A PARENT'S DREAM COME TRUE:

A STUDY OF ADULT STUDENTS WHO ARE PARENTS AND

THEIR ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Doctoral Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of
California State University, Stanislaus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership

By
Heather M. Muser
March 2017

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a world without faith is a world not worth engaging in. You provide the boundless passion, unending joy, and peace that "passes all understanding" for those who hold You by the hand and in their hearts. I praise you for creating me with a heart for the college classroom, a calling that I will pursue until I find myself in Your arms in my heavenly home.

To my parents, Steve and Cinda, I am eternally grateful for the endless encouragement and support of your oldest, impossibly strong-willed, tiger of a daughter. Without you, my life would not be the daily joy that I now experience. Thank you, Dad, for constantly encouraging and reminding me, "You are not done yet!!" as I endlessly push my educational career forward. You can finally cheer as I cross the finish line of my third, and final, educational degree.

Finally to my family and the love of my life, Daniel. You complete me in ways that I never imagined. You are my best friend, my true love, my perfect partner, and the man that I pray our son will model one day. For my children, James and Alyssa, you are my inspiration to become the best woman, mother, and teacher possible. James, without your joyous laughter and genuine heart for others, I would never have smiled within the challenges. Alyssa, it is a true joy watching you grow to be a bright and beautiful young woman of God, you inspire me with your perseverance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to California State University, Stanislaus and the Advanced Studies department, who provided semester grants through the course of my three-year doctoral program. As an active adjunct instructor, sole proprietor, mother, wife, and full-time student the additional aid meant less stress over family finances, and more time to focus on my educational goals.

This dissertation would never have become a reality without the tireless effort of my Dissertation Committee Chair, Dr. Virginia Montero-Hernandez. Her razor-sharp mind, gentle and caring spirit, and true Ethic of Care approach to education and the teaching process itself are all attributes that have gained my deepest respect and life-long admiration. I am grateful for her tireless commitment to reading multiple drafts, endless pieces of valuable insight and advice, and her instruction on the true meaning of "scholarly writing". My future educational career has been enlightened and uniquely improved by her example. Thank you, Dr. Virginia Montero-Hernandez.

I am also grateful for my dissertation committee, Dr. Amye Leon and Dr. Kathryn Bell McKenzie, that provided exceptional support and guidance throughout my time as a graduate student. I thank Dr. Glenn Allen Phillips for his tireless editing assistance. Finally, I thank my seven participants, for your willingness to participate and your insightful and vulnerable responses to interview questions, you have my eternal respect, gratitude, and support in your future academic, familial, and career goals.

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ABSTRACT

The context and experiences of student-parents is an important topic for higher education. Due to the additional responsibilities that student-parents carry, educators are challenged by the fact that most of these adult students are enrolled in higher education on a part-time basis, which places them in a position of risk. Previous studies have not explored the connection between parenting and the construction of student-parents' academic experience. We have limited knowledge of the ways in which student-parents build their identity as students at the same time that they build their identity as parents. The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which student-parents make sense of their experiences as parents and students while pursuing their bachelor's degree at a four-year university. This study uses participant-generated photography and interviews as the main data set. Three results were identified as part of the study: student-parents described their lives as a journey from longsuffering to optimistic resilience; significant others encouraged the development of self-confidence, acknowledgement of the value of education, and acquisition of skills necessary to navigate the academic culture; and student-parents used permanent dialogue to engage in a process of developmental co-construction by sharing with their children the lessons they learned both inside and outside the university context.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

This study explores how the relationship that adult students have with their children intervenes in the construction of their role as undergraduate student at a public state university. For the purpose of this study, adult students are defined as those who are over the age of 25 (Kasworm, 1990) and higher education encompasses only undergraduate academic institutions. Different from previous studies that explore the relationship that the adult student has with other adults, such as spouse or partner, this study analyzes the relationship of the adult student to their child(ren). The insights of adult students and how they perceived and interpreted their experiences as both a parent and student are central to the study; therefore a qualitative interpretive design will be utilized.

Background of the Study

One of the perennial questions within education asks, who should be educated. Our society answers with a resounding "Everyone" (Noddings, 2012). The debate now revolves around exactly *how* this should be done. The demand a requirement to educate everyone places upon educational institutions has led to the growth of publicly-supported universities (Cohen et al., 2014) and public university systems in each state. These universities provide a lower cost alternative to private education, thus opening the doors of access to more than just the financially privileged.

While greater numbers of students can afford the lower cost of public education, issues of access still exist for some students, specifically adults. These issues include, but are not limited to, lack of flexibility in calendar and course scheduling, instructional curriculum that undervalues experiential knowledge, inadequate modes of instruction, and lack of availability of learning services (Dottin, 2007). These access issues affect adult students in every level of higher education. These issues are characteristic of a system of higher education that has been tailored toward the needs of younger undergraduates.

The population of students in higher education is typically defined as 17- to 22-year-old undergraduate students (Kasworm, 1990). However, the characteristics of the undergraduate student population enrolled in institutions of higher education have changed dramatically. Higher education institutions are now receiving students from a diverse range of ages, family backgrounds, and experiences. In the last 20 years, close to 40% of the student population has been comprised of adult students in public four-year universities ("National Center for Educational Statistics- Characteristics," 2015). For example, in the Fall 2015 semester, the total enrollment of undergraduates in the CSU system was 418, 243 students (California State University, 2015, table 1). Over 29% (122,130 students) of the total student enrollment consisted of adult students 25 or older (California State University, 2015, table 1.0). The adult student population, in the CSU system specifically, is underserved due to a lack of knowledge about the service needs and educational experience of adult students.

Statement of the Problem

The population of adult students has increased rapidly over the last 20 years within higher education (Kasworm, 1990; NCES, 2013). When 40% of the population in higher education is adult students and only 30% of that institution is graduating (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013), educators have a problem that requires attention and concern. Due to this increase in enrollment numbers, universities are challenged to provide services and an academic environment that is conducive to adult learning. Some of these institutional challenges include, but are not limited to, the implementation of inclusion practices for varying adult student demographics (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) and the use of adult-based pedagogy.

An important subset of the adult student population is adult students who are parents. We have little knowledge about this student subgroup and how their relationship with their children shapes their academic experience. Student-parents participate in family structures that are not typical among the traditional-aged undergraduate (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). Student-parents belong to families in which they are married, single, or partnered and exist either with or without children. As a married, single, or partnered individual, adult students may also be responsible for the financial success of the family. The specific type of family structure in which they participate also dictates the duties and responsibilities the adult student carries in addition to participating in higher education.

Student-parents have responsibilities that most traditional undergraduates do not face. These additional responsibilities can include anything from raising children

(Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010) to financially supporting a family through full-time employment (Levin, Montero-Hernandez, & Cerven, 2010). Upholding parental duties while also being a student has both positive and negative elements. The literature suggests that the responsibility of raising children places additional strain on adult students (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). The literature also describes the opportunity for the parent to see their children as a source of external motivation (Bye, Pushkar, & Conway, 2007).

Educators should be concerned about the context and experiences of student-parents for many reasons. Educators need to know who these adult students are and where they come from. Due to the additional responsibilities that student-parents carry, educators are challenged by the fact that most of these adult students are enrolled in higher education on a part-time basis, which places the students in a position of risk. Student-parents attending on a part-time basis have little chance to fully engage in campus activities and take more time to complete their courses (Levin, 2007). The lack of classroom engagement can be connected to the additional responsibilities of employment and child raising (Cox, 2009; Levin et al., 2010) and connected to the lack of inclusionary pedagogical instruction practices used by faculty (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012). Having children may be a factor that hinders some students' ability to engage in campus activities because children require that a parent spends more time at home. Having children may also be a factor that causes parents to choose part-time attendance because the responsibility of raising children takes additional time and resources.

The additional time that student-parents take to graduate may result in the loss of focus or motivation, resulting in a decision to "stop out" or drop out (Pizzolato, Hicklen, Brown, & Chaudhari, 2009). In this context, the decision to stop out is defined as taking time out and then returning to active enrollment and engagement in college (Levin, 2007). Those who choose either to stop out or drop out hurt the overall institutional rates of student persistence, but also result in greater numbers of parents who lack a college degree and may be unable to financially sustain their families (Levin et al., 2010). Lacking financial stability, parents are often hesitant or simply unable to allow their children to attend college. There is anticipation that by the year 2018 nearly two-thirds of all job openings will require a college degree, and by 2025, "America will need 20 million more college graduates to support the economy" (Riggs, 2015, p. 25). Without education, families can remain financially unstable, the workforce can remain under-employed and unskilled, and the American economy can suffer. The success of student-parents in higher education should be a serious concern for educators, administrators, and policy makers alike.

Current literature on adult students includes research about adult characteristics including the challenges of family and motherhood (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010), adult females and their unique educational experiences (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997), and classroom inclusion and integration for adult students (Bensimon & Malcom, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). However, there is a gap in the literature in terms of research on the relationship between the adult

student and their minor(s) and how this relationship mediates their role as adult students and their academic experience. This study aims to bridge that gap.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of adult students responsible for raising children. As a growing population, educators need to know and serve this population better. Underserving this population is seen in many different ways. Most universities neglect to fully support child-care centers on campus (Albers, 2006). Few instutions have a designated financial aid advocate who works directly with student-parents to assist them with balancing college financing through the State Department of Social Services (Albers, 2006). Without educated parents, future students will not have a legacy of education to follow and may not have examples of how to become a productive citizen and lead homes in which their children strive to become educated too (Ricco, McCollum, & Schuyten, 2003). The educational achievement of future generations rests, in part, upon adult student persistence and success, especially the success of the population of adult students responsible for raising children.

Research Questions

My research seeks to understand the ways in which student-parents live their academic experience as undergraduates at a university. I am particularly interested in analyzing how adult students' relationship with their children intervenes in the construction of their role as university students. The research questions shaping this

study are presented in terms of one overarching research question (RQ1) and three sub-questions (Sub Q1-3):

RQ1: How do student-parents navigate their academic experiences at the university while also caring for and raising children?

Sub Q1: How does the relationship that student-parents build with their children shape their understanding of their role as undergraduates?

Sub Q2: How do student-parents manage the simultaneous demands of parenting, employment, and studying?

Sub Q3: What type of learning outcomes do student-parents pursue as part of their educational experiences at the university?

Research Objectives

One of the primary goals of this study is to enable practitioners, university administration, and policy makers to understand the identity and needs of the growing adult student population with children, and to identify strategies to improve these adult students' educational experiences. University administrators play a central role in the creation and implementation of service programs for various populations of students. Policy makers also need to gain an in-depth understanding of the prevalent institutional and cultural factors, to develop essential vectors of state financial support needed by adult students to actively engage in the university community.

A secondary goal of this study is to highlight the paired use of data collection techniques that are associated with the qualitative research paradigm. It is noteworthy that in this study, participant-generated photography, shadowing, and interviews are

used to obtain a richer understanding of student-parents' perspective about their roles as parents and students. The use of multiple data sources will help in the triangulation process and will serve as a catalyst for theory creation.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study rests in the stories of adult students who are responsible for raising children and the lack of literature that highlights their unique needs and characteristics. We know that adult students are individual agents choosing between the conflicting priorities of their everyday life (Montero-Hernandez & Cerven, 2012); however, we need to disaggregate the adult student population and learn more about the particular experiences of student-parents. On one hand, this study will explain the character and identity construction of adult students who are also parents. On the other hand, this investigation will explore the experiences and activities in which student-parents engage to understand the specific service needs that these students require. This study points out that the population of adult students, who are also parents, is increasing in higher education, yet the economic, political, and social environments of most colleges have not changed to fully include and integrate them (Kasworm, 2010; Bye et al., 2007). This research adds to the existing literature by explaining the connection between the construction of adults' identity as students and the development of family life. Additionally, by analyzing the experiences of adult students with children, the study increases our knowledge of this unique population and that factors that could contribute to their persistence.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the immense size of the current literature base, adult education is considered a "mature topic" (Torraco, 2005, p. 357). The sheer volume of previous research within this topic requires a synthesis that acknowledges the meso- and micro-level of analysis that are explored in the literature. The meso-level, or "intermediate" level of analysis, focuses on organizations (such as individual university campuses) and the communities in which adults operate. The micro-level of analysis involves "a focus on human agency and small-scale social systems of various types" (Johnson, 2008, p. vi). The meso- and micro-level classification of current adult education literature provides a useful way to locate and contextualizes this study within existing theoretical boundaries.

Discussion of the literature at the meso-level will begin with a focus on the characteristics of institutions of higher education that serve adult students. Consideration will also be given to the institutional challenges that universities face in attempting to serve the adult student population. Discussion of studies at the micro-level will occur through defining the identity and variety of adult students. As a distinct population, I consider the unique socialization and contextual tensions that adult students experience which are different from what traditional students experience. Finally, I will discuss current institutional initiatives focused on improving adult student success.

Colleges and Universities as Adult Serving Institutions

Adults are a growing population in institutions of higher education. Adult students are 25 years old and older, and they also often fit into one or more categories of "risk" including, but not limited to, part-time attendance, delayed enrollment, having dependents, and working while enrolled in college (Crisp, 2010; Levin, 2007). Adult students possess characteristics that are different from traditional students. In this section, I use national statistical reports to explain the presence of adults in higher educational institutions: patterns of enrollment, persistence, and the type of institutions in which they are more likely to enroll.

The recent statistical reports show that adult students are a growing population among the undergraduates in higher education across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015a). "Traditional Undergraduates" are defined as being 18-24 years old, while "Adult students" are defined as those over the age of 25 and enrolled in a credit or degree-granting academic program (Kasworm, 1990). The National Center for Education Statistics publishes a report periodically on the state of education. This report includes current statistical research at all levels of education. Their publication, the *Digest of Educational Statistics, 2013* was most recently published in 2015 by the U.S. Department of Education. (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2015b). Based upon data between 2000 and 2012, this report shows that the enrollment of the populations of traditional students and adult students in degree-granting institutions have both increased by 35% over the course of the first twelve years of the 21st century (NCES, 2015b).

While more students are enrolling from both traditional and adult age groups, the rate of persistence also needs consideration. According to the US Census Bureau, between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of the adult population 25 years of age and older with a bachelor's degree increased from 27 percent to 32 percent (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2015a). Though many adults have never attempted higher education, this low percentage range raises concerns that those starting may not be finishing.

The type of institutions in which students may enroll for higher education are categorized by what degrees and certificates they grant and the time it takes to acquire the institution's signature or traditional degree. The institutions that are degree granting offer at least an associate degree and are separated into either two year or four-year colleges. These colleges can either be public or private, dependent upon the manner in which they receive funds. Public colleges and universities are supported by funds from the state and community in which they are located and require students to pay tuition and fees at a reduced rate compared to private universities. Private universities are not funded by the state or local community, but can be categorized as for-profit or nonprofit. Students are still expected to pay tuition and fees often at a higher rate than public institutions.

At degree-granting institutions, students have a choice to attend on either a full or part-time basis. For example, a student who chooses to enroll full-time in an undergraduate college or university will typically have a credit load of 12 or more semester or quarter units. A student who chooses to enroll part-time will typically

have a credit load less than 12 semester or quarter units (NCES, 2015a, p. 856, 862). The most current data from the National Center for Educational Statistics provides information on enrollment at degree-granting postsecondary institutions by age of student, attendance status, and whether the university is public or private from the Fall semester of 2011. Table 1 shows the difference between traditional and adult student enrollment for Fall of 2011 by comparing students who attend full-time and part-time. Table 1 shows that there is a larger percentage of adult students who are enrolled on a part-time basis in all postsecondary degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2013a; Van Rhijn, Quosai, & Lero, 2011).

Table 1

Difference Between Traditional vs. Adult Student Enrollment in All Public Postsecondary Degree-Granting Institutions, Fall 2011*

	Full-Time %	*Part-Time %*
Traditional Students (age 18-24)	81.9%	51.4%
Adult students (age 25 & above)	18.1%	48.5%

** **Total** is defined as the number of students in attendance at both Public 4 year and Public 2 year institutions*

***These numbers **do not** include enrollment in institutions that offer only career and technical programs*

Adult students tend to enroll on a part-time basis, and traditional students are more likely to enroll full-time. As Adult Serving institutions, there is also a difference in the enrollment of adult students when compared to traditional students at both public two-year and public four-year institutions. Table 2 shows that according to the NCES, in Fall 2011, adult students across the nation enrolled in both four-year and two-year institutions as part-time students primarily.

Adult students are more likely to enroll as part-time students in two-year institutions, in which they have access to various academic, vocational, and basic skills programs (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014; Levin, 2007; Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2009). The support adult students receive through special programs has dramatically increased, especially in the wake of the 2008 recession. Between 2007 and 2010, community college enrollment increased to 8.2 million students, an increase of 20% or 1.4 million students (Helmer, 2013). It is also critical to note, NCES projects the rate of adult enrollment in degree granting institutions to increase by 20% from 2012 to 2023 (NCES, 2015a, p. 378). This projected increase in adult enrollment places more challenges on degree-granting institutions of higher education to recognize, understand, and create appropriate services to handle this projected adult population increase.

Adults are enrolling in greater numbers as part-time students at both two-year and four-year schools than their traditional counterparts. This poses institutional challenges of instruction and campus inclusion and integration.

Table 2

Difference Between Traditional vs. Adult Student Enrollment in Public Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2011

	Full-time 4 year	*Part-time 4 year*	*Full-time 2 year*	*Part-time 2 year*
Traditional Students (age 18-22)	87.7%	49.6%	71.1%	52.0%
Adult Students (age 25 and over)	12.3%	50.4%	29.0%	47.9%

The next section discusses adult education literature that addresses the micro-level of analysis and has been structured to explain three interconnected issues: the process of adult development from a cognitive, social and emotional perspective; the agentic approach that characterizes the learning style of this population; and the challenges that adult students face as part of their academic experiences.

Adult Development: Theoretical Perspectives

Developmental theories are critical in that they provide frameworks for understanding individual transformative changes and patterns of meaning among adult individuals (Boes, Baxter Magolda, & Buckley, 2010). These theories have roots in the work of Piaget (1947), who studied the reasoning and cognitive growth of adolescents and adults. The foundation of developmental theories include, but are not limited to, the work of: Perry (1970), Belenkey et. al. (1986), King and Kitchener (1994), and Baxter Magolda (2001) (Boes et al., 2010). Developmental theories are useful in understanding the complexity of the cognitive, social, and emotional journey of individual development, beginning in childhood and continuing through adulthood.

The developmental trajectory of the individual must begin in childhood, and Piaget's (1947) research provided a critical foundation. Piaget believed that children develop through experience to understand the world, by beginning in a state of egocentrism, a full focus on self, and move from there to a decentralized state or a focus outside of the self (1947, loc. 1217).

Piaget's theory about children's cognitive development included an understanding of regulations, responsibility, and justice. Piaget (1947) noted that

children begin in a heteronomous stage of development, characterized by egocentrism and moral realism, and move from heteronomy into an autonomous stage of development. This autonomous stage demonstrates a shift from egocentrism to decentralized or perspective considerations. In this stage, children will critically consider rules but apply them only within the context of respect and cooperation. Piaget's work is important to the understanding of adult development as it provides the foundation for understanding how reasoning begins.

Kohlberg (1981) expanded upon Piaget's theory by expanding the understanding of how an individual's reasoning changes with age (Kohlberg, 1981). Kohlberg believed that abstract and moral thought is developed through adulthood and that we understand the world by passing through six distinct stages of cognitive development. Kohlberg believed that not every adult would achieve the sixth developmental stage, yet in each stage, individuals exhibit different ways in which they reason.

Perry's (1970) work also provides relevant insight to understand adult development. Perry's model of cognitive development was derived directly from a longitudinal research study on college students. His scheme demonstrates that during the course of the college experience, there is a basic progression in ways of thinking.

Perry describes nine positions from which college students view knowledge and learning. The specific positions can be categorized into three groups. In positions 1, 2, and 3, a person modifies an absolute right-wrong outlook to make room for simple pluralism. In positions 4, 5, and 6, a person accords the diversity of human

outlook from the simple pluralism to contextual relativism. Finally, positions 7, 8, and 9 trace the development of commitments in a relativistic world (Perry, 1970). Knowledge of these positions is critical as it informs faculty on the positions through which students will proceed as they develop the ability to think abstractly/academically at the collegiate level and throughout life. Perry's research is important in terms of understanding adult development as these are stages experienced by most adults at some point in their life and provides insight into cognitive tensions an adult student might encounter during their academic experience. [1] Perry's work is also notable in that Belenky and Clinchy (1986) built upon it, creating a new model of women's cognitive development by showing how women's self-concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined.

Belenkey, et. al. (1997) developed five major epistemological categories in which to group women's perspectives on knowing. These perspectives included silence--extreme denial of self and dependence on external authority, received knowledge--listening to the voices of others, subjective knowledge--the inner voice and the quest for self, procedural knowledge- the voice of reason and connected knowing, and constructed knowledge--integrating the voices. Belenkey et. al.'s (1997) work is important to understand adult development as it provides a context for women's cognitive development as distinctly different from that of men's cognitive development.

[1] See (Knefelkamp, 1999) for an insightful analysis of William Perry's work

Drawing upon Dewey's (1910) work in reflective thinking involving characteristics of reasoning that extend beyond inductive and deductive logic, King and Kitchner (1994) developed the Reflective Judgment Model to describe development in reasoning from adolescence through adulthood. This model consists of seven developmental stages that relate sets of assumptions about the process of knowing and how this process of knowing is acquired.

King and Kitchners seven-stage model can be defined as types of reasoning, so stages 1, 2, and 3 can be described as pre-reflective thinking. Individuals within these stages do not acknowledge or perceive that knowledge is uncertain. The type of reasoning in stages 4 and 5 is quasi-reflective, and is demonstrated by individuals who recognize that problems are ill structured and struggle with how evidence relates to a conclusion. The final type of reasoning is reflective thinking, demonstrated by individuals in stage 6 and 7, thus individuals within these stages argue that knowledge is constructed and knowledge is understood in context (King & Kitchener, 1994). King and Kitchner's model presents further understanding of adult development as it provides an explanation for how reasoning develops, even in the face of real uncertainty.

