A TUNNEL OF HOPE: THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT-MOTHERS IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE BASED DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences of mothers of young children attending a community college-based Developmental Education (DVST) program. A literature review indicated three general notions: 1) mothering in North America today is all-consuming and associated with numerous contradictions and difficulties, 2) student mothers in a variety of post-secondary contexts face difficulties participating, and 3) some DVST students may experience some level of "culture shock" upon entering post-secondary education. Participants were eight women enrolled in the program while assuming the primary live-in parenting responsibility for at least one child under thirteen. Semi-structured interviews and subsequent analysis of interview transcripts revealed six themes. Participation in the DVST program as a student-mother (1) signifies a major life turning point, (2) is a positive experience, (3) involves adapting to new time pressures, (4) involves redefining roles in relationships with children and other family members, which can lead to feelings of guilt, (5) is vulnerable to childcare and financial crises, and (6) is best supported by services related to childcare, financial assistance, and connections with women in like circumstances. The results of this study have implications for daycare policy, career counselling, centralized services for student-mothers receiving income assistance, support networks, and DVST instructors' role in establishing linkages between student-mothers and the college community.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Rationale for the Study

More and more women today are assuming at least half of the financial obligations for themselves and their families. Some are sharing the responsibility with a partner, while others are meeting this demand alone. At the same time that women have an increased need to strengthen their earning potential, the educational qualifications for employment are also increasing. For women with little formal education, securing employment that will be lucrative enough to cover the expenses of a household can seem bleak. Consequently, more women than ever are returning to formal education. Some may opt to enroll in a community college-based Developmental Studies (DVST) program in order to upgrade high school level English or Math. Others may be required to complete specified DVST coursework in order to meet the admission requirements for a desired program. Many women making this decision will return to school while continuing to hold most of the household and parenting responsibilities for their families.

Developmental Studies is very similar, but not identical, to Adult Basic Education (ABE). While both provide opportunities for adults to upgrade academically, the latter is geared more specifically toward achieving high school graduation, while the former has a broader, less specific aim. Many of the students taking DVST have not graduated from high school; however, others have graduated but want, or are required after assessment, to upgrade before taking college-level coursework.

At the time of this study, I was an employee at Lower Mainland College[1], the site of this research. I was working in the Learning Centre, which has a relationship with, but is not

[1] Lower Mainland College is not the real name of the college. All identifying references to the research site have been changed both in the text and reference list.

housed within, the Developmental Studies Program. Although I was not teaching in the department, I had a strong interest in Developmental Studies. I had completed a practicum within a DVST literacy-level classroom, had spent a portion of the research period teaching ABE English for the local public school district, and had focussed the better part of my Adult Education Master's program on Developmental Studies and mature women students.

Very little research exists concerning the experience of student mothers, and those that have been conducted have been primarily within either university or community-based literacy and ABE programs. While there are a few studies (Andres, Andruske, & Hawkey, 1996; Liversidge, 2000) that have examined the experiences of mature women students carrying multiple roles while studying in a Canadian community college, none of these has focussed on student mothers in a DVST program. Also, in a conversation with the Director of Institutional Research (May 2000) at the site of this study, I have learned that no institutionally based research has focused on this group of students to date.

There is a gap in the research regarding the participation experiences of DVST student mothers in a community college setting. It is hoped that by documenting participants' voices, this research will help DVST instructors, program planners, and other professionals to better understand the experiences of these women.

In an effort to bridge the existing research gap, this study will explore answers to the following focal questions:

- How do mothers of young children attending a community college-based DVST program describe their experiences as students and mothers?
- What, if any, factors within the college do participants identify as being barriers to their participation in the DVST program?

- What, if any, factors outside the college do participants identify as being barriers to their participation in the DVST program?
- What, if any, resources within the college do participants identify as offering support to their participation in the DVST program?
- What, if any, resources outside the college do participants identify as offering support to their participation in the DVST program?

The Setting and the Participants

This study took place in a community college in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Participants in the study were enrolled in the Developmental Studies (DVST) Program at Lower Mainland College, which offers upgrading courses in reading, writing, study skills and mathematics. Adults take these courses to upgrade their reading, writing, mathematics, and study skills for a variety of personal, vocational, and academic purposes, including preparation for the General Educational Development Test (GED) or for college-level coursework. This college prides itself on its open door policy and its extensive array of support services. Andres *et al.* (1996) found that the college's attention to student success services was consistent with its philosophy of providing access to all adult members of the community. However, there was also a general lack of sufficient data regarding student demographics, goals and expectations.

According to the Lower Mainland College calendar (Online, 2002), there are four levels in the DVST program ranging from literacy and numeracy to college or university preparation. The 100-level, literacy and numeracy, is for learners who have limited experience with printed word (sometimes illiterate) or computation. Some students stay at this level for several semesters or even years. There were no participants in this study at this

level. At the 200-level, "fundamental" composition and reading comprehension are taught in English. Two-hundred level mathematics covers general fundamental arithmetic, including whole numbers, fractions, decimals, and percents. Three-hundred level reading and writing coursework is suitable as preparation for the GED exam (the high school equivalency exam) or to enter career or vocational programs at the college. Three-hundred level mathematics offers an introduction to algebra. Four-hundred level reading and writing coursework is designed for students who are preparing to do university-transfer coursework. The emphasis is on reading critically and writing academic research papers. There are two mathematics courses at the 400-level. The first one is roughly equivalent to B.C. Introduction to Mathematics 11, and the second is roughly equivalent to B.C. high school algebra 11. Full calendar descriptions of the courses participants were taking are offered in Appendix A.

The Developmental Studies Program at Lower Mainland College used to be called Adult Basic Education but changed its name out of a concern that the word "Basic", in "Adult Basic Education", was associated with a negative connotation (Personal communication, DVST coordinator, November, 2000). The academic upgrading literature reviewed for this study has referred only to "Adult Basic Education" and "Literacy" programs, and never to "Developmental Studies" programs. Henceforth, I will use the term "Developmental Studies", or DVST to refer to the community college based program where this research took place, and will use the terms "Adult Basic Education", or ABE, and "literacy" in accordance with how authors have used these terms to describe their research settings.

Another distinction between this program and some of the programs reviewed in the literature is that this program is not specifically geared toward individuals making a

transition between income assistance and employment. The financial arrangements and income levels of participants were not known prior to the study. However, since ABE literature consistently identifies poverty as a key issue for many ABE students, it seemed likely that a substantial proportion of the women who participated in this study would either be receiving income assistance or would consider themselves to have a low income. Also, this study did not target women of a particular marital status since this would not allow exploration of the impact of spousal relationships, or the lack thereof, in the participation experience.

Overview of the Literature

This study is based on the premise that mothers of young children participating in DVST face particular barriers that are additional to those faced by most other students. These barriers make returning to formal education a difficult endeavor. A literature search revealed no studies that describe the experiences of student mothers in a community college based DVST program. However, related literature suggests that DVST student mothers may face barriers related to the way motherhood is socially constructed; the way public institutions, including educational facilities, fail to embrace motherhood; and how some DVST students may face challenges unique to their educational backgrounds.

Motherhood is not merely a biologically induced circumstance but a social construction. Evidence for this has come from historical and sociological examinations of how motherhood has changed to reflect economic currents and prevailing views about the nature of children (Birns & Hay, 1988; Gleason, 1999; Hays, 1996). In North America today, the responsibilities of motherhood extend well beyond meeting the basic physical needs of the child. Hays (1996) characterizes the current mode of mothering as "intensive"

(p. 4) in its requirement that the mother act as primary full-time caregiver and expend a great deal of emotion, time, energy, and money in rearing her young. Modern-day mothers are charged with bringing up children who are psychologically balanced, physically healthy, intellectually competitive, independent, responsible, well-rounded individuals. To meet the requirements of this task satisfactorily, mothers must rely upon expert advice, rather than upon common sense or folk knowledge as they might have in the past. To make matters worse, mothers are operating as described in a society the places a higher worth on marketplace values, such as efficiency and competition, than it does on the values of nurturing. Consequently, mothers who are combining non-domestic activity with domestic operate in two or more conflicting realities.

The current motherhood ideal is based on middle-class values. Although all women struggle to some extent in reaching this ideal, it is particularly elusive for working women, poor women, and lone mothers (Birns & Hay, 1988; Gleason, 1999; Hays, 1996).

The second area of literature that has relevance for this study is that concerning student-mothers in various post-secondary contexts. Although research concerning parent/student role conflict is in its infancy, early investigations indicate that there are a number of conflicts associated with being both a student and a mother. Research concerning the experiences of mature women entering college dates back at least as far as work by Mezirow (1978), who observed a group of women entering college to have difficulty in deciphering the new experience fully within the frame of reference upon which they had relied previously. The criteria for understanding, judging and acting that had been reliable before returning to school were no longer relevant in the college environment (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow's work emphasized the need for colleges to provide women with forums that

would allow them to alter their perspectives and assimilate to the new college environment. More recent research (Blackwell, 1998; Dalien, 1998; Home & Hinds, 2000; Hornosty, 1998; Sears, 1999) has highlighted instead how difficulties faced by student-mothers stem not from deficiencies within women but from public institutional values and practices that do not accommodate the demands of child rearing, particularly as they are shaped by current mothering ideology.

