenomenon of single mothers, including a quantitative study by Zhan and Pandey (2004) that identified several significant variables that contribute to the economic wellbeing of single-women heads of households. Their study specifically identified the following six significant quantifiable variables to economic independence for single-women heads of households:

Educational achievement. Zhan and Pandey (2004) found the woman’s educational level to be the single most significant variable in contributing to the economic wellbeing of her household. The women with some higher education experience, as compared to those having a high school diploma or those having less than a high school education, measured significantly higher in terms of economic wellbeing.

Age. Zhan and Pandey (2004) found that older single-women heads of households were economically better off than younger women.

Race. Caucasian participants in Zhan and Pandey’s (2004) study had significantly higher measures of economic wellbeing than African-American participants. Cancian (2001) and Haleman (2004) also revealed racism and other forms of discrimination and
stereotyping as factors that limit employment opportunities for single-mother welfare recipients.

Marital status. Zhan and Pandey (2004) found that divorced and widowed female heads of households had higher measures of economic wellbeing than women who had never married.

Number of other adults living in the household. In Zhan and Pandey’s (2004) study, higher measures of economic wellbeing were present when at least one other adult (such as the woman’s parent, sibling, or other family member) lived in the household.

Number and ages of dependent children. Zhan and Pandey (2004) found single-women households with more children and younger aged children to have lower measures of economic wellbeing.

All of the above variables are quantifiable and are likely objective factors affecting or contributing to the successful completion of a higher education or training program for single-mother welfare recipients.

The goal of this qualitative study was to reveal additional, more discreet and subjective factors within the lives of single-mother welfare recipients that contributed to their educational success, such as personal motivational and psychological factors that have impacted these women. For example, Haleman (2004) found that successful single-mother university students cited as motivational factors their personal views of higher education as being instrumental in moving out of poverty as well as a means of modeling positive educational outcomes for their children. Van Stone, Nelson, and Nieman (1994) cited personal ambition and personal beliefs regarding effort, ability, and self-confidence as factors of value.
Beyond personal motivations, Scarbrough (2001) concluded that interpersonal interactions with others within the community or within a support system are important variables contributing to the educational success of single mothers. Specifically, Scarbrough found that the services provided by a college re-entry program were invaluable to single-mother students entering college. Van Stone, et. al. (1994) found that the support of other students, university services, support of family, and support of faculty (in that order) were the most often cited factors contributing to educational success of single-mother university students. This study likewise included external factors such as social programs, college student services programs, and interactions with others as motivational and enabling factors in these case studies.

**Theoretical Framework**

According to Merriam (1988), every researcher enters a study with a theoretical perspective, or “a way of looking at the world” (p. 53). This study, which focused upon the lived experiences of six women, was rooted in a critical feminist constructivist perspective. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), the feminist perspective informs the content of research, as gender often affects the manner in which participants view and construct their world. Since feminist theory intersected with qualitative research methods in the late 1970s, Bogdan and Biklen claim that feminists have played an important role in developing emotion and feeling as topics of research. The feminist research perspective has also moved the field of qualitative research toward greater concern with the relationships between researchers and their subjects, and has also increased the recognition of political implications in research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).
The descriptive case study design of this research study was conducive to a feminist perspective as well; in that case study research, according to Merriam, effectively gives voice to individuals whose voice is seldom heard. The economically disadvantaged single-mother participants in this study were thus given an opportunity to tell their personal stories of tribulation and hardship and to recount both the obstacles and the enabling factors along the path leading to their eventual educational success.

As the umbrella theory informing this research study, the feminist constructivist perspective aided in identifying the development of predominant social values situated in a patriarchal society and the construction of meaning surrounding those values. In other words, women are caught in the conflicting relationship between capitalism (the work ethic) and patriarchy (the family ethic). Attention was also given to the exclusion of gender as a category of analysis in policy development. Specifically, social welfare policy has been drafted and implemented based on historical and societal norms, economics and politics, but without a superimposed gender lens. Failure to consider gender has perpetuated the invisibility of the dual role of single mothers (and women in general) as homemaker/parent and wage worker, which has continued the devaluation of nonwage work in the home (Gordon, 1990; Kittay, 2001). A feminist gender lens in this study allowed the subjective voices of economically disadvantaged single mothers to be heard and differentiated from the predominately non-gendered voices of social policy makers, educators, and employers.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

This qualitative research study consisted of descriptive case studies examining the lives of six single mothers who successfully completed higher education or vocational
training at a southwestern urban community college while receiving public assistance. The purpose of the six case studies was to identify factors that contributed to the success of these single mothers in order to determine how they were able to procure higher education and training while receiving public assistance. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed in order to gain insight into institutional practices that might support the external and internal influences on these women:

1. What are the major influences and motivations in the lives of single mothers receiving public assistance that led to their success in completing their higher education and/or training?

2. What are the characteristics of the community college re-entry program that helped lead to the educational success of these women?

**Research Design**

Since the purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the driving forces that contributed to the success of six single-mother higher-education participants, this study was conducted using a descriptive case studies approach (Merriam, 1988). The design of qualitative case studies was used because this study was interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. According to Merriam, case studies are well suited to developing detailed descriptions of the type desired in this research study, in that descriptive case studies produce a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. Thick description, according to Merriam, means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated. Merriam further asserts that “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those...
being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 3).

The six study participants were identified through the community college’s re-entry program as being successful graduates of the state’s welfare-to-work program. In-depth interviews of the six participants, a review of literature, and a review of the participants’ welfare-to-work program files were used to develop a thick description for these case studies.

According to several authors on qualitative research methods, interviewing is a common means of collecting qualified data in case studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1988). The interview method is cited as necessary when one cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. According to Merriam, interviewing is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals, and is sometimes the only possible way to gather data.

Interview questions were formulated using an open-ended design rather than a more structured design, which is highly recommended by Merriam (1988) as it allows the participant to freely tell her experiences, opinions, and views in her own words. It also allows the researcher the flexibility to respond to the participant’s conversation and explore new ideas and topics that may be introduced by the participant. Marshall and Rossman (1999) also recommend the informal conversational interview in order to allow the participant’s perspective on a phenomenon to unfold as the participant views it, rather than as the researcher views it.
Informed consent was obtained from the study participants which included a provision allowing their interviews to be audio taped. The audio taped interviews were professionally transcribed and double-checked for accuracy. The interview transcripts were then hand coded based on coding categories developed relative to factors influencing welfare-recipient, single-mother student success in higher education. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), coding categories are to be developed based upon particular research questions and concerns, as well as upon the study’s theoretic approach.

Throughout the process of data analysis, the researcher sought and encouraged participants’ feedback on the categorization and interpretation of the interview data and upon the summaries of analyzed data. This process, according to Merriam (1988) addressed the internal validity of the study, which is defined as the extent to which one’s findings are congruent with reality. The researcher also sought advice and commentary from advisors, mentors, and colleagues regarding data interpretation and analysis, which, according to Merriam (1988) promotes the study’s reliability, or the extent to which there is consistency in the findings.

The final chapter of this study includes a discussion of what Merriam calls the external validity, or the generalizability, of the results with specific insights into the factors that influence higher education success among welfare-recipient, single-mother college students. Suggestions for beneficial programs or helpful resources that should be made available to assist such students in the future are also included.

To insure that no ethical or political problems arose within or because of this study, the participants’ identification was kept strictly confidential. No immoral or illegal
acts were performed by the researcher, and no such acts were reported to the researcher by the participants.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Aid to Dependent Children (ADC)*: Federal welfare program, implemented in 1935, designed to assist indigent women with children by providing financial assistance. ADC was changed to AFDC in 1962.

*Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)*: Federal welfare program that provided financial assistance to children whose families had low or no income. It was publicly criticized for offering incentives for women to have children, and for providing disincentives for women to join the workforce. AFDC was in effect from 1962 through 1996 when it was replaced by the more restrictive TANF program.

*Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA)*: Federal legislation that reformed U.S. welfare policy and requires all welfare recipients to work in order to maintain welfare eligibility.

*Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)*: A public assistance program implemented in 1997 under the PRWORA and is still in force today. It requires the applicant to have at least one child living with them or to be pregnant. TANF provides cash benefits to low-income households for a temporary timeframe not to exceed two years consecutively with a lifetime maximum limit of a total of five years.

*Welfare-to-Work program*: A current program sponsored by state welfare agencies to assist welfare recipients in gaining employment. Participation is mandatory for all welfare recipients.
Limitations

While there are about four dozen community colleges in the Southwest region that currently have operational welfare-to-work programs, only six participants from one community college were selected as study participants. The community college used for this study was selected because of its large size and because its geographical location in the growing Southwest region within an urban inner city area made it readily accessible to likely socioeconomically disadvantaged single mother study participants. The study was limited to observations, in-depth interviews with six participants, and review of documents and written data sources made available to the researcher by the community college with proper consent of the study participants. It may be asserted that the needs and enabling factors of the individuals discussed in these six case studies may not necessarily be representative of or generalizable to the needs and enabling factors of other single-mother welfare recipients; however, it is postulated that six in-depth individual case studies have none-the-less provided valuable insight into the needs of single, socioeconomically disadvantaged mothers seeking higher education or training.

Significance of the Study

Single-mother welfare recipients are indeed a high-risk population. For example, single mothers and poverty frequently go together. The consequences of this combination are devastating for their young families, who are, among other things, at a higher risk for truancy, drug abuse, and high school dropout (Polakow, 1993). Higher education and attainment of higher-level skills can provide a path out of poverty for these women and their children. However, in order to provide the educational path to help break the cycle of poverty and low skill attainment, institutions must first determine how
to nurture and support the growing U.S. population of single-mother welfare recipients (Huff & Thorpe, 1997).

Therefore, there is a need to identify the characteristics and/or underlying factors that contribute to the success of socioeconomically disadvantaged single mothers seeking higher education and vocational training. This study assessed whether there are any useful circumstances, strategies, systems, programs, or environments that emerge out of the life experiences of the participants that provide insight into their success. The insights gained from this study should be beneficial to women in the same socioeconomic environment, to social workers and welfare case workers serving this population, and to higher education educators, administrators, and policy makers who have been acknowledged as the key to the problem’s solution.

**Summary**

Single-mother welfare recipients represent a growing segment of the U.S. population, and documented evidence points to the need for higher education or vocational training as a permanent solution to the “feminization of poverty” phenomenon and the continual cycle of poverty often experienced by these women and their children. Studying the “voices” of single-mother welfare recipients provided insight and increased understanding of the experiences and needs of these women so that vocational and higher educational institutions may respond to their unique needs and support them in the attainment of their dream. On a broader scale, this study helps denounce public policy that enforces a “quick fix” low-wage job solution while ignoring higher education and training as the long-term solution. Ultimately, giving voice to single-mother welfare recipients is aimed at eventual long-term self dependence for these women,
enhancements in the stability of family structures, improvement in the viability of communities, and resultant overall advancement of society in general.

This chapter presented a broad overview of the basis and purpose for this study. The next chapter, Chapter 2, provides a more thorough summary of existing literature and past studies pertinent to the topic of single mother welfare recipients gaining community college education and/or training.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This qualitative research study consisted of six case studies examining the lives of single mothers who successfully completed higher education or vocational training while receiving public assistance. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contributed to the success of these single mothers in order to determine how they were able to successfully complete higher education or training while receiving public assistance.

A review of related literature revealed three predominant subject areas or themes relevant to the purpose of this study. The first theme includes discussion of single-mother households and female welfare recipients, effectively portraying the complexity of issues contributing to the impoverished status of this group of women. An appreciation of the contextual nature of poverty is essential in order to resist simplistic and ineffective solutions to a complex and difficult situation. Also included is an historical and contextual discussion of social welfare policy in the United States.

Emerging as the second theme is the argument specifically addressing the potential benefits of including higher education and training initiatives as a means for this study’s targeted population of single mother welfare recipients to gain economic and social independence. Reviews of existing studies of single mothers and welfare recipients who have pursued postsecondary education are also included along with discussion of recommended services that would assist single mothers in their pursuit of higher education.
The third and final theme introduces the critical feminist constructivist approach that served as the umbrella theory informing this research project. An overview of the critical feminist constructivist perspective aids in identifying the development of predominant social values situated in a patriarchal society and the construction of meaning surrounding those values. Attention is also given to the exclusion of gender as a category of analysis in policy development. Failure to consider gender has perpetuated the invisibility of the dual role of single mothers (and women in general) as homemaker/parent and wage worker, which has continued the devaluation of nonwage work in the home (Gordon, 1990; Kittay, 2001). Shaw’s (2001) Successive Stages Model (SSM) provided the conceptual framework for this study and helped to extend the generalizability of this study beyond the six participants. An explanation of Shaw’s SSM framework is included in the literature review.

Poverty and Social Welfare Policy

Economic, political, and societal forces develop over time resulting in an “historical transformation of meaning” (Gordon, 1994a, p. 1). These forces have a direct impact on how contemporary welfare policy has been developed, reformed, and implemented. Thus, any consideration of welfare policy must be situated within the context of history, economy, government/politics, and societal norms (see Figure 1).

Stereotypical representations of the poor developed over time and have become deeply entrenched in our society. The evolution of public policy has thus been, and continues to be, targeted at alleviating societal problems and ills based on specific perceptions or myths that may have little or no basis in fact (Schram, 1995). A
discussion of such myths attributed to welfare recipients is included in this section along with an historic overview of the development of social welfare policy. In addition to providing an historical perspective of welfare policy development in light of economic and social forces, this overview also identifies patriarchal biases and locates the historical roots of structural barriers to higher education for welfare recipients. Exploration of such barriers helps to reveal class and gender discrimination.
Historical and Theoretical Overview of Poverty and Social Welfare Policy

Vagrancy and Elizabethan Poor Laws

The first vagrancy statue was enacted in England in 1349 following the Black Death. The act was instituted with one intended purpose: “To force laborers (whether personally free or unfree, male or female, old or young) to accept employment at a low wage in order to insure the landowner an adequate supply of labor at a price he could afford to pay” (Chambliss, 1996, p. 161). In an analysis of the meaning attributed to the word dependency, Fraser and Gordon, (1994) reported that dependency reflects a norm of hierarchical relationships (rather than a deviant individual trait) such as the distinction between serfs and their feudal lords or between husbands and wives. Additionally, dependency “on another for support, position, etc.; a retainer, attendant, subordinate, servant…did not incur individual stigma” (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p.7). Indeed, poverty was widespread and was not considered shameful; the poor were treated with dignity and respect (Federico, 1980).

A woman’s contribution to the family economy through her household production was seen as essential to family need (Fraser & Gordon, 1994), although the division of labor along gender lines was well in place (Lindgren & Taub, 1993). In his treatise of 1765 regarding English law, William Blackstone described the status of women, applicable during these earlier times, from a legal standpoint: “But, though our law in general considers man and wife as one person (that being the husband) yet there are instances in which she is separately considered; as inferior to him, and acting by his compulsion” (Lindgren & Taub, 1993, pp. 6-7). A woman’s condition during marriage was one of coverture in which the control of her property and earnings was passed on to
her husband. In addition, her influence and participation in economic decision making, religious matters, and political and community affairs were largely denied (Lindgren & Taub, 1993).

Throughout the 1500s in England, it was increasingly recognized that vagrants could be distinguished in terms of their ability to work (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Those who existed outside of the labor force included the aged, sick, feeble, orphaned, and physically disabled; they were regarded as the *worthy poor* (DiNitto, 1995; Handler, 1995). People deemed *worthy* were poor because of reasons beyond their control. They were allowed to beg in certain places and eventually were provided with publicly gathered alms (Handler, 1995). However, for those considered able to work—the *unworthy poor* or paupers—a different form of treatment ensued. This group, including women with children, were considered lazy, shiftless, criminals, drunkards, and unwilling to provide for themselves (DiNitto, 1995). Work was provided for them “as training,” to prevent “roguery,” as a test of “good intent,” and to provide employment for the truly needy (Handler, 1995, p.11). Those refusing to work were viewed with suspicion and often imprisoned.

Certain policy themes are identifiable from the 1500s that have rippled out in time through colonial America and into contemporary U.S. society. These themes include the following: (a) the undifferentiated treatment of the poor where men and women are treated the same; (b) the invisibility of the role of mothering as valued labor by encompassing single mothers under the umbrella of the unworthy poor; (c) the tendency to view the poor as deviant, particularly with regard to the work ethic, and connecting them to policies aimed at controlling crime; (d) an increased focus on individual
character flaws as causes of poverty; and (e) women’s subordinate status and lack of identity in and out of marriage (DiNitto, 1995; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Handler, 1995; Lindgren & Taub, 1993).

**The Early American Welfare State**

The early colonizers’ treatment of the poor mirrored that of England’s. Fraser and Gordon (1994) contended that the unworthy poor were considered “degraded, their character corrupted, and their will sapped through reliance on charity” (p. 10). The severity with which they were regarded was directly related to the threat they posed to the Protestant work ethic in the form of unsanctioned unilateral dependency (Fraser & Gordon, 1994).

Women of working age and able body, but without a job, were not exempt from pauper status, even when they were pregnant or had children. The extent to which a woman complied with the family ethic had great bearing on her ability to settle in any town and obtain work. Thus, married women were less likely to find themselves destitute and without a place to settle than single women, who were regarded with mistrust (Abramovitz, 1988). Single mothers faced punishment for existing outside traditional family life by being forced to work for wages while simultaneously risking the loss of their children due to neglect (Abramovitz, 1988).

The developing American political system of the 1700s differed from the English monarchy in a variety of ways. The ideology of Adam Smith and John Locke was critical in the formation of the limited role of government in America. Both philosophers espoused a “weak federal government, a predominant political role for the states, and an unregulated capitalist economy” (Jansson, 1993, p. 318). Thomas Jefferson proposed a
government in which control was largely located with the state rather than with the federal level. Rugged individualism was valued over state or federal dependency. In contrast, Alexander Hamilton favored a strong centralized government that incorporated mercantilism. Jefferson eventually won the debate through a national election. As a result, no federal structural component existed for establishing programs to aid the elderly, sick, or poor (Jansson, 1993). Instead, capitalism and individualism were significantly strengthened in a nation founded upon the ideal of democratic rule, that is, a strong belief in the power of the common people in electing representatives to serve them in the government pervaded. An even stronger work ethic emerged, emphasizing the independence of the individual and the belief that through hard work it was possible to become wealthy. Moral indignation surfaced against those not fitting into this ideology.

Capitalism and patriarchy powered an increased focus on those individuals less capable of pursuing the American dream. It was believed that

the condition of relief recipients (work and family-ethic deviants), regardless of need or cause, should be worse than the lowest paid self-supporting laborer. While relief should not be denied the poor, life should be made so miserable for them that they would rather work than accept public aid. (Trattner, 1989, p. 49)

The New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, established in the late 1830s, maintained that the main causes of poverty were “extravagance, improvidence, indolence, and above all, intemperance—all noneconomic factors” (Handler, 1995, p. 18). Similarly, according to Trattner (1989), “The environmental causes of poverty [were] filth, crime, sexual promiscuity, drunkenness, disease, improvidence, and indolence… [all] serious obstacles to morality” (pp. 65-66). Indeed, these all-too-familiar stereotypes are still used to describe today’s poor.
With increased industrialization beginning in the early 1800s, the sexual division of labor became more distinct, along with the division between the private and public domains. Consequently, men were identified more directly with the work ethic, public life, and independence, obligating women to the private sphere of domesticity and dependence (Abramovitz, 2000; Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Fraser and Gordon (1994) argued that, as women became economically dependent on men during the industrial revolution, their previous sociolegal dependency and political dependency combined with economic dependency in such a way as to alter fundamentally the meaning of female dependency. Female dependency in the context of the patriarchal family was socially valued. However, dependency existing outside the male-headed household, particularly dependency on relief aid, was viewed negatively, and those relying on relief aid were severely stigmatized (Fraser & Gordon, 1994).

Consequently, gender roles became further dichotomized and stereotyped. Thus, attributes consistent with independence such as reason, autonomy, aggressiveness, and strength were privileged and attributed to maleness, leaving intuition, connectedness, passivity, and weakness as the devalued attributes of femaleness (Sanday, 1981). The development of Newtonian-based science, in combination with Darwin’s theory of evolution, reinforced the belief that women were biologically inferior to men. This belief was evidenced by their negatively constructed emotional and nonrational subjectivity that stood in opposition to the so-called highly developed intellectual and rational objectivity of males (Donovan, 2000).