Adult Student Identity

The previous section described multiple approaches to adult/human development as a lens through which to understand the cognitive, social, and emotional journey into and though adulthood. This section focuses on describing a specific theory that derives from a holistic approach that describes the ways in which

adults experience cognitive and moral development as part of their social experiences in different contexts.

The Holistic Self-Authorship Approach

This section presents one of the latest approaches to explain adult development. This approach is derived from holistic perspectives that try to bring together different perspectives (constructivism and developmentalism). Baxter-Magolda (2009) integrates identity, epistemology, and relational theory into an understanding of the adult from a more holistic perspective. This theory explains adult development by identifying an internal and external environment shaping the individual. The internal environment involves the coordination of beliefs, values, and loyalties, as opposed to the external environment that includes the opinions of others.

Baxter Magolda (2009) integrated principles from constructivism (that humans organize meaning) with developmentalism (that systems evolve through eras based on principles of stability and change) to explain the process of gaining self-sufficiency and emerging through adolescence into adulthood. From a holistic perspective, adult development can then be seen as integrating the cognitive with the inter- and intrapersonal aspects of development (King, 2009). This journey does not rely simply upon individualization but includes recognition of the development of the internal voice within the dynamic contexts of cultural/racial expectations, sexual orientation, the presence/absence of religious faith, and meaning making in education (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

The gradual emergence of the internal voice will help to coordinate external influence and manage one's life. Adult student identity, then, is grounded within the activity of meaning making, use of and reliance upon internal voice, and the importance of supportive relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

According to Baxter Magolda (2009), the attainment of self-authorship occurs when internal authority takes root and mediates external influence. The simple act of moving away from external authority to reliance upon self is the very act of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2009). The opinions and directions of others are often relied upon in childhood as life navigation is learned. Be it from parents, teachers, or even peers, individuals initially adopt externally defined expectations about who they are, or should be, and thus construct identities through external authorities (Boes et al., 2010). These external forces are necessary in childhood but often become "obstacles" (i.e. external messages of value and worth) in the process of developing authentic self-authorship (Stewart, 2009). Self-authorship develops gradually as adults come to develop and rely upon their own voice, self-identity, and belief system. Due to the presence of obstacles, there is often internal and external conflict as adults work to find and identify their own voice.

Adults who hold a structurally mature sense of self rely on their self-authored voice to guide their decisions and life directions (Boes et al., 2010). In this way, intrapersonal development becomes synonymous with "self" as opposed to listening to the opinions and directions of others (Pizzolato, Hicklen, Brown, & Chaudhari, 2009). The construction of self-authorship provides a sense of individual fulfillment.

Past Perspectives and Deficiency-Based Models

Historically, higher education institutions have struggled to understand the characteristics, needs, and strengths of adult students. During many years, higher education institutions adopted constraining perspectives to make sense of the identity of adult students. Kasworm (1990) identified that previous study about adult learners at the undergraduate level utilized a deficiency perspective. Kasworm identified five characteristics in which adult students were seen to express deficiency when compared to their traditional counterparts: cognitive deficiency, lack of adaptability, role conflict, lack of campus involvement, and lack of intellectual/personal development.

Previous studies suggested that adult students' low academic performance was associated with cognitive deficiencies coupled with aging (DeCrow, 1959, cited in Kasworm, 1990). This cognitive deficit assumption is the belief that adults do not have the intellectual ability to make it in the real world, so they return to school to strengthen their intelligence. This lack of intelligence is also described as a direct result of increasing age. The lack of intellectual/personal development identifies the limited impact of the college experience upon the personal and professional development of adult students (Boes et al., 2010). Lack of adaptability is based upon the assumption that adult students would not be readily able to adapt to and keep up with the fast-paced, collegiate, undergraduate environment (Helmer, 2013; Kasworm, 2010). Finally, adult students have been criticized for holding conflicting roles as they are often student, parent, spouse, and employee simultaneously (Levin, 2007; Ricco,

Sabet, & Clough, 2009). The lack of campus involvement is based on this role conflict as the simultaneous roles require that the adult student limit time on campus to attend to multiple tasks. It is critical to note that this overtly negative characterization may be more the fault of the definitions, categorizations, frameworks, and assumptions of researchers than the fault of the adult students themselves (Kasworm, 1990).

Holistic perspectives about adult development (Baxter-Magolda, 2009) are an attempt to overcome previous deficit models and acknowledge the strengths that adults can bring to college and the specific learning styles they possess. An agentic approach is used to explain the specific learning approach that adults embrace as individual agents (Montero-Hernandez & Cerven, 2012). According to this perspective, an agent is defined as a person who possesses the capacity to choose between options and act upon their choice (Agent, 1995). Among adult learners, the agentic approach refers to a series of behaviors and attitudes that include self-monitoring, the use of meta-cognitive skills, self-directed learning, and educational goal selection (Montero-Hernandez & Cerven, 2012). The construction of the agentic approach of adult students is based on five conditions: "(a) adults' cognitive and personal development journey, (b) intrinsic motivation, (c) a self-directed learning style, (d) involvement in off-campus activities, and (e) educational goal selection" (Montero-Hernandez & Cerven, 2012, p. 11). The enactment of self-directed behaviors derives from adult cognitive, social, and interpersonal development. The

agentic approach provides excellent insight into understanding how and why adult students choose to come back to school.

Contextual Tensions for Adult Students

As previously discussed, many adult students experience role conflicts that create significant tensions in their lives. Adult students have multiple responsibilities. They often have to hold steady employment to pay for educational and/or home responsibilities, take care of children or spouse, and navigate college life. The following section explores the ways in which adults deal with the dilemmas that their multiple roles create. Each of the following tensions has both positive and negative aspects associated with it.

Employment as tension. Working adult students are often defined in the literature in terms of the self-perceptions of their 'primary role' as 'students who work' or 'employees who study' (Levin, Montero-Hernandez, & Cerven, 2010). Working full-time while enrolled is also a risk factor known to reduce the likelihood of persisting at college (Levin et al., 2010). Not working or working only part-time are decisions that can facilitate persistence creating time and space for educational focus (Levin, 2007).

Unfortunately, students who work, especially those who work full-time, have limited opportunities to engage socially and academically with other students, with college personnel, or with collegiate life in general (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2009; Levin et al., 2010). Interaction with others on campus is relevant to an adult student as these discussions often highlight or take the classroom conversation into

greater depth, allowing the adult student to further explore educational material with peers (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The time spent on campus is limited for working students as they must dedicate study time to working. Specifically, working more than 20 hours per week becomes a negative influence when employment activities become a source of stress, isolation, anxiety, and unhealthy behaviors (Levin et al., 2010). Little is known about the cases of college students who are able to complete their educational goals despite their "at risk" status and the quality of their working environments.

In spite of the negative effects that working full time exerts on students, some studies have also suggested positive aspects of working while in school (Ayers, Miller-Dyce, & Carlone, 2008; Levin et al., 2010). First, working is beneficial for students, as it provides money to help pay for studies. Second, these studies suggest that employment places students in an environment in which they can implement what they are learning.

Parental responsibilities as tension. Just as there are positive and negative aspects to the tension of employment, so there are positive and negative aspects to the tension of being a parent while in school. Parents matter in the lives of their children. We each owe something significant to our parents, whether it is for our success, failures, or inadequacies we all owe something to parentage and patronage (Gladwell, 2008). One important phenomenon in the parenting process is the tendency for children to adopt a parent's view on education. When parents further their own education, school-aged children observe this, and this shared student experience

represents the potential for a positive influence in the family microsystem (Ricco, Sabet, & Clough, 2009). When a child shares the experience of being a student alongside a parent, this experience can encourage higher achievement goals for both parents and children. This shared goal can then lead parents to emphasize skill learning or mastery over performance as a way to motivate their children to actively seek college attendance (Ricco et al., 2009).

On the other hand, a negative aspect of being a parent while also being a student is financially difficult. Some students must choose between going into debt in order to fund both their studies and child-care (White, 2014). Some students choose to take out $20,000 to $30,000 loans in order to pay for childcare while earning their degree, causing many parents to have higher student-loan debt than their childless peers. Adult students with children are also more likely to interrupt their studies for financial reasons (Van Rhijn, Quosai, & Lero, 2011; White, 2014).

Family/friends as tension. Studies have confirmed that both family and education are greedy institutions that demand exceptional amounts of physical time, attention, and emotional energy from students (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). Furthermore, adult students have reported an array of reactions from loved ones that can range from unsupportive to hostile regarding their college attendance and schoolwork choices (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010).

While domestic pressure can be seen as a risk factor (Levin et al., 2010), it can also be an incentive and motivator for all family members. This is especially true for adult students that are women with young children. Studies have revealed that single

mothers experience the most stress (Levin, 2007). Single mothers have reported being motivated by the opportunity to be a first generation college graduate and to set a good example for their children. For some female adult students, educational success is also intertwined with the success of their children, as they view education as the key to their children's success (Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). In this way, educational success can be motivated by the success of children. This support, inspiration, and motivation provided by family can also be found in the context of peers.

In order to succeed at any stage in life, individuals need both family and friends (Crisp, 2010). Friends, or peers, offer support in ways that family cannot, especially during the transition into college life. Studies have shown that both traditional and adult undergraduate students benefit from peer-led social support programs administered during the first weeks of college (Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, & Brooks, 2010). These peer-led support programs allow students to establish ties with fellow students of all ages, especially after the ties to former friends have been broken due to reasons connected to college attendance. Overall, the enduring effect of feeling more socially connected in college may have important implications for long-term college adjustment, retention, and graduation rates (Mattanah et al., 2010). Unfortunately, even the support, inspiration, and motivation of family and friends can often be offset in the face of fear.

Fear of failure and lack of capacity as tension. Fear of failure can either drive an individual to ultimate success or cause an individual to stop short. Adult students' anxieties offer an example of the profound role fear of failure has in a

student's life (Cox, 2009). This fear can be directly tied to self-doubt and lack of self-confidence about succeeding in college or realizing career goals (Cox, 2009).

This fear of not succeeding is often heightened when students experienced failure in previous academic contexts (Cox, 2009). These fears can be exacerbated in the face of basic skills remediation--as sometimes this fear of failure could be associated with real gaps in a student's academic skills. Fear of failure could be either real or a result of the individual's misperception or low self-confidence. While fear is one of the many emotions adult students are bound to experience at some point in their educational path, another is the challenge to integrate previous lived experience with present study material.

Internal epistemological challenge as tension. Adult students are likely to experience unexpected internal tensions based upon the juxtaposition of their past experiences and the type of material they are studying. For instance, when a student with a strongly scientific background enters a college course in philosophy, this student may face internal epistemological challenges due to the previous training, ideas and values they possess (Kuhn, 1996).

Kuhn (1996) guesses that about half of the adult population with education would have experienced epistemological tension at some point in their life. Internal epistemological tension occurs in the process of constructing new meanings (Hamer & Jan van Rossum, 2010). The outcome of internal epistemological tension is a new way of thinking. Some adults actively seek out this tension simply because it results in new learning, while some adults avoid it at all costs. Despite the individual

preference, this tension is unavoidable when adults return to school. The experience of internal epistemological tension can be simultaneously challenging and rewarding.

Support Structures for Adult students

In order to address the tensions experienced by adult students, institutions have responded by improving campus inclusion and integration of adult students. This section will focus on the programs and practices that aim to address adult student needs. Since community colleges are higher education institutions with the largest number of adult students enrolled, four-year institutions often revise the programs created at two-year sites to support adult students.

Community colleges have implemented programs based on mentoring and counseling services to help both traditional and adult students achieve academically and learn how to navigate academic culture for the purpose of goal attainment (Montero-Hernandez & Cerven, 2012). For example, San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, California has implemented a program called New Student Group Advising as a way to better assist first time students (both traditional and adult) successfully through the first year of attendance (Amen & Harris, 2014). The mentor/counselor team to which each first-year student is assigned includes an academic advisor, an outreach specialist, various counselors, and various counseling classified staff. The purpose of this program is to make connections with students in the first semester of their first year and to assist them in everything from creating an education plan to financial aid, registration, and career counseling (Amen & Harris, 2014). This program was created as a part of the Student Services and Special Programs (SSSP)

mandate, created by the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012, and intended to increase the matriculation rate and student success for all California Community College Students (Chancellor's Office California Community Colleges Students Services and Special Programs Division, 2014, p. 1.1). This program works to ensure that every student benefits from mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and advising services. Methods such as faculty behaviors, relationship building, campus collaboration, and intrusive counseling are all examples of successful programs, services, and institutional agents that are in place to address the educational needs of adult students.

Mentoring (including counseling) and faculty participation are two critical components of the support programs in community colleges. Mentoring experiences have been shown to exist in a variety of forms, ranging from a friendly informal relationship to a formal mentoring program (Crisp, 2010). Adult college students perceive mentoring as several types of support: (a) psychological and emotional, (b) degree and career, (c) academic/ subject knowledge, and (d) the presence of a role model. Mentoring, however, does not need to be experienced through one sole individual but can be experienced through a combination of people including faculty, staff, senior or graduate students, peers, friends, family members, and/or religious leaders (Crisp, 2010). These mentors can also be defined as institutional agents who act to assist the college student in accessing highly-valued resources such as counseling, advising, or transfer requirements (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). To increase persistence and retention, institutional agents can utilize a form of counseling called

intrusive counseling, where the counselor initiates intentional contact to develop beneficial student-institution relationships and establish trust between the student and the institution (Levin et al., 2010). Mentoring for the adult student population has been found to have a positive influence on numerous student outcomes: improved student performance measured by GPA, persistence rates, intellectual and critical thinking skills, and improved social-emotional skills (Crisp, 2010).

Faculty members are key to adult student success in that they establish high expectations for student development, engagement, and future success (Creasey, Jarvis, & Gadke, 2009; Levin et al., 2010; Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2009). In the classroom, faculty members are the first and often primary interaction between the institution and the student; therefore, faculty members are often the institutional agents with whom students, especially adult students, will establish a bond of trust. Faculty members are also the agents who transmit highly-valued resources, including course content, informal mentoring, and encouragement for academic success. These interactions go a long way toward addressing adult student needs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This investigation is based on an interpretative approach to examine the ways in which student-parents construct their learning experiences within the undergraduate academic environment (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 1991). This interpretative approach is focused on "understanding human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts" (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Thus, this study examines student-parents' meaning making as part of their undergraduate experience at the university.

The interpretative approach is based on social constructivism, which suggests that knowledge is subjective and constructed (Schwandt, 2001) and that the lived experiences of the individual are valuable truths that deserve analysis. Creswell (2014) notes that the process of qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures, data that is typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis that involves inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations from the data. With this research foundation in mind, I examined the following research questions:

RQ1: How do student-parents navigate their academic experiences at the university while simultaneously caring for and raising children?

Sub Q1: How does the relationship that student-parents build with their children shape their understanding of their role as undergraduates?

Sub Q2: How do student-parents manage the simultaneous demands of parenting, employment, and studying?

Sub Q3: What type of learning outcomes do student-parents pursue as part of their educational experiences at the university?

I endeavored to understand the adult learning process as experienced by seven adult students who are also parents of children. All adult students were seeking their bachelor's degree. Parenting was defined as the relationship of an adult (over the age of 25, either male or female, and either single or married) to minor(s) that they are legally responsible for. The student-parent description in this study is inclusive of all parent child relationships including biological, adopted, and blended families. For definition, a biological child is defined as having a partial genetic match to the adult student; and a stepchild is the biological child of an adult who is married to another adult who is not the child's biological parent. Another term for the "step" distinction utilized in this study is blended family. Just as adult relationships can have different formats (i.e. married, single, widowed, and divorced) so parenting can also take on different formats (i.e. having biological children or step children).

Research Site

For my research site, I chose a California State University (CSU) located in the Central Valley with an adult student population that included parents. From this population, I purposefully selected seven adult student-parent participants. They are each attempting to navigate their educational experience while raising and caring for children. As an instructor and student, I have both familiarity and access to this site;

therefore, research time on site was accessible. The institution is described as an Hispanic Serving Institution (HIS) with a Fall 2013 reported student headcount of 8,917.

The research site is located within the California State University system. The population estimates of the state of California in 2014 was listed at 39,000,000 people compared to the population of the county where is campus resides, was approximately 530,000 people in 2014. The Hispanic or Latino population of the state of California in 2014 was 38.5%. The Hispanic or Latino population of the county where this campus resides was 44.1% (United States Census Bureau website, n.d.). The Hispanic or Latino population of the research site, as reported in Fall of 2013, was 3,912 students or 44% of the total student population. The average age of the total student population, in Fall of 2013, was 24 years of age.

Participant Selection Criteria

I utilized purposeful sampling (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2013) to select seven adult students currently enrolled in undergraduate courses. According to Glesne, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling…leads to selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (2011, p. 44, emphasis in original). Purposeful sampling provided the opportunity to select specific cases that explicitly illuminated the influence of being a student parent from a relatively large population of adult students. Purposeful sampling was consciously used to fulfill a specific research purpose (Patton, 2015). Table 3 includes a

description of the participants by gender and family structure. Six interviewees were partnered and one was currently single. For clarity, I did not interview both parents; I only interviewed the parent who was also a student.

Table 3

Participant Gender and Family Structure

	Blended Family	*Biological Family*	*Total*
Male Participants	0	3	3
Female Participants	3	1	4

The sample is a reflection of the demographics of those who responded to the call for participants (Table 4).

Table 4

Participants by Attributes

Attributes	**Blended Susan**	**Blended Sister Mary**	**Blended Scarlett**	**Biological Renae**	**Biological Mr. Science**	**Biological RJ**	**Biological Gene**
Age	43	28	31	33	63	33	30
Major Program	Sociology	Child Develop-ment	Kinesiology	English	Geology	History	Biology
Minor	Criminology	N/A	Health	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Single Mother	Married	Married	Married
Number of Minor(s)	4	2	3	2	2	3	1
Student Status	Enrolled Full-time	Enrolled Full-time	Enrolled Full-time	Enrolled Full-time	Enrolled Full-time	Enrolled Full-time	Enrolled Part-time
Employed	Working	Working	Homemaker	Homemaker	N/A*	Working	Working
Residence	Sonora	Riverbank	Madera	Merced	Modesto	Merced	Modesto
Ethnicity	Caucasian/ Native American	Hispanic	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian German	Hispanic	Caucasian

* N/A refers to lack of current employment or minor

The factors of rapport and trust were critical to establishing a positive relationship with each participant (Patton, 2015). I asked participants to share personal thoughts and experiences, but without a mutually respectful relationship based upon rapport and trust, this project would never have succeeded.

Methodological Strategies for Data Collection

As is consistent with qualitative research, I chose a semi-structured interview approach and participant-generated photography (Schwandt, 2001; Merriam, 1991). To answer my research questions data were collected over a seven-week period. Table 5 displays the sources of data in terms of the amount, type, and date collected from each participant.

Table 5

Overview of Data Collection

Sources of Data	**Susan**	**Sister Mary**	**Scarlett**	**Renae**	**Mr. Science**	**RJ**	**Gene**
Interview Length--Date	122 min. 8/11/16	99 min. 8/26/16	74 min. 9/1/16	109 min. 9/2/16	138 min. 9/9/16	84 min. 9/13/16	115 min. 9/16/16
Initial Informal Discussion Date	35 min. 8/9/16	40 min. 8/19/16	25 min. 8/25/16	20 min. 8/26/16	62 min. 8/15/16	30 min. 9/5/16	15 min. 9/9/16
Visual Data (Photos)	32 photos	19 photos	15 photos	20 photos	25 photos	5 photos	22 photos

Initial Informal Discussion

Building rapport and respect began with the scheduling of an initial informal discussion with each of the participants. I met each participant for a minimum of 15 minutes on the CSU campus where they are currently enrolled. The exception to this was Susan; we met at a coffee shop in her hometown of Sonora, due to her work schedule restraints. The other participants had already begun attending classes for the Fall of 2016 semester; so, time was scheduled on campus with each of them. The purpose of this discussion was to introduce myself by sharing personal background and interest in the topic and to reinforce that my purpose was to learn their stories, reminding them that they were the experts in telling the stories of their lives. I then shared the Participant-generated Photography Protocol (Appendix B) and a personal collection of photographs to be used as examples. When I shared these photographs, I briefly explained how they related to each of the categories of images listed on the Participant-generated Photography Protocol. I stated and repeated that though these examples were how I would go about answering my questions, the examples were not indicative of how the participant needed to respond. My intention with the photos was also to take the first step in vulnerability, allowing the participant to see pictures of my home, school, family, and educational and work environments. I assured them that I would be respectful in viewing their photographs. Finally, this initial meeting presented the opportunity to share and discuss the details of the IRB consent form, (Appendix C), which all but one signed on site. RJ requested to take the form home to read, which he did. I also asked each participant to choose his or her pseudonym.

Each person chose a name based upon personal preference and I chose not to ask his or her explanation. From that point on, all paperwork and reference to these individuals was done using their pseudonym. At the end of each meeting, a tentative date and time was scheduled for each interview. I confirmed each interview ahead of time to ensure that the time and location were convenient for each participant. Only one interview, with Mr. Science, needed to be rescheduled.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I utilized a semi-structured face-to-face interview strategy to examine the adult students' academic experience while raising children. The purpose of qualitative interviewing is to capture how the participant understands their world, to learn their language and judgment foundations, and to understand the complex layering of individual perceptions and experiences (Patton, 2015). The semi-structured format allows interviewees to express their individual perceptions and experiences through the use of a small number of open-ended questions.

This method of interviewing has multiple characteristics (Creswell, 2014): 1) gathering historical data on participants, 2) provides the researcher semi-control over the questions asked, 3) data is filtered through the perspective of the participant, 4) data is gathered in a designated place instead of a natural field setting, 5) responses may be biased by researchers' presence, and 6) not all participants are equally articulate and reflective.

Based upon the availability of each of the participants, I was flexible in terms of scheduling interviews at a time and location of their choosing. I developed an

Interview Protocol (Appendix A). Interview sessions lasted an hour minimum and were electronically recorded. I fully informed participants of the recording and obtained their consent prior to beginning the official interview. If, for any reason, a participant declined recording, the interview was terminated immediately. Each interview was transcribed immediately. The transcription was sent to any interviewee per request for correction, modification, and accuracy.