Women in general, and mothers in particular, face barriers to post-secondary education at the point of entry (Blackwell, 1998; Gaskell, 1992), then also as they move through their programs (Andres, Andruske, & Hawkey, 1996; Dalien, 1998; Home, 1993; Lavell, 1998; Liversidge, 2000; Sears, 1999, 2001), and again when they attempt to carry their credentials into the labour force (Andres & Guppy, 1991; Gaskell, 1992; Gaskell & McLaren, 1991; Hornosty, 1998; Pascall & Cox, 1993). Finances and childcare are particularly crucial to accessing and completing post-secondary studies. Gender segregation in the labour force often prohibits women from fully utilizing their credentials.

Several researchers (e.g., Birns & Hay, 1988; Hart, 1995; Hays, 1996; McMahon, 1995) have argued that the difficulties faced by adult learners who are also mothers are attributable to a society which has neglected to embrace, in any practical sense, the business of nurturing and rearing our young, or "motherwork" (p. 99), as Hart (1995) has called it. They have maintained that the public settings of paid work and formal education, based on traditional male priorities and realities, reject being upset by the concerns of the private setting of the home, usually associated with childcare and other traditional female realities. Therefore, even though women are gaining access to all forms of education as never before, most programs fail to consider the realities of many mothers' lives.

Women attempting to operate in domestic and non-domestic spheres simultaneously may face both emotional and logistical challenges. Dalien (1998) found that university student mothers expressed feelings of worry, guilt, helplessness, and frustration related to their own sense that they were inadequate as both students and mothers. They felt alienated both by other students who were not mothers and by other mothers who were not students. They also felt angry at the lack of understanding expressed within the institution. Home and Hinds (2000) found women with low incomes to have an especially difficult time going to school because they could afford fewer resources such as childcare and expended more time and emotional energy dealing with financial crises.

Liversidge (2000) also recognizes how public institutions, such as workplaces and colleges follow a different type of time than that followed by mothers caring for their children. Whereas public institutions follow linear time, which follows the clock and measures tasks by precisely how long they take to complete, childcare is governed by cyclical time, which does not follow the clock but is determined by needs as they arise. Whereas the former can be planned, the latter cannot. Student mothers must regularly switch back and forth between these contrasting temporalities.

A third area of literature that is relevant to this study is that concerning issues for learners in DVST and ABE programs. One of the crucial ways that DVST differs from other post-secondary programs is that most other post-secondary programs have academic prerequisites whereas DVST courses fulfill prerequisites for other programs. Therefore, whereas some level of academic success and familiarity can be assumed of students in other post-secondary programs, such an assumption cannot be made of students in DVST/ABE programs.

Literature in the field of Adult Basic Education has identified some uneasiness in many ABE students about participating in formal education. This uneasiness has been linked to negative previous experiences in grade school. For example, Quigley (1992) found the impact of previous schooling experiences (*i.*e., in childhood and adolescence) contributed to a resistance to participation for some adult basic and literacy learners. Also, resistant learners were much more likely than non-resistant learners to have difficulty adjusting to the school culture and structure. The two groups did not differ in terms of the value they placed on school, but in what they believed they could achieve by participating and in the social networks they could develop in school. Also, low-income ABE student mothers in Luttrell's (1997) research avoided formal educational settings because they remembered grade school as a place where they had been treated as outsiders for being poor and where their common sense knowledge had not been valued. Lareau (2000) highlights how, right from 1st grade, middle-class and working class children are differentially prepared for post-secondary education. This was partly because working class parents had less experience with formal education than middle-class parents did and were consequently less confident to participate in their children's schooling.

In recognition that mothers who are also DVST students may face a unique and complex blend of barriers, several community-based programs have been developed especially for them. Most of the research (e.g., Stasz, Schwartz, & Weeden, 1991; Yaffe & Williams, 1998) concerning this population has investigated how well specialized programs are meeting the educational needs of women. For example, Stasz, Schwartz, and Weeden (1991) recorded the learning outcomes of mothers in an unstructured literacy project room in Geneva, New York. They found that the women in the program were empowered by learning

experiences that incorporated their own knowledge and gave them a sense of ownership in their learning. Similarly, Yaffe and Williams (1998) interviewed mothers of young children on income assistance in a "family literacy program" in a large metropolitan area of the Midwestern United States that integrates adult literacy education with parenting education and daycare. The women attributed their satisfaction with the program to the overall atmosphere in the classroom, which validated their emotions and life situations, as well as to the support network they were able to establish with other women in the program, which motivated them to continue their studies.

Other researchers have investigated mixed-gender literacy classrooms and have found formal learning to have different significance for women than for men. For example, a case study analysis (Malicky, Katz, Norton, & Norman, 1997) of the narratives of 5 successful adult literacy learners in a community-based program in an inner-city Canadian community found that the women in the program more so than the men linked the social networks fostered in the classroom with issues around identity, safety, and knowledge acquisition. They were also more likely to experience enhanced self-expression as being the basis for new feelings of empowerment.

These studies emphasize how programs that are relevant to the personal histories and experiences of learners and that promote interpersonal relationships between learners are instrumental in fostering favourable learning experiences. However, these studies have either focussed on university or college-level programs, which assume some level of prior academic success, or on small community-based programs, which are not linked to larger institutions and are more socio-economically homogeneous than the DVST classes in the community college sites referred to here. In order to better inform DVST practices and

policies, there is a need to investigate the experience of mothers of young children within the context of the community college-based DVST program where most program features are designed to meet the needs of both female and male participants, with a diversity of age, ethnicity, and educational history. The present study aims to address that need.

Theoretical Basis for Design

The research design for this study involves interviewing DVST student mothers about their participation experiences. This design decision heeds the recent program planning advice of several authors within the field of adult education (Butterwick, 1992, 1996; Catalfamo, 1998; Collins, 1997; Davidson, 1995; Fingeret, 1992; Yaffe & Williams, 1998). These authors have supported the argument that it is important to understand the educational needs of DVST student mothers within a context that extends well beyond their performance on educational assessments or on enrollment and attrition rates.

Traditionally, when ABE educators have planned programs and assessed needs, they have relied on the deficit or "banking" model of education for assessing learner needs. This model calls upon instructors to diagnose the degree or cause of incompetence and then prescribe cures, which often involve a reliance on task-oriented curricula that are irrelevant to students' lives and cultures. This type of assessment risks over-emphasizing factors stemming from within the learner and under-emphasizing factors related to the learner's social context. Consequently, the assessor may mistakenly attribute lack of competence to psychological barriers, such as lack of motivation, rather than to social barriers, such as the threat of isolation from friends and family for advancing socially (Fingeret, 1992).

Catalfamo (1998) argues that instead of taking the deficit perspective, planners need to be asking themselves, "What social issues must be brought to bear when discussing the

educational needs of women who are making transition(s)...and what are the implications for adult educators who work with these women" (p.23)? Some of the issues she has identified include affordable, quality childcare, domestic abuse, and spousal sabotage of educational pursuits. Catalfamo maintains that in order for these and other issues to be fully understood, the voices of the participants must be heard.

Collins (1997) echoes this stance and stresses that educators need to be creating genuinely democratic pedagogical environments that allow learners to determine their own needs and those of their communities. He also argues that when educators are assessing needs, rather than merely carrying out "programmatic justifications on behalf of the status quo" (p. 78), they should be analysing the ways that institutional barriers get in the way of emancipatory adult educational practices. Davidson (1995) asserts that educators often attempt to discern learners' needs within the context of institutional constraints, which are in turn shaped by the constraints of larger social structures, such as the fiscal restraints of the state. Instead, they should be "focusing on the processes by which conditions are experienced, expressed, and satisfied as educational needs" (p. 194). Yaffe and Williams (1998) agree, and add that when educators are designing programs, they need to guard against using models that "transmit our own cultural practices to the homes of participants" (p. 17).

Butterwick (1992, 1996) examined how the needs of women with multiple barriers to employment were interpreted in three government-funded job-reentry programs. Women in these programs struggled with racism, histories of violence, chronic poverty, sexism, classism, and substance abuse. However, official policy documents focussed on spending reductions, quick employment matches for participants, and privatizing training programs. Program coordinators and instructors struggled to address participants' needs within the narrow needs

interpretations of these policies. When staff attempted to translate participants' needs to the state, they were compelled to use language from within the policy framework, which occasionally meant portraying participants as pathological. This research demonstrated how needs talk can become repressive rather than emancipatory unless the rights of women who face barriers to economic independence are understood fully.