An important concept when considering social welfare is the family wage. The concept of the family wage rested on the premise that a husband should be able to earn an
income sufficient to support his family, in particular, to keep his wife at home and to subsidize her labor. The underlying assumption of the family wage was based on the patriarchal-led, nuclear family; that is, women entered the work force only as secondary workers in jobs that were an extension of her private sphere responsibilities—to earn a little “pin-money.” This belief reinforced the segregation of women in the work force into low-paying occupations and legitimized systematic wage discrimination against them (Ehrenreich & Piven, 1984). Added together, a significant increase in the number of households headed by single women, unequal access to jobs providing incomes sufficient to support a family, and the widening wage gap between men and women contribute to the contemporary concept of the feminization of poverty (Pearce, 1978; Ehrenreich & Piven, 1984; Polakow, 1993).

Gordon (1990) emphasized the lack of consideration to gender in the capitalistic job market. Women were held to the same expectations as the general labor force, that is, to be employed while at the same time expected to perform their traditional duties as mothers. Consideration of the unique disadvantages women experienced in the job market was not addressed. Clearly these forces placed women in a double bind: In order to escape being termed unworthy poor and, thus, deviant, they worked; yet working took them out of their proper role as mothers. Implicitly, the deviance associated with working, particularly when it was necessary, was, in some ways, a penalty for the deviance of poverty and single parenthood (Abramovitz, 2000).

Gordon (1994a) noted that between 1890 and 1935 single mothers were recognized as representing “both a symptom and a cause of threatening social breakdown” (p. 24). It was during this time period that the definitive shifts in the
meaning of welfare occurred where welfare became a “pejorative term” (Gordon, 1994a, p. 1). Public discourse arose around growing social concerns including increased immigration and industrialization, child labor, and growing welfare needs. Following World War I, conflict between the needs of capitalism and the patriarchal family resulted in two legislative enactments: (a) Mother’s Pension and (b) Protective Labor Laws.

The Mother’s Pension program (also known as Widow’s Pension), as described by Theodore Roosevelt, was for “parents of good character suffering from temporary misfortune and above all deserving mothers fairly well able to work but deprived of the support of the normal breadwinner” (Abbott, 1938, p. 254). The program’s aim was to help single mothers (primarily middle-class widowed and deserted white women) stay home and raise their children properly (Abramovitz, 2000; Gordon, 1994a). In keeping with the standards of patriarchy, it was widely believed that a mother’s employment would negatively influence her child’s development. The 1914 Report of the New York State Commission on Relief for Widowed Mothers stated:

No woman, save in exceptional circumstances, can be both homemaker and the breadwinner of her family…. [Work] outside the home breaks down the physical, mental, and moral strength of the family and disrupts the home life through an inadequate standard of living and parental neglect, due to the enforced absence of the mother at the time the children most need her care. (Bremner, 1967, p. 380)

Gordon (1994a) pointed out that the Mother’s Pension was a significant welfare and feminist accomplishment that put a new emphasis on the role of mothering as valid female labor, albeit in the context of the moralistic Victorian era. The force behind the Mother’s Pension was an attempt to reduce child labor and the institutionalization of children. However, the amount of the monthly pension was generally just over half the amount the court determined was needed to support a family. As a result, both mothers and their children continued to work to meet their basic needs (Gordon, 1994a). Because
the Mother’s Pension was so successful, having been passed in 48 states, it became the model for Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) during the Great Depression, as well as more contemporary welfare policy. Gordon (1994a) identified that the debates surrounding welfare today, such as public responsibility for the poor, how to differentiate the deserving poor from the undeserving poor, how to assist single mothers without encouraging single motherhood, and the proper role of women, all began with the Mother’s Pension.

The Protective Labor Law was designed to regulate women’s working conditions in order to maintain sex-segregated jobs and, thus, a supply of cheap labor, as well as to ensure that work did not interfere with their reproductive responsibilities (Abramovitz, 2000). Concerns grew that young, unmarried, middle-class girls might be tempted to remain in the workforce, turning away from marriage and family (Abramovitz, 1988). Thus, the Protective Labor Law sought to protect respectable women from the workforce by reinforcing gender roles that emphasized a woman’s place as wife and mother.

Both measures, the Mother’s Pension and the Protective Labor Law, were sexist, racist, and classist (Abramowitz, 2000). Women of color, primarily Black women, and chronically poor women, despite their marital status, were deemed undeserving and, therefore, were excluded in writing and in spirit. “The shortage of funding merely strengthened a preexisting commitment to morals testing and supervision of clients and potential clients, pursued through narrowing eligibility to an ideally respectable few” (Gordon, 1994a, p. 51).
Federal Involvement in Social Welfare Policy

Federal involvement in social welfare policy took place primarily in the form of the Social Security Act of 1935, which was enacted by President Franklin Roosevelt in response to the devastation brought on by the Great Depression. Following the stock market crash in late 1929, prices dropped dramatically and unemployment was pervasive. “By 1932 one out of every four persons had no job, and one out of every six persons was on welfare…. The realization that poverty could strike so many forced Americans to consider large-scale economic reform [known as the New Deal]” (DeNitto, 1995, p. 25).

The Social Security Act of 1935, designed along two tracks, continued the distinction between relief aimed at the deserving and undeserving poor (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). Programs for the deserving poor, largely without implying stigmatization, were seen as earned entitlements for U.S. citizens. Included in this category were programs such as old-age retirement benefits and unemployment compensation (DiNitto, 1995). Conversely, programs such as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) were developed for the undeserving poor, reinforcing the “dependency of the poor on low-wage labor, wives on husbands, and children on their parents” (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, p. 14). At best, public assistance provided an income floor and helped to relieve personal distress precipitated by the Great Depression. Relief was available to two-parent families and was particularly aimed at discouraging married women from entering the labor market (Gordon, 1994a). Abramovitz (2000) reported that the rise in numbers of employed women conflicted with their traditional roles in the home and the patriarchal norm. Furthermore, public opinion held women responsible for male unemployment and emotional distress of the family. According to Abramovitz (1988), the federal
government barred the employment of married women from 1932 to 1937 via Section 213 of the Federal Economy Act which prohibited more than one member of the same family from working in civil service. Stouffer and Lazarsfeld, writing in 1937, reported that within one year of enactment more than 1,600 people had lost their civil employment, three quarters of whom were women. By comparison, single mothers were not barred from the workforce, giving them the choice of working in low-status, low-wage jobs, entering into marriage, or going on assistance (Abramovitz, 1988; Gordon, 1994a).

ADC was specifically designed to assist indigent women with children by providing financial assistance (Abramovitz, 2000). This program was income based or means tested to establish whether or not an applicant had resources, including personal property, that could be liquidated for her maintenance rather than receive aid. Gordon (1994a) noted, “In many instances an ADC applicant would have to get rid of useful resources even at a loss, impoverishing herself in order to qualify” (p. 297).

During the 1940s and 1950s, the birth rate increased (both in and out of marriage), the divorce rate rose, and the racial composition of ADC recipients changed. Black women represented those most harshly affected by the postwar displacement of women out of the labor force. Compounding their oppression was racial discrimination against Black men in any but the most menial jobs, leaving Black men less available for marriage and family support (Abramovitz, 1988). A more punitive stance toward welfare recipients ensued in an effort to reduce welfare rolls that had expanded after World War II. Exclusionary eligibility rules were expanded. Recipients were the targets of midnight raids aimed at uncovering whether or not there was a man living in the home. They were
also threatened with the removal of their children if they failed to achieve a good assessment. The underlying implications of these measures, implications that continue today, are that women on welfare are promiscuous, poor parents, and fraudulent (Gordon, 1994a). Thus, continuing the legacy of harsh treatment contained in local, state, and federal policies, poor women are forced into low-paying jobs that “deny them the rights of womanhood under the terms of the family ethic” (Abramovitz, 1988, p. 327) or accept the shame and disgrace accompanying the receipt of public assistance.

In 1962, under President Kennedy, ADC was changed to AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) in response to the perceived need to reinstate the patriarchal family ethic (DiNitto, 1995). The War on Poverty, a federal initiative in the 1960s, was founded on the position that poor people were faced with sociological, psychological, and economic problems. In response, a shift in focus took place that promoted rehabilitation. Work incentives were introduced that provided recipients with work-related expenses such as child care; however, earned income was taxed dollar for dollar. That is, for each dollar earned, the welfare grant was penalized one dollar (Abramovitz, 2000).

Following the assassination of President Kennedy, President Johnson continued the War on Poverty. The Civil Rights Movement, along with efforts of the National Welfare Rights Organization, succeeded in forcing the government to relax punitive eligibility rules such as the man-in-the-house rule and residency requirements. A 35% expansion of welfare rolls followed, including a significant rise in the number of previously excluded African Americans and women in general (Abramovitz, 2000). Accompanying an increase in recipients was a dramatic rise in the costs of AFDC. The taxpayers responded with outrage, their anger fueled by ambitious politicians. A
backlash against the AFDC program and welfare recipients, significantly grounded in racism, resulted in the initiation of harsh rules targeted at penalizing out-of-wedlock births. These rules consisted of the increased threat of child removal and mandatory work requirements (Abramovitz, 2000; Gordon, 1994a). More than ever, welfare recipients were charged with the breakdown of the family ethic and were further scapegoated as responsible for many of society’s ills (Gordon, 1994b). With more middle-class women entering the workforce, an increasing expectation grew that welfare recipients should obtain employment. If they were not willing to comply with the family ethic within marriage, they had no choice but to comply with the work ethic. Thus, women had to shoulder alternative, penalizing roles of breadwinner (in a low-wage job) and head of family and nurturer and housekeeper.

Some recognized that not all welfare recipients were job ready. The Work Incentive Now (WIN) program was established by the U.S. Congress in 1967 as a means to assist welfare recipients in gaining on-the-job training and basic education. Day care was provided along with an earning incentive, in which recipients could keep $30 and one-third of their earnings before their monthly grant was reduced (DiNitto, 1995). Education and training, however, were primarily limited to skills enhancement rather than degree-granting programs.

Welfare programs continued to expand under Republican administrations, although there was growing uneasiness that the national defense was inadequately funded and taxes were too high. The number of AFDC recipients also continued to grow. In response, a more cautious attitude emerged towards social welfare spending during the late 1970s and 1980s (DiNitto, 1995). Opponents expressed increased concern that
welfare was the *cause* of the breakup of two-parent families and also promoted out-of-wedlock births. The attack on poor women as lazy and immoral continued (Abramovitz, 2000).

The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) was introduced in 1973, promising to improve vocational training, provide on-the-job training, and computerize job banks. However, no net gain in employment was realized, and CETA was replaced by the Jobs Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) in 1982. JTPA was designed to offer job training in the private sector and job search assistance but with less federal funding than CETA. Little success was realized with JTPA because more than half the clients served were teenagers. The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) of 1981 was enacted to tighten welfare eligibility requirements, introduce work requirements, lower benefits, reintroduce mandatory workfare, count previously excluded monies as income, and weaken incentive provisions as well as other measures aimed at reducing the welfare rolls (Abramovitz, 1988).

The competing ethics of family and work produced conflicting policies and ideologies that held poor women accountable to different requirements than middle- and upper-class women. According to Fraser and Gordon (1994), all welfare recipients were viewed as unworthy and incompetent despite the events that led them to seek aid, including abandonment, spousal abuse, and physical or psychological impairments. They added that dependency is viewed as deviancy and is contrasted with the ideal of independence. Further, dependency becomes synonymous with femaleness in a society espousing binary oppositions in which maleness equals independence, autonomy, and self-reliance (Fineman, 2001). This polarization leads to a lack of recognition and
appreciation of male dependency on the family ethic where men are dependent on women
to raise their children, prepare their meals, clean their homes, provide an avenue for
sexual activity, supplement their incomes, and further their careers (Abramovitz, 1988).

The Family Support Act of 1988

Handler (1995) noted that the late 1980s saw a shift in the way liberals viewed the
AFDC-receiving mother:

Instead of arguing that it was unfair to require AFDC mothers to work, they now
maintained that AFCD mothers should be expected to work. Two reasons were given.
First, social norms concerning female labor have changed. The majority of nonwelfare
mothers, including mothers of young children, are now in the paid labor force, and it is
therefore reasonable to expect welfare mothers to work. Second, families are better off,
both materially and socially, when the adults are gainfully employed. It is bad (morally)
when families are continually dependent. (p. 29)

While conservatives have generally always acted from the position that poor
mothers and their children are the undeserving poor, the ideological change in the liberal
view, along with the dramatic change in racial composition, created a political
environment that supported President Reagan’s Family Support Act of 1988 (Handler,
1995). Both conservatives and liberals, attempting to capitalize on the relatively
powerless position of those on public assistance and thereby furthering their own political
ambitions, intensified the stigmatization of poor women by reinforcing stereotypes
attributable to welfare recipients, including long-term welfare dependence, out-of-
wedlock births, large families, high school dropouts, and primarily a Black composition
(Schram, 1995). Although these myths have not been proven, the impact on public
opinion has been tenacious. Policy reform has continued to focus on the stereotypical
construction of welfare recipients rather than representation based on facts. Studies have
shown that families who received AFDC tended to have approximately the same number
of children or slightly fewer than the national average of all family types (Handler, 1995).
Of all recipients, 56% are off welfare within one year and 70% are off within two years (Taskforce on Women, Poverty, and Public Assistance, 2001). The majority of single head-of-household parents are white, more than 50% have a high school diploma or GED, and a large majority had their children when they were married (Handler, 1995). Nevertheless, politicians still manage to change the economic problem of poverty into one of morality and race.

**Overview of Education and Training Emphasis in AFDC**

The Family Support Act of 1988 mandated work, training, and education through the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, which contained a 20-hour requirement for participants to be engaged in job-related activities in return for the receipt of welfare (Marmor, Mashaw, & Harvey, 1990). Education and training programs, under the auspices of AFDC, were limited to basic education and vocational training. Under the 1967 Work Incentive Now (WIN) program, proponents of expanded educational opportunities believed that by increasing the educational level of those on welfare that both social status and income would rise. This was accompanied by the belief that children of the newly educated poor would also benefit by gaining enhanced motivation to pursue educational opportunities and achieve occupational skills. This theory of human capital investment was advanced based on the proposition that by “raising the quality and amount of training received by workers on the bottom, inequality of income could be reduced” (Danziger, Sandefur, & Weinberg, 1994, p. 70). Thus, numerous programs were developed in the 1960s that provided educational and training opportunities to a broad range of people such as Head Start, Upward Bound, Guaranteed Student Loans, Basic Education Opportunity Grants, Job Corps, and the Manpower
Development Training Act. Subsequent federal cutbacks, however, negatively impacted the effectiveness of many of these programs (Danziger et al., 1994).

Postsecondary education was identified as an acceptable activity under the 1988 Family Support Act JOBS program; however, education was approved only when it was deemed necessary by the JOBS worker to meet an individual’s goals directly related to obtaining useful employment in a recognized occupation (Gittell, Schehl, & Fareri, 1990). In states allowing recipients to attend college, the majority instituted a two-year time limit. Most states that included postsecondary education as an option tended to decrease its visibility, preferring to promote more immediate returns in job placement (Gittell et al, 1990). Extended educational opportunities are increasingly viewed as extravagant and nonessential, even in the face of almost conclusive evidence that higher education is positively correlated with higher income (Gittell & Covington, 1993). Further, studies looking at the effectiveness of higher education under JOBS as a route out of poverty failed to distinguish between training and postsecondary education; consequently, results were confounded and failed to give a true indication of the value of higher education (Handler, 1995).

Single mothers on welfare who chose to attend college without the support of their JOBS worker were called self-initiates (Kates, 1993). Family services offices penalized self-initiates in many states. Specifically, they received a significant reduction in their monthly welfare checks, loss of child-care benefits, and possible reductions in their food stamps. Even recipients attending college with the approval of their JOBS worker faced financial barriers due to the fragmentation of services provided by different agencies. Food stamps are managed under a different program than AFDC, as are college
Pell grants and student loans. Each agency has its own set of eligibility criteria and ideology that are often in conflict with one another. The result for students, both in the past and present, who receive financial aid in the form of loans is a reduction in public assistance benefits, generally in the form of food stamps (Kates, 1993; Rice, 1993).

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996

Abramovitz (2000) noted that during the late 1980s and early 1990s the welfare rolls continued to rise, culminating in an all-time high of 14.2 million individuals or 5.5% of the entire population in 1994. This expansion in welfare recipients reflected the nation’s economic decline marked by high unemployment, corporate downsizing, stagnant wages, and cuts in social programs for the poor. “By then, more politicians had latched onto the welfare issue for political gain” (Abramovitz, 2000, p. 26).

In 1996, President Clinton kept his promise to “change welfare as we know it” by signing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). PRWORA replaced AFDC and JOBS. The proponents of the act boasted that it effectively ended federal entitlement to assistance and put in its place Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a program requiring work in exchange for time-limited assistance. PRWORA went into effect on July 1, 1997, and was reauthorized by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 signed by President Bush. PRWORA shifted control of the program from the federal government to the state level where states are issued block grants and required to meet certain minimum expectations. States have a great deal of flexibility in designing their TANF programs in ways that “promote work, responsibility, and self-sufficiency, and strengthen families” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007, p 1). The purposes of TANF, as outlined by the U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services (2007), are “to provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; to reduce dependency by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families” (p. 1). The obvious failure of the stated purpose was masked by its lofty goal of reducing welfare rolls by a staggering 50% over a four year period, from 1998 to 2002. Indeed, this goal was not reached by the target year of 2002, nor was it realized by 2005 when the Deficit Reduction Act reauthorized PRWORA and required states to engage more TANF recipients in productive work activities leading to self-sufficiency. States are now mandated to place half of all single-parent cases and 90 percent of two-parent families in work activities, and new penalties were established for states that fail to meet these work activity goals. Work activities for recipients are now required at 30 hours per week and the lifetime limit for families to receive benefits can be no longer than five years. Nineteen states have established lifetime limits of fewer than five years (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).

PRWORA has also resulted in cut-backs in child care assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid benefits. Furthermore, 29 states have adopted policies related to a family cap, holding welfare recipients responsible for the growing rates of out-of-wedlock births among poor women (Abramovitz, 2000). It can be further argued that punishing parents means punishing children. “Time limits, family cap rules, and sanctions that seem harsh when applied to adults only intensifies the already severe problems that their children face. Such policies … penalize children because of their parent’s status” (Patterson, 2001, p. 6). The term family values, apparently means valuing work over valuing
children when applied to poor single-parent families (Reese, 2005). It seems that this welfare reform deprives children of their greatest resource—their parents. Reese (2005) quotes a woman on welfare who said, “I have learned that this so-called welfare reform is not about helping people become self-sufficient but just about shifting the statistics from those on welfare to those of the working poor” (p. 17). She speaks for many women who are baffled to find that the successful welfare story is about a single mother earning $6.50 an hour, who does not have medical or dental insurance, who cannot afford quality and nutritious food for her children, and who has no hope of moving up the economic ladder. Further, while she is statistically off welfare, she still qualifies for food stamps, child care assistance, housing assistance, and medical assistance (Reese, 2005).

An emphasis on moving welfare recipients quickly into jobs, regardless of wage, combined with a decrease in support services and the institution of lifetime limits, is clearly a formula for failure when the larger problem of poverty remains unaddressed. Success under PRWORA is measured only by a reduction in welfare rolls, while effective federal and state evaluation tools to measure the impact on women who left the rolls have been lacking. Further, TANF treats welfare dependency as though it were an addiction, overlooking the fact that single mothers with children who are forced into temporary low-wage jobs puts additional strain on mothers attempting to fulfill both childrearing and wage-earning responsibilities (Schram, 2001).

Recent studies on welfare leavers have found that the majority of them have low-wage jobs with earnings below the official poverty level; 40 percent do not have fringe benefits; and most still qualify for one or more safety net programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, housing assistance, and childcare subsidies, thus they are not truly self-
sufficient (Polit, Widim, Edin, Bowie, London, Scott, & Valenzuela, 2001). Further, welfare leavers were found to have multiple hardships, including living with food, housing, and transportation insecurity, residing in dangerous neighborhoods, unmet healthcare needs, and depression (Polit et al., 2001). Welfare recipients who left prior to reaching their time limits fared better than those who were forced off welfare as a result of hitting their time limits. Among the problems associated with women who reached their time limits were lower educational levels, less job experience, mental illness, health problems, lack of transportation, and children with special needs (Bania, Coulton, Lalich, Martin, Newburn, & Pasqualone, 2001; Polit et al., 2001).