Visual Data: Participant-generated Photography

Photographs provided a unique opportunity to interpret visual scenes and determine whether the interpretation merits additional analysis outside of language-based data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Participant-generated photography is defined as photography in which the participant is responsible for taking photographs as a natural act, which offers a means of communication that is non-threatening (Snyder, 2012). Other researchers have also found strengths and weaknesses of participant-generated photography to include the following: 1) photographs offer language that transcends cultural differences, 2) provides a frame for language, and 3) a catalyst for enhanced interpretation of beliefs. The weaknesses include 1) the technological challenges of still photography, 2) participants confidence/comfort with photography, and 3) photography adds a layer of intimacy and requires additional researcher care (Taylor, 2002). I included participant-generated photography to explore adult students' academic experiences at the university.

During the Initial Informal Discussion, I offered to provide each participant with a 27 shot disposable camera. None of the participants accepted, choosing instead to use their smart phones for taking and sharing photographs. Photography allowed participants to visually document their lives both inside and outside of the classroom. Their photos served as the basis for the semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015). Therefore, I provided each participant with specific guidelines regarding the use of the camera to take and share pictures of their academic experience (Appendix B).

Participants used their smart phone to take photographs and shared them with me through a cloud-based shared folder. The shared photos were discussed during the interview. The researcher did not view any photos prior to the date and time of the interview.

In order to ensure that participants felt free to take any picture, the instructions included permission to take photos that represented their academic experience and the experience of raising children. An agreement was made with each participant that the researcher would remove the face of any individual in any picture included in written or published material, to insure that confidentiality was never breached. A Photograph Release and Consent Form (Appendix D) was created and signed by each participant for this purpose.

Data Management and Analysis Utilizing Atlas.ti

Making sense out of a large and complex collection of visual and textual data is always a challenge. In this study, I analyzed multiple sources of raw textual and

visual data. This process was intensive and required that data was condensed by a process of choosing, uniting, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data.

The process of condensing and systematizing data began immediately after the first interview to avoid letting field notes and transcripts go unanalyzed (Maxwell, 2013). I took the following steps to prevent data pile-up:

- Interviews were recorded via audio file on an audio recorder and saved under an agreed upon pseudonym
- Interviews were converted into mp3 files and sent via secure portal to a transcription agency
- Each interview was transcribed and returned within the transcription agencies promised 5-day window

Once the coding process began, I had each interview coded in its entirety. Each of the seven semi-structured interviews lasted a minimum of sixty minutes. The tools provided for analysis through Atlas.ti were extensive and sufficient for my needs (www.atlasti.com). Transcript documents, research memos, and visual data were uploaded into Atlas.ti for storage, coding, and analysis. Ongoing conversations with my dissertation chair were essential for the creation of the codebook and data tables described below, all of which were critical to data analysis.

The Coding Process

Coding is the process by which tags are attached to segments of text for follow-up retrieval and analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I began the coding process by grouping the transcript documents and the visual documents by

participant pseudonym, with the transcript document listed first. For each participant the photographs were categorized into four major ideas (Appendix B): learning activities, student challenges, parenting experience, and student representation. After I coded the interview, I moved to the photo documents and chose one or two of the most important photographs from each participant. Importance was determined by the amount of time and emotional emphasis with which the participant discussed each photograph. I then wrote a memo that connected the important photos to the quotations and family codes that described them from the interview.

The codes themselves were developed by first determining code families based upon the types of questions that were listed in the Interview Protocol (Appendix A). Overall, the coding book consisted of some pre-identified codes (from literature and conceptual framework) and emerging codes (from insightful remarks identified in the interviews). The initial code families included Challenges, Student Experience, Parenting Experience, and Supportive Relationships. Once code families were identified, the formal process of data analysis was begun.

The coding scheme involved first identifying a family code, and then creating sub-codes. The sub-codes were determined by patterns that became evident in the data. For example, under the family code Challenges, the sub-codes included financial, academic, culture, handicapped child, conflicts, logistics, psychological, technology, and time. The sub-code creation subsequently required that each initial family code be broken down until no quotations remained within the initial family code itself. In alignment with qualitative data analysis techniques, the codebook

included each family code, sub-codes, and definitions of each code (Creswell, 2014). My codebook can be found in Appendix F.

An additional step was taken to also summarize and label each quotation. This became extremely useful in the identification of themes. I also chose to create memos attached to specific documents, codes, or quotations. These memos included reflective thoughts and connections to literature that were then utilized throughout the process of identifying critical themes. The coding process and development of memos were accomplished by using tools offered by Atlas.ti, such as the code family manager and quotation manager. These specific tools allowed me to identify meaning, recognize relationships, select descriptive quotations, and integrate theory into the final set of results (Creswell, 2014).

Thematic Identification

The process of identifying themes was accomplished by creating a matrix in which relatable codes could be identified. The Table for Related Codes (Appendix G) was crucial part of the thematic identification process in that it allowed a linear ordering of components from which I could develop and see connections between specific codes (Maxwell, 2013). In order to complete the Table for Related Codes, I first looked for natural connections between codes, such as the relationship between family and motivation. This relationship was then identified using an attribute or logical connector, such as family relationships are the *cause of* motivation. This type of attribute connector allowed me to identify codes and the exact type of relationship

between the codes. I then used the code co-occurrence tool[2] in Atlas.ti to verify how many times two seemingly connected codes could actually be found coding the same quotation. I completed the Table for Related Codes by identifying the interviews where this code relationship was found, and finally identified to which research question the citation was responding. The Table for Related Codes was then supported by the creation of a colored Code Co-occurrence matrix (Appendix H) to highlight the relative frequency of code relational occurrence.

By identifying and examining the relationships between codes, the themes then began to emerge. For example, Appendix G highlights the codes and relationships relevant to the theme of "Significant Others". The attributes include family relationships *are the cause of* motivation. These attributes can be seen in: 1) Sister Mary's case where her brother was the motivation for her college attendance, 2) Scarlett's husband is her support system, 3) Mr. Science receives reciprocal motivation from his daughter. Each of these code relationships, attributes, and exemplary cases demonstrate the importance of the Narrative of Significant Others, which initially was spelled out as:

> Adult students also need a role model who exemplifies the good that they need at a particular moment in their life… Sister Mary needed inclusion, which she saw in her brother as he made 'school look cool'. Scarlett needed

[2] Altas.ti utilizes an extremely complex formula by which code co-occurrence frequencies are reported. This formula and the actual co-occurrence number was fairly irrelevant to the determination of themes, it was simply used to offer confidence that the chosen codes were actually used together.

support that she received from her husband when he says, “You’re only going to graduate once, ‘Just do it’.

By considering the relationships between codes, attributes, and cases each of the themes were developed. Each of the initial themes are present in the results discussed in chapter four. The presentation of each theme in the form of a *Narrative* was critical because these findings are embedded within the story of the lives of these seven participants. Without the context of their lives and the stories that they shared, these themes would never have come alive to the researcher. To sum up, data management and analysis required the tools provided by Atlas.ti software to identify units of meaning, make comparisons, create multiple matrices for data input, and retrieve specific quotations.

Ethical Considerations

The research protocol was submitted to the Institutional Review Board and granted approval by letter on June 7, 2016. This letter can be found in Appendix E. However, ethical considerations involve more than the letter of IRB approval; ethical considerations are a part of each researcher’s daily interactions with participants and data (Glesne, 2011, p. 162). These daily interactions require that the researcher make decisions about sensitively handling data obtained from participants. This sensitivity requires an understanding that at any time, a laptop could be stolen, research notes can be demanded under the Freedom of Information Act, or a home or office safe can be burglarized or burned; so the data needs to be stored and “backed up” somewhere secure. This sensitivity also requires using a pseudonym on the recorded interview so

that the exact identity of the participant is always protected. Sensitivity is a daily decision and it requires both forethought and consideration of others.

Power Relationships

As a researcher, I am aware of the possible perpetuation of existing power relationships (Maxwell, 2013); to overcome asymmetrical power relationships, I developed ethically-appropriate relationships with my participants (Maxwell, 2013). The propensity to abuse power was also overcome by conducting empowered research that prevented participant exploitation (Vanner, 2015). Research is a process in which power is inherent. Taken from a Foucauldian understanding of power, in research there are two different types of power within the research process, the power of knowledge of the truth and the power to disseminate this knowledge (Foucault, 1980). At the point of interview and observation, the participant holds both types of power, but once the information is passed to the researcher, the power also is transferred. Once the information changes hands through a micro-level dispersion like an interview, the researcher then becomes the primary decision maker and dominant figure (Vanner, 2015). In order to avoid abusing power in the research process, I needed to understand my positionality and the power connected to it. Following this statement, I offer a brief methodological framework to offset this positionality.

I am a Caucasian, American female with my own brand of feminism. I am partnered and responsible for my biological son and stepdaughter, and both an instructor and a graduate student within this research population. I believe that the purpose of education is to create thoughtful leaders that are motivated by justice to act

in service of a more just society. I am particularly interested in utilizing Adult Education as a vector through which my belief of the purpose of education may be fulfilled. The majority of my own formal education has occurred within both private and public California institutions. Initially, I preferred attendance at a small, private, religious, educational institution, but as a doctoral student, I prefer attendance at a larger state university.

I chose to question my foundational assumptions to undertake more participatory research to understand from parents, who are also adult students, what their belief of and vision for the purpose of education entails. While my social position as both instructor and student at my research site was a detriment in some ways, I also used my position to leverage less powerful voices to speak out about their understanding of education. So long as I approached this project with the necessary humility and longing for justice, I believed that it was possible for me to research and write about the environment in which I also reside. I am aware of my influence; therefore, I endeavored to ensure that the representation of my participants aligned with their self-perceptions and self-understandings.

I built relationships with participants that were founded upon respect, reciprocity, and trust. The critical component of reciprocity was developed by being vulnerable with the participants by showing them examples of my own photographs, and telling them a little about my own experience as a student parent, and allowing them to share about themselves for as short or as long a time as they desired. Providing space in the initial discussion for a few participants to share stories

involving broken relationships and personal struggles developed trust between the researcher and the participants. Without prompting, I promised to maintain confidentiality, which I have guaranteed by enacting specific strategies. Prior to recording each interview, I asked the participant to choose a 'pseudonym' to use as a way to introduce them on the audio recording. I alone kept a record of which pseudonym was connected to whom, and this table was kept in an encrypted file. In this way, I kept track of who was who, and once I learned the pseudonym, I did not run the risk of using their first names in recorded conversation. I also destroyed any audio copies of the interview upon verification of the accuracy of the transcript. In this way, I hoped to practice the continual protection of confidentiality through identity protection (Glesne, 2011).

As a consideration for respect, I did not include my own students as participants. For example, there was one student who responded to an email participation invitation with interest. Her response occurred four days before the Fall semester began. Immediately after the semester started, she rescinded her interest in participation, citing the fact that she was a student in one of my courses. I immediately thanked her for her interest in participating and shared the full understanding that her lack of participation was best at that time. The power dynamics inherent within the teacher-student relationship automatically would turn everything previously claimed about my positionality and intentions into a more complicated situation. I refused to place this student and others enrolled within the courses that I teach within harm's way.

Fully Informed Consent. Another ethical consideration was ensuring fully informed consent. Due to the nature of the questions asked, it was important for me to ensure that participants knew and believed the following about this research project: 1) their participation was fully voluntary, 2) there may be questions that affect their well-being, and 3) they may choose to stop participation at any time, for any reason (Glesne, 2011). The questions that may affect the wellbeing of a student could be any question that brings up a memory, specifically painful ones. Appendix C provides a copy of the consent form that was signed by and collected from each participant.

A final point of ethical consideration was to ensure that participants were able to read, observe, and discuss the representation of the product before it is disseminated to a wider audience (Glesne, 2011). In terms of the collected interview data, I shared each of the transcripts with each participant who expressed interest in verification before the coding process began. I also will follow IRB policy to ensure that all photos, drawings, transcripts, and other written documents are shredded three years after the termination of this study.

Validity Strategies

The contribution of this study to the field of adult learning relied upon my ability to assess the accuracy of findings and the ability to convince readers of that accuracy (Creswell, 2014). Here I identify and discuss two validity strategies that I chose to utilize through the course of this research process.

Reflexivity: Purpose of the Researcher

First, I was sure to clarify the *bias* that I bring to the study through the use of self-reflection. Reflectivity is a critical characteristic of qualitative research and informs how the researcher's interpretation of the findings is shaped by their positionality (Creswell, 2014). Robust self-reflection can be used by a researcher to understand personal vulnerabilities, including conflicts between multiple roles of being a researcher while also being a parent and student myself, and connections that illuminate deeper meanings about the research variables. This weekly act of reflection was also used for self-monitoring and the effects of constraints upon collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. I also participated in bi-monthly meetings with the Chair of my Dissertation Committee. These meetings allowed for constant dialogue and time to identify my own pathways of understanding and interpretation.

Triangulation

By examining evidence from multiple sources and "using it to build a coherent justification for themes," I employed a second validity strategy: triangulation (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). The creation of themes that are built upon the convergence of multiple data sources or perspectives adds validity to the study. The use of multiple methods of data collection is done for the purpose of strengthening reliability and internal validity.

The reliability of the qualitative methods of interviewing and participant-generated photography were analyzed in a number of ways. The qualitative reliability procedures that I used included 1) immediately checking transcripts to

insure the absence of obvious mistakes, 2) finding another person to assist in cross-checking codes for inter-coder agreement, and 3) minimizing code drift by constantly comparing data with the codes and writing memos regarding the chosen codes and their definition (Creswell, 2014). The use of Atlas.ti allowed for cross-checking between the researcher and the dissertation chair by discussing potential codes, analyzing the pertinence of these codes, creating code families, and understanding the definitions and distinctions between individual codes. We also worked together to create definitions of both emerging codes and codes that derived from the literature.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The insights of adult students and how they perceived and interpreted their experiences as both a parent and student are central to this qualitative study. The descriptive data from the seven participants present a rich description of the construction of the self, family, and legacy. These dimensions are critical to the understanding of the student-parent experience. As explained in previous chapters, the names of all participants are pseudonyms chosen by each individual participant. This chapter will review three results (narratives) and examine how they support and extend the research on adult students who are also parents: (1) Narratives of Emotion: From Longsuffering to Optimistic Resilience; (2) Narratives of Support: The Role of Significant Others; (3) Narratives of Self- and Co-Construction.

Narratives of Emotion: From Longsuffering to Optimistic Resilience and Critical Reflection

Student-parents experienced an emotional state that I characterize as "longsuffering," which was a result of the tensions associated with the challenges these student-parents found in their everyday life when enacting multiple roles as parent, adult, and student. As described by participants, longsuffering involved a series of constraining emotions such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Each of these emotions was not experienced intermittently, but participants endured these emotions on a quasi-permanent basis. Although participants experienced a sense of

longsuffering, they also managed to develop coping mechanisms that helped them persist and succeed in spite of the difficulties. I identified two main coping mechanisms the participants used to navigate their academic experiences: critical reflection and optimistic resilience.

Understanding the Life Conditions of Student-Parents

The student-parent has to fulfill multiple roles: a student, a parent, a partner, a peer, a sibling, and a friend. The enactment of these roles can cause emotional tension. The combination of different roles within one individual can cause a multitude of emotions and internal tensions. Table 4 on page 33 described each of the participants by attributes. The following paragraphs will provide more descriptive detail of their lives. The student-parents whom I interviewed each have lives that involve traumatic experiences, including serious physical abuse, the birth of a child with a congenital disease, and a divorce from a bi-polar ex-husband that automatically identifies them as having experienced stressful life situations. Though the student-parents in this study have lives that characterize the experience of longsuffering, none of them allowed this condition to dictate their present lives and future expectations.

Susan is a mother of four children, who homeschooled them through high school and has now decided to return to the university to complete her bachelor's degree. She divorced from the father of her children, a man diagnosed with bi-polar disorder, but has used the experience to bond her family together through open communication and unending love. She was the victim of a severe auto accident as

she returned home from class in December 2014, which set her education back 18 months for the purpose of recovery. Fall 2016 was her first semester back in the classroom following the accident.

Sister Mary is the mother of two children, her stepson and her natural daughter. Her daughter was diagnosed with ASD, Autism Spectrum Disorder and is a source of immense joy in Sister Mary's life. Sister Mary is also a first generation college student with an older brother who graduated with his bachelors from the same school she now attends. Her brother strongly encouraged her to pursue her bachelor's.

Scarlett is the mother of three children: two daughters and a young son. Her son was born with a congenital heart disease called right atrial isomerism and heterotaxy with asplenia. The left side of his body is almost a mirror image of his right, and he was born without a spleen. This condition required at least 2 surgeries performed immediately after birth, and the condition only affects seven children in every million (Scarlett, Interview). Her son's condition was not eliminated by the surgeries, but they have given him a jump-start to a healthy life.

Renae is a single mother of two children who also bring her great joy, and like Sister Mary, she is also a first generation college student. She has an identical twin sister, and both were the victims of extreme physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their father when they were young. She finds great joy in education and dreams of becoming a professor of English literature.

Mr. Science is the father of two children and attended UC Berkley as an undergraduate, but stepped away to develop his successful auto mechanic business.

However, after 30 profitable years in the automobile repair industry, carpel-tunnel syndrome in his hands has required that he close his shop and return to school. He is doing so alongside his 26-yr old daughter as they both pursue a geology degree. If not for the existence of this disability, Mr. Science would have remained in his successful shop, but he now faces the requirement of finishing his degree and finding a new career where he can spend the remainder of his viable working years.

RJ is the father of three: two young boys and a daughter. He earned his Associate of Arts (AA) in Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and Drafting, and before the economic slump in 2008, worked successfully in technology. He currently works as a road-repair technician, but seeks a more fulfilling and less-hazardous career for himself and his family. He has chosen to return and complete his bachelor's degree with the desire to teach and coach football in high school.

Gene is the father of a young daughter who has spent over 12 years pursuing his education. He works as a paramedic while going to school for his bachelor's in biology. After a scare when his daughter was infected by H1N1 and the diagnosis was given by a physician's assistant, Gene hopes to become a physician's assistant in an emergency room.

Each of these individual adult student-parents has experienced grief, trauma, depression, and emotional distress. Yet each has shown critical reflection, endurance, and resilience to bounce-back and complete the educational journey they began. The challenging situations and conditions present within the lives of each of these participants is exacerbated by the conflict of roles which they also experience. As I

will present in this chapter, the role of education within the lives of each of these unique individuals has not only added to their stress but in may ways also emancipated them from their traumatic experiences.

Each of these participants performs multiple, demanding roles, which generate a range of emotions such as anxiety, stress, and worry. Susan explains the emotional impact of the challenge of being a student and a mom as the reason for her need for music to relieve the anxiety and stress of being a student, and her worries about being an adequate mother.

> [Emotional impact] is why I have my humor. I have to laugh or I'll just cry all the time and I use music. Oh my gosh, I will blare music on my drive down [to the university] just to get myself back into the, okay, this is going to be fine and…I need that to bring my anxiety down, because I definitely can get stressed out at times and I worry that I'm missing out on my kids' lives, I'm worried that I'm not helping them enough, the normal mom worries.

When queried about the emotional impact of the challenge of being a student and a parent, RJ responded with a description of his fear of failure or fear of letting himself down, which in turn causes him to try even harder than other students.

> The biggest challenge for me is letting myself down. Like, I don't want to let myself down; like, I know what I'm capable of doing…There's like something on my shoulder that's saying, don't stop, keep going, you can do this. And that's my biggest fear is letting myself down… letting myself down, that's like

> stabbing your own self in the back, it's like don't do that. So, that's why I try that much harder.

Renae described her feelings of insecurity about her age, which holds her back from fulfilling her full potential.

> I feel a disconnection [at the university] that makes me feel like insecure…And I think it's because I'm older, and really here it's kind of like more of high school, kids right out of high school. So I think it's the age gap [and] my own insecurity kind of holding me back.

Based upon the experience of these participants, having to participate in multiple roles at a time generated anxiety, stress, worry, fear, and insecurity. These emotions were associated with internal tensions among participants due to their conflict of roles.

An example of this point of tension came when Sister Mary was asked how being a parent related to her role as a student. She acknowledged the tension between getting good grades and being attentive to her children's development. She emphasized that her responsibilities as a mother were her priority but these responsibilities required the sacrifice of good grades.

> I guess I've had to prioritize that my children are more important so if I apply those extra two hours [to homework] that I give to my kids a day, I could be a way better student. But my kids need me, and they need me now. Like, they're still little. Everything is still magic ... So I have to make that compromise … my best is only a C now, but my kids are doing something.

With various roles also come various responsibilities and tasks. Specifically in the role of parent, adults experience the responsibilities of feeding, clothing, and sheltering their children. The role of student includes completing writing assignments, completed assigned readings, studying for and taking exams, attending class and participating in discussion. When the responsibilities and tasks of the role of parent are coupled with the responsibilities and tasks of the role of student, adult students can easily feel overwhelmed. Gene describes feeling overwhelmed by the tension between the role and responsibilities of being a student, and the responsibilities and tasks of the roles of parent and spouse.

> People don't realize that my life isn't just studying. As I showed you, I also got things like laundry, cleaning the house, mowing the lawn and edging, taking care of the animals, and all that kind of stuff. And my wife also participates in that, but it's not as easy as most college kids who really, [all] they have to worry about [is] work, friends, and acing their final. They don't got all these other things that you have to do.

The student-parents in this study faced multiple responsibilities and tasks which they tried to accomplish in order to achieve two central goals: to raise children to be successful and productive members of society and to obtain a degree for the purpose of personal fulfillment or employment improvement.

In addition to the role conflict, all seven student-parents experienced academic, financial, logistical, physical, psychological, and technical challenges. For example, academic challenges were present in the form of confusion and misunderstanding

about the concepts, theories, or examples that the professors present in classes. Renae described that challenge when she described her first exposure to poetry, and the specific concept of sonnet analysis.