Method

Participants for this study were women holding the primary live-in parenting responsibilities of one or more children aged 12 or younger while taking Developmental Studies coursework at Lower Mainland College in the greater Vancouver area of British Columbia. Prior to beginning the study, I conducted a pilot interview with a student-mother who had previously completed coursework in the same program. This pilot interview allowed me to work out logistical issues and to assess the quality of the questions in the interview. Sampling strategies aimed purposely at finding women who met the participant criteria. Before I started recruiting participants, I met with the coordinator of the Developmental Studies Program to receive her informal approval for the study, as well as any suggestions she had for connecting with prospective participants. The main method of recruitment was to send a memo to all DVST instructors teaching in the summer 2001 semester, along with some posters, asking them to inform women about the study. I also sent posters to the Women's Centre and the B.C. Benefits Office because I believed eligible women might see them in these places. To compensate participants for their time, they were offered their choice of $15 cash or a $15 gift certificate for the College bookstore. Eight participants were in the study. Originally I had hoped to interview ten women, however, only eight eligible participants came forward during the semester I had reserved time for interviews.

Information was gathered via a semi-structured in-person interview (see Appendix B). The first section of the interview focussed on the participant's current and past educational experiences. The second section asked a series of questions about how the participant's school life impacted on other parts of her life, such as home. The third section asked what, if any, stressors and barriers to participation in education existed in the participant's life, and what, if any, resources and supports existed at the college or in the participant's personal life that she considered useful and helpful in addressing those obstacles. The interviews lasted between 45 and 100 minutes. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. After an initial analysis of the transcripts, detailed analysis summaries (see Appendix C) were mailed to participants so that they would have an opportunity to provide feedback to my interpretations.

Scope, Implications, and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women participating in a Developmental Studies Program while assuming the primary parenting responsibilities for at least one child under the age of 13. The intent was to document the subjective realities of DVST student-mothers, not to establish casual links between mothering and DVST participation. The aim of this study was to understand the emotional and practical complexities of being a student-mother in a DVST program. I hope that understanding these complexities will inform the policies and practices of DVST/ABE instructors, program planners, and other professionals. I also hope that this research will begin to fill the gap that exists in the literature regarding the experiences of DVST student-mothers.

This study was delimited to the experiences of 8 women in one DVST program, in one college in British Columbia. Consequently, the findings of this study may differ from

those that would be revealed in research involving participants in another program, or another province. For example, provincial differences in funding policies and ABE program structures may limit generalizations.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this section I review literature relevant to the experiences of simultaneously being a mother of young children and a Developmental Studies college student. Because little attention has been paid to this topic in the literature, I have attempted to infer parts of the experiences of DVST student-mothers by examining different bodies of research. These bodies of research may also represent some of the different components of the experiences of DVST student-mothers. In order to begin to understand the experiences of DVST student-mothers, it is first necessary to untangle this larger construct and to look separately at the phenomena of mothering, student-mothering, and Developmental Studies participation. I have arranged this chapter in this way. First, I summarize literature concerning mothering itself. Here I also include literature regarding the impacts on mothering of social class, lone mothering, and the school system. Second, I summarize literature that examines how women experience combining mothering with formal education. Third, I summarize literature that looks at some of the issues that may be faced by Developmental Studies students.

Mothering

There is no single definition of motherhood. Class, race, sexual orientation, religion, geography and many other factors help to shape the identity and experiences of women who are mothers. Furthermore, no woman is only a mother – women are sisters, workers, partners, daughters, and so on. Motherhood also varies according to the ways a given society constructs reproduction and childcare (McMahon, 1995). Mothering has not always looked

like it does in North America today. To understand how motherhood is socially constructed, it is useful to consider how it has varied across time and place.

Throughout history, mothering has changed to reflect prevailing views about the nature of children and their nurturing needs. For example, in the Middle Ages, children were seen as demonic and animalistic and needing to be tamed. There was no belief in the maternal instinct and a wet nurse was typically hired to tend to the child. However, in 17th and 18th century Europe there was a shift toward seeing children as having an innocence that needed to be preserved. More mothers started breast feeding their babies and servants were removed from the home for fear they would corrupt the children. During the same era in New England, the puritanical view that children had an inherent sinful nature prevailed. To tame their rebellious tendencies, children were to work hard and undergo obedience training. The father was the head of the household - mothers were not considered to possess appropriate authoritarian qualities for bringing children to redemption and so were not directly involved in the rearing of the children. Then in the 19th century, children were again seen as having an innocence that should be preserved. In order to keep their children on the path of righteousness, mothers needed to protect them in the home until late in their teenage years and offer them an environment filled with love and affection. In this way the pendulum has swung back and forth about whether children possessed a nature that should be cherished or one that required a firm hand (Hays, 1996).

Mothering has also changed over the decades to reflect economic currents. As economic tides have changed, mothers have been driven back and forth, in and out of the home and the paid labour force (Birns & Hay, 1988). For example, during 17th and 18th century Puritan New England, some mothers oversaw the work of the young labourers on the

family homestead while older siblings watched over very young children. Then, during the Industrial era when factories were replacing farms, some women began staying home and focussing intently on their children (Hays, 1996). However, during World War II, women were needed in the factories, so daycares were opened to free up mothers from childcare responsibilities (Birns & Hay, 1988).

The 1930s and 1940s saw a dramatic rise in the popularity of expert knowledge regarding proper childcare. Mothers were expected to keep abreast of the latest "expert" opinions on their children's emotional, physical, and cognitive development, as well as current views about disciplining children. Also, mothers required new knowledge from one stage of child development to the next, so the task of staying informed was ongoing (Hays, 1996).

After the horrors of World War II, Canadian psychologists gained prestige for their scientific knowledge regarding healthy personality development and management. Their advice was sought and popularized through magazines, radio, schools, and advice manuals. High on their list of prescriptions for a next generation of responsible citizens was a stable home life, anchored by a stay-at-home mother. During the war, women's participation in the labour force had increased to 60%, but they were now being advised to return to their homes where they could offer a stabilizing presence. Women were validated in their domestic roles and were offered advice about the ways they could make the role more challenging and fulfilling (Gleason, 1999).

Although mothers who stayed home were viewed as crucial to the well being of their families, their role was characterized by several paradoxes. First of all, their predominant parenting role also left them vulnerable to blame for any psychological maladjustment in

their children. They were warned simultaneously against neglecting and over-indulging their children. They were told not to boss their children too much but neither to play with them too much. Ultimately, mothers could never get it quite right (Birns & Hay, 1988; Gleason, 1999). Second of all, despite women's apparent central position as household managers, this role left them economically dependent upon their husbands. Finally, even though women were seen to possess natural qualities for childrearing, women-dominated homes with no father present were thought to be potentially unhealthy for children (Gleason, 1999).

Post-war psychologists' advice reflected and normalized the values of the predominant white, middle-class, heterosexual population. Ironically, however, as psychologists were emphasizing the importance of mothers staying in their homes, the number of married women in the labour force steadily increased. Immigrant and poor women, in particular, continued to work outside the home in considerable numbers. The realities of these women were not included in the prevailing narrow stereotype of the "ideal" mother. Instead, their work for pay was linked to increased juvenile delinquency and mental health risks in their children (Gleason, 1999).

Many of the tenets of the post-war period are still popular today. Mothers are still held accountable for the inadequacies of their children. Parenting practices are blamed more for how children are functioning than employment or poverty is. Expert discourse still holds higher status than mothers' common sense (Gleason, 1999; Woollette & Phoenix, 1991). This thirst for expert knowledge on child development has risen steadily to today, when 97% of households own at least one manual written by a child-rearing expert (Hays, 1996). Much of the advice continues to assume the primary caregiver is a Whit married woman of

middle-class status. Consequently, a narrow mothering ideal is reconstructed against which mothers with fewer resources are compared (Woollette & Phoenix, 1991).

The psychological literature from which much parenting advice is derived has largely focussed on the needs of the child, leaving the mother as a shadowy figure who meets these needs. The emphasis is unidirectional, as though it is only the mother who affects the child. For example, sensitivity is considered an essential component of healthy child development, but nowhere is it considered what it is like to be sensitive to the needs of a child day after day. Also, motherhood is portrayed as essentially similar for all women. Mothers are assumed to be heterosexual, and to function within White, middle-class culture. Neither the various subjective experiences women have as mothers, nor the conditions under which women attempt to rear their children are considered (Woollette & Phoenix, 1991). Mothers who meet their child's demands as spelled out by the experts are assumed to be good mothers, and those who do not are assumed to be bad. In this way, a myth of "good" mothering is perpetuated, and mothers who do not live up to this myth feel guilty and inadequate (Birns & Hay, 1988).

Hays (1996) argues that, today, we as a society have gone far beyond what is necessary for meeting the basic needs of a child. We have moved to an "intensive mothering" model that is "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive, and financially expensive" (p. 64). This intensive mothering model is based on three assumptions:

1) Children need a central caregiver. The mother should be the central caregiver because men generally are not as naturally nurturing.