**Overview of Education and Training Emphasis in TANF**

Jones-DeWeever and Gault (2006), researching for the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, reported that TANF work requirements dramatically limit opportunities for women to participate in postsecondary education. Vocational education training may count as a work activity, although for no more than 12 months for any individual. Each state has the authority to determine if postsecondary education counts as a participation activity, but only nine states have done so. Further, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 intensified limits to education by allowing no more than 30 percent of the TANF recipients in a given state to count vocational education as a work activity. Additionally, teenage parents involved in high school or GED programs are counted toward that 30 percent. In most states, participation in vocational education does not count towards the first 20 hours of required work participation per week. Thus, a single mother wanting to pursue higher education is required to work from 20 to 30 hours per week, attend school, and raise a family (Jones-DeWeever & Gault, 2006). The result, noted Kates (1998), is
that many women are forced to make lifetime economic decisions that affect their families without the right of self-determination or reasonable choices.

Misunderstanding and myth surround women on welfare who pursue higher education. It is largely held that welfare pays for college attendance for these women. In fact, welfare recipients compete with other students for a variety of forms of financial aid, including Pell grants, state grants, loans, and scholarships. Unlike nonwelfare students, welfare recipients are penalized for receiving scholarships that are counted as income and in turn counted against the amount they are eligible to receive in aid, including food stamps and childcare subsidies (Kates, 1998).

Maine and Wyoming are states that have found creative ways around the federal requirements. An option open to states is to create a separate, state-funded program for students enrolled in postsecondary education with maintenance-of-effort funds. Such a program offers cash benefits and support services comparable with TANF, but the benefits are distributed through state funds rather than through TANF. In this way, the TANF restrictions are bypassed while the state still legitimately retains federal TANF funding (Jones-DeWeever & Gault, 2006).

**Incidence and Prevalence of Poverty in the United States**

Does poverty differentially impact families headed by women? The clarification of terms is important before considering the numbers. Gordon (1994a) maintained that it is important to distinguish between the terms *female-headed households* and *single motherhood*. Female-headed households does not consider the many numbers of mother-only families who are living with other families. As a result, the following census data represent an underestimation in the actual number of mother-only families.
Based on data compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Office on the Economic Status of Women (2007) reported that the 3-year (1998-2000) poverty rate for the total U.S. population was 11.9 percent. Women and children accounted for 75.6 percent of persons in poverty. The same group found children under 18 years old were 37.5 percent of persons in poverty in 1999. Female-headed families with children were disproportionately represented in poverty. Of the families with children, 23.5 percent lived in poverty and 60.8 percent of those families with children were headed by women. By comparison, the total of U.S. unmarried male-headed families with children were only 5.8 percent of families with children, and accounted for only 6.8 percent of families with children in poverty. Comparing eight industrialized nations, the U.S. had the highest ratio of women’s to men’s poverty at 1:38, which means that women’s poverty is 38 percent higher than men’s.

While women have higher poverty rates than men in all racial and ethnic groups, poverty has a pronounced impact on women of color. In 2000, the poverty rate for Black women was 21.4 percent, Hispanic (all races) women 20.1 percent, and Asian or Pacific Islander women 10.1 percent, compared with 9.6 percent for white women (Office on the Economic Status of Women, 2007).

A 2001 report released by the Children’s Defense Fund found that, nationwide, 12.4 million children lived below the poverty line and the proportion of poor children who lived with an adult who worked throughout the year soared to 37 percent, up from 33 percent in 1999 and more than double the 1991 proportion of 18 percent.

According to Edin and Lein (1997), “Nearly three decades of stagnant wages, ineffective child support enforcement, and dwindling welfare benefits have made single
mothers and their children America’s poorest demographic group” (p. 4). Roughly 60 percent of children born in the 1980s spent part of their childhood in mother-only families. Trends show that of the children born in the 1990s an even higher proportion will be raised by single mothers (Edin & Lein, 1997). Given such statistics, one wonders how the pervasive poverty of mother-only families remains invisible and goes largely unaddressed by policy makers. An approach is needed to deconstruct the patriarchally based acceptance of poverty as a normal condition for single mothers and their children as well as the insidious notion that poverty exists only as a result of individual deviancy. Critical feminist constructivist theory serves as that filter by identifying and challenging social injustice that perpetuates unequal treatment of mother-only families.

Summary of Poverty and Social Welfare Policy

Prior to 1996, social welfare had become increasingly ineffective at reducing the number of welfare recipients, and it had made little if any impact on poverty (Handler, 1995). With the adoption of the PRWORA of 1996, welfare rolls have been cut dramatically; however, most women have been forced off welfare to accept low-paying jobs, often without access to benefits, which will effectively keep them and their families in perpetual poverty (Kates, 1998).

Policies continue to be developed and implemented that scapegoat the poor, primarily women and children, as being responsible for most of society’s problems. As such, these policies continue to attempt to change the perceived deviant behaviors of those receiving welfare—those who are perceived as failing to live up to work and family ethics, while unequal job opportunities, the wage gap, inadequate policies and programs, corporate tax breaks, governmental waste, and other forms of subsidies go unaddressed
(Gittell & Covington, 1993; Gruber, 1998). Indeed, Schmitz (1995) contended that
gender inequality, not single-parent families, is the problem.

Miller (1989) asserted that “It is in the interest of both the patriarchy and
capitalism to emphasize a woman’s role as mother and to restrict her opportunities in the
labor market” (p. 17). Yet, current welfare programs are designed to extend minimal
financial relief and to reduce welfare rolls while proving limited avenues for self-
improvement and occupational skill attainment. Low-wage employment is thrust upon
welfare recipients with little chance of truly realizing self-sufficiency through
employment.

In 2009 over one-third of single mothers were in jobs that are low paying (defined
as below two-thirds of the median hourly wage, which was $9.06). In addition to the low
pay, these jobs typically lack benefits such as paid sick or vacation days and health
insurance. Many low-wage jobs that single mothers find in retail and hospitality have
very irregular work hours, providing the employers with much flexibility but workers
with almost none. These features of low-wage work wreak havoc for single mothers. An
irregular work schedule makes child care nearly impossible to arrange. A late school bus,
a sick child, or a sick child-care provider can throw a wrench in the best-laid plans for
getting to and staying at work. Without paid time off, a missed day of work is a missed
day of pay. And too many missed days can easily cost a single mother her job (Albelda,
2012).

If programs were designed to truly help women become financially independent,
the reality is that policymakers should strengthen rather than weaken provisions to make
it easier for a single mother to attain employment providing a living wage (Abramovitz,
Instead, current programs are serving capitalism by supplying the labor market with low-wage female labor while reinforcing patriarchy through maintaining the ideal of marriage as the best avenue out of poverty for most women on welfare. (Abramovitz, 2000; Miller, 1989).

**Education as a Means for Achieving Self-reliance**

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1681, constituted a major step towards abolishing sex discrimination from schools and served as a model for state and federal efforts to provide equal opportunities for men and women (Lindgren & Taub, 1993). Title IX reads:

> No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. (U.S. Department of Labor, 1997, Section 1681. Sex)

Title IX regulations were aimed at designing statutory requirements regarding admissions, recruitment, curriculum, research, extracurricular activities, student aid, student services, counseling and guidance, housing, financial aid, and athletics (Lindgren & Taub, 1993). Despite these provisions, however, and continuing their tradition of contradictory treatment of welfare recipients, legislators have limited or eliminated access to higher education for poor women on welfare. This unfortunate reality has denied single-mother welfare recipients effective access to the most effective means of gaining economic independence—higher education and vocational skill attainment. Instead, they are treated as though they are “incapable students undeserving of the opportunity to transform themselves” (Kahn & Polakow, 2000, p. 68). Indeed, those few women receiving welfare who do manage to secure an education for themselves are charged with exceptionalism. It seems that policymakers remain unconvinced that the
majority of single mothers on TANF are competent to learn in the classroom if their unique social, family, financial, and academic needs were met.

President Clinton held that education is a national priority that is critical for the nation’s workforce and for national well-being (Greenberg, 1993). He maintained that educational proposals will improve access to higher education and reward academic excellence by including tuition tax deductions, decreases in student loan interest rates, and increased Pell grants. Clearly, these measures are aimed at helping those who might otherwise not be able to afford a college education, yet it can be questioned that poor women with children will not be able to avail themselves of such opportunities due to welfare policy-based barriers. Blank (1995) noted that “educational credentials appear to have become increasingly important in the labor market, making it more and more difficult to improve one’s earning capacity than [through] experience alone” (p. 57). The contradiction in policy between PRWORA and Title IX when applied to women on welfare has obviously remained unexamined.

Bane and Ellwood (1994) noted that more welfare recipients might be eligible for postsecondary education than is generally believed. In 1999, 56 percent of recipients nationwide already had a high school diploma or GED (Zedlewski & Alderson, 2001). When considering the role of education for welfare recipients, two distinct groups of recipients emerge: (a) those who do not have basic skills to become employed and (b) those skilled enough to be working at entry-level, low-wage jobs (Strawn, 1998). “Research shows that job training combined with basic education can help the first group to become employable. Postsecondary education and training can help the second group to find better jobs, outcomes that job search alone cannot achieve” (Strawn, 1998, p. 1).
The Value of Higher Education

Enrollment in higher education between 1987 and 1997 increased by approximately 13 percent. The majority of this growth was comprised of female students. The number of men enrolled increased 7 percent, and the number of women enrolled increased 17 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Women currently comprise over half of undergraduate enrollment in 4-year colleges and universities.

During 1997, the number of women attending graduate school full time exceeded men, representing an increase of 68 percent compared to an increase of 22 percent for men. In 1976, the proportion of minorities enrolled in college was 16 percent and had increased to 27 percent in 1997 (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Despite these positive educational trends for women and minorities, community colleges and universities have experienced a dramatic drop in enrollment among welfare recipients since the 1997 passage of PRWORA (Strawn, 1998). For example, Baltimore City Community College reported a 29 percent drop in welfare recipients enrolled in college from fall 1996 to fall 1997 (from 893 to 633, respectively); City University of New York experienced a decline from 27,000 to 17,000 or 59 percent between 1996 and 1998 (Schmidt, 1998); community colleges in Massachusetts reported a 47 percent decline in enrollment among welfare recipients during the same two-year period (Welfare Education and Training Access Coalition, 1998). In 1997, just one year after the enactment of PRWORA, reports estimated that community colleges would lose approximately 60 percent of students on welfare because of the PRWORA-imposed work requirements (Ritter, 1997). As a proportion of the total caseload, the number of AFDC/TANF families reported as participating in activities that could be considered
postsecondary education or training fell from 3.9 percent to 1.8 percent of the caseload (Greenberg, Strawn, & Plimpton, 1999). The decline in the number of welfare recipients enrolled in college has been attributed to several factors, including an overall reduction in welfare rolls; difficulty juggling school, work, and parenting; increased participation in the labor market; fear of using up welfare time limits; and prohibitive social service policies and practices (Schmidt, 1998). Kahn and Polakow (2000) found that concealment and misinformation about available options and services on the part of welfare case managers contributed to the plummeting number of welfare recipients entering and continuing in postsecondary education programs. Following a qualitative study of welfare recipients in Michigan, Kahn and Polakow (2000) concluded:

Women who have initiated and persisted in postsecondary education are making strategic decisions to insure long-term self-sufficiency, sometimes persisting despite unmanageable work requirements, . . .case worker hostility, and unaddressed child-care needs. They sometimes prevail even though policy virtually ensures they will fail. (pp. 68-69)

Indeed, higher education is positively correlated with higher employment rates. Approximately 80 percent of adults with a bachelor’s degree participated in the labor force in 1998 compared to 65 percent of persons with a high school diploma and 43 percent of persons 25 years old or older with less than a high school education (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Unemployment rates for 1999 were as follows: 1.8 percent for those with a bachelor’s degree or higher, 4.0 percent for high school graduates, and 7.1 percent for those with less than a high school education (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). In addition, higher education resulting in higher incomes for women has long-term positive effects for women upon retirement, enabling them to combine higher levels of Social Security income, pensions, savings, and earnings from individual retirement accounts.
Researchers have claimed that there is a growing demand for a skilled, college-educated labor force (Danzinger & Gottschalk, 1995; Kates, 1993; Solomon, 1990). Blank (1994) added, “Fundamentally, the demand for less-skilled workers appears to be declining faster than the number of less-skilled workers, and their wages are therefore drawn downward” (p. 173).

Investing in the human capital of workers is expensive in the short run. However, increased educational attainment, particularly the completion of a bachelor’s degree, has a significant impact on the lifetime earnings of a typical worker (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1995; Kahn & Polakow, 2000). Further, education is effective in “increasing the economic and social mobility of the poor. Arguably, it represents the nation’s most important and most costly public policy to reduce long-term poverty” (Burtless, 1994, p. 73). Additionally, a strong positive correlation was shown between a person’s education and that of his or her children (Manski, 1994). Early development of language and reading skills and the likelihood of school success are associated with the educational level of parents (Gittell et al., 1996). In fact, even more strongly stated, the most effective predictor of how well children will do in school is their mothers’ level of education (Smith & Zaslow, 1995) Manski (1994) further asserted that education could influence social mobility within and across generations.

The issue of long-term costs compared with long-term savings is important. The costs of continuing TANF support, food stamps, child care, and medical coverage through the completion of a two- or four-year degree might be minimal when comparing it to increased revenue associated with a significantly higher taxable income over time, increased consumer spending, and the likely chance that generational patterns of poverty
will be broken (Burtless, 1994; Danziger & Gottschalk, 1995; Manski, 1994). Those leaving welfare rolls to accept low-paying jobs are more likely to continue requiring other support services and return to welfare in what has been identified as the “revolving door” phenomenon (Handler, 1995).

Finally, women’s median income is lower than men’s at all levels of educational achievement. A man with a high school diploma or equivalency in 2000 earned a median income of $27,666, whereas a woman earned $15,119 or 83 percent of that of a man at the same educational level. With an associate’s degree, a woman still earns less than a man with a high school diploma. Only when a woman achieves a four-year postsecondary degree does she exceed the earnings of a man with a high school education by earning a median income of $33,365. However, a man with a bachelor’s degree earned $49,178 or 47% more than a woman at the same educational level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). These figures provide strong evidence of the wage gap between women and men participating in the labor force. Higher paying jobs at lower educational levels are traditionally closed to women. Clearly, the educational needs of women are accentuated when they need to earn enough money to support a family (Kahn & Polakow, 2000).

President Clinton spoke about the value of education in helping Americans attain better jobs. This message, however, appeared to be directed at everyone except women receiving welfare, as evidenced by his emphasis of moving people quickly off welfare into jobs and providing jobs for those who cannot find work (Gittell et al., 1993; Greenberg, 1993). In his recent eight-year tenure, President George W. Bush neglected to discuss higher education, focusing instead on primary and secondary education. Kates
(1993) maintained that poor women remain fundamentally invisible in policy discussions about access to higher education. “Higher education, as a route out of poverty or, more generally, as a policy option and right of poor women, has yet to be legitimized philosophically or strategically” (Rice, 1993, p. 11).

**Summary of the Value of Higher Education**

Through braiding interventions aimed at the individual (e.g., higher education) with those aimed at ameliorating poverty, it may be possible that women can realize authentic gains in personal and societal status that will also positively impact the lives of their children, extended families, friends, communities, and, ultimately, the nation. While postsecondary education may not be the answer for all women in poverty, social justice requires that education should exist as an option available to all people, regardless of gender, race, age, class, ability, or sexual preference (Okin, 1989; Robb, 1995). The studies cited herein add to the growing knowledge base and substantiated proof that higher education truly provides a solid foundation of skills and credentials that can provide single women and their families with a permanent passage out of poverty.

Gittell and Covington (1993) summarized:

Women’s low earnings, the strong correlation between education and income, and changes in the labor market strongly suggest the wisdom of reform policies that support greater investment in the human capital of … recipients. While more immediate welfare savings may result from policies that emphasize rapid job placement, the long-term benefits from an extension of college opportunities for … recipients are clear. College increases earnings, strengthens labor market attachments, broadens horizons, supports life-long learning, and encourages the postsecondary college aspirations of the children of college graduates. (p. 8)

Indeed, a need truly exists for research aimed at discerning ways to enhance access to education and to provide encouragement and support services to welfare recipients who are motivated to attend college as a means to achieving economic independence. Such services might include quality child care, health insurance, financial
aid for part-time attendance (rather than for full-time students only), transportation, and
exclusion from TANF time limits.

**Feminist Critical Constructivist Theory**

Feminism has been defined as “a belief that gender is a primary category of
experience (and therefore of analysis) and an attendant commitment to remedying the
disadvantages of women” (Morawski, 1997, p. 667). Feminists believe that women have
been subordinated through men’s greater power. They value women’s lives and
concerns, and they work to improve women’s status (DeVault, 1996). According to
Reinharz (1992), feminism does not provide a method of research, but rather a
“perspective” on the conduct of research. Feminists, Reinharz explains, use the same
research methods employed by other social researchers, but they modify, innovate, and
improvise in order to create research responsive to the insights and challenges of
feminism.

In this study, a feminist gender lens allows the subjective voices of economically
disadvantaged single mothers to be heard and differentiated from the predominately non-
gendered voices of social policy makers, educators, and employers. Specifically, social
welfare policy has been drafted and implemented based on historical and societal norms,
economics and politics, but without a superimposed gender lens. Failure to consider
gender has perpetuated the invisibility of the dual role of single mothers (and women in
general) as homemaker/parent and wage worker, which has continued the devaluation of
nonwage work in the home (Gordon, 1990; Kittay, 2001).

Critical theory refers to

the positive act of detecting and unmasking, or exposing existing forms of beliefs that
restrict or limit human freedom . . . to uncover aspects of society, especially ideologies,
that maintain the status quo by restricting or limiting different groups’ access to the
means of gaining knowledge. Thus, theory is “critical” because it departs from and questions the dominant ideology, creating at least the possibility of being “outside” of that ideology. (Nielsen, 1990, p. 9)

As conveyed earlier, the dominant ideology contained in social welfare policy is rooted in an interpretation of reality based on patriarchal principles within a capitalistic political and economic organizational structure (Naples, 1991; Nielsen, 1990). Critical theory challenges the historically positivistic epistemology, which contends that one immutable male-defined reality exists. Critical theory also rejects the concept of objectivity by arguing that knowledge is subjectively constructed; thus, bias is introduced into any understanding of reality (Nielsen, 1990).

Constructivism is associated with relativism. That is, realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111)

Thus, knowledge or meaning is socially constructed and can be altered. Social constructivism implies that the process of knowing is contextually situated in history, politics, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. However, constructivism goes further than critiquing existing ideologies by seeking an understanding of the “complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Interpreting knowledge from a constructionist perspective, then, relies on inductive processes associated with an expansion and appreciation of the complexity of meaning in contrast with reductionistic and simplistic methods used in positivism.

The feminist perspective applied in this study combines the strengths of critical and constructivist theories in identifying the gendered ways in which dominant ideologies have oppressed women structurally and socially. This perspective furthers the
understanding of the consequences of limited opportunities for women in addition to validating the various constructions of meaning from the lived experiences of women individually and in groups. Therefore, a feminist critical constructivist perspective is especially helpful in examining and challenging social welfare policy in the context of history, politics, society, and economics.

The feminist critical constructivist approach to analyzing social welfare policy is a somewhat recent endeavor that began in the late 1960s (Abramovitz, 1988). Nonfeminist approaches to policy discourse have been subject to context stripping (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which has removed contextual variables such as politics, history, race, class, gender, and changing values. The following discourse situates welfare policy within these contexts, thus forming a complex and multidimensional understanding of social welfare policy as a dynamic process rather than as a series of independent outcomes. A gendered critical analysis of welfare policy is essential in order to expose the ways that patriarchal ideology has served in privileging the status of men over the status of women (Hirschmann & Liebert, 2001; Naples, 1991). For example, gender-neutral language, as used in the Family Support Act of 1988 (woman is used only once), dilutes the gendered human relationship (such as the mother-child relationship) by reducing it to an abstraction (Naples, 1991).

A critical feminist constructivist theoretical base, the umbrella theory of this study, implies an activist posture. Fine (1994) asserts that a theoretical base such as this “seeks to unearth, interrupt, and open new frames for intellectual and political theory and practice. Researchers critique what seems ‘natural,’ recast ‘experience,’ connect the vocal to the structural and collective, [and] spin images of what’s possible” (p. 23).
Inherent in this perspective is an attempt to confront social injustice, thereby facilitating its transformation (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

**The Construction of Gender**

The construction of gender as compared to sex must also be addressed. Biological sex is differentiated from the construction of gender. Sex refers to biological differences, based on genotype, in which females have \( XX \) sex chromosomes and males have \( XY \) sex chromosomes. Sex is generally considered unchangeable and is communicated through a person’s phenotype, that is, his or her physical makeup and bodily appearance. Gender, by comparison, is a socially constructed representation of identity or role characteristics. Thus, gender informs individuals of more than sex differences. For example, only women are biologically capable of bearing children; however, the belief that women are primarily responsible for the care and nurturance of children does not stem from their ability to give birth. Rather, this role is socially constructed, as evidenced by its variability among societies and individuals (Stolcke, 1993).