> In my Shakespeare class this semester, … we had to read poetry, sonnets in the beginning…poetry…it's not for me. And so I never knew what a quatrain was. I'm like, what is that? And a couplet. I never learned that… I'm like; I don't even know what that is. And then my girls told me, because we met up, and I'm like, what was [the professor] talking about? What is that? And they told me…the next class we had to analyze another sonnet. I was actually able to do it all on my own…I understood what it was. And I was like, oh, my gosh, I did it. I can't believe I understood it.

In this example, Renae sought to solve her lack of understanding by asking some of her friends to help. Another academic challenge presents itself in the form of professors who did not adopt an effective instructional approach or build relationships with students. For Mr. Science this challenge became apparent in his description of his mineralogy professor.

> There is a phrase in academia that acknowledges that professors basically bait their students into repeating the same paradigm back to them for approval, so that you end up with teaching being fundamentally parochial by nature. And I found that to be so profoundly true that even when you have teachers that challenge you to think outside of the envelope, they punish you when you do.

Unfortunately, Mr. Science did not find a solution for his problem; he had to keep

working with his mineralogy professor the rest of the term.

While dealing with some professors can be challenging, the time spent in college created challenges for participants in this study. Table 6 illustrates the amount of time to degree for each participant. This time to degree is challenging in that ideally, the student is expected to spend four years in college. Yet this table demonstrates that each of the participants has dedicated five or more years to attain their undergraduate degree.

Table 6

Challenge of Time to Degree for each Participant

Name	**Trajectory**	**Institution Certificate/Degree**	**Total**
Susan	2 yrs. Auto Accident= 1.5 yrs. 3.5 yrs.	Local College- 2 AA Certificates Regional Research University BA degree- Sociology	**7 years**
Sister Mary	1 yr. Stop out- 1 yr. 3 yrs.	Local College Regional Research University BA degree- Liberal Studies	**5 years**
Scarlett	2009- various community colleges 2017	 Regional Research University BS degree- Kinesiology	**8 years**
Renae	3 yrs. 1 yr.- Bad university advising 2 yrs.	Local College- AS certificate Regional Research University BA degree- English	**6 years**
Mr. Science	3 yrs. 2 yrs. 2 yrs.	Local UC Local College night courses Regional Research University BS degree- Geology	**7 years**
RJ	2 yrs. 2 yrs. 2 yrs.	Local College- AA certificate Local Community College Regional Research University BA degree- History	**6 years**
Gene	2006- various community colleges	 Regional Research University	**12 years**

	2018	BS degree- Biology	

The time required to complete each participants' degree was not always under the control of the student. For example, Susan was hindered for 1.5 years (18 months) by a automobile accident that caused her serious physical injuries. She was actually on her way home from class when she was "t-boned" by an 18-wheel truck while waiting at a stoplight. Renae's extended time included a year of extremely poor academic advising at the university, which misdirected and delayed the start of her first semester at the university by adding unnecessary tests and remedial courses.

This need to spend more than four years in college posed a psychological challenge for participants. The additional time in unnecessary or non-transferrable courses caused extreme frustration and doubt among student-parents. These adult students often felt frustration towards the academic structure and university system because it required much time, energy, and money towards fulfilling requirements that, at the time, felt unnecessary. When frustration and doubt build to a breaking point, these students felt as if they were wasting precious time, energy, and money and could have chosen to "stop out" (Levin, 2007, loc. 111). However, they chose to persist. The continual institutional and personal setbacks the participants experienced are part of the longsuffering that characterized the emotional state that student-parents described.

Navigating Longsuffering: Overcoming Long- and Short-term Challenges

Foundational to the emotions experienced by these individuals who hold multiple roles was the experience of *longsuffering*, which involved patiently enduring despite hardship or challenge. These participants all have withstood the test of time

(five years or more to complete their degree) and they had to conquer some substantial obstacles, such as overcoming personal fear and doubt about success, dealing with financial hardship and the physical or mental afflictions of their children, and juggling a multitude of roles.

Although the lives of all student-parents in this study were characterized by the persistent existence of challenges, student-parents tried to ameliorate the psychological impact of life's difficulties by categorizing their life problems as "temporary" or "permanent". In doing so, the emotional response was more easily directed through the use of coping mechanisms. The coping mechanisms that student-parents reported included *critical reflection*, the ability to stand outside of one's experience and examine the internal and external influences on thinking and action (Marienau & Segal, 2007), and what I describe as *optimistic resilience*. According to the actions described by participants, I see critical reflection present when a participant chooses to turn an almost overwhelming challenge into a personal, passionate, pursuit as a result of their analysis and reframing of the experience. As Marienau and Segal describe, "reflecting critically on experiences involves…paying conscious attention to a person's values, assumptions, and beliefs that might affect how he or she is interpreting an aspect of the parenting experience" (p. 771).

I use the concept of optimistic resilience to describe the participants' ability to suffer setbacks yet continue to recover quickly from difficulties with a positive or optimistic outlook on what the future holds. Optimistic resilience is similar to what Andersson (2012) defined as "dispositional optimism…a stable expectation that good

things will happen across a variety of complex life situations" (Andersson, 2012, p. 291). Andersson's concept is similar to a life perspective, while optimistic resilience takes dispositional optimism a step further and includes a reaction to life in the form of persistence and the ability to bounce back. So the concept of optimistic resilience included the positive thinking that students experienced and the forward-oriented action that characterizes resilience, which requires both optimism and action. The coupling of optimism with resilient action demonstrates that the positive thinking has an impact upon events within the student-parent's life.

Scarlett illustrates the use of critical reflection as a coping mechanism in this process of longsuffering. Scarlett found herself in the middle of a long-term permanent challenge when her son was born with a congenital heart disease, for which there is no cure. Her response was to turn her sadness at the existence of her son's condition, into a personal, compassionate drive to help alleviate the suffering of others. When presented with the reality of her son's condition, the coping mechanism of critical reflection helped her redefine her educational direction from being a nurse to patient advocate or patient rights counselor. Through this moment of redefinition, she chose to turn a challenge into a personal, passionate pursuit.

> I cannot tell you enough how driven I am to excel, and to be the best, and to find a cure for those kids, it's like kind of an emotional thing for me. It's a big part of my life. I just want to do my best… I don't want the kids to suffer. It's sad. And to watch them in the hospital. I had to see a kid die that was in the room next to us. And it's a lot, it's a lot on these families. And so when I lived

> through that; you don't want people to suffer like that. You don't want people to feel that way. And so it's just kind of hard sometimes… But I'll get through it. I always do. But I'm hoping it makes me stronger, and it makes me fight that much harder for them. I just feel like there's so much emotion that people don't bring out anymore.

While some students would give up or "stop out", Scarlett chose to turn this challenge into a more passionate personal pursuit, to increase her own knowledge and thereby empower herself to assist, both physically and emotionally, those who experience the permanent challenge of raising a child with a heart condition.

Temporary challenges were defined by the short-term nature of the difficulty being experienced by participants in this study. For example, attending college places these student-parents in a short-term financial challenge, which was identified by all seven participants. Susan emphasized that as an older student, being vested in her education and future helped her to overcome challenges. This feeling of "being vested" was an important condition for her motivation to persist.

> Typically, [as an older student] you're there, because you want a better life. You're trying to better yourself, your education, your job, whatever it is that you're trying to better, your knowledge. So you want to do that, you're there for you, whereas younger kids tend to be there just because they have to, and their parents are paying for it, and they could[n't] care less, but they want to go to the next party. So you're really focused financially. I have to pay for it. So I'm definitely vested … it's my investment in a sense. You know, I put the money in

there, I'm going to work for it.

This description of "vested" is a mature approach to the realization that when money spent on an education could be put toward other personal or familial priorities, the decision to spend it on education carries the responsibilities of staying focused and working hard in the process.

The coping mechanism of critical reflection in the face of a short-term financial challenge can also be understood by looking at the expense of an education and the cost of educational tools such as textbooks, computer programs, exact compasses, etc. as an investment in one's future. For example, Mr. Science described this investment in necessary tools as an investment in something that will move him to the next phase of success. Mr. Science looked beyond the financial cost and struggle and sought to find value in the learning opportunities he is experiencing.

> What's affordable to me, I have a different perspective on it than other students. I mean, if I know I'm going to use it and it gets me to a position where I need to, I wouldn't think $1,000 or $2,000 for software is necessarily out of line. I would never buy a new car, but a new car won't get me to a different place than an old car. If that software was pivotal [to my education or career] I would get it. You know, there's a device called a Brunton compass that's a $600 very precise…compass and a transit in one. It's for measuring angles of slope, of faults…and I will need to buy one, and I will use it professionally. And I look at it as a serious investment...I think other students really look at dollars and cents as lost opportunity, like if I buy this book that I have to buy, it's something else

> I won't be able to buy, without thinking of the book as an asset. You know, it's not an impediment. I guess I've been in debt enough in my life where I know the debt is like flat tires, just a bump in the road that comes and goes. You know, sometimes you have to man up to it and spend the money on that stuff.

These uniquely reflective responses view temporary financial challenges as an "investment", "opportunity", and "a bump in the road that comes and goes." These descriptions express a level of emotional maturity founded upon critical reflection of past experience with financial hardship, which allows the student-parent to presently respond with less anxiety and more understanding of their current conditions and aspirations.

Another short-term challenge student-parents mentioned was the absence of uninterrupted study space, as shown in Figure 1. Especially for those who had young, curious children, the absence of a quiet study space was temporary in that their time in school will come to an end, but it was an immediate challenge as young kids are curious about what their parents are doing. RJ described this temporary short-term psychological challenge as simply one that is a part of his academic life.

> It's not a desk, it's not in a quiet room, it's not dim lighting. It's basically where I can find space, time to do what I need to do to get done…. it's where I can kind of seclude myself for whatever time I need…we live in a house, it's three bedroom, but the kids have their rooms and there's no place for me to study quietly. Some would think a garage is not the best part of the house, but it's what I have available to me. It doesn't mean I don't get interrupted…my study

room is constantly being opened up with kids coming in wanting to play or wanting to come out to see what I'm doing, but I have to shoo them inside and then refocus every time that happens. RJ's description also exemplifies critical reflection through his ability to stand outside of his experience of limited study-space and examine non-traditional options.

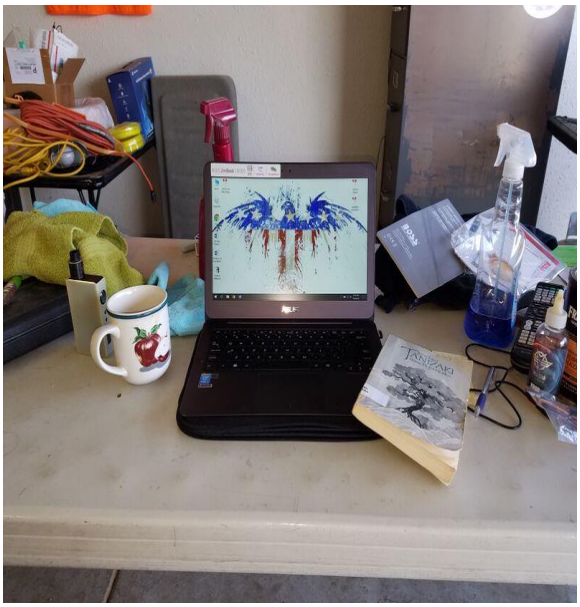

Figure 1. RJ's study space in his garage

Another family-oriented short-term challenge identified by all seven student-parents was the challenge of missing special times with children. For RJ one of those special times is the evening bedtime routine, which for his children, involves dinner time, reading time, bath time, and then bed. This is a temporary in that RJ will only miss the bedtime routine on the nights he is in school and for the duration of his educational program, and it is a familial challenge in that his wife is affected by his absence too.

The other [challenge] is leaving your family, leaving your kids. My wife has to

> deal with the three kids the rest of the evening and I miss out on putting them to bed. My wife reads to them every night and we all eat dinner together and I miss that. I'm missing that part. A challenge for my wife, I believe, more than me because she deals with the kids and putting them to bed and my boys are a hand full, to say the least…so, it's a challenge for me as well. Like I said, I miss my kids.

The ability to "bounce back" from a temporary challenge, be it financial, psychological, or familial is also connected to another unique adult response; optimistic resilience. Optimistic resilience describes an individual who is able to fully recover from a setback or challenge and maintain a positive, hopeful, or confident view that the future is still bright and possible. So while critical reflection provides the opportunity to step outside of circumstances and critically evaluate the response, optimistic resilience, the coupling of optimism with resilient action, demonstrates that the positive thinking has an impact upon events within the student-parent's life. These coping mechanisms are also interconnected in that critical reflection is a precondition for optimistic resilience. Optimistic resilience emerges when individuals choose to interpret their challenges as a condition that does not define who they are or what they can do.

This optimistic resilience came from many sources, but the most common sources discussed by these participants were *expressions of love* and *spiritual encouragement*. Expressions of love as identified by all seven participants, were either given by these adult participants, or received from others. Participants

described love as an emotion that involved the intense feeling of deep affection and was expressed in simple “love notes”, or in loyalty and good habits. For example, Sister Mary describes a little chalkboard in her living room that is used for displaying little encouraging memos for the family, or as she described them, “love notes”. These encouraging memos include things like, “let’s learn something new today!” or “let’s have a great day at school!” Her daughter has really taken the practice of “love notes” to heart, which is an important condition that keeps Sister Mary motivated to persist.

> [My daughter] really takes to them, out of all of us, I feel like she really takes to the little encouragement notes. So she'll write like ‘I love you’ on my coffee, even though she wasn't supposed to write on my mug. Because I write on her applesauce. I write ‘love you’, so she wrote on my mug. She's like, “look, I wrote my name,” I go, “I love it, where did you find a sharpie?”

These written expressions of love, shared between mother and family and mother and daughter, provided the resilience to emotionally respond to the challenges posed by the roles, responsibilities, tasks, and goals of being a parent and student. These written expressions of love allowed Sister Mary to feel confident that despite the challenges of ASD, her daughter still loves and appreciates the effort she dedicates to encouraging her. When coping with longsuffering, sharing written expressions of love provided the opportunity to share laughter and love with children, which strengthened the parent’s resilience.

These expressions of love also allow a participant who experiences a short-term

academic challenge to respond with optimistic resilience. Sister Mary continued the description of these ‘love notes’ in the following quote and pictured in Figure 2, as she described a moment of anxiety brought by studying for a test and how a love note from her daughter changed her perspective from anxiety to positive thinking and action.

> I had to read [a book] for a class called *Parenting from the Inside Out*…I knew I had a test, and I make note cards when I study, and I have different colors, and I had stepped away for a break, and [my daughter] had come over to the table, and she picked up a note card and she was going to study with me. She didn't say anything, she was really quiet. And when I came back to the table, she had taken a note card and wrote, as best as she could, Parenting from the Inside Out, she copied the title of the book…it made everything worth it. I don't remember what the stress of the week was, if I couldn't afford my rent that week, or if that's the week we almost ran out of groceries. But like, the first year of deciding to go back to school, it was a shock to my finances and working…trying to be a better mom for her. And I remember taking that class and thinking, “What am I doing? Can I do this? Should I just go back to work? Should I just call it?” And that stupid test I was stressed out…and it just instantly broke me, that memory it seems like because it was that little nudge that I needed, like I can do it.

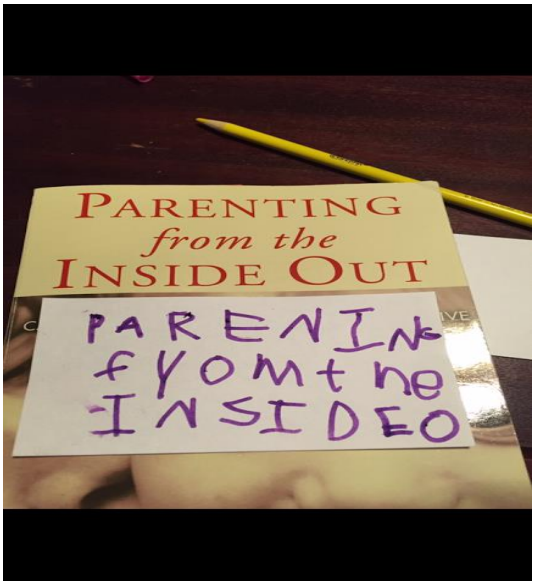

Figure 2. "Love note" from daughter

This 'love note' allowed Sister Mary to respond with optimistic resilience to the test-taking anxiety. Her daughter's action provided her with the knowledge that she could complete her educational goals despite the short-term financial and academic challenges that she experienced.

Another expression of love can be described as loyalty to your spouse or partner. This was described by one of the participants, Mr. Science. He has been partnered for 32 years to a women he loves and who provides him with unwavering support during his educational endeavors. As an older adult student, he described using the "momentum of having good habits" as a way to be extremely careful with the feelings of his wife.

Mr. Science responds to his wife's unwavering support for his education and the time it takes him away from her with an expression of love that prioritizes her

above others. The expression of loyalty (or of prioritizing one's beloved above all others) was also important for optimistic resilience because it helped Mr. Science to build a home environment founded upon support. Mr. Science explained that if the student's partner feels supported and loved by an expression of loyalty in a tempting school environment, then the partner is more likely to reciprocate with support through other expressions of love while the student is at home and studying. When immersed in a home environment of love, Mr. Science was more likely to respond to temporary challenges with optimistic resilience simply because he felt supported, and this emotional support was critical to a positive, long-term outlook on the future. So in order to avoid even the hint of impropriety, especially when he was at school and immersed in an environment surrounded by younger, vibrant, intelligent adults who also wanted to include him in their academic and social activities, he explained that his response to social invitations was going home, thereby encouraging his wife to continue supporting his academic endeavors.

> There are times when the entire geology group is going to go do something and [they would ask] 'would you like to come along…?' And I know that it's more party than it is legitimate activity, and I'll defer to my wife and go home. I've made the choice not to do things to accommodate my wife more often, because I'm careful with her feelings [more] than anything else. I wish young people knew the sage things that I know… it's easier to be a good husband when you're older, but I think a lot more of it has to do with just the momentum of having good habits.

This ‘momentum of having good habits’, especially the habit of loyalty, was an obvious expression of love that contributed to the construction of a supportive family environment for Mr. Science.

A second foundational part of optimistic resilience was *spiritual encouragement*. For some individuals, the experience of spiritual encouragement provided an emotional anchor, a place to turn for encouragement in the face of either temporary or permanent challenges (Sharp, 2010). Spiritual encouragement requires the existence of spiritual belief, and this belief was present in this study in four of the seven participants. These four described their spiritual experience without being asked. The other three participants did not mention spirituality and were not pressed for their opinion or experience with the topic. All four student-parents who shared about their spiritual life identified spiritual belief or forms of spiritual practice to be a crucial part of their optimistic resilience.

In this unique group of student-parents, Susan expressed her love for the traditional, Judeo-Christian Lord and Savior. She explained that her faith in Jesus Christ was part of who she is as a person, part of the brokenness and woven together nature of her family, and part of their family’s success. She describes her reverence for and personal knowledge of God in multiple situations, the three in which she also found spiritual encouragement are included here. The first was at a point of both personal and family baptism, as she described a picture of her family after being baptized by her Uncle Jimmy and the feeling that if God was not present, she and her

family would not have had direction. The baptism was foundational to her experience of optimistic resilience.

> We all got baptized together. So Uncle Jimmy baptized all of us at the same time and I feel like that represents our family really in every realm, because if God wasn't in it, [we'd] be no good.

Susan attributes her longsuffering mentality, her ability to make it through two years at a community college, two years at a state university, and then a horrible automobile accident that took her 18 months to recover from. Her desire to return to her university to complete her education, while still driving the same route at similar time to when the accident occurred, is founded upon spiritual encouragement.

> I know that God's the only reason why I've hung on and made it through and I know that he's helped me see that I'm not stupid and we each have our own strengths and we each have our own weaknesses. And I think that I definitely -- I pray every time I drive down there and every time I drive back for safety since it's so far and I pray before every exam.

She expressed joy in going to the Grand Canyon and allowing her children to feel the environment, as shown in Figure 3, and truly understand the significance and beauty of God's hand in creation. Once again, the experience of spiritual encouragement provided an emotional anchor, a place to turn for encouragement in her pursuit of learning opportunities.

> [The] Grand Canyon was kind of a field trip. Instead of just reading things in books, I wanted my kids to feel it and really understand it…so we went to the Grand Canyon and I think that enjoying nature, it does a lot of things. One, you can see how beautiful is, what God has created and just kind of take that in.

Figure 3. Grand Canyon educational trip.

This spiritual belief provided a refuge when Susan experienced negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, or uncertainty.

The use of prayer as an individual emotion management strategy is defined as "individuals often seek 'spiritual support' through prayer to help deal with negative emotions caused by experiencing stressful events" (Sharp, 2010, p. 418). Scarlett describes her spiritual belief as a refuge from the stressful event of her son's heart condition, a practice that requires listening to God's plan and prayer. Scarlett describes her spiritual encouragement as the foundation for her optimistic resilience.

> God has a plan for me and I have to listen…And I'm so grateful for all of the

> opportunities I've had, even the ones that sometimes don't come off as a blessing; my son having a heart disease. That at the time was a challenge for me…it made me really tune into my faith and really focus on what was important in my life…Really having that relationship and coming to terms with, "I do need you. And now I'm here, and I'm finally broken enough to where I can't look to anything else but you. Please help me." … I believe in miracles. You really have to listen.

Sister Mary described finding refuge from self-doubt in a spiritual response to the moment that her daughter wrote a little love note that gave her the confidence to continue. She recalled, "Yeah, she just made that note card and it was just like a little sign from God that like if she can do it, then I can do it." This moment of spiritual encouragement was the foundation of her optimistic resilience.

RJ also describes finding spiritual encouragement in the face of self-doubt or uncertainty. This encouragement exists in the challenging look that his grandfather gave, a look of disapproval that he never wants to receive because he wanted to make his grandfather proud. Even now, in a spiritual sense, "the look" challenges him to be his best, and provides another moment of spiritual encouragement as the foundation of his optimistic resilience.