2) Appropriate child rearing is a full-time job. To meet this lofty order, mothers must put their children's lives before their own.
3) A monetary value cannot be placed on mothering. It is a labour of love and to compare it to the kind work in the paid labour force is ludicrous.

Many mothers are almost solely responsible for the children, who come with "their own impressive array of needs" (Lavell, 1998, p. 194). Today mothers are not just responsible to keep their children clean and fed, but to stimulate them cognitively, participate in their schooling, offer them unconditional love, and have them in numerous extra-curricular activities. Mothers, and not fathers, are usually responsible for arranging adequate daycare, interacting with schools, and supporting their children's education. Silver (2000) has analyzed Statistics Canada data and has found that full-time employed married Canadian mothers of children under 5 spend at least 2 hours more per day than fathers do in the care of their children. This gap narrows as children get older, mostly because older children do not require the same level of personal care as younger children. In Hays' (1996) study, there was not a single household where the father assumed all of the childcare responsibilities and rarely did fathers take on completely any one child rearing duty.

The intensive mothering model poses an illogical contradiction in an era when more than half of all mothers is in the paid work force and when there is an unprecedented emphasis on personal and economic gain (Birns & Hay, 1988; Hays, 1996). The experiences women have of motherhood, which symbolizes non-contractual arrangements between people, run counter to the abstract, separate, individualistic ideal of the marketplace (McMahon, 1995). In an attempt to unravel this contradiction, Hays (1996) researched the

history of intensive mothering, analyzed top child rearing manuals, and interviewed mothers of diverse economic, ethnic and educational backgrounds.

Hays (1996) concluded that the primary purpose of intensive mothering is to sustain the white middle-class male system currently in place. The marketplace has a lot to gain from intensive mothering. Women can be convinced to work for lower wages in exchange for being allowed to fit work around mothering. Men have less competition for higher-level jobs because many women avoid them, as they tend to require too much time and energy to be combined with intensive mothering (also see Hochschild, 1997). At the same time, men can be relieved of the "grunt work" of rearing their young and be freed up to focus on their careers. Future workers are groomed for little cost to corporations. Intensive mothering provides children with the cultural resources they need to become competitive middle class adults. It also benefits the state because it helps to create law-abiding, disciplined citizens who are less likely to rely on government assistance. Despite its central role in sustaining the current marketplace ideology, the ideology of mothering does not hold the same status as the marketplace and is compartmentalized from it (Hays, 1996).

Some authors (e.g., McMahon, 1995; Rossiter, 1988) have highlighted how the act of having children transforms women into "mothers", a socially constructed concept that comes with prescribed characteristics and conditions. For example, Rossiter (1988) believes that, because of their connection to the maternal body, children do have preferential attachment to their mothers. This attachment in itself does not pose a problem. What poses a problem is how the mother-baby attachment has become associated with a social construction of woman made within a patriarchal framework. New mothers in Rossiter's qualitative study were presumed by their cultures to be the primary full-time caretakers of their babies.

Furthermore, these women soon came to see their role as undervalued (mostly by their male partners), quickly lost sight of their own needs, and became isolated from the outside world.

The isolation of the mother-child dyad, Rossiter (1988) asserts, oppresses women on a daily basis, makes women's work invisible, excludes children from public activity, and stops women from organizing collectively. The isolation arises from the capitalist belief that it is impossible to work when children are around. Isolation also means that mothers are not participating fully in public sphere activity, where important decisions about them are made and images of them are shaped (also see Birns & Hay, 1988).

Similar findings were made by McMahon (1995) who, coming from a sociological feminist framework, set out to conduct research that examined the extent to which motherhood still shaped the identity of women who participated in the labour force. She found that, indeed, the women in her study felt such a strong connection to their children that it shaped their identities in profound ways: motherhood brought personal growth, enhanced self-worth, moral transformation, and verification of having reached womanhood. Becoming a mother, "produce[d] a gendered sense of self in women" (p.3). As McMahon put it, mothers do not produce children, children produce mothers. McMahon also found that children brought a particular validation that emphasized women's maternal identity in such a way that they experienced motherhood as preferable to non-motherhood.

However, this transformation to motherhood is not valued in the public sphere. Instead, the biological process of childbirth has been used to organize a society that engenders women in a way that oppresses them. Nurturing has the power to oppress women because it is not valued financially and can suppress earning capacity, and therefore tends to place caregivers in subservient roles (Hays, 1996; McMahon, 1995).

Thompson (1998) reminds us that much of what we read about in motherhood literature comes from a White feminist perspective. White middle-class ideals view motherhood as synonymous with the home and emphasize a public/private sphere dichotomy that may not be emphasized by feminists of colour. A Black feminist perspective, for example, highlights how many Black women have not had the luxury of a domestic haven in which to care for their children. Instead, these women have been obligated to focus on survival from racism and poverty, which have both precluded any concept of a safe home. Also, this emphasis on survival has made caring much more a community effort than a private one. Consequently, caring in Black communities may involve the Black church, extended kin, and other members of the community.

Low-Income and Middle-Class Mothers

Today, the typical mother is more likely than not to be in the paid workforce, and is as likely as not to have never or no longer be married. Furthermore, the typical unmarried mother is as likely as not to live in poverty (Birns & ben-Ner, 1988). Even though so many women are raising children alone and in poverty, mothers' performance continues to be judged against a narrow middle-class ideal.

The structure of the job market is such that only a portion of divorced mothers working full-time can support their families without spousal or government support. Furthermore, finding full-time employment that will support a family is especially difficult for women who have been out of the workforce for any length of time. Older women may also face age discrimination. Mothers with younger children face the additional expense and coordination of childcare. Many divorced mothers will never be able to earn enough money to compensate for time spent homemaking (Straus, 1988).

Even though there are many different experiences of motherhood, some are more highly validated than others are (McMahon, 1995). Mothering discourse matches middle-class, not working-class resources (Griffith & Smith, 1991). Women have been charged with most of the responsibility of rearing the next generation to be self-reliant, self-controlled citizens, and many working-class women do not have sufficient resources to reach this ideal (Phoenix & Woollette, 1991). Also, the differences in resources (time, money, power, connections) between middle class and working class women prior to becoming mothers are generally exacerbated with having a child (McMahon, 1995).

Catalfamo (1998) points out the contradiction in our society that middle-class women who stay home to raise their children in two-parent homes are often said to be making a financial and professional sacrifice in order to do what is best for their children. In contrast, mothers who live in poverty, many of whom have been abandoned, have escaped from an abusive relationship, or have been widowed, and may have been forced to seek government support, have a stigma of relying too heavily on welfare, and their struggles to raise their children are minimized.

Mothers of all classes are aware of, aspire to, and are judged by the same ideals of mothering. Women do not differ from one another in wanting what is best for their children. However, most working class and poor women do not have the time and money to realize this ideal and are often viewed as doing an inadequate job of mothering. Also, whereas working-class women are likely to be aware of middle-class ideals, middle-class women are unlikely to be aware of the realities of working class and poor women (Hays, 1996).

Developmental psychology has reinforced this White middle-class ideal of motherhood by excluding non-middle class, non-white women from their research as a means of controlling variables. They have also tended toward examining the lives of women who are conveniently accessed such as those on university campuses and those who are available during the day. Conversely, poor women and women of colour are more likely to be included in research concerning pathological mothering, thus reinforcing a notion that they are inadequate mothers. For example, poor mothers are portrayed as providing less cognitively and linguistically rich environments than middle-class mothers (Phoenix & Woollette, 1991) and as depriving their children academically (Gaskell, 1992). Furthermore, the interpretation of these kinds of findings generally focuses on mothers' inadequacy rather than on their lack of resources.

The differential treatment of middle-class women, women of colour, and poor women in research studies leaves a large gap in the literature. Questions about how motherhood fits into the everyday lives of working-class mothers are not addressed. The gap also does not consider variations within cultural and class groups (Phoenix & Woollette, 1991).

Even the decision processes leading up to becoming a mother in the first place may be different for middle-class and poor women. Middle-class women in McMahon's (1995) study said they had children because they reached a point in their professional, financial, and emotional lives where they felt ready to have children. However, working class and poor women in the study emphasized how becoming a mother helped them to achieve maturity and a sense of importance. For the working class and poor women, there had not been sufficient resources to claim identity through educational or financial achievement prior to

having their babies, but motherhood allowed them to feel a sense of responsibility and accomplishment.

Lone Mothers

Mothering discourse also prescribes when and how women should become mothers. Women who are too young, are lesbians, are unattached, or work outside the home, do not meet this prescription (Phoenix & Woollette, 1991). Discourses are usually derived from academic or policy expert knowledge from which categories and language are picked up by media. Media stories are popularized with the general public and popular opinion is formed. Kelly (2000) examined popular discourse in Canada and the United States and has articulated the stigma associated with young unwed mothers in the following way. Young unwed mothers represent two sore spots for conservative middle-class North America. First, they challenge moralistic views toward teen sexuality and contraception. Second, they are increasingly associated with welfare dependency.