Another example of gender role construction, introduced earlier, is the historical division of labor in which males are responsible for protecting and providing for the family through inhabiting the public sphere, whereas females maintain the private sphere through caring for the children, cooking, and cleaning (Abramovitz, 2000). The domination of women by men is a social construction that was originally justified scientifically by the anthropomorphic differences between the genders, which is most apparent in women’s smaller physical stature and ability to give birth. One of the difficulties with gender-role constructions is they can become naturalized or made real.
Thus, opposition to gender-ascribed behavioral expectations is resisted and viewed as deviant and unnatural. Further, claims of injustice, oppression, and inequality based on gender are often dismissed by the dominant group as extraneous and irrelevant, or they simply go unheard (Nielson, 1990; Stolcke, 1993).

The meaning of gender and its consequent role assignment has become stereotyped; thus, characteristics are attributed to various groups “which structure inequalities between men and women” (Stolcke, 1993, p. 19), and they have no intrinsic correlation to sex. Stolcke further argued that the naturalization of sociocultural inequality is used to justify the reality that social inequality exists in spite of the ethic of equal opportunity. Inequality is based on the biological or natural deficiencies of the other who, given equal opportunities, fail through self-determination to better their position in society. Therefore, naturalization maintains the dominance of one group over another based on gender, as well as on race, sexual preference, and class (Abramovitz, 2000). Furthermore, the ideologies that support the naturalization of inequality continue to play a subtle but effective role in the continuation of that ideology as legitimate within Euro-American cultures; that is, women are charged with raising children and instilling in them the values of society. Thus, people use social meaning to justify social conception about gender that, in effect, justify social inequalities and the devaluation of others, and effectively maintain male privilege and domination (Stolcke, 1993).

Feminist researchers from many disciplines have analyzed the meaning and assumptions inherent in the traditional male-privileged constructions of gender. For example, critical analysis in education has been used to uncover subtle gender-based classroom behaviors, such as revealing that teachers would often challenge boys and
insure their understanding of the lessons more so than girls. Thus, the perspectives of our patriarchal society were unknowingly being promoted within our educational system despite the overall lofty goal of inclusion and equality for all.

As the umbrella theory informing this research study, the feminist constructivist perspective aided in identifying the development of predominant social values situated in a patriarchal society and the construction of meaning surrounding those values. In other words, women are caught in the conflicting relationship between capitalism (the work ethic) and patriarchy (the family ethic). Attention was also given to the exclusion of gender as a category of analysis in policy development. Specifically, social welfare policy has been drafted and implemented based on historical and societal norms, economics and politics, but without a superimposed gender lens. Failure to consider gender has perpetuated the invisibility of the dual role of single mothers (and women in general) as homemaker/parent and wage worker, which has continued the devaluation of nonwage work in the home (Gordon, 1990; Kittay, 2001).

FEMINIST CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

*Women are caught in the conflictual relationship between capitalism (the work ethic) and patriarchy (the family ethic).

*Social welfare policy is recontextualized within history, societal norms, economics, and politics.

*These contexts are viewed through a gender lens.

*The subjective voices of women are privileged.

*Dominant ideologies are challenged.

Figure 2. Theoretical framework
Successive Stages Model

The Successive Stages Model (SSM) was the conceptual framework adapted by the researcher from Shaw’s (2001) Predictive Pathways Model (PPM). Shaw developed the SSM as a framework within which to present the factors influencing the success of women entering the trades as apprentices. Hernandez (2007) likewise used the SSM model in researching the educational success of Chicano males.

The SSM was modified for this study to include four stages that may have influenced the single mothers’ success on their paths to educational achievement and self-sufficiency. In this study, Stage 1 represents the participant’s developmental background. Stages 2–4 are representative stages of their participation in their educational program at the community college and are further delineated below. There were barriers and enabling factors found in each stage for the six study participants. Within each stage, the participants, in order to progress to the next stage, had to overcome barriers by exercising the enabling factors.

Stage 1 of the SSM is the developmental background. It includes family, environment, neighborhood, early education system, early work experiences, religion, and peers. Barriers occur when choices are poor, there is no support, and systems such as education may be ineffective. Enabling factors such as good decision making and choices, support from family, teachers, counselors, mentors, and positive attitudes toward education give the participant support to move through the barriers to the next stage.

Stage 2 is the programmatic period. This stage includes an awareness of the opportunity of access to higher education while receiving public assistance. The information can come from a variety of sources such as teachers, mentors, counselors,
program managers, government agencies, community organizations, and peers. It is essential that the information is accurate and that the women will be able to navigate through the enrollment period at the community college and the re-entry program and begin the course work necessary for the chosen career. Barriers such as child care, housing, subsistence, home life, transportation, medical and education costs, and welfare work requirements are often encountered in this stage. The enabling factors such as knowledge, information regarding access, support from welfare case workers, good decision making and choices, and a connectedness to the community college and their educational program give the participants support through the barriers in this stage.

Stage 3 is the middle and completion level. In stage 3 the women are at various levels of higher education and are entering the workforce. It is a time of acquiring new experiences. They are navigating through many of the same barriers as in Stage 2 in addition to coursework and job expectations. Mentoring by counselors and teachers precede this stage. The enabling factors that lead the women through the barriers to the completion of this stage include such things as support, confidence, tenacity, knowledge, and courage. The completion of this stage is marked by successful completion of the educational program and entry into the workforce in their chose career field.

Stage 4 is the leadership and advocacy stage of the model. Some the barriers such as child care, job expectations, and staying employed remain in this stage. Productivity, confidence, good choices, self-sufficiency, and support are some of the enabling factors that reinforce the participants in their new careers and help them succeed in their job and remain employed. At this stage, knowing that the goal of educational attainment and job obtainment motivates and empowers the women.
Summary of the Literature Review

The discovery of patriarchal-based assumptions that have informed the ethics of family and work and the subsequent development of social welfare policies aimed at the social control of women are vital in articulating and bringing into consciousness that which continues to oppress. Through the application of a gender lens, this literature review has provided an historical, social, and economic consideration of the etiology of current welfare policy, and it has also exposed the contradiction inherent in promoting self-sufficiency to largely untrained, under-educated single mothers. Jobs that provide an income sufficient to support a family are located in a labor market requiring workers with sophisticated skills that, for the most part, can only be obtained through postsecondary education. For welfare recipients, limiting access to higher education forces them to accept low-wage jobs, often providing incomes below the poverty line, and thus continuing the devastating effects of poverty and reliance on public support. Higher education provides an avenue for single mothers to prepare themselves for employment opportunities that will lift them and their families out of poverty and further their chances of future financial independence. This research study contributes to the knowledge base and understanding of the structural and experiential factors that serve both as barriers and facilitators to higher education for single mothers on welfare against the backdrop of changes in public welfare policy.

The next chapter provides an overview of the research design used in this study, the data sources and participant selection process, the site selection, data collection procedures used, and the data analysis process.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The focus and purpose of this study is to identify the driving forces that contributed to the success of single mothers who pursued an educational program at an urban community college while receiving public welfare assistance. This chapter provides an overview of the research design used in this study, the data sources and participant selection process, the site selection, data collection procedures, and the data analysis.

A review of the developmental backgrounds of the individuals participating in the study was gleaned, paying particular attention to family and home life, neighborhoods and peers, early education and work experiences. To further cultivate a contextual background for the development of the study, the study participants were specifically asked to examine and discuss (a) influences that led them to enter a community college educational program, (b) early perceptions and anxieties they encountered after beginning their educational program, (c) levels of confidence emerging and the feelings of probable success, and (d) the significant influences that enabled them to gain success in their lives. From these data insight was gained into the success factors related to their educational achievement and recurrent themes common to the six participants were discovered.

**Research Design**

This research was informed by a descriptive case studies approach. The design of qualitative research case studies was appropriate since the purpose of this study was to identify the driving forces that contributed to the educational success of six single-mother
welfare recipients. This study focused on insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than on hypothesis testing.

Methods of research, according to Van Dalen (1997), can be classified into three types: experimental research, historical, and descriptive. The descriptive method of research was employed in this study in order to systematically and accurately describe the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest (Isaac & Michael, 1997). In other words, descriptive research was used in this study for its intended purpose of describing life situations and events. Isaac and Michael describe this type of research as the accumulation of a database that is solely descriptive, not necessarily seeking or explaining relationships, testing hypotheses, making predictions, or attaining meanings and implications. Descriptive methods may, however, be incorporated into research ultimately aiming at one or more of these more powerful purposes. Since one of the purposes of descriptive research is to collect detailed information that describes existing phenomena (Isaac & Michael, 1997), it was used in this study to ascertain the background, current status, and environmental interactions of the six single-mother participants in order to identify contributing factors to their successful procurement of higher education and/or training while receiving public welfare assistance.

Qualitative research covers several forms of inquiry that aid the process of understanding and explaining the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 1988). The key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that individuals interacting with social worlds construct reality. “Qualitative researchers are interested in
understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1988, p. 6).

Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy. This is the type of research that builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories instead of testing existing theories. It builds toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field. Finally, since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning and understanding, the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive. Words rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

According to Merriam (1998), case studies are one of the five types of qualitative research commonly found in education which entail the basic generic qualitative study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. Case studies were well suited to developing detailed descriptions of the type desired in this research study. Isaac and Michael (1997) stated that the purpose of the case study is to “study intensively the background, current status, and the environmental interactions of a given social unit: an individual, group, institution, or community” (p. 52).

Borg, Gall, and Gall (1996) found that a characteristic of case studies is that phenomena are studied in their total context. Its special features can define the case study and include particularistic, heuristic, and descriptive features. Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, or phenomenon. Heuristic means that the case studies illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study. Descriptive means that the end purpose of the case study is a rich, “thick” description of
the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). Thick description, according to Merriam, means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated.

Stake (1998) wrote that the purpose of a case study is to learn as much as possible from that case, not to generalize beyond that case. He suggested, as a form of research, that “a case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (p. 86).

Therefore, through the qualitative case study method, this study discovered, described, and illuminated new meanings and understanding relative to the relationships, themes, and influences underlying the essence of the lives of single mother welfare recipients who successfully pursued and completed higher education.

**Selection of Site**

While single mother welfare recipients are widespread across the entire nation, large urban areas, because of their dense population, are inarguably home to the greatest percentage of them. Urban inner city areas are also home to the largest percentage of low socioeconomic residents. Thus, it was determined that a large urban inner city area would provide ready access to single-mother welfare recipients for this study. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Southwest area (comprising Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah) is the area comprising the nation’s most rapid population growth. Therefore, it was further decided to conduct this study in an urban metropolitan area within the Southwest.

Community colleges most often serve as the first entry point to both vocational and postsecondary education for economically disadvantaged adults primarily because of open entry admission practices that are central to the community college mission of
providing readily accessible and affordable educational opportunities. According to the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study of 2003, more than two-thirds of adult community college students were low-income (Prince & Jenkins, 2005). The potential of a community college to serve, therefore, as a pathway for single mothers leaving welfare for employment is evident and provided an excellent context in which to locate the participants for this study. Thus, the site selected is a large public community college located within a Southwestern inner city urban metropolitan area. Within this study, the selected community college will be referred to as Urban Community College (UCC).

**Selection of Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the six participants. The power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting what Patton (1990) called “information-rich” cases for study—in-depth cases from which one can learn most about issues central to the purpose of the evaluation and the needs of the decision makers. For this study, the director of the Urban Community College (UCC) re-entry program was contacted and permission was requested to contact women who have successfully completed their program, had received training and education at that institution, and had continued onto job retention. In selecting participants, it was stipulated that the participants must be single mothers who successfully completed higher education or training at UCC while receiving public assistance. An initial demographic survey (see Appendix A) was completed by each possible participant assuring that they met the selection criteria before being formally invited to participate in the study.
Data Collection Procedures

Interviews of the six study participants, a review of literature, and a review of the participants’ community college re-entry files were used for the purpose of this research to develop a thick description for these case studies.

According to Gay (1987), an interview is essentially the oral, in-person, administration of a questionnaire to each member of a sample. Gay stated the interview is most appropriate for asking questions that cannot effectively be structured into a multiple-choice format, such as questions of a personal nature. It is more flexible than a questionnaire, and the interviewer can adapt the situation to each subject. By establishing rapport and trust within a relationship, the interviewer can often obtain data that would not be included on a questionnaire; and the interview may also result in more accurate and honest responses, since the interviewer can explain the purpose of the research and questions. Asking additional probing questions can provide follow up on incomplete or unclear responses.

Merriam (1998) stated that interviewing is a common means of collecting qualified data in case studies, and it is necessary when one cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. According to Merriam, it is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals and at times is “the only way to get data” (p. 72). In this study, to glean information pertaining to the six participants, the oral interview method was used.

The interview protocol (see Appendix B) in this research study was more open-ended and less structured. The list of questions covered were delivered in an unstructured, conversational manner, which allowed the researcher to respond to the
circumstances at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topics in the interview instrument (Merriam, 1998).

Two in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the six study participants in order to develop a complete, well-organized picture of each. The interviews obtained demographic and financial background, family and home-life information, school and higher educational experiences, and workforce experiences. The researcher attempted to explore the world (Hernandez, 2007) of the participants to gain insight into how these women achieved self-sufficiency and productivity.

Interview questions were developed and framed in a way to elicit information-rich data. This task was accomplished through a review of the literature and discussions with educators and other researchers. Gay (1987) stated that the interviewer must have a written guide indicating what questions are to be asked and in what order, and what additional prompting or probing is permitted. He continued that in order to obtain standardized, comparable data from each participant, all interviews must be conducted in essentially the same manner; therefore, a protocol for interviewing was developed.

Since the participant interviews constitute the primary tool for gathering data for this research, the items included open-ended questions that afforded the respondent a frame of reference within which to react, without placing a constraint on the reaction. This process allowed for flexibility, depth clarification, and probing. It also enabled the researcher to encourage cooperation and establish rapport with the respondents, thereby allowing for unexpected responses that revealed significant information that had not been expected.
After obtaining names of potential participants from the UCC re-entry program, the researcher mailed each a letter of introduction (see Appendix A). The letter included a very brief explanation of the research goals and a statement explaining that they will be contacted by telephone to arrange a meeting time to elucidate the purpose and objectives of the study. It was explained that their participation is on a voluntary basis and that they would be completely free to discontinue participation at any time.

At the initial meeting, the participants were advised that they were being asked to participate in two in-depth, audio taped interviews to discuss information such as personal background, welfare and educational program experiences, work related experiences, and personal influences. Gay (1987) explained that if a recording device is used, the interviews move along more quickly and responses are recorded exactly as given; therefore, audio taping served more efficiently than handwritten notes alone. According to Merriam (1998), audio taping subjects ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained that multiple-operations research or triangulation of methods is the best means of ensuring that one will be able to make sense of data collected through interviews; therefore, the participants all signed a release allowing the researcher access to their UCC re-entry program file. It was explained to the interviewees that a review of their individual files in the re-entry office would be conducted to gather information such as documentation and analysis of grades, extracurricular activities, projects in which they may have participated, test scores, previous review of jobs, and resumes. They were advised that all information would be kept strictly confidential, and the participants were referred to by number or fictitious
name in the study. Upon their agreement to participate in this study, each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D) and was given a copy for their records. At that time, appointments were set for the interviews. The interviews were conducted at a site chosen by the participant—one that helped her feel most comfortable.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews for this research were conducted in an in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured manner with the main objective being to record the authentic reality of the participants’ experiences. As Ladson-Billings (1994) stated, “My role was to represent those experiences as accurately as possible while realizing that no inquiry is ever without initial values, beliefs, conceptions, and driving assumptions regarding the matter under investigation” (p. 146).

The audio taped interviews were professionally transcribed, and the researcher listened to the tapes while following the verbatim transcript prepared by the transcriptionist to check for accuracy. The interviews were then hand coded based on emergent themes within the conceptual framework of the four stages of Shaw’s Successive Stages Model (SSM). Merriam (1998) stated that a conceptual framework is derived from the orientation or stance that is brought to the study. It is the structure, the scaffolding, and the framework of the study. The conceptual framework for this study evolved through the literature review from the studies performed by Hernandez (2007) and Shaw (2001) and involved coding interview data into four distinct stages of the Successive Stages Model (SSM) as follows:

1. Stage 1 was the developmental background of the single mothers. Enabling factors and barriers that had an influence in the participants’ lives were discussed.
2. Stage 2 was the programmatic stage, which included the initial contact with the UCC re-entry program, application into the system, and job and classroom requirements. At this stage the women gained awareness of access and program requirements facilitating their entry to higher education at UCC. Again, the enabling factors and barriers in this stage were discussed and coded.

3. Stage 3 was the middle and completion stage. At this stage, the participants reached the final semester of their educational program and were entering the workforce. During this third stage, the rigors of being a single mother and employee were discussed.

4. Stage 4 went beyond educational completion and job attainment and attempted to discover the participants’ enabling factors and barriers to long-term self-sufficiency. Additional coding categories as listed in Appendix E were derived from both expected themes from the literature review and actual themes revealed from review of the transcribed interviews. Initial coding categories were developed as a guide to early analysis rather than as fixed categories. As is common in qualitative research, data analysis was conceptualized as an open-ended process occurring simultaneously with and responsive to on-going data collection.

**Credibility, Validity, and Trustworthiness**

Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that arranging a time and place so that the participant is relaxed and at ease is important; but the actual face-to-face interaction depends on a variety of factors, only some of which are under the control of the interviewer. They explained that in order to obtain truthful, credible personal information from an interviewee, the interviewer must have a clear understanding of self and of the
situation. The interviewer must be confident and always display a nonthreatening
manner and presentation. In this study the researcher took this advice to heart which
hopefully provided some keys for unlocking needed data from the participants that was
truthful and trustworthy.

Gay (1987) stated that most interviews use a semi-structured approach involving
the posing of structured questions, followed by clarifying, unstructured, or open-ended
questions. The unstructured questions facilitated explanation and understanding of the
responses to the structured questions. Therefore, a combination of objectivity and depth
was obtained, and results could be tabulated and explained. In this study, a formal
instrument was used to guide the questions while allowing for many unstructured
questions and answers to emerge through the interviews. Using the instrument as a
guide, the intention remained “simply to have a good conversation with each” (Ladson-
Billings, 1994, p. 149). In order to accomplish this, the researcher “opened a window”
into herself, thus developing a caring trust that allowed and encouraged the participants to
“open windows” into their own lives. Above all, the researcher always maintained a
commitment to conduct the research in way that was respectful to the participants and
that might subsequently benefit other re-entry program participants.

While there are approximately 50 community colleges in the Southwest region
that likely have operational welfare-to-work programs, only six participants from one
community college were selected as study participants. As explained above, UCC was
used for this study because of its large size and because its geographical location within
an urban inner city area made it readily accessible to socioeconomically disadvantaged
single mother study participants. The study was limited to in-depth interviews with six
participants and review of documents and written data sources made available to the researcher by UCC. It is known that the needs and enabling factors of the individuals discussed in these six case studies may not necessarily be representative of or generalizable to the needs and enabling factors of other single-mother welfare recipients; however, by intertwining well-known and widely accepted developmental and motivational models, the study results became more generalizable beyond the six study participants. It is therefore believed that these six in-depth individual case studies give valuable insight into the needs of single, socioeconomically disadvantaged mothers seeking higher education or training.

**Ethical Considerations**

The utmost ethical consideration for any research study is that no harm be inflicted upon the participants. Babbie (2001) explains that formalized informed consent in social research assures that the study participants have been fully informed of and fully understand the possible risks involved in their participation in the study. Furthermore, the participants must base their voluntary consent to participate in the study upon their full understanding of the risks involved. While it is tempting to assert that social research involving participant interviews is void of risk, Babbie explains that there is a subtle danger involved in asking participants to reveal behaviors, attitudes, or personal characteristics that might make them feel uncomfortable and may later cause grief or agony. In this study, for example, a participant could have revealed that she had committed a secret crime or immoral act, perhaps involving something such as welfare fraud or academic dishonesty. Then later, after the interview, she may agonize over
either the revelation of the act or over the act itself. Any probing questions, according to Babbie, may potentially harm a fragile self-esteem.