> It's my grandfather, and he's sitting there looking -- he's not saying anything, he's just looking…just don't make your grandfather give you the look of disapproval…and that's what pushes me. It's like that mythical or that spiritual thing sitting there just gives you that look like, what are you going to do? You

going to keep going? I mean, just the look says it all.

For some participants, optimistic resilience is founded upon spiritual encouragement and is practiced in the following ways: the practice of baptism, finding beauty in God's creation, the practice of prayer, listening to God's voice, envisioning "the look" of a deceased loved one, or identifying a sign from God. Optimistic resilience was also founded upon expressions of love in the following ways: love notes, the momentum of good habits, loyalty, and reciprocal emotional support. Optimistic resilience was a response to challenge, whether temporary or permanent and provided a coping mechanism for the challenging condition of longsuffering.

Concluding Remarks

The combination of different roles within one individual causes a multitude of emotions, and when some, or all, of the roles held by one person are in conflict, internal tension results from the emotions associated with each role. *Longsuffering* was a condition common to all seven student-parents in this study. It involved the existence of role conflicts and temporary or short-term and permanent or long-term challenges related to finances, health, and the academic life. These student-parents were in disadvantaged conditions because of the multitude of roles that they need to juggle, and the tensions caused by the conflicting agendas they were required to uphold. Student-parents struggled to sustain emotional stability and to finish school in only four years, yet they coped with the challenging condition of longsuffering by categorizing their challenges as temporary or permanent. This strategy helped them manage the emotional tensions present within roles and responsibilities. Along with

the categorization of short-and long-term challenges, student-parents developed other coping mechanisms: critical reflection and optimistic resilience. The former was a pre-condition for the latter. Among participants in this study, optimistic resilience derived from expressions of love from their significant others and spiritual encouragement, either from God or elderly family figures. Optimistic resilience and critical reflection were used to deal with the challenge of longsuffering. It is critical to note that in their narratives, these student-parents did not represent themselves as victims. Instead, they positioned themselves as individuals who experienced challenges and were willing to overcome life's difficulties. These student-parents are physically, spiritually, and emotionally complex individuals who exist in a multidimensional sociocultural environment; they responded to their challenges by being resilient.

Different from descriptions of most adult students in college, even when the literature describes that they develop multiple roles (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2009), there is minimal discussion about the emotional life or psychological wellbeing that emerges as part of the enactment of multiple roles. There are few studies that focus on how the multiplicity of roles held by one student-parent affects their emotional and psychological experience of the college environment.

Narratives of Support: The Role of Significant Others

The first finding underscored the emotional state and coping mechanisms that characterize the life conditions of student-parents. The second finding will focus primarily on the relationships student-parents build with *significant others.* These

significant others are most often members of the immediate family such as partner or child but also include a member of the extended family such as mother, father, or adult sibling. These relationships were critical to the success of the participants because they provided support, guidance and encouragement, and a positive example (i.e. role model). The majority of the participants emphasized that adult learners also need role models to help them navigate the challenges of life, especially life while in school.

Significant Others as Role Models

Significant others included those people who provided a critical component to the success or failure of the student-parents in this study. For Sister Mary, her brother was a critical figure in her life. Her older brother held a special place in her heart, especially when it came to her education. Not only was he the only one of her brothers who completed his degree, he consciously took the time to offer advice to her on the type of classes that she needed to get into college. His advice was an example of support that existed as an important condition for her college attendance.

> He was probably the only one ever to tell me like you need to take a college prep class. My other two brothers, the older twins, God bless their souls, they weren't very academically inclined. They went to summer school every year since kindergarten. My brothers insist they're owed a Ph.D. from all the accumulated summer school. But he's the only one of my brothers with a degree. The only reason I wanted to come here was because he came here, and he made it look so cool…He worked in the computer lab when this building

> first opened, he worked on the second floor in the computer lab, and I remember coming to school with him on minimum days…he used to have to pick me up and bring me to school with him, and I thought he was the coolest person ever.

Sister Mary expressed such a high opinion of her brother because he made a conscious decision to advise and guide her in the value of pursuing an education. As a first generation college student, she needed his assistance.

As a single woman and a first generation college student, the support of a best friend was critical for Renae. They met in a chemistry class at a community college, and while she is attending the university and he now attends another state college, she still seeks his assistance in math, and he will still send her written drafts of essays for editing. The communication she and Tom (a pseudonym) share is an important condition that keeps her motivated to persist. Tom encourages Renae to stay focused by being someone she can implicitly trust and who provides her with the skills to navigate the academic culture.

> Tom… helped me tremendously in our chemistry classes, because all the math…and I'm still friends with him to this day. He's like really my only true friend; I would say… He's a huge support in my life actually. And he's a veteran, so he got hurt in the war and came home...We're there to kind of help and support each other, because he's in school as well. And so we're kind of like our own little mini support group for each other. … [W]hen you kind of just need to let go and go out, he's the one I go out with. And that's like once

> every couple of months…I tell him everything … and we'll call each other, we'll talk, even just to vent… Oh, my gosh, this happened today…and then we'll talk about it, and help work out our problems together…I think without that I feel I would have more frustration.

Not only does Tom provide her with peer tutoring in math, one of the many necessities for success in academics, but he is also a good listener and a supportive ear in times of frustration and stress.

Mr. Science was not a first generation college student, but he did look to his daughter as an example of how to effectively navigate academic culture. He described the special place that his daughter holds in his heart, as she was his motivation for returning to school, and his example of how a hard-working student behaves in the face of distraction.

> There's definitely a reciprocal [motivational] thing going on. My daughter broke her back in a bike accident a couple years ago, and was pretty down in the dumps about losing her momentum and it involved moving from Portland back home. And by the time she got back on her feet, decided that she wanted to change her major. And if Dad can go back to school at 60, she can certainly go back to school, and she's 24. So her "poor me" argument sort of flew out the window…She is a very good student, and I would rather do the dishes than do another structural diagram. I have a very sympathetic example in the home with me, someone really keeping her nose to the grindstone.

It was for her hard-working, fun-loving personality that Mr. Science expressed such a profound love for his daughter. Distractions are present in everyday life but if his daughter could avoid them and choose to focus on completing her homework, then he could as well. This skill of avoiding procrastination was critical for Mr. Science's navigation of the academic culture.

For this group of student-parents, the influence and support provided by these significant others was provided in the form of being a *role model*. While we know that young students, even children, need good role models from which to learn about how to successfully navigate the functions of daily life. It is also apparent that student-parents need a role model who exemplifies an area of development they require at that particular moment in their life. As first generation college students, Sister Mary and Renae needed a role model to help them understand academic culture.

Sister Mary wanted to be a part of the school community and to develop a sense of achievement. As a role model, her brother provided her with the example of achievement and persistence by attending college and making it look an important goal in life. By interacting with her brother and watching as he practiced social inclusion regularly with others, and by including her in some of his campus activities, he became a role model that has guided and encouraged her into her own academic success.

For Renae, the interaction with Tom provides her with the necessary guidance and encouragement to continue working toward her goal of her bachelor's

degree while undertaking the role of single parenting. Tom's practice of regularly listening and helping her solve the problems she encounters, or simply letting her vent her frustrations or stress about the day, provides Renae with the space that she needs for reflection and conflict resolution. This interaction with Tom then becomes a resource to assist her in emotional management, which helps her to succeed in her academic experience.

For Mr. Science, his daughter provides him with the example of a hard working student, one who is extremely dedicated to her studies and her major. They share the same major, geology, and the same department on the same campus. He admits that there are times when he would rather do housework than his homework, but she reminds him of how important it is to focus on studies first. Mr. Science's daughter provided him with the guidance and encouragement to continue focusing on his studies, even in those times when he is distracted by the activities of life. The regular interaction with his daughter, both in school and at home, helped him to succeed in his academic experience.

Scarlett's relationship with her husband provided substantial support of her abilities, she had a developmental relationship (Piaget, 1947) with her husband. Scarlett described the support of her husband as necessary for her success. The communication she and her husband established was an important condition that kept her motivated to persist. Her husband encouraged her to explore learning opportunities and to keep focused.

> My husband…He's my support system. He is that guy who's encouraging me when I'm getting good grades. I tell him about different things when it comes to school and he's like, "Do it, Babe." I got a letter for honor society to join it and he's like, "You are only going to graduate one time. Just do it. Get as much as you want from it. Experience as much as you want.

The encouragement and support of her husband was also important as he chose not to attend college, but now looking back, he feels confident that he could have been successful. The self-confidence and motivation that Scarlett derives from her relationship with her husband is based on the emotional support she receives on a daily basis.

Concluding Remarks

Significant others provided the student-parents with a role model and assisted the developmental process of these individuals. This developmental assistance encouraged the development of self-confidence, the acknowledgement of the value of education, and acquisition of skills to navigate an academic culture. These role models provided opportunities for interaction and exchange of information, which increased the probability that each participant persisted in their studies and developed skills, ideas, and life goals. The existence of significant others was a critical component of these student-parents' successes because in most cases, they lacked the cultural capital needed to navigate the academic environment. In this context, cultural capital is defined as social resources other than money (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Three of the participants came from underrepresented minorities (Susan, Sister Mary,

and RJ), four of them were first generation college students (Susan, Sister Mary, Renae, and RJ), and two of them identified themselves as lower socioeconomic status (Sister Mary and Renae). This finding emphasizes the relevant role that emotional support and developmental relationships play in the academic journey of student-parents. This finding also serves as a critical reminder that student-parents have unique characteristics that influence their patterns of participation in the university context.

Even when the literature describes the importance of role models for low-status youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), it is important to acknowledge the importance of role models for adult students. Literature recognizes the importance of mentors for community college students as a population (Crisp, 2010), but provides minimal discussion of the population of student-parents. There is a focus in literature on traditional and nontraditional undergraduates and the conditions in which they persist (Levin, 2007), but the discussion is minimal regarding the specific conditions under which student-parents succeed.

It is also critical to note that contrary to other literature that mentions the key role that faculty play as role model or mentor (Crisp, 2010; Levin, 2007) the students in this study did not emphasize the importance of faculty in their academic success. In fact, some participants were critical of faculty. This observation simply highlights the unique nature of the participants in this study and warns against using qualitative data to create generalizations about adult student parents and their relationships with faculty as role models or mentors.

Narratives of Self- and Co-Construction

Elements of the family culture and structure are woven into the construction of individuals' being; the work of self-construction is not completed alone (Boes et al., 2010). Just as the construction of the adult self occurs within the context of the home and family, so the construction of children's self-identities also occurs simultaneously. By sharing the knowledge of skills and lessons with their children, parents are actually constructing their self at the same time that they co-construct the identities of their children. As described by participants in this study, the process of co-construction of selves requires that once an adult becomes a parent, they engage in shared process of self-construction with their children. This finding will highlight the interrelated nature of the construction of self among parents and children. I discuss lessons learned that parents share with their children through specific practice. I highlight the centrality of dialogue as part of the communication that parents establish with their children to provide a legacy.

Student-parents in this study emphasized that they learned personal lessons within the context of both family and college. In conversation with participants, it became evident that the home context was almost inseparable from the college context due to the fact that these student-parents need to be mindful of both environments even when only physically present in one. When participants are at home, they are always on the lookout for ways in which to complete work required for school. While at school, they are always looking for lessons and insight that may be applied at home. Thus, the inseparable relationship of the context of home and

college enhances the learning process for student-parents by providing lessons that can be applied in multiple contexts.

Lessons Learned: The Sources of Legacy

Student-parents emphasized that they have learned critical issues through their life at the university and in everyday life. The lessons they learned were critical to improve their life conditions and guarantee their educational success. Some examples of the lessons they learned include the following: integrating priorities, organization through time management, note taking with annotation, and critical self-awareness. All participants emphasized the critical nature of these lessons in the success of both parents and children.

The first lesson of integrating priorities requires finding time both to study and to devote time to play or work with children in the course of a single day. For example, Gene describes his need to devote quality time to the interaction with his daughter. He made sure to spend time playing with his daughter by building a fort, pictured in Figure 4. Among the majority of student-parents, when going through critical situations (i.e. sickness), attention to their children took priority over getting good grades. By combining time with his daughter, household chores, and studying, Gene demonstrated that learning to integrate priorities was critical to his academic success.

> I think that I have to constantly check myself, I want to make sure my priorities are correct. And family should always be number one. That's not always easy … and so I think the fort kind of represents that I always make an

effort every single day to spend time with my daughter, but I also try to make an effort every day to get stuff done around the house and … try to get good grades. I always try to make family my priority.

*Figure 4.*The "fort" Gene made for his daughter.

Like Gene, the other student-parents emphasized the importance of integrating their priorities with flexibility as they combine studying with spending time with their children. Sister Mary demonstrates this commitment in her description of completing her child development reading assignment while reading with her six-year old daughter, a page of text is pictured in Figure 5. The level of understanding Sister Mary achieved while reading with her daughter kept her motived, and encouraged her daughters' reading skills too.

I had to read yesterday again, so instead of reading a book with [my daughter] for bed, I had her read my child development book to me. She can only read words like "to" and "the" and "on" and "is," little words, but she read those

words and I read the bigger words… So she was repeating all the big words and she would ask what it meant, so it helped to be able to explain what these bigger words meant to her and try to put it in context. I was told that if you can't explain [concepts] in simple terms to a six-year-old child, you're over thinking it and you're over complicating it. So I was literally explaining it to a six-year-old child what she was reading to me, and repeating, parroting back what she was reading. And it helped cement it, like what I had read I was understanding.

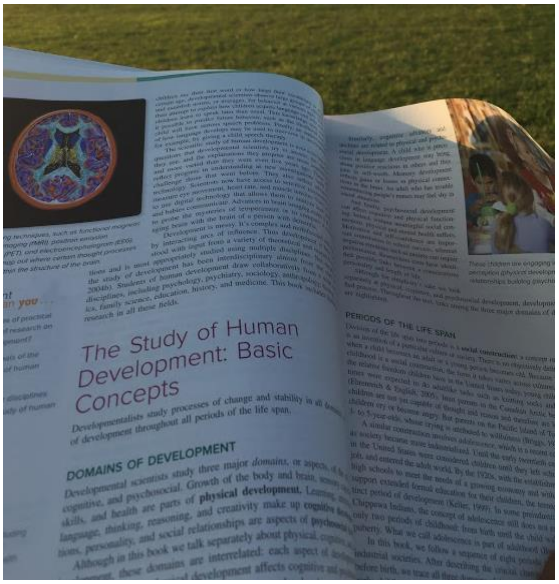

Figure 5. Sister Mary reads textbooks with her daughter.

For Sister Mary, prioritizing parenting and identifying or constructing experiences of integration of both roles required willingness and patience to sit together and slowly read a chapter of a textbook with a six-year old. The experiences of Sister Mary and Gene illustrate the lesson of integrating priorities. The other participants recall similar

type of experiences through which they tried to integrate their university and parenting agendas.

The second lesson, organization through time management, was emphasized by all participants in this study. For example, Renae defines herself as an overachiever who relies on time management because, as a single parent, she must be ready for anything. Her organization through time management was foundational to her academic success.

> I usually am ahead in the class, because I'm one who very much relies on time management. And so as soon as one thing is out of place on that time management, I start freaking out. And so you'll usually find I am never behind on anything. I'm like one of those overachievers. Let me get ahead. And I think it's because as a single parent you never know what's going to happen, and you never know what's going to come up. And so you kind of have to prepare yourself to be able to be ahead so that way you're never behind.

This personal lesson of effective time management also brought the opportunity for self-definition. Renae defined herself as “an overachiever,” “never behind on anything”, and “ahead in the class.” Renae has set herself up for success in school by developing the skill of effective time management.

A specific example of how to effectively manage time was the use of a timer. After struggling with how to successfully integrate his priorities with organization, Gene describes how the use of a timer, as pictured in Figure 6, greatly improved his ability to effectively manage his time and priorities. His choice of using a timer,

based upon previous research (Zimmerman, 2012), is an important practice that keeps him motivated to persist.

> I set a timer on my phone for 15 minutes and then 10 minutes and that's how I study. And that's something that I learned last semester as my grades were going down. I looked up stuff online like how to study…there was a whole hour-long program about how to study. It's a dean of some school and he did this whole seminar and it was awesome and lots of good stuff…another one he talked about is he talked about timers because he said they took all these samples of Yale and Harvard medical students, the best of the best --and they found that they could only concentrate for a maximum average of 20 minutes…one of the things I have to do as a parent and as a student, is I have to juggle household parenting and school…I set a timer on my phone. So I study for 15 minutes, when the timer goes off I set the timer for 10 minutes. In a 10-minute time period I do what needs to be done. So laundry is one of the things that would need to be done that day, as well as picking up the house. So 15 minutes goes off. I set the timer for 10 minutes. I start doing laundry. Timer goes off. I go back. I study 15 minutes. Timer goes off. I set it for 10 minutes go put clothes away, go do all that kind of stuff.

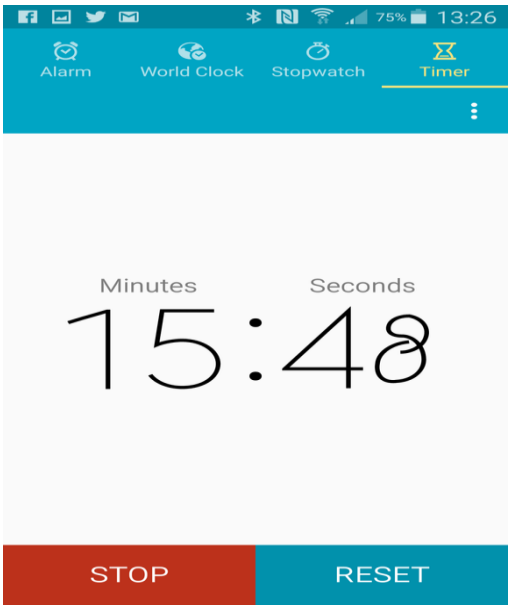

Figure 6. Gene's phone timer.

Like Renae, Gene's use of a timer helped him improve his organization through time management. The use of a timer was an innovative study habit and encouraged persistence and discipline for Gene.

In another experience of effective organization through time management, Renae describes the importance of personal environmental organization. She chooses to study in an organized environment as pictured in Figure 7, with a calendar, a white board and color markers that she uses to keep track of due dates and assignments, and an inspirational quote to help keep her focused. Renae's use of environmental organization, which keeps everything needed within reach, helps her manage her time by preventing loss and chaos. These environmental conditions encourage her to stay focused and productive.

> [This is] my work area where I do the majority of my homework and studying. I have … A saying for teachers, like why to become a teacher. So I

> find that inspirational …and my diploma and my Dean's List. And then this is a picture of my calendar, my whiteboard, and I just mark everything on there that I have due. And then as I complete them I check them off.

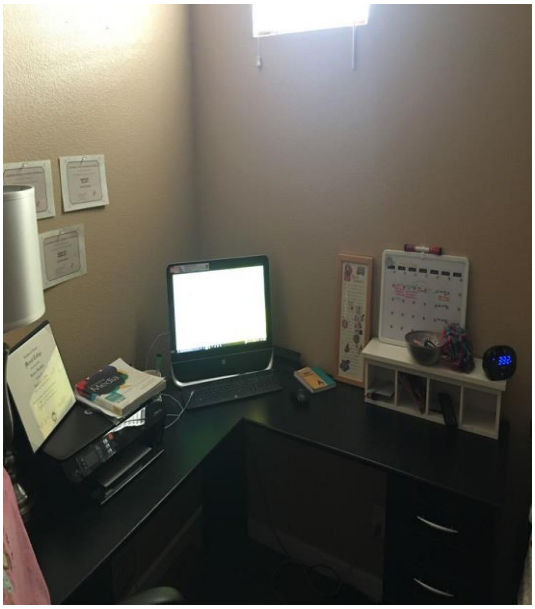

Figure 7. Renae's organized study environment.

Renae has also passed this habit of environmental organization on to her children, as she hangs their awards and certificates (Figure 8) in places where they are visual in the house. She describes that it is important for her children to see their diplomas because it helps them feel pride in their accomplishments, and helps them feel a part of something bigger than themselves and to stay focused on success.

> [My daughter] got an award, certificate of character at her school. And it's for trustworthiness, citizenship, fairness, responsibility, caring and respect…I always hang these up around our house on our refrigerator in the kitchen, or in my room, or in their room so they can see, okay, this is what happens when you are good and responsible and caring, and you get recognized for that… I

always showcase these so they see …what [they] accomplished at school…what [they] did.

Figure 8. A certificate of achievement.

Renae taught her children to be proud of their accomplishments, to feel pride in taking part in something greater than they. By using environmental organization and visually displaying certificates, Renae provides focus by demonstrating the results of hard-work and organization.

Similar to Renae, Susan also described the importance of using colors to define her organization through time management (Figure 9). The use of color was an important condition that kept Susan and her children motivated.

I used color-coordinated devices of every sort, I love color. It helps me. Certain kids are certain colors and certain classes and things like that…[This is a] picture of our calendar…each person is a different color to represent what appointments and where we're at, and it's the only way I can survive

remembering what's going on with four kids, what doctor, what therapist, what school… my car looks like a little office on the passenger side and I have all the things that go to each class, and then inside each class is what dates, things that are coming up and outlined where I'm going to be, taking finals and all the little projects that we have to do. So they're all completely organized and by color. So if it's yellow, that means it's the syllabus and if it's orange, it means that's due and if it's blue that means that it's a writing thing. And so that's what I do for each class.

Figure 9. Susan's color-coordinated calendar.

Color use for Susan was critical for her schoolwork, to keep track of folders that hold pieces of critical information, and for keeping track of the needs of her family. She then goes on to say that her kids organize themselves this way too. "I taught them that through high school and now in their college, they have the same [organizational structure]." Using a timer, environmental organization, displaying certificates of

achievement, and using color are all techniques for personal and familial time management that increased the meaningful nature of the learning process.

The third lesson, note taking with annotation, was highlighted by one student-parent as critical to her success. Renae has found that she learns best by taking reading notes in outline format, and then using annotation when she reads her assignments. Renae describes the use of annotation as one of her most successful study habits because it provides a visual guide to the important contents of a book, pictured in Figure 10. Annotation is an important learning practice that keeps Renae focused and motivated.