Some of the descriptors used for welfare recipients in general include laziness, economic irresponsibility, promiscuity, and a general inability to "delay gratification" (Kelly, 2000, p. 36). Added to this list of traits for young unwed mothers are assumptions that they are inept mothers and that through their poor decision making have brought a child into the world who, too, is destined for poverty and state dependence (Kelly, 2000). Since lone parenting and the poverty associated with it are viewed as a result of poor decision making, society is absolved of any responsibility for them. Even mothers themselves internalize this view: Several of the women in a study by McMahon (1995) entered mother unintentionally and tentatively, but soon shifted to a sense of ultimate responsibility for their maternal predicament.

Even though child rearing is mostly considered to be a private responsibility, poor single mothers are particularly at risk for drawing public attention to themselves for any apparent deficiencies in mothering. Many well-meaning health and social service professionals serve a public surveillance function to which single mothers on social assistance are especially vulnerable. Some ordinary citizens participate in this activity as well. The suggestion is that mothers receiving welfare are not entitled to the same degree of privacy as other mothers. Lower-income women are sometimes unjustly presumed to be abusive or neglectful and targeted as potentially inadequate simply because of their social status (Little, 1998; Phoenix & Woollette, 1991).

In addition to popular mainstream discourse, there are also several other competing discourses regarding unwed young mothers. Policymakers use stereotypes about young unwed mothers to their advantage, targeting them with policies designed to reduce state dependence. Bureaucratic experts, seeking funding for their programs, use psychological theory to paint a picture of young mothers as victims of multigenerational poverty who want a baby to fill a void in their lives. Opposition movements (for example, anti-poverty groups, feminist groups, and Aboriginal people's rights groups), focus on the structural roots of poverty, but are rarely heard by media or inform public opinion (Kelly, 2000; Little, 1998).

Critical feminists believe that young mothers are scapegoated to shroud the structural roots of poverty. They have identified five challenges to popular assumptions about young mothers, welfare, and poverty: First, poverty does not necessarily cause teen pregnancy – many poor young women do not become pregnant. Second, teen mothers are not necessarily any poorer than older mothers. Women of any age who have children are economically disadvantaged. Also, some young mothers eventually become quite financially successful.

Third, the claim that welfare entices women to become pregnant is not supported. Countries with some of the best welfare programs, such as Sweden, have the lowest teen pregnancy rates. Fourth, the claim that teen pregnancy is a leading cause of welfare dependency is not well supported. Most of the research in this area has been cross-sectional, not longitudinal, and has made exaggerated causal links between teen pregnancy and welfare dependency. Finally, contrary to popular belief, welfare spending would not be substantially reduced if teen pregnancy were somehow eliminated – in 1991, teenagers accounted for only 6.4% of Canadian single female parent-led homes. Also, poverty itself is much more likely to lead to poverty than teen pregnancy is. Young mothers who receive income assistance for extended periods tend to be those from poor backgrounds, who have multiple barriers to economic independence (Kelly, 2000).

Young single mothers on welfare face two double binds. First, on one hand they are not allowed to have a partner living the house and so are discouraged from reconciling former relationships or starting new ones. Yet, on the other hand, remaining single prolongs the time they must endure the stereotype of being single, as well as vulnerability to harassment by people in positions of power (for example, landlords). Second, on one hand they feel the pressure to get off of welfare, but on the other they know that they will need further education to earn enough money to cover living and child care expenses (Kelly, 2000).

The young mothers in Kelly's (2000) research took issue with much of the popular discourse surrounding them. Instead, they wanted to be seen in an empowering light rather one of victimization, immaturity, welfare-abuse, and moral-depravity. Kelly is convinced the

young women in her study wanted to take responsibility for their families and, with support, develop their competence as parents.

Schools' Role in Reinforcing Intensive Mothering and Perpetuating Class and Race Differences

Mothering discourse has been extended to include mothers' relationship with their children's schools. Schools attempt to integrate White middle-class notions of caring into to the classroom (Thompson, 1998), thus inadvertently reinforcing intensive mothering and perpetuating class and race differences between mothers. Classroom parent volunteers were virtually non-existent only a few decades ago (Lareau, 2000); however today, schools have come to rely on parent volunteerism in order to provide the kind of the education they do. This work can involve helping the teacher in the classroom, driving children on a field trip, sitting on a committee, or helping children with work at home (Griffith & Smith, 1991). Mothers today are also increasingly responsible to provide a cognitively enriching environment for their children. Teachers want parents to work in partnership with them - to teach their children at home, read to their children, provide a homework area and supplies, have their children in extra-curricular activities, attend school functions, and work in the classroom (Lareau, 2000).

In both working and upper-middle class homes, whether married or not, and whether working or not, it is mostly mothers, and rarely fathers, who assume full responsibility for their children's daily school routine (Griffith & Smith, 1991; Lareau, 2000). Mothers prepare lunches and get their children off to school in the morning. They attend parent-teacher meetings, check homework, monitor progress and trouble-shoot where necessary.

Consequently, mothers' lives are disrupted by inevitable, unpredictable disruptions in their children's school lives (Lareau, 2000).

This level of involvement has not changed with women's increased involvement in the paid labour force. Whenever a child becomes sick at school, has a doctor's appointment, a professional development day, or forgets her lunch, working mothers either miss time from work or coordinate other arrangements (Lareau, 2000). Regardless of the conditions under which women mother, most feel compelled to offer this help and they feel guilty and anxious when they cannot (Griffith & Smith, 1991). Also, much of mothers' contribution to education is devalued and invisible (Gaskell, 1992).

Working-class parents are far less likely than their upper-middle-class counterparts to be directly involved in their children's schooling. In turn, teachers are less likely to invite the participation in the classroom of working class parents than they are of upper-middle class parents (Lareau, 2000). To find out what was behind this difference in parent involvement, Lareau (2000) followed 12 upper-middle class predominantly White families and 12 working-class predominantly White families through their children's 1st and 2nd grades. She found that because the upper-middle class parents were at least as well educated as their children's teachers, they were not too intimidated to question school or teacher policies and practices. They were also able to speak the same vocabulary as teachers. Working class parents whose previous schooling experiences were less favourable, on the other hand, were less likely to face teachers as equals or question their decisions. The working-class parents were also less likely to help their children at home with their schoolwork, thinking they should leave the teaching to the teachers. Upper-middle class parents had the resources to hire tutors and to have their children professionally assessed whereas most working-class

parents did not. Furthermore, whereas many of the working-class mothers were working during the day, many of the upper-middle class mothers were home during the day and were available to participate more in the classroom. Teachers were impressed with the behaviors of upper-middle class parents and formed stronger linkages with them.

Mothering and the Non-Domestic Sphere

To understand some of the challenges faced by student mothers, it is helpful to consider some of the literature that has examined the experiences of women who are combining motherhood with employment. The social constructions of motherhood and employment are mutually exclusive and operate in opposition to one another. According to their respective ideologies, both motherhood and employment require a full-time commitment to be done successfully. Consequently, working-mothers face a double bind: they cannot be the ideal mother and the ideal employee at the same time. Also, a working mother's self-esteem can easily be eroded when she compares herself to non-employed mothers on the one hand, and with employed women with no children on the other (Lewis, 1991).

According to Lewis (1991), mothers have three options: 1) conform to the ideal mother status, 2) take part-time lower status positions which interfere less with mothering, or 3) conform to the male work model and risk high personal cost. The first option is differentially promoted to women of different income levels. While all women are told that they will ideally stay home with their children, lower-income women are told that their first priority must be to provide an income. The second option refers to what Lewis (1991) calls a "female pattern of work," (p.204) which is characterized by part-time hours, breaks from employment, over-qualification for positions, and fewer work years over the life span. For

many women, this pattern means fewer pay raises than other employees, subordination, employer exploitation, and a lower status at home. For married women, this income may be seen as secondary and is likely to be used to cover childcare costs. The third option, known at the end of the 1980s as the "supermom" syndrome, involved attempting to excel at both career and motherhood. However, this approach was still oppressive to women and did not challenge the social constructions of either role.

Since the marketplace is characterized by bottom-line, efficiency thinking, it is not sympathetic to the demands of childcare. Taking time away from work to take a sick child to the doctor, staying home with a sick child, or arriving at work already drained from a morning of getting oneself and the children ready to head out for the day can mean missing out on a promotion. As mothers walk through the office door, they are expected to switch off the concerns of caring for their children and switch on the concerns of the cool and competitive workplace. Still, working mothers continue to be just as child-centered, expert-guided, and emotionally absorbed in their mothering as mothers who are home with their children. Working mothers deal with this contradiction by convincing themselves that what they are doing will ultimately provide a better life for their children (Hays, 1996).