Therefore, the participants in this study were made fully aware of all possible risk factors, including subtle psychological risks, before their written voluntary consent was obtained. They were also given the opportunity to decline to answer any questions asked and to withdraw from the study at any time. The Institutional Research Board (IRB) application process was followed to assure the protection of the study participants and the researcher, and the appropriate permission to conduct this study was granted by the IRB.

Additionally, since the researcher is employed as an instructor at UCC, extra precaution was taken to assure that the six study participants were initially unknown to the researcher and had never been in one of the courses taught by the researcher nor in any of the courses within the researcher’s academic program. This insured that the participants viewed the researcher simply as a researcher and not as a college instructor, thus averting any possible bias that could have resulted if the participants were previously known to the researcher or vice versa.

**Summary**

This study used qualitative descriptive case studies as the research model. The results of these case studies offer insights and meanings that expand the reader’s experiences, thus adding to a field of knowledge and helping structure future research. An interview instrument was used to facilitate in-depth interviews of the participants (see Appendix B). The instrument was not designed to produce statistically significant data; but rather was designed to identify specific themes, problems, possible policy solutions, and areas for future research. According to Merriam (1998), insights gained from case
studies can directly influence policies, practice, and future research. The information gleaned from the interviews, literature, and files of the participants was then analyzed within the four stages of the SSM conceptual framework.

The next chapter contains a summary the study’s participant interviews including vignettes from the participants and a description of the overall themes that emerged from the study.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the in-depth interviews of six single mothers who received public assistance while procuring higher education at UCC are reported in this chapter along with information derived from interviews with a state welfare administrator and the UCC re-entry program director. The themes that emerged were considered within the Successive Stages Model (SSM) theoretical framework of Shaw (2001) and titled Successive Stages Influencing Single Mother’s Success. The data collected yielded almost 500 pages of typewritten transcripts; therefore, only the most salient passages from the participants’ interviews are presented in this chapter to advance the study’s purpose of identifying the driving forces that contributed to the success of these single mothers who pursued an educational program at an urban community college while receiving public welfare assistance.

A brief description of UCC, the city wherein UCC is located, UCC’s re-entry program, and federal, state and local statistics are included in this chapter. The presentation of the findings in this section is reported around three major themes that emerged from the participant interviews: (a) choices/decision making; (b) support—family and external; and (c) systems—educational, social services, and re-entry program.

Federal Data

According to Martinson and Strawn (2010), while many welfare recipients left welfare for work under the 1996 law, most of these individuals were not faring well in the labor market. In 2007 the average median wage for those who left the rolls of public assistance was $8.50 an hour. Moreover, those individuals were unlikely to receive employer-provided healthcare coverage or paid sick and vacation leave. Approximately
52% of those who left welfare in 2007 had incomes below the poverty level. Many were poor because they were not working full time and year round, and many lacked appropriate education and skills training. Each year of schooling beyond high school increased wages by 7%. Thus, it was concluded that education credentials and skills rather than work experience appeared to be more important to increase earnings.

Martinson and Strawn (2010) continued that the more education women acquire the more they increased their earning potential. Data from the 2000 census show women with an associate’s degree earned twice as much as women without a high school diploma ($36,000 annually compared to $18,000 annually) and 37% higher than women with a high school diploma ($23,000 annually).

**State Data**

In the state welfare and supportive services 2010 Fact Book, the state wherein UCC is located reported that welfare recipients who began work during July 2008 through June 2010 earned an average hourly rate of $9.09 per hour and worked an average of 28 hours per week. This calculates to an average annual wage of just over $13,000, well below the state and federal poverty levels. The same publication narrates that the state welfare program “provides assistance to needy families so children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives, and provides work-eligible individuals with job preparation, work opportunities and support services to enable them to leave the program and become self-sufficient.” It is clear from the outcome statistics, however, that self-sufficiency is not possible given the average annual salary of $13,000 of its welfare-to-work participants.
In a personal interview conducted on February 15, 2012, the Family Service Supervisor of the state welfare department expressed frustration over the situation saying, “Welfare is a mess.” To meet the welfare work requirements, all of their departmental resources are used preparing and placing recipients for job placement while higher education is not considered. Vocational training efforts they have tried, specifically through a proprietary cosmetology school and a proprietary business school, have not worked out, as their graduates were not considered employable by reputable area employers. Community college training is generally not considered because time-intensive courses interfere with the participants’ work requirement. Wal-Mart stores represent the major employer of their welfare-to-work participants; and while Wal-Mart does pay slightly above minimum wage, almost all of their employees are part-time, working less than 30 hours per week with no insurance benefits. (R. Barnes, Family Service Supervisor, personal communication, February 15, 2012).

**UCC Data**

UCC is the only community college serving a county with a population of just under 2 million people (US Census Bureau, 2010). The same county is also home to a state college and a state-sponsored university, with the community college being the largest of the three educational institutions serving over 44,000 students in 2010. However, only half the total students at UCC attend full-time.

Fifty-one percent of UCC’s students are female, and the racial and ethnic mix of students at UCC approximately mirrors that of the county with 44% Caucasian, 25% Hispanic, 11% African-American, 10% Asian, 3% Native American, 2% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 1% multiethnic, and 4% unknown. (Facts in Brief pamphlet
Table 1 provides a detailed comparison of UCC’s demographic profile compared to its county population.

**TABLE 1. Gender and Ethnic Diversity of Student Population Compared to County Population, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UCC</th>
<th>County*</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>+1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian (Not Hispanic)</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino Origin</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>-4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>+0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>+1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>+1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiethnic (Two or more races)</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>-3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*County data from US Census Bureau QuickFacts, 2010.

According to the community college’s mission, vision, and values statements, it strives to maintain a student-focused environment within a diverse community, to promote student success through excellence in teaching and learning, and to create opportunities and change lives through access for students of all ages and backgrounds. As a comprehensive community college, UCC provides a wide variety of career programs and courses as well as transfer opportunities to four-year colleges. Over 80% of its student population receives financial aid.

Despite their efforts, though, UCC has a low retention rate, in that only 68% of the students who begin a semester actually complete the semester, and only about half of the students who complete one semester return for a second semester. Annually, UCC reports just over 2,000 graduates, which represents less than 1% of their total student population. UCC acknowledges their low retention and graduation rates, but claims to be comparable with other urban community colleges of their size and scope.
Re-Entry Program at UCC

According to UCC fliers, their re-entry program provides assistance to students facing significant barriers to education and/or employment. The mission of the re-entry program is to provide opportunities for eligible participants to improve their academic, employment, and personal skills to become self-sufficient UCC graduates. The primary emphasis of the re-entry program is the recruitment and completion of students in non-traditional career education and training programs and Career & Technical Education programs offered at UCC.

Services provided by the re-entry program include:
- Academic and career advising
- Career exploration
- Information about internships and volunteer opportunities
- Non-traditional career information for women and men
- Information about financial resources for college students
- Student development workshops
- Scholarships for tuition and books
- Assistance with uniforms and transportation
- Textbook loans

Eligibility for services through the re-entry program is based upon student financial need. Eligible students must apply for financial aid, declare a major (Associate Degree or certificate program), participate in required meetings, and maintain adequate progress in their educational program.

According to the UCC re-entry program director, the re-entry program is designed to give financially needy students a chance to obtain marketable skills that can be used to secure livable employment and to provide them with the assistance needed to ensure a smooth transition into the college environment. Through personal attention, specialized service, counseling and motivation, specially designed re-entry courses, and student success workshops, the program provides the participants with special preparation for a
successful academic experience and for a successful career. Students attend employability skill classes and workshops, receive assistance in résumé preparation and job interviewing skills, and attend UCC-sponsored and community-sponsored career fairs. (K. Wuest, ReEntry Program Director, personal communication, February 10, 2012)

Due to funding constraints, the UCC re-entry program is limited to 50 students per semester. Given the size of UCC’s student body and the fact that 80% of their 44,000 students receive financial aid, the re-entry program can reach only a miniscule proportion of needy students, much to the chagrin of the program director.

Study Participants

The six participants in this study were single mothers, ranging in ages from 21 to 50, all receiving public assistance through state welfare while pursuing higher education at UCC, and all were UCC re-entry program participants and successful graduates of UCC. Below is a brief demographic description of each participant. In order to facilitate the results of this study, fictitious names beginning with the letters A through F were assigned corresponding with their participant numbers.

1. Participant 1 “Ana” was interviewed on May 2 and 5, 2012.
2. Participant 2 “Barbara” was interviewed on May 14 and 15, 2012.
3. Participant 3 “Charlotte” was interviewed on May 26 and 27, 2012.
4. Participant 4 “Donna” was interviewed on May 30 and June 2, 2012.
5. Participant 5 “Ellen” was interviewed on June 3 and 5, 2012.
6. Participant 6 “Felicia” was interviewed on May 21 and 23, 2012.
Ana

Ana was a 50-year-old single mother of three male children at the time of her interview. Her eldest son, age 26, was no longer living at home. The two sons still living at home were 13 and 15 years of age. Ana’s ethnic/racial background is Hispanic, specifically, Mexican-American. Her socioeconomic background at the time of the study could be described as stable with full-time employment and total benefits. She was self-sufficient and a proud new homeowner. She graduated from high school in 1978 and entered the workforce in retail sales until she married and became a stay-at-home mother. She found herself in need of public assistance after she divorced her husband due to his alcohol addiction and abusiveness. She was “very upset” and “very frightened.” She drew upon all her strengths, remembering the confidence and satisfaction she felt as a young working woman, her passion for art, and the ever emerging computer technology she was learning from her children. While receiving welfare assistance, she completed her UCC education in May 2010 when she received an Associate of Arts degree in computer graphics, and she immediately secured employment in a “dream job” as a layout artist for a newspaper.

Barbara

Barbara, a 37-year-old Caucasian woman who never married, graduated from high school in 1989. She initially attended a community college but dropped out after her first semester due to “partying.” She was in an “on-again, off-again” relationship when her two children were born. They are now 14 and 12 years old. For the most part she supported herself and her children working as a waitress until her substance abuse rendered her unemployable. She “bottomed out” and eventually entered a lengthy
substance rehabilitation program. With successful recovery came a desire to improve herself and attain a better job than the food service job provided by the welfare-to-work program. She graduated from UCC in May 2010 with an Associate of Applied Science degree, passed her state licensing board examination, and is now a physical therapy assistant. She easily gained full-time employment with full benefits and is now self-sufficient.

Charlotte

Charlotte was about to turn 30 years old when she was interviewed. She is African-American and was raised by her single divorced mother and her grandmother in what she described as a “really close” family unit. While Charlotte was in high school, her mother became wheelchair bound due to multiple sclerosis, which “changed everything.” Charlotte stayed in high school but quit all her high school extracurricular activities to stay home and care for her mother. She did retain her high school sweetheart, though, and their child was born shortly after high school graduation. The baby’s father moved in with the family and a six-year tumultuous relationship ensued. When he left her, she felt like her “whole world was just crushed.” She was “depressed” for several years until she decided she could do much better for herself and her son. She became especially concerned over the declining nature of their neighborhood and decided she needed to “move up and out” for the sake of her son. She remembered her early high school ambition of being a nurse so she entered UCC and “made it happen.” She is now employed as a full-time nurse and has moved her extended family into a new neighborhood.
Donna

Donna, a 29-year-old Caucasian woman, dropped out of high school at age 17 when she was pregnant with her first child. Because the child’s father was African-American, she faced social stigma over having a “mixed” baby. She had been a marginal student anyway and her mother (a single divorced mother herself) didn’t prod her to go back to school. Donna loved staying home with her baby and had a second child two years later. She didn’t think much about her future until prodded by her welfare counselor when her TANF time limit was looming. She was able to remain on food stamps and medical assistance, but without the monthly welfare check, she and her mother could not meet expenses. She was sent to UCC for GED preparation and loved the college atmosphere. She obtained her GED, enrolled at UCC, and in three months’ time completed a Certificate of Achievement and became a Certified Nursing Assistant. Her current full-time wage of $10 per hour (including full benefits) is sufficient for now, as she continues to live with her mother. She hopes to continue her education someday to become an LPN or RN and become totally self-sufficient.

Ellen

Ellen, a Caucasian 28 year old, explained that she had been out on her own since before she turned 18. As the oldest of seven siblings living with their divorced mother, she had assumed more than her share of the household chores and responsibilities and grew “sick and tired of it.” In defiance, she became pregnant at age 17 and entered the social service system. She lived in homes for pregnant teenagers and young mothers and later in half-way houses. Living with “mentally disturbed” individuals in the half-way houses and lacking the basic freedoms of independent living, she was easily enticed to
move in with a male acquaintance, which resulted in two more children over the span of a five-year abusive live-in relationship. When she “finally woke up” at age 24, she was ready to “really turn (her) life around.” On welfare assistance and with social service guidance, she entered a two-year vocational program for women in nontraditional careers. In three years she completed an Associate of Applied Science degree in air conditioning technology and is now gainfully employed as an H-VAC technician and is living and raising her children on her own.

**Felicia**

Felicia, the youngest of the six participants, was 21 years old at the time of her interview. She became a single mother at age 17 to her now 4-year-old son. She is African-American. Upon high school completion she depended on welfare to support her and her young son, but she had always had a strong desire to become a teacher. She had been a good student all along and had strong encouragement from her family to enter UCC. She graduated from UCC in May 2010 with an A.A. degree in early childhood education and has been employed ever since at a corporate child care center. She is still living with her parents but proudly contributes to the household finances. She hopes to return to school soon to pursue a four-year teaching degree.

**Emergent Themes**

The women in these case studies faced numerous perceived and real barriers. However, at the time of their enrollment in UCC, they were not conscious of the factors that would ultimately enable them to overcome these barriers to their success. Enabling factors and barriers that had an influence in the participants’ lives were identified in each of the four stages of the Successive Stages Model (SSM). During the participant
interviews, three emerging themes emerged: choices, support, and systems. These themes became the basis for analysis of all the data collected. Of course, some overlap was evident, as these themes were not independent of one another. The themes are ultimately reported within the context of the following research questions:

1. What are the major influences and motivations in the lives of single mothers receiving public assistance that led to their success in completing their higher education and/or training?

2. What are the characteristics of the community college re-entry program that helped lead to the educational success of these women?

**Choices/Decision Making**

Every individual’s life is full of choices. Some are good and some are poor, some are simple, and some are life changing. At times these choices significantly change the life of an individual. For example, Lance Armstrong, the five-time Tour de France winner and cancer survivor, clearly described a time when he made one of the most significant choices in his life:

> That ascent triggered something in me. As I churned upward, I reflected on my life, back to all points, my childhood, my early races, my illness, and how it changed me. Maybe it was the primitive act of climbing that made me confront the issues I’d been evading for weeks. It was time to quit stalling, I realized. Move, I told myself. (Armstrong, 2000, p. 202)

Choices or decision making is a theme that appears to flow through all six participant’s lives. A few of the more salient choices of the participants are presented here:

> A lot of things that I went through...those kinds of things were because of the way I was raised. I was very—that first time I went to college—I was so rebellious. I did all kinds of things that I...maybe not regret, but I would do differently... I think we should be born old and grow young...At least we would do the right thing [Barbara]
Barbara entered UCC immediately upon completing high school, because her best friend was going there and they thought it would be a lot of fun together. “Decisions we make, make such a difference.” Going to college brought a lot of freedom they hadn’t experienced in high school. “That first semester seemed wasted,” so Barbara decided not to return to UCC and joined the workforce to “be independent…I didn’t think I’d ever go back; I never thought about it…not until the situation I was in.” The decision to drop out of community college and go to work did not give Barbara the productive self-sufficiency that she so desired. Substance abuse further complicated her life to the point of feeling “there was no way out.”

Poor choices also affected Felicia’s life during her teenage years. Earlier in school she had excelled academically. “I was always on honor roll and distinguished honor roll in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. I did really well in junior high school.” Social and peer acceptance began to be very important during these years to Felicia. She stated that she began to be very conscious of her weight and did not want to be thought of by her peers as “a brain.”

I think that’s when I started backing off. I don’t think it had to do with boys, just maybe being accepted in general by my peers… ‘Cause I’d gotten this reputation as being a brain in junior high, ‘cause I was. And then by the time high school came, it wasn’t cool to be a brain—not cool at all. I had a few close friends, and those few close friends weren’t. I guess I wanted to fit in with them or something. I think… I wanted to be more popular, or so I thought. You did that by not acting like a brain.

Another challenge for Felicia in those high school years was the clique atmosphere of the high school environment.

Depending on what activities you were involved in, that was the group or the clique of friends with which you ran. So if you were not in specific activities, often times you felt left out. If you weren’t, you would get lost—especially with a thousand kids in your class. I didn’t feel school was a waste of time…I wanted to get on with it. I was through with this high school, and there’s a lot of kids that were very disgruntled and discouraged with their experience because of the cliquishness of it.
Peer relationships were obviously very important to Felicia through these years, even if it meant allowing her studies and grades to drop in order to be accepted. The need to be understood and accepted by her peers seemed to have been very strong for Felicia during her high school years. In the SSM, Stage 1 (developmental background), teenagers and young adults often encounter the barriers of poor choices due to peer influences.

Both Felicia and Donna became pregnant at age 17. Donna’s realization of her predicament and the need to tell her mother was evident in the following comment:

This was a very touchy subject. I didn’t know what to do for a long time. I had my friends take me to, um, Planned Parenthood and take me to Welfare and try to get Medicaid so that I didn’t have to use my mom’s insurance. I didn’t know what to tell her. I felt so ashamed inside, like, I can’t even believe I did this to my mom…. Welfare mailed something to my house, and my mom opened it and found out. I told my mom that this is not going to be your responsibility. I’m taking responsibility for it….I think she was upset at first….She was adamant about me doing it on my own—you know, taking care of my own child that I created for myself; and I told her, “you have nothing to worry about…”

Ana’s poor decision involved her staying with her abusive alcoholic husband for 23 years. She stated, “There was a couple of times I was so depressed…in fact, one time I found myself with a razor blade in my hand, ready to do it.” She continued:

But thinking of my boys made me stop, because I didn’t want them to be raised by him. I don’t think I would have tried to use the [welfare] program, uh, if my husband hadn’t been alcoholic, but then I would have never finished my education…not unless I was in the situation where I needed it…. And I may have had to go through a lot of hard times, but it started me towards getting on the right path.

Ana made some very difficult decisions during this time in her life. She chose to leave her abusive alcohol-addicted husband and the isolation that was occurring in the relationship. Ana often stated throughout her interview that she was responsible for the situation in which she found herself due to the decisions that she had made throughout her life. The decision that she made to return to school and procure a higher education became a decision that positively changed her life. She stated:
I think it was when I started to become involved in school with other people, that I started getting this outlook that being negative won’t help me at all—it won’t help at all. You have to talk positive; you have to look at everything as a positive, and what you’re going to learn from this, and work off of it…. It has taken a lot, though…. I didn’t have much support until I came to [UCC], to school here. Before then it was more or less… I think just knowing that my kids—I could not let them be left with him. Because the only way I was going to get through it all was going back to school.

Charlotte’s decision to stay home after high school graduation and care for her disabled mother seemed “necessary” at the time: “It was so difficult—it was truly difficult. You know, I would have gone to nursing school if I hadn’t had my mom at that point.” Staying home also came with loneliness. “I saw a lot of my friends that I had in [high] school just kind of disappear.” Charlotte “clung on to” her boyfriend [Trevor], as he was “all I had” outside her mother and grandmother.

I tried so hard to be happy…. We had our baby… and I was always trying to keep [Trevor] involved. But I was gettin’ tired, and I’m like, “This is your child, and you have to make the effort yourself.” He didn’t want to be around the house much… but I didn’t want to let him go either. All we did was fight about it.

When Charlotte’s boyfriend ended their relationship and moved out, she eventually got over her “depression” and, like Ana, realized that he had been holding her back:

And I wasn’t going to be one of those [depressed] people. I have goals, and if I want to do something, I’m going to get there, and there’s nothing that’s going to get in my way… whereas other people would be like, “This is too much…I can’t handle this.”

Charlotte talked to her welfare case worker about her desire ever since high school to enter nursing school, and she was sent to the UCC re-entry program for vocational interest testing. She proved to have a tremendous work ethic and completed her associate nursing degree in four years.