> I annotate when I read, and I find that really helps me, because I find the main points, the supporting details. Or if it's anything that just kind of catches my eye…and so this is kind of how I study as well because sometimes our professors will give us questions in advance for our readings, and so I'll pre-read that. And then as I'm reading…I'll relate it to that question…In this book they are specific, but usually it's just whatever post-it I can find because I hate writing in books…I can't defile a book that way… I don't like reading on the screen. I love holding. And I love the smell of books. So I'm more hands-on, let me hold it…And I feel I actually recall information better reading from a book than on a screen, because I can't mark it. And so I feel reading on a screen interferes with my learning.

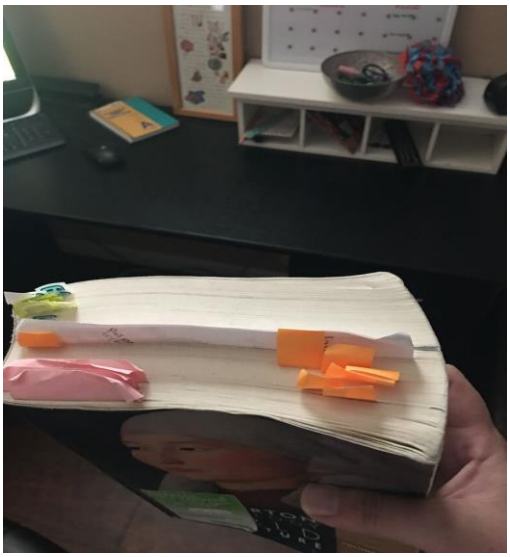

Figure 10. Renae's annotated anthology of British literature.

This practice of annotation was critical because Renae was able to describe it to her niece, who started annotating in all of her classes and excitedly told her aunty Renae that she has been getting A's because, as she explained to Renae, "it is so much easier when I go back to review for tests…I just look at what I wrote and then I read where I marked it and why I marked it…I even do it in my math book." By taking notes with annotation, Renae is naturally highlighting the meaningful nature of the learning process for herself and her niece.

All participants in this study highlighted the fourth lesson of self-awareness and critical thinking. Self–awareness and self-expression were important conditions for *critical self-awareness*. RJ describes how a professor facilitated his understanding of the importance of his own opinion. Instead of feeling afraid that he lacks the knowledge or authority to speak on an issue, RJ understood that to have an opinion

does not require specific expertise. This understanding is an important condition that keeps him motivated towards his future goals.

> [When I become a teacher and my students] return a paper to me, I want to say "What's your thought on that? How would you go about…What do you think of this?"... I got a lot of that from [a professor], he kind of opened my mind a little bit on things, on [describing] what's your opinion. What do you think? Give me something -- I know what it is, I want you to -- I want to know what you think.

RJ's knowledge of himself, his understanding of his own thought process and opinions, translates into how and what he wants to teach future junior high students.

Critical self-awareness also involved understanding one's own limits and shown through the skill of self-testing. Gene describes how he is testing himself to determine if he can handle the position of being a physician assistant (PA) in an emergency room (ER). He has the self-awareness to understand what he wants from his future, which is to be a PA in the ER, and he demonstrates this awareness through the skill of testing himself as a 9-1-1 paramedic to determine if he can handle being in the ER. His comparison of the life of a 9-1-1 paramedic to the life of someone who works in the hospital ER is insightful and provides a foundation for his motivation to persist.

> I want to do 9-1-1 [paramedic] so bad because I want to know if I can handle that…I'll get my bachelor's in science…at least at a hospital you don't got to go into these people's homes [like a paramedic does]…you don't got to be

> there when the parents are screaming at you to save their kid…you don't got to be in that area where someone just go shot, someone just got ran over, someone blah, blah, blah. So if you can handle that, if you can go home and brush your shoulders off from that, then ER's a piece of cake…So that's the other reason I'm really pushing to try and get into 9-1-1 as well, but that's not what I want to do the rest of my life. I don't want to be on a rig. It breaks people down. You see the paramedics and I hate to say it, the majority of them are overweight, extremely tired, they've got almost more health problems than their patients do.

Gene demonstrates self-awareness by reflecting on what he wants to do with the education he is obtaining and the skills that he has developed and the ones he still needs to improve.

The critical self-awareness Mr. Science demonstrates also reflects the ways in which formal education sometimes can diminish authentic learning. His analogy of the relationship between parents and children versus students and professors, translates into a perspective on professors that provides a clear understanding of the place of professors as mentors and highlights what he expects from the educational process, and demonstrates critical self-awareness through the perspective of age and experience.

> I would say [this] was true with this particular mineralogist, he would be goddamned if there was going to ever be someone in the class -- more erudite, more knowledgeable than him. It just flew in the face of what he wanted and

> that's anthemia to the educational process. He needs to be more like a mentor and less like the rat tester…So age has definitely given me a different perspective on…what I personally expect from the educational process and I expect less from him.

Mr. Science made it clear that the politics of this mineralogy professor were founded upon personal pride, which required that he conducted the course in a manner that was antithetical to the trust and mentorship that Mr. Science expects from the educational process. He had enough experience and critical self-awareness as student to be able to compare the courses of this mineralogy professor and that of one of his favorite professors, Dr. Brown, a geologist at a local community college, to understand that the political environment of this particular mineralogy course did not promote authentic learning.

Scarlett's critical assessment of her reality and conditions (critical self-awareness) is noted when she reflected on the difference in attitude and appearance of traditional students and student-parents. This critical self-awareness led to a clear understanding of her commitment to learning.

> But I feel like [younger 18-25 yr. old students] take it for granted. I see them come to school and like they just woke up. They didn't do their homework. And I'm like, do you realize how much time you have? … I feel like I'm the oldest one in my class all the time. ... But I want to shake them and be like, "Listen to me. Do you know how easy your life is right now? Your parents are paying for everything. Don't go drink it away. Get good grades." I don't get it.

> I honestly don't understand. *But they don't have the motivation I do, as far as the kids*. They don't have that motivation staring them in the face constantly. The number one [difference] I see is *their [lack of] confidence*…nobody wants to sit in the front row. Nobody wants to raise their hands ... If anything, you should feel comfortable in your own skin to stand and raise your hand if you want to speak and partake in the conversation. I wish that they had more confidence. And I think that's something you are taught as a child. And so I'm using this learning tool; this education to teach my own children…[both] academically [and socially] (emphasis added).

According to Scarlett, the difference in motivation between her and her younger peers was the existence of her children. The experience of parenting allowed for critical self-awareness, which made learning meaningful.

The four lessons that student-parents considered crucial for success included integration of priorities, organization through time management, note taking with annotation, and critical self-awareness. In order to ensure that lessons remain salient within their children's minds, student-parents also emphasized the importance of communication through dialogue with their children.

Caring Dialogue: The Pathway for Shared Learning

Student-parents engage in permanent and caring dialogue to promote their children's learning. Permanent dialogue is defined, in this context, as the use of dialogue between parents and children based on permanent interaction and powerful language that is either encouraging or motivational (Ancelle, Callagher, and Masse,

1982). Engaging in permanent dialogue was done in random or routine moments, together during study breaks, or when sharing travel time with children. Mr. Science exemplifies permanent dialogue in a random moment, describing a situation where his son approached him to ask for guidance about his Eagle Scout project. This type of caring communication was an important condition for children's learning.

> He said, what should I do [for my Eagle Project]? And I said, James (a pseudonym), you can do anything you want, but I'm going to give you one thing that I'm going to insist and that is you choose an Eagle Project that has enough merit that you're never going to be embarrassed telling somebody what it is, you want to own it and you want to put yourself into it enough so that you own it.

Susan also expressed this type of permanent dialogue as a nightly routine, when she describes the effect that a bipolar ex-husband had on her children and how that experience taught them the value of speaking kindly to one another. Caring communication was an important condition for teaching the skills of listening and respect.

> You know, as a single mom, as I was for 12 years, everything we went through with their dad being bipolar, it made us close…Then every night we'd get together and we'd say our favorite thing for the day, our worst thing for the day, our happiest moment and what we want to do tomorrow. And we'd all sit there and take turns and listen to what the other would say…it taught them how to respect each other, and it kind of starts at home.

The importance of what Susan described was that this sharing of permanent dialogue was not a simple one-time practice, but something that they developed as a nightly dinnertime routine.

Permanent dialogue was also established through the use of study breaks. All student-parents agreed with this; Susan described an ingenious way of using study breaks as a way to both communicate and relieve the stress of academics and of life. She described the relief that comes flooding in when you are given permission to scream and break things in a safe environment.

> I would get really cheap china from a thrift store and… we'd go outside and…I'd count to three and on the count of three, [my kids and I] all scream as loud and as angry and goofy or whatever we were feeling at the time and then if it was really bad, they would break a plate and it just relieves stress, I don't know. Teach your children to break things, that's not really smart, but in a good environment. So that was something that we would always do is if you get too frustrated, you've got to let it out. So that was their fun thing, we could smash china and we'd have to clean it up, but we felt a lot better.

The four female student-parents in this study emphasize that permanent dialogue was also established through the use of sharing travel time with their children. Travel time included joining their children on school field trips, or simply choosing to go somewhere educational as a family. Renae gave a good example of the importance of family educational trips when she described taking her children yearly to Yosemite National Park (Figure 11) and to Moaning Caverns near Angels Camp, California.

The communication she and her children share is an important condition for them to explore learning opportunities together.

> I feel like anywhere I go I want to try to make it educational so they can learn something new. So that is one of the key components I look for whenever we go somewhere. And so Yosemite is one of their favorite places to go…So this, again, was another learning experience, because as you're going in the cave they always talk about, oh, this happened over here, and during this time, this is what happens, and then with the rock formations, and so it's very informative. Very educational…[The kids ask a lot of questions] they always want to know everything. They're very curious, so they're always asking questions…Education is key.

Figure 11. Renae and her children at Yosemite.

By taking trips to educational places, Renae is communicating with her children and improving her children's knowledge base. She encourages communication and curiosity through the dialogue they create during their trips.

Even a simple trip to the local grocery store was both an educational experience and an example of permanent dialogue. Scarlett exemplified this in her description of taking the kids to Costco grocery shopping and teaching them the importance of money and family responsibility. The communication she established was an important learning opportunity for her children.

> You go to the grocery store and pay for things. Things cost money. They don't just show up on your table. And a lot of kids, because their parents don't want to take them or for whatever reason …You have to experience these things while you are growing up in order to do them comfortably when you are a grown-up. So if you don't experience going with your mom to the grocery store and watching her struggle to keep everybody together…And I think it's important for them to learn that things don't just happen out of the air…[the food] costs a lot of money so I explain to them every time we go; that was a $200 trip or… "Why can't we get this book, Mom?" Well that's another $15. Like, sorry, that's four gallons of milk…everything has a price. And you don't just get whatever you want because you feel like it. It's not realistic. So I'm trying to teach them my realistic bit.

The importance of these trips to the store was to teach the importance of grocery shopping and the wise use of domestic finances. Completing this task together allowed for family construction to occur.

The use of permanent dialogue was a communication technique used to assist children to learn important lessons. Whether done in random or routine moments,

together during study breaks, or when sharing travel time with children, the lessons remembered from the practice of permanent dialogue allowed for both self-and co-construction to occur.

The final enhancement of the learning process for student-parents occurred when lessons can be translated into a shared language with their children. For student-parents, the opportunity to pass the lessons they learned to the next generation was crucial as it cements a timeless legacy. For parents, the quality of legacy that is left for children and future generations can make or break the future of a family.

Family Legacy: Inherited Learnings for Life

The *legacy* that student-parents wanted to leave to their children included the development of patterns of thought and habits. Student-parents tended to translate the lessons they learned into mottos. Participants expected their children to adopt the critical life lesson that they have acquired as part of their university experiences and life in general. For example, a pattern of thought that participants wanted to teach their children was self-awareness or self-confidence. For example, Scarlett is raising her children to believe that "if you put your mind to it, you can accomplish anything." Through this pattern of thought, Scarlett wanted to teach her children that no matter the educational path or career chosen, if her children chose to focus and put their minds to a task, they could accomplish that path, career, or task. This pattern of thought acts as an important condition for motivation.

> I want them to constantly see that you can do whatever you want. You can be whomever you want. You can have kids and have a career and go to school

> and do everything you want. You've got to work hard to do it, but you can do it if that's what you want to.

Susan also describes teaching her own children that "it's all yours, this is your world, you are the next generation, but you have to give back." As pictured in Figure 12, Susan is teaching her students and her children to develop a pattern of thought regarding generosity, which is another important condition for the elimination of egoism and self-centeredness.

> I've taught my students in my workshops that it's all yours, this is your world, you guys are the next generation, but you have to give back…I learned that lesson from my parents. We grew up Seventh Day Adventist, and I was very strong in my upbringing with God and Jesus and giving back. You know, just going through life realizing if you just take everything, it's not fun. If you give, it makes you happy and I taught my kids that from when they were born.

Figure 12. Susan's legacy for her students and children.

The idea of leaving a legacy was woven throughout Susan and Scarlett's statements, as both share the goal of developing productive citizens out of their children and students, by teaching important patterns of thought.

Teaching lessons by formulating mottos that children can adopt was highlighted by five of the seven student-parents. Mottos include such sentiments as "having hope," "confidence lives within," or "never forget your roots." Foundational values can be seen in each of these mottos, values such as hope, self-confidence, and respecting your elders and family of origin. For example, Scarlett has chosen to raise her children to understand the value of respect for the environment, as it is critical to their survival. (Figure 13)

> We garden, and we have a lot of different things we can teach outside… I take a lot of pride in showing [my kids] where food comes from. We have trees we can go pick from…we talk about the life cycle of the tree. And you pick a fruit from the tree. You don't buy it in a grocery store…I want them to understand where the food comes from, how it's grown, and the importance of taking care of it and making sure you can have food for next year, off of that same tree…So we have watermelon, peaches, apricots, cherries, zucchini, tomatoes, bell peppers, jalapenos, onion. I mean the list goes on and this is like my part of showing them how important the environment is for their health and making sure that you incorporate that inside your life always.

Figure 13. Scarlett's environmental classroom.

Student-parents wanted their children to adopt positive habits that they modeled for them on a daily basis. For example, Susan chose to stay home and home-school her children and then decided to pursue her bachelor's degree once her children were older. Her children are following in her footsteps, and she could not be more proud.

> [A]ll four of my kids and I have taken college classes together. It just kind of ended up being, hey look, here comes mom. So it helped them get into college. They all did college in their high school years…That way they're a little more ahead of the game.

While Susan's children followed her footsteps into college attendance, Sister Mary has a different story. She works at her daughter's school, so she can participate and track her daughter's progress. She encouraged her daughter to believe that she is smart, kind, and brave. Her daughter then made a cutout tee shirt with her resource teacher who showed it to Sister Mary. The tee shirt encouraged Sister Mary that her

daughter was internalizing the lessons that she was trying to share, following in her character driven footsteps.

> Every day, I get to see [my daughter] at school [and] where she's making progress…I tell [my daughter] she is brave, even if it's as simple as can you cross the street to get your ball. Like, you are so brave and you are so smart. I emphasize those things. I don't want her to think, like, girls get by because they're pretty. Looks will go, but, like, who are you as a person will be forever. So I tell her you are brave and you are strong and you are smart. So she made her t-shirt. And her resource teacher showed it to me…And it said I am brave, I am strong and I am smart and kind…. My kid listens…Those were her words she used to describe herself.

The simple fact that her daughter is listening and internalizing the lessons about character that Sister Mary is trying to teach her was a critical part of the sense of parenting accomplishment that keeps her motivated. She also took note of the legacy of character that she is raising her daughter with.

Scarlett's daughter has already made it known that she wants to be a veterinarian and to attend UC Davis. The legacy of college attendance established by Scarlett motivates her daughter to explore college search opportunities even in her young age.

> So I feel like with each of them I get something different. With my oldest, she gives me more seriousness…I really feel like she truly [unconditionally] loves me; like I can do no wrong in her eyes. I'm the smartest person. I feel like she

> really looks up to me; which is nice because I had her at 19, so for me to have come this far and for her still feel that way… She told me today that I need to buy her a [university] hat because she took mine and she's like, "Mom I want my own…"And she actually told me she wants to go to UC Davis because they have a great veterinarian program…I'm like how did you know this? I didn't tell you that. She's all, "I like to look things up." College is great; that sounds great. Yes, you can go to UC Davis. I love it.

For student-parents, it brought a significant sense of accomplishment and motivation to see their children's internalization of values, patterns of thought, and habits that they have taught them.

Like Scarlett, Renae has young children who also have expressed an interest in following her footsteps into college attendance. She has a daughter who is eight who loves to play school and act as teacher, just as Renae did when she was little. Her son, who is ten, either wants to be a doctor or a police officer. The dreams of her children encourage Renae to stay motivated in her own goals and excited about her children's future.

> She'll play school. It's so funny because she is, honestly, a mini-me. She plays school. She'll set up her dolls. And she'll play school with them. And she has her own little chalkboard and a whiteboard in her room, and she'll write on it. Okay, students, this is what we're working on today. She'll come up with little math sheets…just like how I did when I was little. And I'm like, oh, my gosh. That's so me when I was your age. So she says she wants to be a teacher. My

son, he either wants to be a doctor or a police officer. He goes, I just want to help people.

The importance of leaving a legacy through lessons passed down through generations was crucial for participants. The existence of a legacy was the final step in self-and co-construction for the student-parents in this study.

Concluding Remarks

The family context was critical in the student-parent's self-construction. Student-parents' self- construction was accomplished through lessons learned in the context of the home and the college. Although adults valued the university context as a learning environment, the development of student-parents children's was a greater motivator. Adult students valued lessons that they could apply and pass on to their children. From their collection of personal lessons, student-parents chose certain lessons to pass on to their children in the form of a legacy. These participants emphasized the importance of lessons such as integrating priorities, organization through time management, note taking with annotation, and critical self-awareness. These lessons were then shared with their children through permanent dialogue and communication shared in random or routine moments (i.e. study breaks and travel time with children). Student-parents' legacy for their children involved the development of patterns of thought and positive, productive habits and values. The narrative of self- and co-construction emphasize student-parents' identification of lessons used for self-construction that can then be shared with children through

permanent dialogue. The inheritance of a legacy was the goal of the process of co-construction.

There is minimal discussion in the literature about student-parents in higher education that student-parent's self-construction and learning process is tied to their capacity to build the selves of their children (Levin & Montero Hernandez, 2009). Much of the value of education for a parent lies in the fact that the lessons learned at college will all be given or shared with the children for the purpose of their own self-construction. The self-construction of the parent becomes entwined in the co-construction of the child. Previous studies have shown that the presence of family can create a natural ebb-and-flow in the educational life of a student that helps to negate disengagement (Hamer & Jan van Rossum, 2010). While this is not wrong, it does not speak to this critical component: the entwined nature of self-construction between parent and child. This argument for the entwined nature of self-construction will be unpacked further in chapter five.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Higher education institutions receive students from a diverse range of ages, family backgrounds, and experiences. In the last twenty years, adult students have constituted close to 40 % of the student population in public four-year universities (National Center for Educational Statistics- Characteristics, 2015). Adult students in higher education institutions tend to be underserved due to the lack of knowledge about the needs and learning styles of this population (Kasworm, 1990). For example, four-year higher education institutions lack child-care alternatives or designated financial aid advocates for student-parents (Albers, 2006). Attention to the needs of adult learners in higher education is crucial since they often support and guide the next generation of learners. The success of adult students responsible for raising children is particularly relevant because without educated parents, children will not have an educational legacy to follow and may not have examples of how to become productive citizens or build strong families (Ricco, McCollum, & Schuyten, 2003).

This qualitative study examined how student-parents' relationship with their children contributes to the construction of their role as university students. Different from other studies of adult students, this investigation emphasizes the emotional stress generated by the conflicting roles held by student-parents and the co-constructed nature of their developmental process. In this chapter, I will begin with a summary of the results. Next, I present an integrated discussion of what these results mean in light of theory. Finally, I discuss implications for practice. I identify potential

intervention programs and policies aimed at helping adult students who are parents. Potential areas for future research that expound upon the limitations of this study are described.

Summary of Results

Three main narratives were presented to explain the ways in which adult learners construct their roles as both parents and students: (1) Narratives of Emotion: From Longsuffering to Optimistic Resilience; (2) Narratives of Support: The Role of Significant Others; (3) Narratives of Self- and Co-Construction.

First, the lives of student-parents were characterized by emotional strains of the multiple roles they had to play on a quasi-permanent basis. These emotional strains involved stress, anxiety, and depression, which created the emotional state of "longsuffering." However, while all participants experienced a sense of longsuffering, they also managed to develop coping mechanisms that included critical reflection and optimistic resilience.

Second, student-parents had to navigate two different worlds (i.e. the context of home and college) connected by learning and crucial for their individual construction and the construction of their children. Within each world, they developed significant relationships with others. The existence of significant others was a critical component of the success of this group of student-parents because in most cases they lacked the cultural capital needed to navigate the academic environment. Additionally, in most of the cases the significant other became a role model who provided opportunities for interaction and exchange of information, which increased the probability that each participant persisted in their studies and developed

skills, ideas, and life goals. These student-parents built relationships that were critical because they provided support, guidance, encouragement, and a positive example.

Third, although adults valued the university context as a learning environment, the development of student-parents' children became a stronger motivator to engage in learning. Parents and children's co-construction of the self was accomplished by sharing lessons learned. These lessons included the importance of integrating priorities, organization through time management, note taking with annotation, and critical self-awareness. Dialogue allowed student-parents to share learning with their children and to create a timeless legacy. Student-parents' legacy for their children included the development of patterns of thought and positive, productive habits and values.

The inseparable relationship of the context of home and college enhanced the learning process for student-parents. Both contexts provided emotional, social, and academic tools that were foundational to their successful navigation of college life and parenting. The entwined nature of the home and college environment, coupled with the entwined nature of the construction of the parents' and children's selves, create a level of complexity rarely acknowledged or understood by higher education institutions. The figure below summarizes the main findings of this study.