It is a mistake to think that all working mothers fit into the same category. The factory worker faces very different daily realities from the college professor. Other conditions such as marital status, having had a working mother, and ethnicity also impact the experience. Women also vary in the extent to which they enjoy their work, with some enjoying it very much and others not at all. Despite these differences, most women share in common that they find it difficult to compartmentalize work and family in the same way that men do. Consequently, they carry the concerns of motherhood with them when they go to

work (Lewis, 1991). Also, even though there is a lack of evidence to support the attachment-theory notion that mother-child separation is harmful to the child (Tizard, 1991), working mothers feel guilty about having being away from their children and about leaving them in alternate childcare (Liversidge, 2000). This is exacerbated by the fact that most working mothers continue to carry the majority of the domestic work and so continue to face competing responsibilities after they get home from their jobs (Lewis, 1991). Hochschild (1997) has reported that because mothers face so many competing responsibilities when they get home from work, many actually feel more competent, appreciated, and content when they are at work than they do when they are home.

Family and education have different value systems in much the same way that family and the paid labour force do. Research in this area dates back to 1978, when Mezirow observed a group of women entering college to have difficulty deciphering the new experience fully within the frame of reference they had relied upon previously. The criteria for understanding, judging and acting upon which these women had come to rely in their lives before going back to school were no longer relevant in the college environment. It is hard to know how valid Mezirow's findings are today, especially given the improvements in women's access to post-secondary studies. However, more recent research has observed differences in the kind of problem solving that is required in mothering and that which is required by academia.

For example, Luttrell (1989) and others (e.g., Baird, 1991) have found women's ways of learning to be rooted in community, family, and work relationships. In her work as an ABE instructor with working-class mothers of young children, Luttrell (1997) found the women in her classrooms to measure intelligence in other people by their level of common

sense. This way of knowing allows women to cope with life's daily problems. It is not acquired through formal education but through collaborative, inter-generational, and cultural means. The women in Luttrell's classrooms linked their own common sense to caregiving activities and relationships with others. This "motherwise" (p. 31) knowledge came in flashes and was often linked to significant events such as childbirth or divorce. This kind of knowledge mixes scientific knowledge with emotional, often causing confusion over the "facts" (p. 31). Luttrell argues that, because the work associated with motherwise knowledge cannot be separated from the emotions of caregiving, it is not valued by society in the same way that academic or scientific forms of knowledge are.

Whereas family is characterized as "subjective, personal, emotional, and anecdotal, higher education is "objective, impersonal, unemotional, and abstract" (Edwards, 1993, p. 136). The mature women students in Edwards' (1993) study developed strategies for moving back and forth between these conflicting realities which involved either separating the two, connecting the two, or using some combination of both. These were not consciously developed strategies with specific goals but rather arose in response to demands. The women varied in the extent to which they wanted to separate or connect family and education. Some women wanted to bring their children to campus, bring classmates back to their homes, and form friendships with their instructors. Other women did not want to do any of these things. Generally, the women who kept education and family separate experienced less conflict. Women in this study found their new student role reshaped their relationships with male partners and friends outside the institution, sometimes in negative ways. However, they also found a shift toward greater power balance with male partners and felt more confident when dealing with public sphere officials.

Sears (2001) interviewed mothers of children under 13 pursuing a doctoral degree in a British Columbia university. She wanted to find out the extent to which the women in her study perceived and accepted the ideologies of intensive mothering (as articulated by Hays, see above section on mothering) and the good student, and whether they experienced a contradiction between the two ideologies. She found that, for the most part, the women in her study rejected the notion of the "ideal" mother, which would have them staying at home to raise their children and mothering in a very child-centered way. Instead, they preferred a balance between mothering and activities outside the home.

However, the women in Sears' (2001) study rationalized their preference for alternative mothering using intensive mothering arguments. For instance, they emphasized the ways that their going to school benefited their children: their children were happier because their mothers were happy; they were modeling what it was like to be a well-balanced, public-sphere participant for their children. Still, they were bothered by some of the ways they did not live up to the ideal mothering image. They felt guilty about having their children in daycare too much, missing important childhood events, and sometimes being impatient. They also compared themselves negatively to mothers who were more present for their children, especially when they were stressed or tired.

Whether they are students or paid employees, women operating in both domestic and non-domestic spheres attempt to make up for the time they spend away from home by doing special things for their children and spending more "quality time" (Lewis, 1991, p. 206) with them. They also compensate by redefining themselves (for example, by taking on less of the domestic work) or by redefining the structure in which they operate (for example, by

persuading superiors or family to alter current operations) (Edwards, 1993; Lewis, 1991; Sears, 2001).

Mothering and Formal Education

Hart (1995), a critical feminist theorist, has argued that adult learners who are also mothers face several barriers that are attributable to a society which has neglected to embrace, in any practical sense, the business of nurturing and rearing our young. "Motherwork" (p.99) has no obvious economic value in society, is not thought to be important, and is taken for granted. Therefore, even though women are gaining access to all forms of education as never before, most programs fail to consider the realities of many mothers' lives.

Research examining the experiences of women juggling the demands of both student and mother roles is sparse and has been conducted primarily in university settings (Dalien, 1998). However, recent investigations (Dalien, 1998; Home & Hinds, 2000; Liversidge, 2000; Sears, 1999) have revealed that there are multiple difficulties associated with being a student mother. Despite their increased access to post-secondary education in recent decades, women continue to face obstacles to accessing and continuing in their programs, and in applying their credentials to the labour force.

Barriers to Accessing Post-Secondary Education

Gaskell (1992) and Blackwell (1998) have examined barriers women face in accessing post-secondary education. Gaskell (1992) found the greatest barriers for women entering adult education programs to be childcare and money. Blackwell (1998) interviewed mature women students in a mid-sized university to learn what had prevented them from attending university earlier. The women said they had not gone straight to university for one

or more of the following reasons: they had married and/or had children immediately following high school; in their families, boys and not girls were encouraged toward higher education; or, their high school experiences had made them feel intellectually incapable.

Three factors that have facilitated women's access to post-secondary education have been an increase in part-time studies options, enhancements in distance education, and the development of the community college system. Community colleges' "lower tuition fees, flexible admission requirements, and programmes located within commuting distance," (Andres & Guppy, 1991, p. 169) have all made it easier for women to participate in studies.

Today, women enter universities with higher grade point averages than men and are more likely to complete their degrees. However, undergraduate women are also more likely than undergraduate men to come from upper-class backgrounds. Women undergraduates tend to have parents with higher educational levels and more social and economic resources with which to support their daughter's education. In contrast, women enrolled in community colleges tend to have parents with lower levels of education (Andres & Guppy, 1991).

Barriers to Continuing in Post-Secondary Programs

First-year post-secondary students in general are overwhelmed by the workload, amount of information, cumbersome bureaucracy, time pressures, and instructor expectations they experience in colleges and universities. They also feel isolated on campus (Andres, Andruske, & Hawkey, 1996). However, studies set in undergraduate (Home, 1993), graduate (Lavell, 1998; Sears, 2001), and community college nursing programs (Liversidge, 2000) alike have found that student-mothers face additional difficulties. Many student-mothers continue to be the family organizers after they start going to school (Liversidge, 2000). Consequently, they face time constraints that are unique to juggling multiple roles. These

time constraints often lead to guilt over not being available to their families (Home, 1993; Liversidge, 2000; Sears, 2001) and sometimes lead to exhaustion (Home, 1993). Some student mothers, especially those who are lone parents, suffer financial strain while they are going to school (Home, 1993; Lavell, 1998; Sears, 2001). They also find it difficult to concentrate in both their mother and student roles (Home, 1993) and sometimes suffer emotional stress (Sears, 2001).

Earlier we saw how the field of developmental psychology has focused on the healthy development of children to such an extent that it has neglected to consider the emotional impacts of mothering. However, recent student-mother research has come out of the counselling psychology community, and has focussed on the psychological distress faced by many student mothers (Dalien, 1998; Sears, 1999). Dalien (1998) used a phenomenological approach and interviewed 7 women about their intra-personal experiences in being undergraduate university women students with children. Analysis of interviews revealed several themes. Specifically, the women

a) faced conflicting demands from at least two roles

b) often felt guilty and inadequate over not being able to live up to ideal mother and student images

c) often felt helpless and frustrated at not being able to consistently meet both student and mother demands

d) often felt alienated and disconnected from both other students on campus and other mothers off campus because they shared little in common and lacked time to socialize

e) neglected themselves, getting too little sleep, exercise, and social activity

f) felt angry and resentful about the apparent lack of consideration from the status quo

g) occasionally reached a point of crisis

h) eventually redefined their expectations of self as mother and self as student (became more accepting of the compromises they had to make in both roles), as well as of the role of family and friends (they started to ask for more help) and of institution (they started to seek out supports).

Sears (1999) interviewed 15 student mothers over age 30 of various marital statuses enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs at the University of British Columbia to find out how these women felt about themselves as students and what issues they faced as students. The women expressed a number of worries including, a) feeling they were not measuring up as either mothers or students; b) worrying that they were too old to fit in with other students and too old to be able to save for retirement after they finally graduated; c) clinging to a belief that they were sub-standard students despite grades that contradicted this belief; d) worrying about seeming like they were using their children as excuses when they would miss class or ask for an extension; and e) dealing with very stressful situations like writing a final exam after being up all night with a sick child.