In stage 3 of the SSM, women implement and adapt to the learned workplace culture. Felicia appeared to model that behavior by obtaining experiences that enabled her to develop into a skilled child care employee. She said beginning her very first job
after graduating from UCC was very stressful, but not as much as it was before when she did not have a job: “A lot of stuff has changed. And when I entered there, I thought I could never change those bad habits that I had…. It’s working!” At the time of her interview, Felicia was making the choices to make positive changes in her life. She stated:

I don’t know—I thought I was going to give up a whole bunch of times, but I haven’t yet, so why should I now, just looking over everything that I have been through….I think once I got that job, that’s when I knew everything was going to be okay….Once I got that, I mean, there’s nothing in my way now. Even if I don’t go back to school [for my bachelor’s degree] right away like I want to, I’m still in a good place….I’ll be able to get my whole life situated—everything will work out.

**Support: Family and External**

The participants stated many times that they would not be productive and self-sufficient today if it were not for the support they received from both family and external sources. Noddings (1984) stated that human beings want to care and to be cared for: “Caring is important in itself” (p. 7). The theme of caring support flowed through the lives all the participants from family members, teachers, counselors, and community organizations. Noddings best described this support in the following statement:

> When we see the other’s reality as a possibility for us, we must act to eliminate the intolerable, to reduce the pain, to fill the need, to actualize the dream. When I am in this sort of relationship with another, when the other’s reality becomes a real possibility for me, I care. (p. 14)

Ana, who grew up bilingual, benefited from having loving, caring parents. Even though neither of her parents completed high school, they were active in helping her with homework, school projects, and subjects such as math. She was not allowed to have any other activities until her homework was completed:

> I couldn’t go out to play, couldn’t watch TV—it had to be all done…. I remember having to do reports, you know, like papers and stuff, and my mom wouldn’t let me on the weekends go out to play until I had that report done. I’d be sitting there watching the kids play outside and I couldn’t go until I had it done. Their rules
about school were very strict. They expected straight A’s every year…. I remember coming home with all A’s and one B and my mom said, “Well, this is really good, but I know you can get that B to an A.” That’s how it was in my house.

Ana felt that her parents’ encouragement for her to get through high school was strong but was always demonstrated in a positive manner. “There was no doubt that I was going to graduate from high school.” She recalled that graduating from high school was very important to her parents, but especially her mother, who regretted not completing high school. The support of her family appeared to have helped her throughout her life, as she continued by sharing:

I think that a lot of the way they raised me has helped me go through a lot of what I’ve been through. I didn’t think I was such a strong person, ever—it surprised me a lot… that I had the perseverance to do what I did…. I’ve never been on my own; I always thought that I needed somebody to take care of me, but I didn’t know whether I had it. Because I never had the opportunity of—I shouldn’t say opportunity, let’s say—I was never in a situation where I had to find out. Luckily, I was old enough that I could handle it.

In recalling her developmental years, Barbara emphasized the support she received from her family, especially her mother. Her mother always encouraged her children with their school work. Barbara stated that completing high school was “always assumed, not really an issue…. We all graduated, and there was just not any problem there…. It was just something we did. I mean there was no question about it.” Generally speaking, during Barbara’s early developmental years, the support from her family was loving, caring, and strong. Activities such as reading were important. Both her parents read to Barbara before she had developed her reading skills:

I have fond memories of dad reading to us the comics every Sunday. Yeah, we have good memories of that, and he was very animated, and he would tell a lot of stories, and then mom and I also read together.

There were always reading materials in the home as Barbara grew up, such as literary classics and encyclopedias. She recalled that her parents were “avid readers.” Doing homework was always encouraged by both parents and something that she wanted to do,
“because I wanted to do my best.” She does not ever remember having to be pushed to do homework. Barbara’s early and middle childhood years appeared to be very stable and loving.

The developmental background for Ellen was quite different from the other study participants. Ellen lived with her mother and six younger siblings after her parents’ divorce, and she visited her father approximately every other weekend; however, as she grew older, she stopped because he was very abusive. She stated, “My mom was always there to defend us. She would take a lot of the beatings, or at least half of them.” The home life during these developmental years was, at best, quite difficult for Ellen. The relationship she had with her mother was one of support, trust, and love and was a very important enabling factor during this time. She stated, “My mom has always been there for me, even at times when I disobeyed the rules.”

Ellen’s relationship with her father depended on “if he was having a good day or not.” She seldom remembered “hearing him say ‘I love you.’” Her role with her brothers seemed to be that of a “parental big sister.” She helped dress them each morning, walked them to school each day, and helped them with chores and homework.

Ellen always tried to complete her homework before everyone came home, because after that it was very hectic. She remembered her home life as hectic, full of commotion, and stated, “It is really painful to remember that stuff.” She was very specific in her accounts of the abuse she, her sister, and her mother received at the hands of her father. She hated it, and stated, “It’s hard to see my brothers so young, like, freaking out, ‘cause my dad’s going after my mom. I knew this was not the way you’re supposed to handle situations…my friends’ parents didn’t act like that.”
All of the participants spoke of how instrumental their mothers’ support was to their success. When asked whether she had any specific role models at this time, Barbara quickly answered, “My mother.” She stated that her mother was someone to whom she could always look up to throughout her life and someone in whom she could always confide. “You know, she was supportive of whatever I wanted to do.” She continued:

When I lost my job [as a waitress]...I thought this one good job would come up, and then they wanted to pay me ten dollars an hour. I thought, “Oh, my goodness, how can I make ends meet, me and my kids?” Uh, their father was into drugs and just partying and not paying child support and I couldn’t rely on, you know, any money from him. So I thought, “Well, I’ve always wanted to go into healthcare—maybe this is my opportunity.” And the only way I could do it though, would be moving back in with my mother, which I didn’t want to do at the time, but it was kind of the only way. And I went and talked to her, and she just basically opened her arms and said, “Oh, yes, please.” She’s so sweet...and I’m so fortunate in having that support. I don’t think all girls—people in my situation did. I always had good family support.

Barbara stated several times that her situation was much better than most young women in the same situation but that it was still “nothing short of difficult.”

Ellen stated:

My mom was by my side the whole time, but never pushed.... She was my strength; she was there next to me, like, “You can do this ... you’re going to do this.” I mean, I always wanted to graduate school, and I always wanted to go to college and stuff;

but if I did not have that positive reinforcement from her, there’s probably a good chance I wouldn’t have gone as far as I am now.

In addition to family support, all of the participants received external support from teachers and school counselors. Felicia described her favorite teacher as the history and social studies teacher who had taught on U.S. Army bases throughout Europe and seemed to make history “come alive” for the students. She felt that her passion for teaching today stems from those high school experiences with that teacher. She remembered always being encouraged by teachers and school counselors and knew that they thought she was intelligent. Even in high school, she thought she wanted to be a teacher. Felicia’s positive memories of these school years may have been a contributing
factor in laying the foundation for the success she has had in the completion of her schooling at this time in her life.

For Ellen, the elementary years brought with them memories of support by many friends, very good grades, mentor teachers, and being awarded the Presidential Academic Award at school. Ellen’s successes at school during this time and her responsibilities at home seemed to be supported by her perseverance, as seen in how her personality strengths of competence and knowledge of method emerged as an adult after she realized the dire consequences of her poor choices.

While at UCC, Ana received not only support from the program advisors and counselors within the Re-entry program but also from instructors. She related:

I got my first IT job when I was going for my computer classes. One of the instructors said the new media center needs an intern…and would I be interested. Then I could get work experience…and that’s how I started out—as an intern. I didn’t get paid, like for, I’d say, for the first year, and then they got a grant and they were able to pay me…. Then TANF kicked in too, and they started paying me to stay there…. That was piddly, not even seven dollars an hour.

The Center for Women Policy Studies (2002) stated that welfare counselors can ease their TANF students’ work, family, and school balancing act by offering them opportunities for on-campus internships, employment, and work-study that can fulfill TANF work requirements.

Donna related similarly that her confidence level increased as she continued in the UCC nursing assistant program. She said that when she was offered a full-time position at the skilled nursing facility where she had completed her UCC clinical externship, she really started to believe in herself and in her abilities. She said, “That probably doesn’t make sense, but before I got that job offer, I didn’t think I was going to make it as a CNA. But my clinical instructor never gave up on me and kept making sure I understood everything and could do everything we were taught.” Since Donna has been at that job as
a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), she explained that she has asked for “more work, more important work, and more challenges.” Her first and second reviews at work were very good. She recounted with a sense of empowerment:

I was so uptight for my first review—gosh, I was freaking out. When it was over, it made me feel so good. I got a copy of it and was telling everybody… “Look at all the stuff my boss noticed that I did.”

Now Donna hopes to return to school for either an LPN or RN degree, and she says she will never forget how her clinical instructor believed in her and mentored her.

**Systems: Educational and Welfare**

All of the participants of this study were involved with various systems—some that were quite successful and some that appeared to have failed them. Hernandez (2007) stated that learning is a building process that requires stacking one set of principles upon another in order to maintain and develop future learning capabilities. A solid educational foundation helps ensure that the process moves smoothly. Its absence makes it difficult for further learning to be realized. He continued, “Education provides a path towards upward mobility for members of the poor and ethnic minorities” (p. 8).

For Ana, the elementary, middle, and high school systems were effective; the counseling and guidance were appropriate for her needs at the time (30 years ago). She recounted:

I really enjoyed high school, from ninth grade on. I was always in the plays. Um, I was involved in the student body, I was prom chairman; I was class secretary for two years and on the year book. I was really involved in the school, ‘cause it gave me an out, you know. I got to do a lot of things that I couldn’t have done otherwise.

On the other hand, Barbara and Ellen did not feel that the high school system properly prepared them for college or for a career. Felicia explained that there were over a thousand students in her graduating class and that she was fortunate to see a counselor
once a year. She recommended, “Perhaps less population, less student population, much smaller…that way I would not feel so much like a number in a sea of numbers.”

For Donna, there were no teachers or counselors that stood out in her memory. She didn’t recall ever receiving any encouragement to improve her marginal performance. In fact, she did not recall ever seeing a counselor for any guidance in high school. Her first positive experience in an educational setting was when her welfare case worker sent her to UCC for GED classes. The GED instructor advised her to go to the re-entry program for assistance. There she met with a counselor, discussed her future vocational prospects, and enrolled in their career exploration program. The re-entry counselor was instrumental in encouraging her to enter the UCC nursing assistant certificate program.

According to Stage 2 of the SSM, women must have information and an awareness of how to access available resources and programs. This information can come from multiple sources. For Donna, resources information came from her welfare case worker, GED instructor, and re-entry counselor. All these mentors gave her accurate information and were enthusiastic and supportive—factors that can have an essential impact on a woman’s entrance into a program.

During Ellen’s first semester taking classes at UCC, she lost her residence and she and her son found themselves homeless. This was a very emotionally difficult time for Ellen, as she had recently completed a lengthy drug rehabilitation program and was still battling the temptations associated with addiction recovery. It was very difficult for her to concentrate on her studies. Per Ellen’s re-entry program file, her advisor suggested that she drop all her classes at that time and concentrate on finding a place to live. Ellen
was assured that the program would recall her in a couple of months to develop a new plan with her. The advisor also suggested temporary shelters until Ellen could find more stable housing for herself and her son. Stage 2 of the SSM illustrated that this support and knowledge of access to the program by the advisor was an essential enabling factor for Ellen at that time in her life.

The counselors in the re-entry program were very helpful from the beginning according to Ellen. “If you had a problem with Social Services, the counselors were there to help you solve it. They call the worker and talk to them for you.” They helped her with child care, textbooks, school supplies, applying for financial aid, bus passes and gas vouchers when she rode in a car to school. The importance of this support was stressed by the National Partnership for Women and Families (1998), which explained that learning more about these barriers is the first step toward developing serious strategies to help welfare recipients successfully enter and remain in the workforce. Counseling was also provided to develop a student education plan (SEP) and long-term plans for Ellen’s education (student files, re-entry program). Ellen stated that the re-entry program counselors’ support was essential to her success at UCC.

When Ana made the decision to begin school at UCC, she unfortunately did not have knowledge of the resources available to her. She found the hardest thing in the beginning was getting started. She stated, “The word ‘desperation’ comes to mind…. There’s many a times when I’d say, ‘What am I doing here… and is this really going to pay off like I think it will?’ And it did!”

Ana navigated the admissions system and applied for financial aid on her own and was first introduced to the re-entry program after she had started classes and was juggling
her time between her part-time welfare-to-work job, her classes and studying, and her children. She was forced to take days off from school to attend welfare-to-work orientation classes that she did not need to continue her aid. When she complained about having to miss classes, she was told, “What’s more important, your school or your aid?’’ Instead of trying to understand her individual situation, she said she was “treated like a number.” Ana continued:

Women who have been in these kinds of situations are seen as being dumb—no motivation, no nothing—just didn’t want to go any further than they are. The majority of us, we don’t want to be in this situation, needing a hand-out all the time. And I hope that people will understand that we’re—a lot of us are very glad…we just needed that one little chance.

It was during her second semester of taking classes at UCC when Ana had her first encounter with the re-entry program. She was offered an internship position in the UCC media center by one of her instructors, and the internship was coordinated by the re-entry program. The re-entry counselor worked with Ana’s welfare case worker to allow the internship hours to replace her welfare-to-work job while still maintaining her eligibility for TANF. The re-entry counselors also supported Ana in meeting many of her other needs, such as helping with the cost of textbooks, school supplies, transportation, and emergency money when needed. “That’s why [UCC] is very unique. I mean, whoever goes to school there is very fortunate, there’s so much help there.” Ana continued:

The community college has given me a foundation for what I’m doing now, and my family. … They’ve been nothing but supportive the whole way. They’ve become—a couple of them, like good friends. They’re still there for me; I can still talk to them and get their advice…. You don’t go off into oblivion when you’re done with the program.
Ana expressed that her self-esteem and self-respect increased as her competencies, achievements, independence, recognition, acceptance, and freedom increased:

I think the recognition from people and how I was able to…especially after I started working full-time, I applied for being on different committees and things and I was never turned down. So I think I’ve been chosen because of my perseverance, maybe my smarts, I hope well-roundness, and I can talk…. I think that I built up my character a lot more by going to school…being able to get on the phone, and you can talk to someone who’s telling you one thing, and you know that’s not right. It’s saying, “Hey, this is not right,”…standing up and arguing my point.

The feeling after I graduated was the feeling of empowerment that I had control over my life, finally. And that whatever came about was my own making now….

I’d finally gotten to where I felt comfortable and safe and independent…. That’s really hard for someone that’s never had it, never, ever!

Empowering women through postsecondary education has far reaching benefits, not all of which are financial, according to the Center for Women Policy Studies (2006). Several studies during the past decade found that not only did postsecondary education increase women’s income and job security, but it also improved their self-esteem, gave them greater self-confidence, increased their children’s educational ambitions, enriched their personal and family lives, and improved their parenting skills.

When Barbara found herself unemployed and with the unemployment compensation running out, she started receiving public assistance. Never had she thought of herself as someone who would need to receive public assistance, but she found herself in a situation of having “no choice.”

I got to the point in my life where, my goodness, you know, I’m going to be homeless if I don’t do something. I was helpless, I had no choice—what else was I going to do, live on ten dollars an hour?

She continued:

I had no other choices. Because of the choices I made in the past, this is where I have to be right now. It’s only temporary; it’s only for a short while. I have to go through this garbage in order to get where I want to be, and it was very embarrassing for me—it really was.
The situation in which Barbara found herself did not seem congruent with the environment in which she had been raised. Perhaps this factor led to the feelings of helplessness and embarrassment.

In both the early stages and middle stages of the program, Barbara found it very difficult to juggle all the aspects of her life: being a mother, a full-time student, and meeting the work requirements of the TANF program. One of the most difficult times was during the holiday breaks from school when she needed to replace school hours with more work hours. She stated, “How are you going to find temporary work for two or three weeks?”

Again, in the middle and completing stage (Stage 3) of the SSM model, one of the enabling factors in overcoming such barriers is strategic mentoring. The re-entry counselors were instrumental in giving guidance to Barbara by offering hours of classes that could be taken during the interim period to enable her to meet the time requirements. Barbara stated:

> The requirements were kind of ridiculous…they’re not, uh, real feasible. They’re not realistic. Here you are putting all these demands on a single mother…who’s having enough problems. Now she’s got to go out and fulfill all these hours. What do you think her kids are doing? You know, where are they, who is watching them?

Barbara felt strongly that the emphasis of the law, to put welfare recipients to work more rapidly, was a distinct disadvantage for the single mother. She asserted, “I don’t know how you can develop a job into a career without continuing your education.”

Martinson and Strawn (2002) suggested making it easier for TANF recipients to balance work, family, and school by keeping the overall required hours of the participants at a reasonable level. They believed that the more hours postsecondary students work, the larger the negative impact it has on their grades and ability to stay in school.
Being a recipient in the TANF program also meant that each participant had to deal with the social service system. When asked about the support given to her from Social Services, Charlotte stated an emphatic, “Nothing, nothing!” There was especially no support or encouragement given to her to continue her higher education. “When I was able to say, take me off, it was a great feeling. I think it was a great turning point, too, especially in my morale.” She continued:

I’m really sad that the system works the way it does, where we’re at the mercy of a government bureaucracy, that doesn’t take the time to come to see what’s going on or talk to us about what we’re doing, how much time we’re spending in school, and that we do not want to be on aid… It’s sad that they don’t know—they just assume—I think that if they saw that—that the majority of us do not want to be in this situation, maybe they would help and have more support for us.

There is never a call to show us support, never, never, never. Just, “Are you ready to go in and reapply, and don’t bring your kids.” Well, my gosh, what are you going to do with them?

And the way they treat us, they don’t treat us as human beings—there’s no politeness, no manners, no nothing. “Just go in there and sit down, we’ll call you, a worker will call you.” And you sit for hours and hours, like your time is not worth a nickel….

They treat us like criminals.

Many of these types of obstacles had to be overcome by all six participants in order for them to reach their goals. The drive to overcome challenges and obstacles in the pursuit of her goals appeared to be the strongest for Charlotte. She had not only set goals for herself but had also assumed personal responsibility for reaching those goals. Feedback about her performance was important to her, along with receiving personal credit for her efforts.

Felicia also assumed personal responsibility for reaching her goals, although she asserted that the UCC re-entry program was instrumental in her success in becoming productive and self-sufficient. When asked to discuss the support of the Social Services Department, she stated:
If I didn’t get in there myself, I’d probably be stuck working a nothing job and not doing what I wanted to do. They’re not out for education. That’s why the re-entry counselors are out talking to them, telling them how important education is, proving to them that it works…so it gets people to be off the system for good. My boyfriend’s sister—they didn’t send her to school, they sent her to work. She works, loses that job after a year, ends up back in the same spot…. Tell me, what is that going to do for someone? They don’t help people…. They get lost! They only see people in and out; they aren’t really there to help people. They are like robots or machines doing the same exact thing every day, so they don’t help…. Many people have been given the wrong information. I help them; if their workers won’t, then I will.

Barbara responded similarly: “Well you know they don’t do much. You go in once a year and fill out the paperwork. They make it more difficult than anything else.”

She stated that the emphasis by the social worker is to get a job, not to continue one’s education. She continued, “It’s probably because they don’t become involved personally. I got a social worker change, it seemed like once a month. And if the worker decides you are not meeting the specific qualifications, then you are pulled in.” This happened to Barbara when she was in the clinical externship part of her education. The UCC re-entry program counselors assisted her in solving the problem, and their help continued until she had completed the physical therapy assistant program. She stated, “The relationship I had with the counselors was very positive and supportive.”

Summary

The findings of this study were reported within the contents of three major themes that flowed throughout the framework: Choices/Decision Making, Support, and Systems. Poor choices made by each of the participants were critical to the outcomes that led them into the rolls of public assistance. Family support (especially that of the participant’s mothers), schools, teachers, and counselors were all significant influences in their lives. The UCC re-entry program implemented various strategies that facilitated the success of these participants. Such strategies included (a) subsidized on-campus child care, (b)
financial assistance for textbooks and transportation, (c) linking participants with job training programs and internships, (d) working with community-based organizations, (e) counseling participants on program access, and (f) providing strategic mentoring. These campus-based supportive services were reported by all the participants to be especially important enabling factors to their successful completion of their higher educational program.

Various barriers and enabling factors were identified for each participant and are presented in the next chapter, Chapter 5, within the study’s conceptual framework of Shaw’s (2001) Successive Stages Model. The next chapter contains study conclusions, discussion relating the study results to the current literature, implications for theory and practice, reflections, and recommendations.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

This final chapter serves to summarize this study, present the conclusions drawn in response to the research questions, and discuss implications for theory and practice. The limitations of this study and recommendations for further research are included as well as the researcher’s reflections.