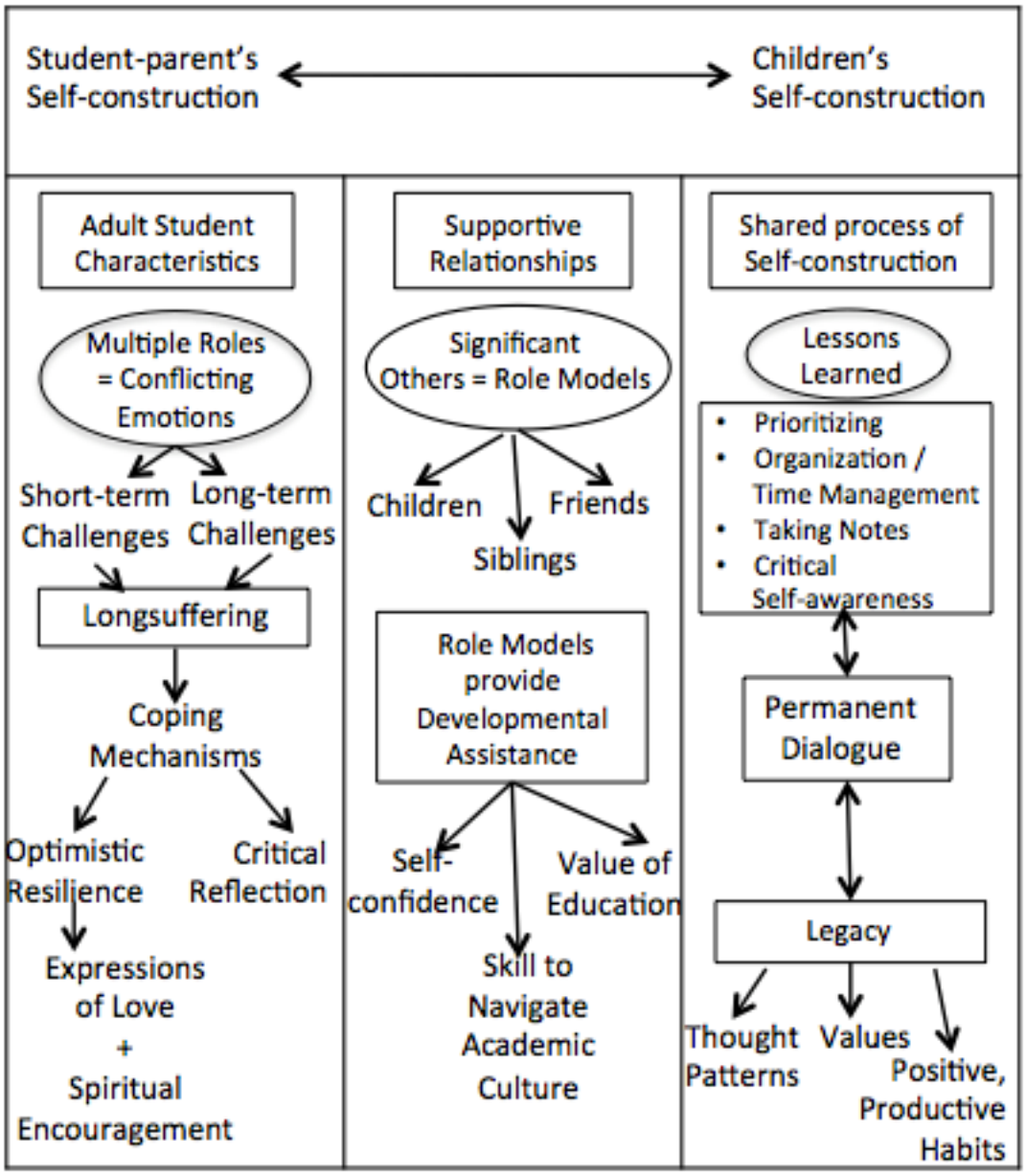

Figure 14. Visual integrated summary of study results.

Discussion in Light of Theory

The complexity of the process of growth and development through which these student-parents are traveling can be best described by using the notions of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2010) and co-construction (Packer & Goicoechea,

2000). Baxter-Magolda integrates identity, epistemology, and relational theory into an understanding of the adult from a holistic perspective. This theory of self-authorship explains adult development by identifying internal and external environments that shape the individual's actions and interaction. The internal environment involves the coordination of beliefs, values, and loyalties, as opposed to the external environment that includes the opinions of others. Once an adult begins to prioritize their voice, their sense of self over the views and opinions of others, this individual is working towards self-authorship. This position of self-empowerment occurs when an adult trusts their internal voice, building an internal foundation and securing internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2010). This theoretical approach that describes the journey into adulthood and self-authorship is enriched when paired with social constructivist theory.

Social constructivist theory defines a person as constructed within a social context and formed through practical activity and relationships of desire and recognition that can split a person and motivate the search for identity (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 228). The social construction of the person acknowledges two dimensions, including the historically cultural context of the person and the epistemological structures or ways in which a person systematically gains knowledge (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). It is through the learning process, both personal and social, that individuals construct themselves and others.

According to self-authorship and the social constructivist theory, the learner is transformed by internal and external structures. This theoretical principle is illustrated by the experiences of participants in this study (see Figure 15). Adult-parents walk

onto a university campus filled with trepidation and doubt (Kasworm, 2008) then experience emotional conflict and multiple commitments related to family, their educational pursuit, and employment. As they navigate their college and home environment, they experience a process of personal transformation through which they give authority to their internal voice, construct knowledge at various levels of expertise, and define career and life goals. By pairing theories of social construction and self-authorship, this study contributes to the current body of literature on adult students by suggesting the notion of *developmental co-construction*, which describes the shared process of development that is built through the collaborative learning and support between student-parents and their children. Student-parents experience self-construction while learning lessons both inside and outside of the classroom (Kasworm, 2008), they also seek to trigger the construction of their children's selves by sharing with them the lessons they have learned. Developmental co-construction occurs through permanent dialogue and the creation of a legacy that student-parents pass on to their children. Student-parents teach patterns of thought and positive, productive habits and values to their children. Both learners, parent and child, are transformed by internal and external structures.

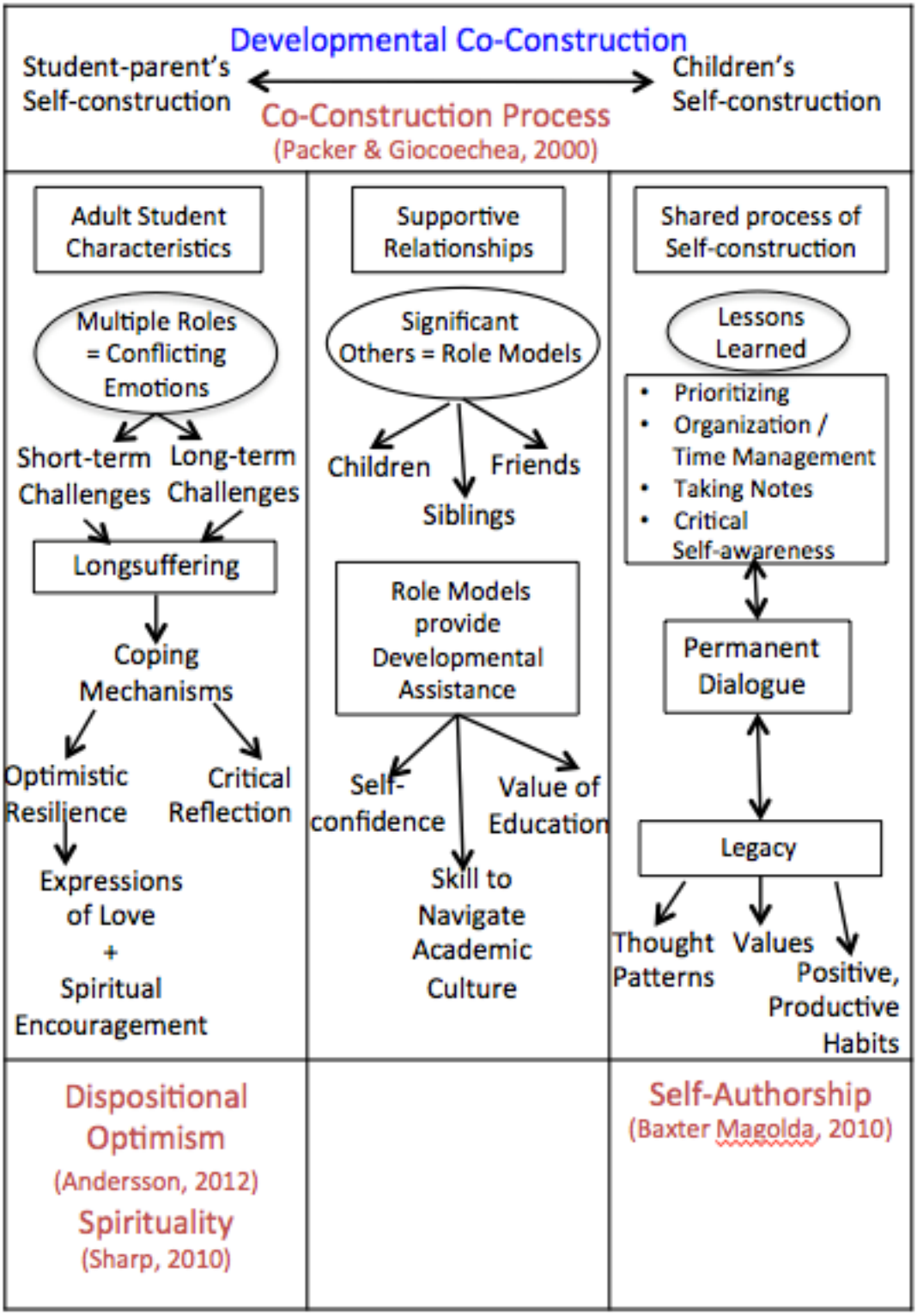

Figure 15. A visual integrated summary of results, with theory connections.

Self-Authorship and Personal Voice

A critical principle in Baxter Magolda's theory suggests that adults who have reached a level of self-authorship develop and show the use of a personal voice (Baxter Magolda, 2010). One of the things student-parents were able to achieve through their academic and parenting experiences was the development of their own voice, which is based on the coordination of beliefs, values, and loyalties.

Student-parents development of their personal voice is illustrated in this study by the critical self-awareness and optimistic resilience they use to make decisions as well as guide their lives and those of their children. Self-awareness and self-expression were important conditions for critical self-awareness, which involves student-parents' understanding of their own thought processes and limitations. Optimistic resilience represented the student-parents' ability to create a personal philosophy or approach towards life. Participants developed this personal approach in order to persist and recover quickly from difficulties with an optimistic outlook on the future. Optimistic resilience included both positive thinking and forward-oriented action that characterizes resilience. Student-parents authored a personal approach to life that allowed them to face adversity, attain educational goals, and educate their children.

The holistic perspective of adult development is reaffirmed in this study. Similar to recent studies of self-authorship, I found that these students required opportunities for identity development through critical self-awareness, learning, and relational support structures (i.e. significant others). This study adds to the notion of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2010) by describing the specific ways in which

adults with children attain self-empowerment and find an internal voice. For student-parents, it was also critical that their own children found a voice as well. Thus, the development of self-authorship was experienced as a process of co-construction of the student-parents' and children's selves.

Creating Developmental Co-Construction

Adults are personally and socially transformed by the learning process (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). One of the things student-parents were able to achieve was the co-construction of their selves and that of their children through the process of personal and social transformation. It is important that neither the student-parent nor the children have finished their process of self-development. However, the narratives of the participants of this study show areas of personal transformation and learning, which are indicators of development of self-authorship. Student-parents and their children's transformation required shared learning that was based on permanent dialogue, care, and the creation of a legacy. This transformational process results in an ongoing active cycle of self-reflection and the integration of knowledge (Kasworm, 2008). The person constructs his or her identity within a social context and through practical activity (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 228). Student-parents in this study engaged in learning experiences in the family and college context. Their interaction with faculty, significant others, and their children were educational opportunities through which they acquired multiple lessons including organization, annotation, integrating priorities, and the use of critical self-awareness.

The notion of developmental co-construction of student-parents and their children involves sharing learning lessons and individual transformation. Student-

parents' commitment to legacy creation was the main catalyst to attain developmental co-construction. These moments of personal development for both parent and child were described by Scarlett when she stated, "my legacy is the people I leave behind... and that's my greatest accomplishment--who I leave behind, and what kind of people they become." This commitment to the developmental co-construction of herself and her children motivated her to be the best parent she could possibly be. Through this study, I have understood that the co-construction of student-parents and their children requires dialogue founded upon care and commitment to sharing learned lessons and building a family legacy.

Optimistic Resilience

These student-parents used optimistic resilience as a coping mechanism for their longsuffering. Optimistic resilience is similar to what Andersson (2012) defined as "dispositional optimism"--a stable expectation that good things will happen across a variety of complex life situations (Andersson, 2012, p. 291). Andersson's dispositional optimism is similar to a life perspective while optimistic resilience operationalizes dispositional optimism and includes a reaction to life in the form of persistence and the ability to bounce back. I chose to utilize the concept of optimistic resilience to describe the participants' ability to suffer setbacks and continue to recover quickly from difficulties with a positive or optimistic outlook on the future. The concept of optimistic resilience includes not only the positive thinking that students experienced but the forward-oriented action that characterizes resilience, which requires both optimism and action.

This study reaffirms the existence of dispositional optimism (Andersson, 2012) in that these student-parents held a complete expectation that good things would happen, regardless of the complexity of their life circumstance. This was seen in Susan's response to a critical car accident that cost her eighteen months of recovery time. In spite of this traumatic event, Susan was motivated to continue and finish her educational journey. Dispositional optimism is a life perspective present in Susan's narrative. However, her accounts also suggest persistence and the ability to bounce back. Optimistic resilience is introduced as a conceptual contribution. Additionally, as explained by participants, optimistic resilience derived from expressions of love and spiritual encouragement they found in the family context.

Spirituality was a foundational component of optimistic resilience. Previous studies have shown that adults will utilize spirituality to provide an emotional anchor, a place to turn for encouragement in the face of challenge (Sharp, 2010; Stewart, 2009). The majority of student-parents identified spiritual belief or forms of spiritual practice to be a crucial part of their optimistic resilience. I found an emphasis on spiritual practices used to assist in emotion management.

Critical Self-Reflection: The Researcher as Student-Parent

The findings of this study resonate with my own experience. Similar to my participants, I am a student-parent completing my doctoral degree. As I write about each one of the experiences and reflections of my participants, I am able to relate my own struggles and achievements to the stories they shared. Similar to my participants, I feel split between the multiple roles I have to play. I often felt frustrated and guilty for not being able to devote more time to my children and my assignments. As a

result of this study, I have experienced personal emancipation and have developed a compassion for the student-parents in my classes.

The opportunities to hear the stories of other individuals with life journeys similar to mine allowed me to systematize and make sense of my own life. I realized that the concepts I used to make sense of the narratives of student-parents are equally valid to explain my own story. I can see and make sense of my own reality by using a new conceptual framework. The lens through which I view my environment and my social place is constructed almost entirely of *lessons learned:* lessons from a challenging divorce, lessons derived from education both as an educator and student, and lessons derived from my spiritual experiences. I have shared these lessons learned through a caring daily dialogue with my children, hopeful to develop a personal and educational legacy in which they can successfully partake. I construct myself within the context of education as I also work to co-construct my children. The result of Narratives of Self-and Co-construction became a point of foundational insight and emancipation for me. As a result of this study, I now also encourage student-parents to discuss the experience of sharing the lessons from class with their children as this process builds self-confidence within the student-parents and respect among their younger peers.

This emancipation also occurred within a breakthrough moment: presently I feel split between the desire to be present with my children and the desire to complete my education. As a learner who self-describes as an individual whose heart is in the college classroom, I tend to gravitate toward activities that are classroom connected. The practices in which I routinely engage, which include reading, writing, preparing

lectures, and grading are all very time consuming. Loyalty to my professional activities and learning goals makes it challenging to spend the time I desire to spend with my children. Although I resonate with the idea that "people become good at the practices that they routinely participate in [and] flexibly adapt to contingencies" (O'Connor, 2003, p. 65), I still search for the solution that allows me to integrate my passion for the classroom and my desire to be present in the everyday life of my children.

All participants described this split as a distraction. If a student-parent is missing their children and worried about them while in the classroom, their mind will not be on the activity at hand; instead, it will be focused on the children who are the object of the distraction. Personally, education has been the foundation of my identity for many years; however, this recognition itself does not provide an escape from the guilt that parents feel when they split themselves to complete either an educational-related or a parenting-related task. I have witnessed this distraction or split feeling among the student-parents in my classes. At one point, one of my student-parents, who is a mother, frantically told me that her children had just been in a minor car crash with their babysitter and asked to leave. She was granted the absence because I knew her worry would completely distract her. The tasks of education and parenting need to be understood and acknowledged by higher education institutions: for student-parents, parenting will always take priority over education. Yet neither this acceptance nor acknowledgement is possible without first recognizing the population of student-parents on campus.

Through this study, I also realized that the emotional conflict caused by multiple roles is a short-term challenge for me as well. Similar to my participants, I choose to deal with my emotional suffering through the coping mechanism of optimistic resilience. I feel the split and am distracted daily by the desire to spend more time with my children and my partner. However, I attempt to evaluate the positive benefits of the future I can build if I remain committed to my educational process. I feel more empathetic to my students as I see expressions of this optimistic resilience in them. Understanding the value of this coping mechanism, I will seek to encourage them to embrace optimistic resilience.

I can now identify my mother as a role model of optimistic resilience, persistence, and genuine family care. I became cognizant that my mother has been the significant other within my life who has provided a sympathetic example of surviving the task of higher education while being split between multiple roles. At the age of 60, she chose to return to school to receive her Master of Liberal Arts and completed it while working full-time as a curriculum coordinator and caring for her husband and grandchildren. She has provided countless hours of valuable babysitting support to allow me to pursue my terminal degree while also working full-time. Her identities as mother, wife, teacher, and daughter have also become mine. However, I also see my identity in the student-parents within my classes which can become a point of immediate, mutual respect.

This investigation has brought the opportunity to "reflexively [re]engage in the [re]construction of one's self and identity" (Zhao & Biesta, 2012, p. 332), as it has provided insight into the construction and multiple dimensions of my own identity.

Additionally, this study has also highlighted the complexity of the lives of those student-parents who attend my classes. As I end this study, I find myself with a new understanding of my own process of self-construction. Simultaneously, as an instructor, I emerge as one who has gained a more realistic and compassionate approach toward students who need to combine studying and parenting.

Potential Implications for Practice

As identified in this study, student-parents identify their children as a priority. As a result, the attention of student-parents in classes is divided between the college and family context. For professors, this means that the time and attention of students who are parents is not focused in the classroom entirely, even for the short period of time they are present within this environment. While student-parents are physically present in the classroom, intellectually, their mind may be focused on solving challenges at home. This means that the self of the parent actually belongs to the children, as described by RJ, "Like I said, I miss my kids…I love my kids and all parents do, and to leave your kids away is tough." Susan echoes this sentiment, "I definitely can get stressed out at times and I worry that I'm missing out on my kids' life, I'm worried that I'm not helping them enough." For both RJ and Susan, they miss their children when they are in class, and Susan explicitly describes the worry and anxiety that results. Psychological research (Piaget, 1947) suggests that when parents worry about their children, this worry can be an object of distraction, and the mind seeks equilibrium between the external disturbances and the activities of the individual. In many cases, a student-parent's mind is focused upon solving the external worry, despite the present activity of class attendance.

If a student-parent is missing their children and worried about them while in the classroom, their mind will not be on the discussion or lecture at hand; instead, it will be focused on the children who are the object of the distraction. The potential implications of this insight could be utilized to assist faculty, staff, and administration by identifying a number of potential improvements to serve the student-parent population. This section will identify specific interventions that could be of assistance to adult students who are parents.

Student-Parent Identification: A Demographic Question

The first suggested intervention is to put into place a mechanism by which student-parents can be readily identified. This could be accomplished by adding a simple question to the University Enrollment Application regarding the presence of dependents. The question could state, "Do you care for dependent children? Y/N" Just as the current application includes a demographic section asking questions of ethnicity, gender, and age, so this question about dependents could be added to this section and information catalogued for population identification purposes.

When I started this study there was no intuitional data to identify the percentage of student-parents in the student population. The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) was contacted to find possible participants. When queried about a list of current students that are parents, OIR responded that they had no way of identifying members of that population. This response indicates a gap in population identification and suggests that the student-parent population is very likely to be underserved because they have not been identified by the institution as a population

requiring different type of services. A failure to collect data on the needs of these parents prevents the creation of adequate service programs.

The acknowledgement of the presence of student-parents in the campus is critical for many reasons. Educators need to know who these adult students are and where they come from (Kasworm, 1990, Levin, 2007, Vaccaro & Lovell, 2010). As the participants in this study have described, adult students, especially those responsible for raising children, exhibit specific differences in their academic level of institutional engagement and life activities in comparison to a younger, traditional undergraduate population. To know a population is to serve that population. We cannot serve this population of adult students who are parents if we do not actually know who they are, where they come from, or have data on their actual needs.

In order to assist and respond to the needs of various populations within institutions of higher education, data needs to be recorded and tracked on a regular basis. These data points include enrollment numbers, persistence numbers, graduation rates, dropout rates, choices of degree major and minor, and service access.

Financial Aid Advocate

Another area for institutional improvement is the inclusion of an individual in the Financial Aid Office who works directly with student-parents to ensure that they have access to certain grants and are excluded from certain institutional fees that do not apply to their needs. The importance of a financial aid advocate, or at the very least, targeted financial aid assistance for the population of student-parents was suggested by all participants. There are other examples of targeted assistance to a population with different needs than traditional undergraduate students: international

students and veterans, for example, for whom this service has been successfully implemented.