Home and Hinds (2000) shifted the focus of their study away from the intra-psychic experience of being a student mother to the external factors that had an impact on combining multiple roles. They used quantitative survey data from 453 undergraduate, graduate and professional program student mothers to develop a qualitative interview regarding "the contribution of life situations and institutional supports to role strain and stress experience" (p. 181). Interviews were conducted with 30 women of various marital statuses and ethnic backgrounds studying either full- or part-time in adult education, social work, or nursing

while juggling both family and work responsibilities. The results revealed the single most important stressor for participants was having a low income. Poor women had to expend more strain and energy in figuring out how to make ends meet for themselves and their children, could afford less childcare, had to work more hours in paid jobs, and lived in fear of unforeseen crises such as a broken appliance.

Lavell (1998) provides her personal account of being an unmarried, poor mother attending a prairie university. She describes the university system as "spectacularly unresponsive" (p. 194) to the needs of working-class mothers. The assumption behind scheduling, curriculum, and funding arrangements is that the student has education as a primary responsibility. Lavell (1998) adds that women students with low incomes who are single parents face greater challenges than other students do because of the very energy- and time-consuming "foundational work" (p. 196) involved in meeting the survival needs of themselves and their children while they go to school. Included in this is volumes of paperwork involved in securing and maintaining funding for housing, daycare, and other living expenses; making arrangements to get children to and from daycare or school; and, after returning home from classes, putting in a full afternoon shift of parenting and household activity before even starting homework in the evening.

Similarly, for women in Blackwell's (1998) study, time and money were the greatest contingencies for success. Also, single mothers were especially likely to incur large student loans. The authors worried that because of wage disparities between men and women, these women would have a harder time repaying the debt.

Although women have more years of education than men do, it often takes them longer to achieve the same educational level (Gaskell, 1992). Since women are typically

responsible for balancing both home and work and for arranging suitable childcare, they are more likely than men to take time away from their studies when family needs arise (Hornosty, 1998). Also, major life events such as marriage and parenthood are more likely to interfere with women's educational attainment than they are with men's (Andres & Guppy, 1991).

Labour Market Barriers

Research (Gaskell, 1992, Gaskell & McLaren, 1991) has shown how even though girls are at least equal to boys in high school performance and women attain a higher level of education than men, they lag behind in labour market success. This lag results largely from women's domestic labour not being recognized by the state in measures of economic activity or by employers as valuable experience. On average, women earn only 63.8% of what men earn (Townson, 2000).

Also, starting from a gendered high school curriculum (e.g. home economics vs. trades), women are channeled into a narrow range of lower paying fields, which offer little opportunity for advancement. Furthermore, boys are far more likely than girls are to study mathematics and science in high school and to excel in these subjects. This seems to stem from differential treatment of boys and girls both in and out of the classroom whereby boys are encouraged toward mathematics and science and girls are not (Andres, 2002). Women's job categories do not pay as well as men's even when they require an advanced skill set (Gaskell, 1992; Gaskell & McLaren, 1991). Women are still disproportionately represented in health and education and not in engineering and applied sciences (Hornosty, 1998). Women gravitate toward the health and education fields because they will reasonably

accommodate family concerns (Andres & Guppy, 1991; Gaskell, 1992; Gaskell & McLaren, 1991; Hornosty, 1998).

Pascall & Cox (1993) found a contradiction between what the literature said and what participants in their study said regarding post-secondary education. Participants were women who had spent a long period at home or in low-paying jobs prior to enrolling in higher education. Whereas the literature identified structures that were oppressive to women, such as preparation for low-paid employment with little opportunity for advancement, women in their study felt education offered them the opportunity to make a better living and break away from domesticity. When Pascall and Cox examined this contradiction they found that the literature was taking a perspective different from their participants. Whereas the literature was looking at larger structures, participants were talking about their own personal experiences. The larger oppressive structures identified by researchers were invisible to the participants. At the same time, Pascall and Cox speculated, the theoretical basis for research in this area may be overly deterministic and blind to the agency women exercise in using education to reach their own desired ends.

Even though education has done little to narrow the wage gap between men and women, it is nevertheless the best way for women to increase their earning power. Therefore, education can be especially important for women who are single parents, who have recently divorced, or who are living in poverty (Andres & Guppy, 1991). Regardless of income category, women are more likely than men are to experience a reduction in income following a divorce. Also, single women who become mothers are especially at risk of experiencing downward economic mobility. However, higher levels of education are associated with increased earning potential for both married and unmarried women (Andres, 2002).

When Pascall and Cox (1993) followed up with mature re-entering women after they earned educational credentials, they found that the largest number ended in a new career path than they had been on previously. For most of these women, the origin and the destination were both typical female fields. Still, most of these women felt they had received a fresh start. Another group found it hard to use their education at all, identifying health, ageism, sexism, and geographical constraints as important factors. Edwards (1993) found that, upon graduation, women in her study still found it difficult to pursue positions that matched their new qualifications because of family responsibilities.

The Upside of Being a Student-Mother

In spite of the many hardships faced by student-mothers, women have identified several benefits to carrying mother and student roles simultaneously. Some women have said getting a university degree would help them to escape the "pink ghetto" (Home, 1993, p. 216). They have also cited increased self-esteem, enhanced time management and organizational skills, and a favourable re-distribution of labour in the home (Home, 1993). Women in a community college nursing program said they had a strong personal desire to achieve and reaped a great deal of personal satisfaction from managing their multiple roles (Liversidge, 2000). Some student-mothers have said that although they continued to be preoccupied with family issues when they were in class, they valued the time away from home that school afforded them (Edwards, 1993). Other women have expressed that being a mother gave them special insights that other students might not have; that they were excited about going to school; and that they were proud of themselves for surviving being both a mother and a student (Sears, 1999).

Other researchers have investigated mixed-gender ABE classrooms and have found some positive learning experiences to be more typical of women than men. Using a qualitative, case-study research design, Malicky, Katz, Norton, and Norman (1997) went to a community-based literacy program in Edmonton, "to investigate the nature of literacy learning for five successful adult learners...as well as to identify factors which supported their learning" (p. 84). The results indicated that both the men and women learners found social networks to be important to their learning and felt empowered by their learning. However, the women in the program more so than the men linked favourably the social networks fostered in the classroom with issues around identity, safety, and knowledge acquisition. Furthermore, they were more likely to experience voicing their opinions as the basis for new feelings of empowerment.

Student-mothers also contribute to a richer classroom environment. Faculty members have described multiple role women as motivated, eager to learn, and driven to succeed. They also appreciate the practical approach and life experiences multiple role women bring to the classroom (Home, 1993.) Graduate student-mothers have said they feel that being mothers makes them better students by grounding them and giving them a broader perspective on their studies (Sears, 2001). Women in a study by Edwards (1993) said they felt their instructors valued the contribution they brought to class discussions. They believed that by not going straight to university after high school, they had gained useful life experiences that they drew upon in their studies.

Lavell (1998) has identified some of the benefits that working class and welfare mothers bring to the institution. Among these are a deep gratitude for their education, a

genuine desire to contribute to society, a sincere desire to help disadvantaged people, and a high evaluation of learning for it own sake.

Supports

Students arrive at the institution with a variety of constraints, and then encounter institutional policies and practices that facilitate or further constrain them to varying degrees (Andres, Andruske, & Hawkey, 1996). Despite the fact that many post-secondary institutions offer an array of support services for students, research has pointed to a number of areas for improvement. Various student surveys have found campus support services to sometimes be too narrowly focussed, difficult to access, or even ill-advised.

Although student-mothers rely on both practical and emotional support to help them succeed, most of this support comes from outside the institution (Home, 1993). Many student-mothers prefer the support of family and friends to going for professional help on campus (Andres *et al*, 1996). Graduate student mothers in Sears's (2001) study identified spousal support as being more significant than extended family or institutional support.

Andres *et al.* (1996) found that women balancing the demands of family, work, and college relied upon supports both within and outside of the college to help them juggle successfully. However, they were reluctant to access college support services. Some services were appealing but were awkward to access. For example, participants said they avoided attending workshops offered by the women's centre because they were short of time. Students also had a hard time finding accurate information and hooking up with appropriate help. Other research has found some services to be not at all appealing. For example, Lavell (1998) recalls her own personal experience of receiving advice to take workshops on time and money management, which felt completely inappropriate given the extent of her

financial and scheduling pressures. In Home's (1993) research, the support that was received by student-mothers on campus was also mostly informal in nature. Individual instructors were seen as offering the best support, which generally came in expressions of empathy for juggling multiple roles.

Student-mothers have said they prefer support activities that are built into the program such as in-class group work, which provide opportunities to form friendships and informal support groups (Andres *et al*, 1996; Home, 1993). Many of the women in Edwards' (1993) study also found their most valuable relationships to be with other women students who were in similar circumstances. They found it especially useful to talk about childcare and other family issues. Lavell (1998) explains that it is comforting to meet other student-mothers because a lot of younger classmates who are not mothers have such different concerns that it can be awkward to relate to them. However, it can be difficult to hook up with other women facing similar issues (Edwards, 1993).