Overview of the Study

This research study consisted of in-depth case studies examining the lives of six single mothers who participated in the re-entry program at UCC and who successfully completed higher education or training while receiving public assistance. The purpose of this study was to identify what factors contributed to their success in order to determine how they were able to procure higher education and training while receiving public assistance. Based on this purpose, two research questions were developed to gain insight into the internal and external influences that led to the women’s productivity and self-sufficiency. Answers to this study’s research questions are discussed in this chapter.

A review of the related literature was presented in Chapter 2. The review included the evolution of historical and current systems developed by our society to meet the challenges of the transition of socioeconomically disadvantaged populations to self-sufficiency. Critical feminist constructivist theory was explained as the umbrella theory informing this study. Thus, a feminist gender lens was applied to situate this study in an overall context beneficial to women and helping uncover common misperceptions assigned to single mother welfare recipients as well as social policy injustices rendered upon women within the federal welfare program. A conceptual framework for this study
evolved from Shaw’s (2001) Successive Stages Model (SSM). An adaptation of the SSM framework that suited the specific case studies in this research was used.

Chapter 3 contained an explanation of the research method and procedures. The study consisted of six descriptive case studies from successful graduates of the re-entry program at Urban Community College (UCC).

The findings of the study were reported in Chapter 4 as a summary of the salient data gleaned through participant interviews, the review of the literature, and document analysis. They were reported within the subject area themes that emerged as a result of the research: choices/decision making, support, and systems. In this chapter, the findings are further positioned within the four stages of the SSM conceptual framework and discussed in relation to the critical feminist constructivist perspective that served as the overarching theoretical basis for this study.

**Answers to the Research Questions**

Relative to the first research question posed in this study, the conclusions are:

1. *What were the major influences and motivation in the lives of single mothers receiving public assistance that led to their success in completing their higher education and/or training?*

   Poor decisions made by each of the participants were critical to the outcomes that led them onto the rolls of public assistance. Several times throughout the interviews, the participants stated that they found themselves in the situations they were in due to poor choices they had made in their lives. In time, however, all the participants were able to make good decisions to compensate for their previous poor choices. The decision to pursue higher education or training was definitely viewed by each of the women as a
positive turning point in their life. The major influences and motivations that helped lead
to the participant’s successful educational completion are presented here within the
conceptual framework of the four stages of the SSM.

**Developmental Stage**

Stage 1 of the SSM represented the participants’ developmental background, and
enabling factors and influences were identified in this stage for all six women. A very
positive attitude toward school and education was evident within the elementary and high
school backgrounds for five of the six participants. While Donna was a marginal student
and dropped out of high school, she encountered a very supportive GED instructor at
UCC who encouraged her to pursue a vocational certificate. Thus, all six participants
reported at least one supportive teacher who provided guidance and encouragement.
They all entered their UCC program with positive attitudes toward higher education,
which helped contribute to their successful educational outcomes.

Within their childhood homes, at least one parent was caring and gave love,
guidance, and support. Ellen was from a home with an abusive father, but her mother
provided the much needed love and support throughout her life. She stated:

> I think my dad’s negativity that I grew up with…I’m like, stronger because of it. I
> won’t put up with anyone messing with me. My mom’s, on the other hand, positivity,
> and her, like, loving and caring for me and being my strength through a lot of stuff…
> without her I wouldn’t be who I am.

The mothers of each participant were very involved in their lives, especially during early
childhood and elementary years.

Outside their homes, the neighborhoods in which the participants grew up ranged
from Charlotte’s declining neighborhood to Ana’s pleasant and safe neighborhood that
served as an extended family. While Ana’s developmental background, which included
powerful family and extended family support, definitely provided motivation for Ana’s success later in life, Charlotte was also strongly motivated by her intense desire to leave her declining neighborhood for the sake of her son.

**Programmatic Stage**

While the barriers to entering a higher educational program (Stage 2 of the SSM) were numerous for all the participants, the enabling factors were equally numerous and strong. Their financial and sustenance needs were at least minimally met through the state welfare programs including TANF, food stamps, and medical assistance. Four of the participants (Barbara, Donna, Charlotte, and Felicia) lived with their mothers or parents while attending UCC, which helped make ends meet financially.

All of the participants, except for Ana, were introduced to the UCC re-entry program before entering UCC. The guidance and assistance they received from the re-entry program counselors was definitely instrumental in their educational success. They cited help with applying for financial aid, textbook acquisition assistance, city bus passes, and subsidized campus childcare among the most helpful services provided by the re-entry program. Academic and career advising workshops provided by the re-entry program were also cited as beneficial. Ana’s first encounter with the re-entry program occurred during her second semester at UCC when she was offered a paid internship by one of her instructors, and the re-entry program coordinated that internship. Ana then wished she had known about the re-entry program when she had first entered UCC, as she had found it very difficult and encumbering to have navigated the admission and financial aid processes on her own without assistance.
All of the participants fondly expressed gratitude to more than one UCC staff member or instructor who encouraged them and helped them through difficult times during their college experience. For Ana, it was her IT instructor who offered her a paid internship and the re-entry program counselor who tirelessly worked with the welfare caseworker to get approval for Ana’s internship hours to be counted toward her required work hours. For Barbara, it was the strategic mentoring from her re-entry program counselors who helped her schedule school hours around her required work hours and helped her get more credit for her school hours, especially her clinical externship hours. For Donna it was her GED instructor at UCC who referred her to the re-entry program and her CNA clinical instructor who prodded her in her studies and spent extra time with her to assure she had learned the material. For Ellen it was the re-entry counselors who guided her through her period of homelessness and provided much needed moral support. For both Charlotte and Felicia it was the individualized attention, help, and encouragement received from their re-entry program counselors.

**Middle and Completion Stage**

The enabling factors that allowed the participants to persevere through to graduation are much the same as those enumerated above in the programmatic stage. The participants were still receiving needed sustenance assistance from welfare and work, tuition assistance through financial aid, subsidized child care, textbook, and transportation through the re-entry program, and moral support and encouragement from family, instructors, and re-entry counselors. It was at this stage, though, when participants reported the emergence of personal feelings of confidence and empowerment. The emerging feelings of confidence came as result of the academic
accomplishments they achieved despite the numerous and continuing obstacles, and they felt proud of their stamina and endurance.

At this stage, the participants cited the nearing of the prize—graduation—as their motivator, along with their hopes and dreams of a better life for themselves and especially for their children. Charlotte was growing especially concerned about raising her son in their declining neighborhood:

I worried about [Malcom] hanging with the wrong crowd. That’s why I constantly tried to stay with him. I didn’t want him seeing so many kids getting killed and selling drugs and in gangs and everything.

Charlotte said she thought about her son and her need to move him out of their neighborhood whenever she felt overwhelmed in school and felt like giving up.

Felicia expressed her newfound confidence and self-esteem like this:

I feel like education has made me mature and it’s made me more knowledgeable about people and things. Plus, education has helped me to accept myself better. I don’t have to sit back and worry about all those stereotypes. I don’t even think about it anymore.

When I used to walk down the street in high school and I was pregnant, I used to think, “What do they think about me? A Black teenager, pregnant—what’s she doing with her life?” I don’t even think about those things anymore.

For all the participants, as their social needs were being met by the re-entry program counselors and their friends and classmates at college, their self-esteem was allowed to emerge and fully develop, probably for the first time in their adulthood.

Leadership and Advocacy Stage

Graduating and passing licensing exams brought tears of joy for these women and their families, but the true sense of accomplishment came with the attainment of their first “real” or professional job. Four of the six participants are now living on their own with their children. In addition to being proud of her self-sufficiency, Ana related:

I’m proud of the fact that I’m a single parent…. I did all the parenting when I was married. The only difference I see is that it’s harder to be married than it is to be single. I think single parenting is easier than having to compromise not only my relationship with my children but also maintain a relationship with a spouse, and keep that all going
in some equilibrium. Being a single parent I get to make all the decisions. I don’t have to worry about asking anybody if it’s okay, or listening to somebody else’s decisions…. I do everything; I like that feeling of being able to do everything on my own.

Ana has definitely moved even beyond her own self-esteem needs into the highest level of self-actualization. The fact that Ana now volunteers her time to speak to current re-entry program students and tutor current students is definite proof of her successful achievement within the SSM leadership and advocacy stage.

Donna continues to live with her mother, as her wage as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) is not sufficient for her to live on her own. She is now, however, very cognizant of her future and has lofty goals of continuing her education to become a nurse and ultimately becoming self-sufficient. Felicia likewise continues to live with her parents while she otherwise supports herself and her 4-year-old son. Her position as a preschool teacher is perfect for now, because her son is afforded complimentary attendance at the preschool which alleviates all childcare concerns. When her son enters school full-time, Felicia plans to return to college for her bachelor’s degree in elementary education and then gain self-sufficiency.

The enabling factors that permitted the study participants to succeed in completing their higher education program while receiving public welfare are summarized for each participant within the four stages of Shaw’s (2001) SSM in Tables 2-5.

This study’s second research question is answered as follows:

2. What are the characteristics of the community college re-entry program that helped lead to the educational success of these women?

All the participants unanimously credited the UCC re-entry program with providing needed help and assistance that led to their successful college program
### TABLE 2. Barriers and Enabling Factors in SSM Stage 1: Developmental Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SSM Stage 1: Developmental Barriers</th>
<th>SSM Stage 1: Developmental Enabling Factors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Poor Choices</td>
<td>• Parental support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Peer pressure</td>
<td>• Positive school attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Rebelled against parents</td>
<td>o Reading encouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Teenage pregnancy</td>
<td>o Success in early education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Dropped out of high school</td>
<td>• Teacher/counselor encouragement/guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Substance abuse</td>
<td>• High school completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Non-supportive partner</td>
<td>• Social services support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No high school guidance</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Chaotic home life</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Needed at home</td>
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### TABLE 3. Barriers and Enabling Factors in SSM Stage 2: Programmatic Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SSM Stage 2: Programmatic Barriers</th>
<th>SSM Stage 2: Programmatic Enabling Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Financial stressors</td>
<td>• TANF aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No child support from children’s father</td>
<td>• Family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Required work hours for TANF aid</td>
<td>• Aware of access to community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attitudes of welfare caseworkers</td>
<td>• Support/encouragement from instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transportation</td>
<td>• Support/guidance from re-entry program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affordable childcare</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 4. Barriers and Enabling Factors in SSM Stage 3: Middle/Completion Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Enabling Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty juggling work hours/studying/family obligations</td>
<td>Support of instructors and re-entry counselors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of losing aid</td>
<td>Confidence expands/empowerment emerges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of being unable to continue education</td>
<td>Completion of degree/certificate program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of failing classes</td>
<td>Passing board exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of Stage 2 barriers continue</td>
<td>Obtaining employment in career field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5. Barriers and Enabling Factors in SSM Stage 4: Leadership/Advocacy Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Enabling Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No support from children’s father</td>
<td>Positive supervisory reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>Passion for helping other single mothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tutors current students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteer activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-entry program guest speaker</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Role model for others</td>
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completion. For each obstacle encountered on their path to educational completion, the re-entry program provided some form of assistance. First, for individuals with no knowledge of how to register for college courses and apply for financial aid, the re-entry counselors provided one-to-one personalized assistance. Financial assistance with buying textbooks, school supplies, and uniforms (for the healthcare students) was most helpful, as was financial assistance with the ongoing expenses of transportation and childcare. The availability of on-campus childcare was also instrumental in relieving their ongoing childcare worries. The availability of tutoring and mentoring was another significant factor in helping the participants succeed in their studies. Unlike attending monotonous and degrading welfare program meetings, the women reported actually enjoying and gaining a great deal of practical advice from attending the re-entry program workshops and seminars. Above all, though, the availability of the re-entry program counselors to listen to their concerns and provide guidance and advice was highly praised by all the participants. Especially helpful was the willingness of the re-entry program counselors to communicate with the women’s welfare caseworkers and help them receive some credit for required work hours for their class attendance, study time, and externship hours. As Donna simply stated, “I couldn’t have done it without them.”

**Implications for Theory**

The umbrella theory for this study was a critical feminist constructivist perspective that is activist in nature. Continued efforts to unmask and confront patriarchally based influences in policy formation are needed. Who other than those most impacted by welfare policy, the recipients themselves, is capable of recontextualizing attempts to reduce them to inaccurate and demeaning stereotypes? Expanded efforts at
including current and former welfare recipients in policy development and implementation are needed.

It is evident, based on the findings of this study, that an investment in human capital made a huge positive difference in the earning potential of the participants. Combined with findings from other studies (Gittell et al., 1990; Gittell & Covington, 1993; Burtless, 1994; Danzinger et al., 1994; Bryan & Morse, 1995; Handler, 1995; Huff & Thorp, 1997; Strawn, 1998; Kahn & Polakow, 2000; Martinson & Strawn, 2002; Mather et al., 2002; Zhan & Pandey, 2004), it is safe to conclude that higher education is one of the most effective and long-lasting means of increasing a single-mother’s lifetime earnings, access to job benefits, and ability to gain total self-sufficiency. The potential exists to reopen the political debate over the reduction of poverty and change the emphasis of the welfare work-first policies to recognize the long-term effects of helping poor mothers realize their earning potential through higher education rather than through the quick-fix of work alone.

The impact of unequal pay for women is evident in the literature revealing that only with a bachelor’s degree does a woman exceed the earnings of a man with a high school diploma (US Census Bureau, 2000). In other words, higher paying jobs at lower educational levels are traditionally closed to women. Feminist activism remains critical in continuing efforts to increase the rate of pay both in employment historically considered women’s occupations (which are, in fact, more “family friendly” in terms of flexibility around birthing and parenting roles) and in equal pay for the same job. It is interesting to note that the majority of the participants in this study pursued careers in healthcare and teaching, traditionally women’s occupations involving caring for and
helping others. It may be that the participants learned firsthand the feminist adage, “the personal is political” (Hanisch, 1969), by recognizing, perhaps at a subconscious level, the connection between their personal experiences and sociopolitical conditions and structures that are the focus of the helping professions. Through their experiences of completing college while receiving welfare, the participants may find academic affirmation for the hardships they faced and for understanding their experiences in the context of economic, social, and political forces. The recognition that they are not failures in a society that had cast them off as deviant to the ethics of family and work, may have influenced them to want to help others realize a similar transformation.

Another important feminist implication is the push to recognize and value parenting as legitimate work and to continue efforts to pay women for their currently unpaid labor at home. This, combined with fair and just divorce judgments and stronger enforcement of paternal financial obligations, may put women at less of a disadvantage when caring for their families as a single parent. Indeed, there is an obvious conflict inherent in political positions that give lip service to the importance of family and child well-being while failing to appreciate the work that it takes to raise a family.

**Researcher’s Theoretical Reflections**

According to Reinharz (1992), feminist research is conducted by women, for women. The sharing of their personal stories by these six study participants was both a cruel and kind journey of remembering. As women, they all have a voice—a voice that is not always heard nor appreciated in the larger society. The participants expressed that they found the relaying of their story to be therapeutic, joyful, comforting, validating, and freeing. They demonstrated these thoughts and feelings when bringing closure to our
conversations. Oftentimes, they would give me a hug of thanks and voice expressions of gratitude.

Every conversation reinforced that I could not and should not underestimate the power and healing of giving voice, sharing stories, engaging in conversations and creating dialogues. As a woman conducting feminist research, I felt equipped to understand and interpret their voices, but many times during the research process I found that I had to turn away from social constructs and suspend my prejudgments. I had to say no to what I was reading about “fatherless” America and the stereotypes of single mothers and their children. For example, Rick Santorum, a 2012 Republican presidential primary candidate, stated with conviction in a campaign speech that “Single parenthood is the leading cause of poverty” (February 2012).

While I was listening to and interpreting the voices of the participants, I was moved and overwhelmed by the generosity of spirit and love of the child that was and is inherent in the inward and outward lives of these “motherful” women. I coined the word “motherful” as a result of my immersion into their dialog. To call them “single mothers” or their children “fatherless” did not adequately reflect what I was hearing and learning from the authentic voices of the mothers.

As I remember my first conversations with these six mothers, I recall being initially struck by the incredible challenges that these women faced and continue to encounter. I was prepared for the challenges that I read about in the literature, and the ones that I discovered while interviewing these women; however, I was not prepared for the depth of the past and present adversity that they had encountered and continue to overcome. I anticipated hearing that they had so little money that they could only buy
Kleenex or tooth paste not both (Ehrenreich, 2001); however, I did not foresee hearing and feeling the love that the women had for their children and their acceptance, without lasting anger or bitterness, of the past wrongs inflicted upon them. I remember working through my sadness and anger over the way Ana’s husband had disrespected her and made her and her children’s lives miserable. Yet, Ana relayed that by living in the present and future she relied on faith, hope, and love for her strength to pull through. She found that having her children was the blessing that helped pull her through the tragic circumstances. Essentially, I discovered that by honoring her voice and her reality, that I could suspend my ego, thoughts and opinions, and work through reducing my emotions of sadness for her and anger at her ex-husband. Thus, I developed an understanding of the narratives constructed through the participants’ experiences and stories (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Feminist constructivist research, as the umbrella theory informing this study, allowed the voices of the women study participants to construct the meaning and values of their personal world within the larger and often conflicting construct of our patriarchal and capitalistic society (Reinharz, 1992). In other words, these study participants provided a feminist gender lens upon the patriarchal lens of our work-first national welfare policy that requires “motherful” women to accept low-paying jobs and ultimately stay on the welfare rolls while working, rather than attain higher education as preparation for gaining employment paying a respectable living wage and ultimate self-sufficiency off the welfare rolls. All of these study participants successfully attained self-sufficiency because of their successful completion of a higher education program. Therefore,
individual stories and narratives have the potential to create new meanings that may impact social policy and overall knowledge.

Presently, much of our country’s social discourse on single motherhood reflects negative notions and stereotypes. Whereas, I discovered while analyzing the themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010) within the stories that these “motherful” women are loving people and parents, hopeful and faithful individuals, courageous women, and mothers committed to the well-being and future of their children. The more I engaged in these conversations, I was drawn to a new way of viewing their lived experience. I was called to create a new construct that spoke to the voices and authentic harmonies that I was listening to throughout this study. This construct is based on the fundamental principle that these women did not, do not, and will not perceive themselves as “welfare mothers,” hopeless victims, or husbandless women. These concepts, in fact, would not benefit the women’s self-confidence or self-esteem. Rather, the personal stories of these “motherful” women serve to refute the negative notions and stereotypical views of single welfare mothers.

As I bring closure to this challenging, dynamic, confusing, enlightening, and joyful research process, I experience a multitude of thoughts and feelings. These thoughts and emotions range from a sense of loss of consistent interaction and conversations with Ana, Barbara, Charlotte, Donna, Ellen, and Felicia to excitement about discoveries uncovered and heard from the voices and choruses of these motherful women. I will always remember the participants voicing gratitude for participation in this research process, and I have similar expressions of gratitude and thankfulness for this journey of learning and discovery. This significant experience has truly enlightened and
inspired me to continue onward in this journey to uncover and discover further understanding and active listening to the voices of single mothers, helping to increase their access to higher education, and contributing to literature on single motherhood. It is my hope that my future experiences will reflect the conversations, lives, experiences, and gifts of betterment, faith, helping, caring, loving, and encouragement echoed in the voices and beings of the motherful women of this study. Hopefully with heart’s courage and thinking, welfare policies will someday respond to the voices and heed the echoing call for betterment, educational opportunities, and unlimited future possibilities for single mothers and their families.

**Implications for Practice**

As a descriptive study, the findings support the cadre of other studies showing that, despite the restrictions against it under TANF, postsecondary education provides a long-term proven means of lifting poor families out of poverty (Gittell & Covington, 1993; Rice, 1993; Burtless, 1994; Manski, 1994; Danzinger & Gottschalk, 1995; Bryan & Morse, 1995; Strawn, 1998; Kahn & Polakow, 2000; Zhan & Pandey, 2004).

Understanding the impact of policy decisions on the lives of those most affected by policy is helpful in recommending strategies that will have positive and meaningful consequences. The invisibility of poor women in welfare policy dialogue and development has led to policies that are both punitive and fail to attain the stated goal of helping women and their families become “self-sufficient.”

This study sought to privilege the voices of poor women as the experts on how welfare policy might be changed to remove barriers to long-term economic independence by recognizing the impact of higher education on earnings and quality of life. Although
this study focused primarily on community college education, the intent was not to disregard other issues related to humane welfare policy such as valuing parenting as work, making work pay, accessibility of affordable and quality childcare, and addressing multibarrier families such as those impacted by trauma, domestic violence, substance dependence, or differently abled members.