Adult students who are parents may also work full-time while attending school (Van Rhijn et al., 2011), yet they pay fees for services for which they have no time or ability to access such as the gym, Student Identification Card Service, and the Student Center. These student services all close before student-parents arrive for the start of night courses. Susan described the frustration of paying for services that she is restricted from accessing,

> [Administration] tells me all the time you need an ID [card]. Well I can't get an ID, because [the service is] closed. I have to pay all this money for the nurse and the gym and it's all closed by the time I get there, but I still have to pay for it…the student center…well, again, they're closed. Financially, they need to be more open to the fact that if I have to come at night, [they shouldn't] make me pay for things I can't use.

The frustration that results from limited access resources results in the feeling of being treated unfairly and placed at a disadvantage in relation to other students. The lack of a designated financial aid advocate who works directly with student-parents to assist them with balancing college financing through the State Department of Social Services (Albers, 2006) and targeting the fees according to their specific needs is an intervention that could be included into the current structure of most institutions of higher education. Once the members of the student-parent population are identified, then the information may be supplied to the designated financial aid advocate for cooperation and support.

Creation of a Drop-In Childcare Facility

In order to assist student-parents with their engagement in the university setting, another support mechanism would be to provide a babysitting program for adult student-parents that is accessible on-campus. In order to accomplish this, an academic support program could be created for adult-students who are parents to safely receive babysitting for their young children, providing the parents a place where they could drop off their children for short periods of time during which they may attend classes or on-campus activities. A reasonable fee could be collected from each parent at time of service. This program could be administered near a small, on-campus playground, administered by a full-time support staff member, and employing current college students in need of part-time work. As long as parents demonstrate enrollment in a specific course or participation in a club or activity occurring at a specific time on campus, they would be allowed to leave their child in the babysitting area. The parents could be responsible for providing any necessary supplies such as food, clothing, or diapers.

The participants in this study who had young children described the need for this type of service. Both Renae and Gene identified the fact that they are limited by the activities in which they can participate and even enrollment in some courses, due to a lack of babysitting. For example, Renae stated, “there's [no clubs or activities] I can really be apart of…[If] we could get a sitter once a month and we meet, and something like that where they accommodate…that would be awesome.” This need was also identified in the literature as one that needs to be addressed by institutions of

higher education in order to adequately serve the student-parent population (Van Rhijn et al., 2011).

The creation of a childcare program for students, not only for full-time faculty, would take institutions of higher education a step-further toward a family-oriented approach (White, 2014), which would make attendance more attractive for student-parents especially. The development of a childcare facility is not a financial priority for most institutions of higher education; however, to do so would make attendance an attractive goal for the booming population of adult student-parents.

Faculty & Staff Training Seminar Series

A final strategy for improvement of the service of the student-parent population would be the implementation of a training seminar series for all faculty on the characteristics and challenges that define the lives of student-parents. This seminar would offer a training for the purpose of assisting the learning needs of student-parents and suggest pedagogical changes and key instructional designs, student-parents' dilemmas and struggles, and adult-supportive policies (Kasworm, 2008).

The process of co-construction itself necessarily requires that as parents give more of themselves to their children, parents' needs then become less relevant. Faculty need to recognize this relationship and improve upon the flexibility extended to student-parents within their classrooms. Student-parents noted that caring for their children was the most important priority in their lives. As a result, the scope of attention that faculty receive from student-parents can be limited if there are family issues at play. As a result of the time and attention constraints of student-parents, the

availability of audible course material would be greatly appreciated as it provides flexibility.

The existence of material available in an audible format is an example of a pedagogical change to accommodate student-parents as it allows student-parents to listen to lectures that they may have missed due to the illness of a child, or allows them to listen to the reading of the text material while traveling to and from class. Another suggestion for improvement, for not just student-parents but for all populations, would be to make quizzes or readings available online in such a way that parents can carry around an electronic device, such as a smartphone or an iPad in order to read their required material, versus the use of a costly and heavy textbook. This would provide student-parents, especially, the opportunity to have their required reading material close at hand anywhere, and allows for the use of a simple finger-swipe to highlight and comment on the assigned text or PDF. This option helps parents to save time and energy by providing immediate access to reading material that can be read in any light, such as after kids have gone to bed, or in any location, such as a doctor's office when taking children in for health-care appointments. This falls under faculty and staff training as it provides insight into the challenges that student-parents face.

The integration of technology and ease of access was a suggestion from Susan, "I wish more textbooks were on CDs so I could just listen to them on my very long drive back and forth and then it would be a win-win, but they don't have a lot of those." This availability of material in CD or audio form was one suggestion for the realization of pedagogical changes to accommodate student-parents. Another was the

use of recorded lectures that allowed attendance to be recorded online. There is a program called Panopto that can be used to record lectures in real time and then post those recordings within the online learning environment, such as Moodle or Blackboard. This allows the professor the freedom to record the lecture exactly as it was given in the classroom, and also allows them to control access, availability, and track which students viewed the lecture in online format. This recording can provide student-parents with the flexibility to be attentive and present for their children in critical moments of health or development, but also allow for flexibility for student-parents while still holding them accountable for viewing and understanding the material at the same level that is expected of the remainder of the class.

A final suggestion for faculty would be the creation of appropriate intellectual challenges for student-parents. Professors can present material that can be made relevant to the adult life outside of the classroom in such a way that student-parents choose to attempt to make further connections outside of the classroom (Kasworm, 2008).

Potential Areas of Future Research

In order to expand our knowledge of this vulnerable student-parent population, additional studies are required. Within this study, the age of student-parents in this study hovered around those who were in their thirties, with one participant who was in her forties, and an individual who was in his sixties. Due to the focus of students who were in their thirties (primarily early thirties) significant insight was missed due to the absence of voices from other age groups. Future studies could address the question of difference: is there a difference in what was valued,

shared with, or inherited by the children of participants who were older parents, such as those in their forties, fifties, and sixties?

Only two primary cultures are represented in this study, Caucasian and Latino,[3] yet there is a myriad of other cultures present within the student population of this institution of higher education. There are opportunities to find new insights by examining experiences of student-parents from other cultures such as African American, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, etc. People from other cultural traditions may communicate a different perception and experiences about the construction of family life. Future studies could address the question of difference in what was valued, shared with, or inherited by the children of participants from different cultures.

In this study, participants self-selected to be part of the investigation. Participants who agreed to participate may already have an inclination to value parenting and to make their children a priority in their lives. Thus the overall optimistic outlook is not a surprise as the participants themselves were optimistic and mindful parents. However, we need to be aware of those student-parents who have a different parenting and educational experience. An analysis of different types of parenting could suggest different results, which would require additional studies.

A final area of future research would be the inclusion of the child's voice in response to the parent's decision to return to school. Dependent upon the age of the child, the use of pictographs representing emotional language could be used as a way

[3] While Susan is Caucasian she did claim a very small percent of Native American ancestry, but not enough to be considered culturally Native American.

to assist them in sharing their thoughts about their parent's educational journey. It would also be interesting to see if the response changed based upon the age or gender of the children. Do the younger children (i.e. age seven through twenty-four) have a different perspective on their parent's education than children who are twenty-five and older (or members of the population of adult students themselves)? It could be important to explore how the process of developmental co-construction occurs when children are attending college at the same time that their parents are getting their degrees. Does this dual attendance experience change the perspective or experience of co-construction that student-parents with younger children experience?

This qualitative study examined how student-parents' relationship with their children contributes to the construction of their role as university students. This investigation emphasized the emotional stress generated by the conflicting roles held by student-parents and the developmental co-constructed nature of legacy and identity process experienced by student-parents and their children. Three main findings were presented to support and extend the research on adult students who are also parents. It is critical that educators understand this remarkably critical population.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ADULT STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Adult Student Interview Protocol

This is a guide so not all questions will expected to be asked

From the beginning remind that will be an hour, ask if need to be anywhere specific (use a watch)

1. ***Preliminary Questions***

- Researcher's self-introduction- (give own personal background and interest in topic, "I am here for you to teach me, you are the expert here")
- (be as specific as you can…specific details are best)
- Explanation of general characteristics of the research project (looking at Students who are parents and wondering 'how they do it')
- Questions or concerns expressed by participant prior to interview beginning

2. **Adult student identity**

- Tell me about yourself? Tell me about your background?
- What other activities you have to attend to on a daily basis?
- How would you describe yourself as a student? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Do you see yourself as a productive adult student? Why?
- What are your goals after finishing studying?
- Describe any challenges that you have experienced?

3. ***Parenting Experience***

- How do you balance being a parent and a student?
- Please describe the relationship that you have with your children. What are the positives and negatives of this relationship?
- How has this relationship affected your role as a student?
- How has the decision to be a parent impacted your educational goals?
- Please describe any educational activities that you and your children participate in. Has the experience of being a student yourself changed the way that you help your children with homework or studying? Please describe these changes.
- What do your children tell to you when you are working on homework or go to classes?

5. ***Adult Student Experience***

- Tell me about your experience studying at this university?
- What has contributed to your learning process?
- How do you interact with faculty and peers at school?
- What is your favorite class? Why?
- Describe the strategies (steps, process) that you use to do your school activities and homework?
- Reflect upon your time here at the university. Please describe any specific moments that stand out as "ah ha" moments where you realized something unique or learned a profound lesson. In other words, what are some of the most significant things you have learned as part of your experience of being a student?
- How do you manage the multiple activities you have to do every day?
- balance your relationships with other adults and being a student?
- balance being an employee and a student?
- If you are not employed, or work only during school breaks, who supports you during school?
- How do you balance this part-time or break-time work and your parental responsibilities?
-

6. ***Participant Generated Photography***

- How many pictures did you take?
- Which pictures did you like the most and why?
- Why did you capture this person, or place, or activity?
- How do these pictures represent/ show your experiences here at the university?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT-GENERATED PHOTOGRAPHY PROTOCOL

I have just handed you a 27 shot disposable camera. Please use the camera over the next 7 days to *take pictures of your academic experience.*

This might include images that represent:

-Learning activities that influence you
-The learning strategies that you utilize
-How do you visualize your academic experience
-Something that is a metaphor for you as a student or your relationship with your child(ren)

Seven days from today (*date)* please return the camera to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you prefer, you are welcome to use your personal digital camera. If this is so, please share your email with me so that we might open a shared cloud-based folder (i.e. through Google Drive, Drop Box, or Ever note) for digitally saving each photo. After I develop the photos from the disposable camera, I will communicate with you regarding your preferred interview date and time, as these photos will serve as the foundation for that interview. I will request that you be as specific as possible regarding what is in the photo and how it connects to your academic experience…

Template for this excerpt from (Snyder, 2012, Figure 3)

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT
A Study of Adult students who are Parents, and their Academic Engagement in Higher Education

You are invited to participate in a research study because you are an undergraduate adult student who is also the parent of a minor(s). Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate.

INVESTIGATOR

- Heather Muser, MA - EdD Canidate, CSU Stanislaus, Advanced Studies in Education

FACULTY SPONSOR

- Virginia Montero Hernandez, PhD- Assistant Professor, Advanced Studies in Education

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to get the knowledge that is needed to fully address the problem of adult student persistence, focused specifically on the population of adult students responsible for raising children. As a growing population, educators need to know and serve this population better. This research seeks to understand the ways in which student parents live their academic experience as undergraduates at a university, focusing specifically on how adult students' relationship with their children intervenes in the construction of their role as university students.

PROCEDURES

Heather Muser will conduct an interview with you that will last from 1 to 2 hours. The time and place for the interview will be negotiated with you. You will be assured conditions of confidentiality. Topics discussed during the interview will include: 1) personal information, 2) personal understandings about your universities' organizational structures and academic resources, 3) forms of interactions with other students and family members regarding your academic experience, 4) description of individual parenting philosophy regarding the education of both you and your child(ren), 5) self-perception as adult student, personal projects, and description of self-motivational resources that influence the achievement of academic success, and 6) personal and academic conflicts, dilemmas, and constraints.

You will also be offered a disposable camera and asked to take pictures of how you perceive your life as a student and a parent. The photographs that you take will be used as the foundation for the semi-structured interview, and will be included in the research. Further consent for use of photographs will be requested as needed.

As compensation for your time and effort in assisting the researcher to schedule interview time and sharing photographs, a $25 gift certificate will be provided to each participant at the beginning of the study.

Audio recording- With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. Following the interview, participants have the right to view their transcripts, correct any errors, and pose any questions or revise information.

Total time involved:
You will be involved in this study for one day to participate in one individual interview, for the period of 1 to 2 hours.

RISKS
Participation in this study would entail two potential risks. The first risk involves a break in confidentiality/anonymity. The researcher will minimize this risk by assigning a code or pseudonym to all participants, not using exact names or titles; and keeping all study records, including all digital files and transcripts in an encrypted file, on a password-protected computer. Only the principle investigator and the faculty sponsor will have access to said records. The second risk involves experiencing some degree of emotional distress before, during, or immediately after the interview. However, previous studies and research experience suggests that semi-structured interviews with the population of adult students will not cause long-term emotional harm or distress for participants. Participants may skip any objectionable questions and may end the interview at any time.

BENEFITS
To the Participant
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you may find opportunity to reflect upon your academic and parental experience, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of yourself. Only CSU Stanislaus undergraduate adult students, aged 22-65, will be invited to participate.

To Others or Society
Participating in this study may not benefit you directly**,** but it will help improve understanding about the needs, characteristics, and persistence tensions experienced by undergraduate adult students. This information can guide formulation of policies and academic management programs that improve the participation and academic experience of adult students in higher education.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION OF STUDY PARTISIPATION
You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you can communicate your decision to the researcher without any negative consequences. If you stop your participation in the study, the researcher will destroy any data received from you, including audiotapes and transcripts.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you will share with us if you participate in this study will be kept completely confidential to the full extent of the law. Your information will be assigned a pseudonym that is unique to this study. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in an encrypted file, on a password protected computer. No one, other than the principle investigator and faculty advisor, will be able to see your interview or even know whether you participated in this study. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list linking participant's names to pseudonyms will be destroyed. Study findings will be presented only in summary form and your name would not be used in any report.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Heather Muser, 209-667-3586, hwilliams@csustan.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Virginia Montero Hernandez, Dissertation Committee Chair, Advanced Studies, CSU Stanislaus 209-664-6564 or vmonterohernandez@csustan.edu or Dr. Joyce Bell, Administrator IRB, CSU Stanislaus Turlock, 209-667-3784 or IRBadmin@csustan.edu.

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

☐ I agree to have this interview audio recorded

☐ I do not agree to have this interview audio recorded

VOLUNTARY PARTISPATION STATEMENT

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I may refuse to answer any question or discontinue my involvement at any time, without penalty. My decision will not affect my future relationship with CSU Stanislaus. My signature below indicates that I have read the information in this consent form and I consent to participate.

_____
Printed name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of the Adult Participant Date

_____ _____
Signature of the Investigator Date
Heather M. Muser

APPENDIX D

PHOTOGRAPHY RELEASE AND CONSENT FORM

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, STANISLAUS

Photograph Release and Consent Form

Dissertation Research- Adult Students who are also Parents
By Heather Muser, MA

- ✓ I authorize the use of photographs of my likeness for the purpose of this research project without payment or other compensation.
- ✓ I understand that any face will be removed from any photographs used in any published version of this dissertation project.
- ✓ I release all claim to photographs and assign all rights to these images to the Principle Investigator, Heather Muser.
- ✓ My assignment of these rights is not limited to any specific time period or purpose.
- ✓ I warrant that all photographs furnished by me are my own original work.
- ✓ I agree to all of the above on behalf of myself, my minor child, or other family member or person for whom I have legal responsibility.

Subject Name (Please Print) _____

Signature _____

Parent or Guardian Name (Please Print) _____

*Parent or Guardian Signature _____

*parent or legal guardian name and signature is required if subject is a minor child or unable to sign for any reason

ONE UNIVERSITY CIRCLE • TURLOCK, CALIFORNIA 95382 • WWW.CSUSTAN.EDU • PHONE (209)667-3686 • FAX (209)667-3526

APPENDIX E

UIRB PERMISSION LETTER

California State University, Stanislaus
Institutional Review Board
One University Circle, MSR 160
Turlock, CA 95382

(209) 667-3493
Fax: (209) 664-7048
IRBAdmin@csustan.edu

June 7, 2016

Heather Muser
One University Circle
Turlock, CA 95382

Re: Protocol #1516-149

Dear Heather,

Congratulations. Your research has been approved via Expedited review and can be conducted as detailed in your research protocol, **"A Parent's Dream Come True: A Study of Adult students who are Parents and their Academic Engagement in Higher Education."**

This designation is for one year and will expire on June 6, 2017. If you have any questions regarding this designation, please contact the IRB Administrator at (209) 667-3493.

Please Note:
Human subjects research liability protection from the university only covers IRB-approved research by faculty, students, and employees of CSU Stanislaus. If your employment or student status changes during the year or if you make changes to your methods, subject selection, or instrumentation, please discontinue your research and notify the IRB to obtain the appropriate clearances.

If any research participant experiences a serious adverse or unexpected event during or following participation, please notify the IRB Administrator immediately.

Best regards,

Susan M. Neufeld

Susan M. Neufeld, Ed.D., Chair

cc: Virginia Montero Hernandez

APPENDIX F

CODEBOOK

Categories, Codes and Criteria- Codebook		
Family Categories	**Codes**	**Definition**
Advise for Others-AO	-Family	-advise for other adult students on family
	-Kids	-advise for other adult students on parenting
Challenges-CH	-Academic	-academic challenges for adult students
	-Conflicts	-conflicts often between 2 'goods'
	-Culture	-the challenge of culture
	-Financial Situation	-the challenge of financial hardship
	-Handicapped child	-the challenge of a child that is developmentally/physically different
	-Logistics	-the challenge of commuting/working/scheduling time and transportation to school
	-Psychological	-the challenge of individual personality traits or characteristics
	-Technology	-the challenge with the distraction of, yet necessity for using technology in college
	-Time	-challenge of no time or space in order to accomplish everything
Learning Activities-LA	-Application of Education	-moments where pervious learning applied to real life
	-Description of How We Learn	- Learning accomplished with field trips/openness/classroom examples, etc.
	-Generational Knowledge	-Examples of knowledge passed on to children from parents and vice versa
	-Study Habits	-techniques used to successfully accomplish scholarly work
Parenting Experience-PE	-Kid academics	-the experience of kids doing something that mom/ad does for the first time
	-Lessons taught	-lessons parents teach kids for overall life success
	-Personal Lessons Learned	-lessons the kids teach their parents, often not understood until reflection;
Personal Resources-PR	-Motivation	-experiences that motivated the

	-Satisfaction	adult student to continue -feeling satisfied in actions, opportunities, personal success
	-Self-definition	-ways in which individuals describe themselves, both positive and negative
	-Spirituality	-moments of spiritual experience, explanation
Self Management	-Balance	-ability to balance all the demands of life
	-Decision Making	-demands of critical decisions that were made well
Supportive Relationships-SR	-Car Relationship	-relationship that an adult student has with the vehicle that allows education to occur
	-Couple Relationship	-quality of spousal relationship used as a support for adult students
	-Family Relationship	-the description of the family relationship used to succeed
	-Supportive Relationships	-description of the supportive, non-family relationship important to success
Types of Dialogue-TD	-Couple Communication	-ways that couples share important details of life
	-Peer Communication	-ways that peers share important information about school
	-Teacher Communication	-ways that teachers share important information inside and outside the classroom
Ah-Ha Moments-AHM	-Ah-Ha Personal	-Ah-Ha moments where realization or insight is of a personal nature
	Ah-HA Academic	-Ah-Ha moments that are of an academic nature
NO CODE FAMILIES	-Fear of Failing	-descriptions of the fear of not measuring up
	-Future Goals	-description of future goals, dreams, plans on a personal level
	-Institutional improvements	-Suggestions for institutional improvement for CSU Stanislaus, either structural or programmatic
	-Relationship with their children	- description of the relationship with the children

APPENDIX G

TABLE FOR RELATED CODES

		Initial Findings- Relevant Categories and Themes		
Related codes	Attribute of the relationship	In which cases is the relationship present	Sample pop. Rep.	To what RQ this relationship between codes respond
Family relationships, Motivation,	FR is cause of Motivation	Susan- 1:22 God=good Sister Mary- 6:48 Brother=motivation for CSU attendance Scarlett- 11:37 Husband=support system, motivation, no college Mr. Science- 21:14 reciprocal motivation between dad and daughter	4/7 SQ1, SQ2	"if God wasn't in it, I'd be no good" "He was probably the only one ever to tell me like you need to college prep class…The only reason I wanted to come here was he came here, and **he made it look so cool**." SQ2 "**He's my support system**…'You are only going to graduate one time. Just do it. Get as much as you want from it. Experience as much as you want.'…But I think he wishes he did go to college." SQ1 "My daughter broke her back in a bike accident a couple years ago, and was pretty down in the dumps about losing her momentum and it involved moving from Portland back home. And by the time she got back on her feet, decided that she wanted to change her major. And if Dad can go back to school at 60 she can certainly go back to school and she's 24. So her "poor me" argument sort of flew out the window."
Narrative of Significant Others- "Adult students also need a **role model** who exemplifies the good that they need at that particular moment in their life… Sister Mary needed inclusion, which she saw in her brother as "he made it look cool", Scarlett needed support, which she received from her husband, and "You're only going to graduate once 'Just do it'				

APPENDIX H

CODE CO-OCCURANCE TABLE

Code Cooccurance Table

	AHM-academic	LA-Generational Knowledge	LA-Study Habits	PE-Personal Lessons Learned	PR-Motivation	PR-Spirituality
AHM-personal	7	1	0	1	2	0
CH-academic	1	0	1	0	2	0
CH-psychological	0	0	1	1	2	2
Future goals	2	2	3	0	14	0
LA-Generational Knowledge	1	0	12	6	5	4
LA-Study Habits	1	12	0	4	2	2
PE-Lessons Taught	0	15	2	3	3	0
Self Management	0	4	10	1	4	0
SR-Family Relationships	0	3	7	3	12	7
SR-Teacher Relationships	2	1	0	1	3	0
TD-Couple Communication	0	0	0	0	1	0
TD-Peer Communication	0	0	0	1	0	0
Self Definition				3		