Following are specific recommendations for welfare policy reform and college program improvements:

**Recommendations for Welfare Policy Reform**

1. Extend or eliminate time limits on TANF assistance.
2. Allow full access to postsecondary education, making college a priority for those choosing college as a path to employment.
3. Count training and education as meeting the full requirements of work activity.
4. Provide a complete array of support services for students, including child care, help with transportation, housing assistance, Medicaid, and food stamps.
5. Allow recipients to keep earned income without penalizing cash supports and other benefits.
6. Change the emphasis of welfare to recognize the value of parenting and work to reduce the stigma associated with welfare recipiency.
7. Require nonpaying fathers to work or obtain training for employment and enforce child support laws.
8. Assure that welfare recipients are aware of all programs they are eligible for and educate recipients of their rights.
9. Provide transitional supports when recipients leave education and enter the workforce.

10. Train welfare caseworkers to be sensitive to the needs of the people facing poverty, and reward them for helping families obtain an education and work that pays a living wage.

11. Allow mothers to stay at home with preschool children.

**Recommendations for College Program Improvements**

1. Educate administrators, staff, and faculty about special programs available on campus to assist needy students and encourage referrals to available campus programs.

2. Develop a demographic profile of all adult students in order to reach specific groups and offer specialized services, such as re-entry program services, campus childcare, assistance with financial aid applications, career exploration and advisement, academic tutoring, personal counseling, and special support groups.

3. Expand the re-entry program to allow for provision of services to a greater number of students each semester.

4. Initiate a liaison between higher education and departments of social services. This non-biased person should be trained in most aspects of the welfare system as well as the offerings and admissions procedures of higher education institutions.

**Limitations**

There are 50 community colleges in the Southwest region of the United States (Arizona has 21 community colleges, Colorado 13, Nevada 4, New Mexico 9, and Utah 3), and each community college likely sponsors its own services akin to the UCC re-entry
program. This study was limited to in-depth case studies of six students who graduated from one southwest community college. It was not an examination of the UCC re-entry program itself, but of six women who participated in the program. While human motivational and behavioral theories were intertwined with the study results to increase their generalizability, it is nevertheless known that these six case studies are not necessarily representative of the population of single-mother welfare-recipient students at UCC or any other community college. It could easily be argued that the six study participants were exceptional and thus not at all representative of their counterparts; and I would strongly agree that these six women were indeed exceptional. The study sample was chosen purposefully in order to give voice to single mothers who were able to successfully complete a higher educational program while receiving public welfare assistance, effectively adding their stories and voices to the existing body of knowledge in order to reveal how they were able to overcome the numerous obstacles in the path to their success.

Exceptional success stories, as presented in this study, are potentially very powerful as personal motivators and as funding and policy change enhancers. The participants in this study clearly viewed higher education as an opportunity to move not only beyond welfare but beyond poverty as well. Thus, education served an important instrumental purpose for these women, as it undoubtedly will for all single mothers.

Donna summed it up best:

I had to go to school, there wasn’t anything else, there wasn’t any other option, because if I just went out and got a job I wouldn’t have enough money to pay bills or day care and everything. So I had to go to school first.
Recommendations for Further Research

Presently, there is limited research on single mothers pursuing higher education. The literature review in Chapter 2 outlines relevant issues, studies, and findings; however, while this review certainly guided and informed the research process, many aspects of this study cannot be found in studies that focus on single mothers pursuing higher education. Therefore, educational leaders and researchers must increase research efforts to discover understandings and meanings of this phenomenon. Enhancing our knowledge of single mothers pursuing higher education will not only contribute to the literature but will promote a much needed understanding of single motherhood in our country. This understanding would have a comprehensive and dynamic impact on the lives of single mothers and better ensure their educational success for the benefit of our society.

Specifically, further research is recommended in the following areas:

1) Studies addressing the reasons for failure of single mother welfare recipients who begin a college or vocational training program but do not persist.

2) Multi-method studies that research the lives and experiences of single mothers who are not pursuing higher education compared to those who are pursuing a certificate or degree. These studies need to analyze single mothers with similar backgrounds, ethnicities, economic status, and support networks.

3) Longitudinal studies that research the long-term impact of higher education on single mothers. Focus areas to consider for further study would be academic and life-long learning, personal growth and development, economic self-sufficiency, and career aspirations.
4) Longitudinal studies that research the long-term impact of their mothers’ higher education on the children of single mothers. Focus areas to consider for further study would be academic achievement, social behavior, student involvement, and future aspirations.

5) Historical studies that research single motherhood within various communities and various cultures. These studies would provide an accurate historical framework for the contemporary and recent upward trend in families headed by single mothers.

6) Multi-method studies researching the principles and values of a diverse range of mothers pursuing higher education. Comparing and contrasting data and discoveries from married and single mothers could uncover similarities and differences that determine successful themes and factors for all mothers pursuing education.

7) Studies that further determine reasons, experiences, lives, contexts, variables, and factors why some single mothers persevere through significant challenges, illnesses, and hardships to foster and create hopeful futures for their children.

8) Studies that research the reciprocity and mutuality of helping and caring for others and oneself. These studies would discover the experiences of single mothers that take responsibility to help and care for their families and others. The significance of giving and receiving help would be analyzed.

9) Studies that discover and analyze the impact of families and extended families on persistence and graduation rates of single mothers.

10) Studies that determine the impact of higher education on welfare reform initiatives. These studies need to research the short- and long-range impacts of welfare to work
versus welfare to education. Areas of focus could be agencies and systems that encourage or discourage educational opportunities for single mothers.

Further research in these outlined areas would deepen the understanding and knowledge of the experiences and lives of single mothers. This understanding would guide and inform decision makers and policy makers in social and public discourse about single mothers and their families. Inclusion of single mothers’ voices could result in harmonies that affirm the needs, rights, gifts, and aspirations of families headed by single mothers. These harmonies may result in policies, procedures, programs, and services that increase access to educational opportunities and enhance self-sufficiency for single mothers and their families.

**Conclusions**

Higher education is known to improve employability and earnings for every year completed. Current welfare policy has focused on moving women off welfare into jobs, despite the fact that those jobs do not provide a family a living wage. These descriptive case studies provided an opportunity to better understand the lived experiences of six single mothers who improved life conditions for themselves and their families through attainment of a community college education. Based on this study’s findings and similar results from other studies, it is concluded that postsecondary education is effective in promoting employment and a living wage for welfare recipients. Future welfare discussions, therefore, need to include higher education as an option for women on welfare. The barriers and enabling factors that allowed the women of this study to complete their educational program while receiving public assistance were identified in
order to propose recommendations for improvement in welfare policy and higher education programs.
APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS
Congratulations on recently completing your certificate or degree from the College of Southern Nevada!

You have been identified as a successful Re-Entry graduate and are now cordially invited to participate in a research study being conducted by a UNLV graduate student, Rhonda Faul.

Ms. Faul's research is intended to determine the factors that led to your personal success in completing your educational program as an economically disadvantaged single mother. Your personal success story is very important and valuable to help us identify and understand both the challenges and encouragement you encountered during your path to educational success. Your personal success story will be especially useful to CSN in designing, implementing, and maintaining policies and programs that encourage educational success for the single mother population. Your participation is entirely voluntary and all your information will be kept strictly confidential.

If you wish to participate in this important research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview conducted by Ms. Faul. You will simply be asked to share aspects of your life that helped lead you to your educational success.

The questions on the attached form are intended to assure you meet the qualifications for this study. Please answer the questions on the form and e-mail your answers back to Ms. Faul at Rhonda.faul@csn.edu; or call her at (702) 651-5701; or mail the form to:

Rhonda Faul  
CSN (W2B)  
6375 W. Charleston Blvd.  
Las Vegas, NV 89146

We hope to hear back from you.

Thank you,

Director  
Re-Entry Program
APPENDIX B

INITIAL DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
Initial Demographic Survey

DATE: _____________________  Respondent Number ______

Please answer all the questions as completely as possible in the spaces provided.

1. Age ______  Gender ______  Number of Children _____

2. Marital Status:  ___ Single, never married  ___ Married  ___ Separated
   ___ Divorced  ___ Widowed

3. Cultural Background

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. Socioeconomic Background

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. Living Arrangements

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. Employment

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

7. Educational Attainment:

Did you graduate from high school? _____  If yes, year you graduated ________

Did you obtain a GED? _________  If yes, year GED obtained _________

Postsecondary education completed and date completed:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Did you receive public welfare assistance while attending school? ____________

Are you attending school at this time? _____  If yes, where? ________________

Are you employed at this time? ________________________________
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol for Study Participants

1. Developmental background questions concerning family experiences:
   1a. How many siblings are in your family?
   1b. What is your position in the family?
   1c. What was your father’s occupation while you were in school?
   1d. How many years of formal education did your father complete?
   1e. What was your mother’s occupation while you were in school?
   1f. How many years of formal education did your mother complete?
   1g. Where both parents living at home while you were in school?
   1h. If not, which parent was absent from the home?
   1i. What was the reason for the absence?
   1j. How old were you when the absence occurred? How did it affect you?

2. Family and home life:
   2a. What kind of encouragement was given to you by your mother to complete high school?
   2b. What kind of encouragement was given to you by your father to complete high school?
   2c. What kind of encouragement was given to you by your brothers and sisters to complete high school?
   2d. How do you remember the child-rearing practices in your home?
   2e. Describe your relationship with your mother.
   2f. Describe your relationship with your father.
   2g. Describe your relationship with your brothers and sisters.
   2h. Describe your childhood.
   2i. Did you have a quiet place in your home to study?
2j. Did you have reading materials in your home? Please describe the kinds of materials present.

2k. Did your mother, father, brothers and/or sisters ever tell you they thought you were intelligent? If so, who?

2l. Did your mother, father, brothers and/or sisters ever encourage you to go to college? If so, who?

2m. Did any of your brothers or sisters receive post-secondary education or training?

2n. Did any of your brothers or sisters graduate from college?

2o. Did your mother think education was important?

2p. Did your father think education was important?

2q. Did your brothers or sisters think education was important?

2r. Which of your family members, if any, read to you while you were in elementary school.

2s. Which of your family members, if any, encouraged you to do your homework?

3. Work experiences:

3a. Were you assigned chores at home during your early years?

3b. Describe the kinds of jobs, if any, you had while in high school.

3c. Did your job keep you from doing your homework?

3d. Did any of your friends work while you were in high school.

3e. Did your brothers or sisters work while they were in high school? Or while you were in high school?

3f. Did you ever have to drop out of school to help support your family?

3g. Did any of your brothers or sisters have to drop out of high school to help support the family?

4. Religious experiences within the family:

4a. Describe your religious experiences within the family.

4b. Did your family attend church/temple/mosque regularly?

4c. Were your religious experiences important to you? If so, how?
4d. Did you ever attend a private or parochial school? If so, how many years did you attend? Describe your experiences while attending these schools.

5. Information relating to your peers and the neighborhood in which you grew up:

5a. Describe the neighborhood in which you grew up.

5b. Were you ever a member of any groups? If so, describe your activities and how that membership affected your schoolwork.

5c. Describe your friends’ attitudes towards school.

5d. What kind of grades did your friends get in school?

5e. Did you or your friends ever get into trouble at school? If so, describe the kinds of trouble.

5f. Did you or your friends ever get into trouble with the police? If so, describe the kinds of trouble.

5g. Did any of your friends continue on to post-secondary education or training? If so, please describe the higher education or training they received.

5h. Did your friends think you were intelligent?

6. Information relating to your elementary school experiences:

6a. Tell me about your experiences in elementary school.

6b. Did you like elementary school?

6c. How did you feel about your teachers?

6d. Did you have role models during this time?

6e. If you could, what would you change about that period of time?

7. Information relating to your middle school/junior high years.

7a. Tell me about your experiences during your middle school years.

7b. Did you like middle school/junior high?

7c. What type of grades did you receive?

7d. How did you feel about your teachers?
7e. Who were your role models?
7f. What would you change about that period of time?

8. Information relating to your high school years:

8a. Tell me about your experiences in high school.
8b. Did you like high school?
8c. How did you feel about your teachers?
8d. What was your favorite subject in high school?
8e. Did you have a major or area of concentration in high school? If so, how did you like those classes?
8f. Did any of your teachers, counselors, deans, or principals ever tell you that you were intelligent or capable of doing better than you were doing?
8g. Did any of your teachers, counselors, deans, or principals ever tell you that you were dumb? If so, describe how that made you feel.
8h. Did any of your teachers or counselors ever encourage you to go to college? Did they ever discourage you from going to college?
8i. Did any of your friends encourage you to go to college? Did any of your friends tell you not to go to college?
8j. Describe the type of counseling you received in high school.
8k. Did you get married while you were still in high school? If yes, describe how your marriage affected your school work.
8l. Did you get pregnant and/or deliver a baby while in high school? If so, how did that affect your high school experience and performance.
8m. Did you drop out of high school? If so, please explain why. How has that affected your adult life?

9. Information about military experiences:

9a. Have you ever been in the military? If so, when and why did you enter the military?
9b. Describe your military experience.

9c. Were you married or have children while in the military? How did that affect your life?

10. Personal thoughts, feelings, and opinions:

10a. While you were in school, did you think education was important?

10b. What do you think of education now?

10c. What kind of education do you want for your children?

10d. While in high school, did you ever think about going to college?

10e. While you were in high school, did you ever think about what you wanted to do with your life?

10f. While in high school, did you ever think about or plan for a career for yourself?

10g. While in high school, did you ever think that you could “get ahead” if you tried hard enough?

10h. Do you feel you could have done better in school? If so, how?

10i. Do you feel your school(s) could have done a better job for you? If so, how?

11. Welfare program experiences:

11a. When and how did you come to first apply for welfare assistance?

11b. When and how did you become involved with the welfare-to-work program?

11c. What was your initial reaction to the program?

11d. Please share your experiences with the welfare-to-work program.

11e. Was the program effective for you?

12. Influences for higher education or training:

12a. How did you first hear about your program at UCC?

12b. Who, if anyone, influenced you to seek higher education or training?
12c. What were your expectations of the higher education/training program?

12d. What were your biggest fears about entering your program? Were these fears founded? If so, how did you overcome them?

12e. What was the program like for you in the beginning?


12g. How did you solve any problems in the above areas?

12h. Was there counseling or guidance available?

13. Achieving a level of confidence:

13a. When did you achieve a level of confidence that you knew you would succeed in attaining higher education or training?

13b. Who or what helped you get to this level of confidence?

13c. What were your indicators of success?

13d. Describe how the success felt.

13e. Did you begin to feel that this success could extend into other areas of your life?

14. Significant influences while in the UCC program:

14a. What were your most significant influences?

14b. Describe influences within the educational system.

14c. Describe influences from the community.

14d. Describe influences from family and friends.

14e. How did the welfare agency and/or social service agencies support your goal for higher education/training?
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT
TITLE OF STUDY: Factors Contributing to the Educational Success of Single-Mother Welfare Recipients at an Urban Southwestern Community College: Case Studies of Six Success Stories

INVESTIGATOR(S): Vicki Rosser Ph.D, Rhonda Faul MBA

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 702-895-1432 (Dr. Vicki Rosser) 702-651-5701 or 702-765-9236 (Ms. Rhonda Faul)

Purpose of the Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the issues, needs, and concerns of economically disadvantaged single mothers and determine the motivational and institutional factors that helped lead them to successful completion of a community college higher educational training program.

Participants
You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criteria: As a single-mother welfare recipient you successfully completed a community college higher educational degree, certificate, or vocational training program.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following: Answer interview questions regarding your personal background and life experiences as a single mother, welfare recipient, community college student, and employee. You will need to participate in up to three interview sessions lasting up to an hour each.

Benefits of Participation
There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn about the challenges you faced as an economically disadvantaged single-mother college student and discover what motivational factors and institutional programs helped you succeed in your higher educational degree, certificate, or training program. Your personal story may help improve programming and resources made available to you and other single-mother students at a community college, as well as provide a broader understanding of the issues and concerns single mothers face while completing their educational program.
Risks of Participation
There are risks involved in all research studies. This study, however, will include no more than minimal risk. For example, you may become uncomfortable when answering some questions, but you may always decline to answer any questions that you are not comfortable answering. Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times and there are no other foreseeable risks to your participation in this study.

Cost /Compensation
There may not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take up to three hours of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Vicki Rosser at (702) 895-1432 or e-mail Vicki.Rosser@unlv.edu. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the college or university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV while the study is in progress and for 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.
**Participant Consent:**
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

______________________________          __________________
Signature of Participant          Date

______________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)

I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

______________________________          __________________
Signature of Participant          Date

______________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)
APPENDIX E

ANALYTIC CODING CATEGORIES
### Analytic Coding Categories

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SSM Coding Categories</th>
<th>Code</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Programmatic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Middle/Completion</td>
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<td>Stage 4: Leadership/Advocacy</td>
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REFERENCES


Greenberg, M. (1993). *The devil is in the details: Key questions in the effort to end welfare as we know it*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.


CURRICULUM VITAE

RHONDA R. FAUL
6375 W. Charleston Blvd.
Las Vegas, NV 89146

TELEPHONE: (702) 651-5701
E-MAIL: rhonda.faul@csn.edu

EDUCATION:
Bachelor of Science, May 1979
Viterbo University
La Crosse, Wisconsin
Major: Medical Record Administration
Minor: English

Master of Business Administration, December 1988
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Las Vegas, Nevada

Currently pursuing Ed.D. in Higher Educational Leadership
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Las Vegas, Nevada

CREDENTIALS:
Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA),
October 1979 - Present
American Health Information Management Association,
Registration No. 10742

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:
Instructor/Professor, Health Information Technology
College of Southern Nevada
6375 West Charleston Boulevard
Las Vegas, Nevada 89146
August 1997 - Present

Health Information Director
Southern Nevada Adult Mental Health Services
6161 West Charleston Boulevard
Las Vegas, Nevada 89158
October 1986 - August 1997

Adjunct Instructor, Health Information Technology
College of Southern Nevada
6375 West Charleston Boulevard
Las Vegas, Nevada 89146
September 1992 - May 1997
PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (Cont.)

Medical Records Manager
Sierra Health Services
2724 N. Tenaya Way
Las Vegas, Nevada 89128
September 1982 - October 1986

Medical Records Director
Southeast Arizona Medical Center
Route 1
Douglas, Arizona 85607
January 1982 - July 1982

Supervisor, Medical Records Department
St. Joseph's Hospital
601 St. Joseph's Avenue
Marshfield, Wisconsin 54449
May 1979 - January 1982

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION:

American Association of University Professors
Member: 1997 - Present

Nevada Faculty Alliance
Member: 1997 - Present

American Health Information Management Association
Active Member: 1979 - Present
National Delegate: 1986
Council on Education: 1997 - Present

Nevada Health Information Management Association
Active Member: 1982 - Present
President: 1986 - 1987
President Elect: 1985 - 1986
Secretary: 1999 - 2001
Scholarship Comm.: 2000 - 2001
Program Committee: 2002 - 2003

Southern Nevada Health Information Management Association
Active Member: 1982 - Present
President: 1985 - 1986
President Elect: 1984 - 1985
Secretary: 1999 - 2001
CURRICULUM VITAE
RHONDA R. FAUL, MBA, RHIA
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PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION (Cont.)
Wisconsin Medical Record Association
Active Member: 1979 - 1981
Student Member: 1977 - 1979

North Central Wisconsin Medical Record Association
Active Member: 1979 - 1981
President Elect: 1981

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:
Several news and informative articles published in News Network the quarterly newsletter of the Nevada Health Information Management Association

Featured speaker at a meeting of the Southern Nevada Health Information Management Association on the topic: “National Issues Relevant To Health Information Professionals”

Textbook Review, W.B. Saunders Company, Essentials of Medical Transcription

COLLEGE SERVICE:
Member, Academic Standards Committee
Member, Health Professions Limited Entry Review Comm.
Chair, Dean of Health Sciences Search Committee
Member, five Faculty Search Committees
Member, Management Assistant Ad-Hoc Committee within School of Health Sciences
Member, Subcommittee of Salary and Benefits Committee regarding Adjunct Faculty Needs
Guest Speaker, CSN Continuing Education Class
Guest Speaker, Health Programs Orientation Sessions
Coordinator, Medical Transcription Advisory Committee

COMMUNITY SERVICE:
Member, Advisory Committee, Rancho High School Academy for Medical and Allied Health Professions, North Las Vegas, Nevada
Health Information Management Consulting Services provided to State of Nevada Division of Mental Health Services, Las Vegas, Nevada
Transcription Services provided for Biotechnology Summit Meeting, a Nevada Legislative Subcommittee, Las Vegas, Nevada