Dalien (1998) has reported a need for greater flexibility in class schedules and assignment deadlines, as well as a need for student-mother support groups. However, Home and Hinds (2000) found that student-mothers felt more stressed when they received assignment deadline extensions and did not have time to attend extra study skills workshops or support groups.

Hornosty (1998) argues that the only way to treat women and men equally is by accommodating their differences. When universities fail to meet the scheduling, affordability, and childcare issues for mothers on campus, the result is "systemic discrimination against women" (p. 180). Institutions must distinguish between services that help women to adapt to existing structures and structural changes that accommodate the

needs of women. For example, lacking adequate daycare arrangements can make it impossible for women to achieve equity in education. However, as Hornosty points out, many on-campus daycares are not comprehensive enough to meet the childcare needs of many student-mothers. Some of the restrictions on-campus day cares carry include waitlists, age restrictions, high fees, inflexible hours, no arrangements for sick children, no arrangements for school-aged children, and no sliding fee.

Older women students may be more attuned to the ways that institutions systematically discriminate against mothers. In Blackwell's (1998) study of university student-mothers, women over 25 were more likely than younger women were to be sensitive to gender inequities and feminist issues. For example, they were more likely to say there should be a women's centre on campus and to anticipate potential career barriers. Also, single mothers in the older group were more likely to want better childcare and support groups.

Some of the conclusions reached by Andres *et al* (1996) regarding support services were as follows: First, students require intentional direction to support services. Second, supports should be built in across the curriculum and coordinated across departments. Third, faculty need to act as a link between students and appropriate services. Faculty can also act as mentors for students facing mid-life challenges. Fourth, success strategies should be built into programs, particularly those involving peer support. Finally, the institution should establish more links between students and the world of work.

Developmental Studies

A third area of literature that is relevant to this study is that concerning issues for learners in Developmental Studies and Adult Basic Education. One of the crucial ways that

Developmental Studies differs from other post-secondary programs is that most other post-secondary programs have academic prerequisites whereas Developmental Studies does not and may be used to meet the prerequisites for other programs. Therefore, whereas some level of academic success and familiarity can be assumed of students in other post-secondary programs, such an assumption cannot be made of students in Developmental Studies/Adult Basic Education Programs.

Some researchers have highlighted how previous schooling experiences may have impacted ABE/DVST students in particular ways. Quigley (2000) has argued that this is because ABE students "often come out of a radically different lived experience than educated adults on their shared background of prior schooling and a caste system of norms surrounding formal education" (p.367). To support this position, Quigley points to the 1995 International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD & Statistics Canada) finding that only 28% of adult Canadians who had not graduated from high school had participated in any formal education activity the preceding year, compared to the national norm of 61%.

Quigley (1992) conducted three studies concerning resistance and reluctance to participate in Adult Basic and Literacy Education. The first was a phenomenological study that involved the analysis of fictional short stories and novels about characters that were resistant to literacy as learned in formal schooling. Resisters in these stories experienced "a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of their rights and a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of him/(herself " (p. 206). Resistance was defined as "a struggle to become free in the eyes, mind and heart of the resister on the basis of a specific liberty which must be attained and held at any cost" (p. 206).

The themes found throughout the analysis conducted in the first study were incorporated into an in-depth interview developed for the second study. Participants for this study were 12 females and 8 males of mixed demographic backgrounds who had less than high school education and who had chosen not to go back to school even though they had been informed about an ABE program in their area. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed three "resister types":

> Personal/Emotive Resisters: Those who recalled their previous school as a place where they felt alienated, ignored, and traumatized. This group resisted adult programs because they thought they would be a repeat of their previous schooling experiences.
>
> Ideological/Cultural Resisters: Those who remembered previous schooling as a place where they had experienced "a culture clash with dominant norms" (p.208). For these adults to want to return to school, they would have to be satisfied that program content, delivery and evaluation would involve their input. However, they were skeptical that traditional programs could ever accomplish this.
>
> Irrelevance and the Older Adult: Some older participants were not bitter but felt schooling was no longer relevant to them at their particular life-stage.

Having established in the second study that previous experiences play a major role in the resistance to Adult Basic and Literacy Education, the third study compared individuals who had been identified by counsellors or instructors as either persistent learners (those who had participated satisfactorily for at least 6 months) and reluctant learners (those who had left after 3 weeks for a lack of motivation) to see whether the two groups differed in terms of

how much they expected the ABE program to be a repeat of the previous schooling experiences. In-depth interviews concerning the expectancy of personal success and the expectancy that ABE would be the same as previous schooling were conducted with 17 reluctant and 20 persistent learners.

The two groups did not differ in terms of the value they placed on school (i.e. they both saw it as valuable). They did differ, however, in terms of what they hoped to achieve by participating, and in terms of the number of social networks they were able to develop in school. Resisters were much more likely than persisters to be loners, and were seemingly unable to adjust to school culture and structure. They were also less likely to ask for help from instructors even though they actually wanted more individual attention.

Luttrell (1997) reported similar findings in her study of working-class mothers of young children who had returned to school for upgrading. Even though these women said they valued education, they expressed a "revulsion against the work of educated people" (p. 16). They had chosen a community-based program over the college-based program close by because they did not think they would feel like they belonged in the more formal setting. These feelings were linked to memories the women had of their early schooling experiences when teachers had routinely placed greater emphasis on the knowledge of children of a higher social class than they did on the common sense knowledge these women had as youngsters.

Participants in a study by Tett (2000), who were enrolled in a post-secondary program for students with disadvantaged backgrounds, also recalled previous schooling experiences in negative terms. However, the experiences of the men and women in this study could be separated along gender lines. Whereas the men in the study attributed their negative

experiences to teachers who did not like them or to being preoccupied with other interests such as sports, the women linked their experiences with family pressures that did not allow them to focus on their studies. The women were also more likely than the men to recall being preoccupied with romantic relationships when they were in school.

Lareau (2000) found that, beginning from early elementary school, middle-class children are more likely to be groomed for post-secondary education than working-class children. The parents of middle-class children are more likely to have attended post-secondary education themselves and so pass on the rights of passage in deliberate and non-deliberate ways. Middle-class parents are also more likely to form collegial relationships with their children's teachers, giving their children a greater sense of belonging in the formal educational environment. In contrast, working-class children who go on to higher education are often charting new territory because their parents often did not have positive educational experiences they could draw upon.

Most of the success stories concerning ABE student mothers documented in the literature have taken place in community-based ABE and literacy programs. These reports may have limited relevance to the current study because many of them are about programs in inner-city settings, many of which were in the United States, and some of which had high crime and poverty rates. The current study took place in a predominantly middle-class small urban and a middle-class suburban Canadian community. It is hard to know what differences would exist between the circumstances of participants in other studies and those in the present study. It seems safe to assume, however, that there would be differences. Nonetheless, the literature on community based programs helps to inform the ways that

certain program features are addressing the sense of alienation faced by DVST students described above.

Community-based programs are based on three principles: they are learner-centred, focus on community building, and are guided from a critical perspective (Malicky *et al.*, 1997). The conceptual underpinnings for these programs are based on knowledge that adults learn best when they have a sense of ownership and on the belief that all adult learners can be self-directed (Stasz *et al.*, 1991).

A few researchers (e.g., Stasz *et al.* 1991; Yaffe & Williams, 1998) have studied student-mothers in ABE classrooms to find out what classroom activities are effective in contributing to a positive learning experience. For example, Stasz *et al.* (1991) recorded the learning outcomes of mothers working on an autobiographical book in an unstructured literacy project room in Geneva, New York. These students learned to write by way of whole language techniques (language learned in context rather than as a set of isolated skills) and oral history techniques (the learner talks about her childhood while the instructor records the information and asks probing questions). The women in the group were empowered by the learning experience, largely because the instructional techniques incorporated the women's own knowledge, thereby giving them a sense of ownership in their learning. Davidson and Wheat (1989) also recommend reading and writing experiences that "capitalize on the learner's natural oral language, culture, life experiences, and interests...which can provide rich, unique, and often underestimated conceptual background upon which to build meaningful reading and writing experiences" (p.344).

Yaffe and Williams (1998) conducted interviews and used exploratory procedures inspired by grounded theory analysis, or theory that emerges from observation (Palys, 1997)

to find out why mothers of young children had chosen to participate in a family literacy program. The study took place in one of the many United States inner-city "Even Start" programs, which employ "an intergenerational approach designed to improve the literacy of both children and adults through a curriculum that integrates early childhood education, parenting education, and adult literacy education" (p. 8). Participants were 6 African-American women who were "generally undereducated" (Yaffe & Williams, 1998, p. 9) and lived in some of the most under-employed, crime-ridden areas of the city.

Interviews followed a prepared list of questions and were audiotaped. Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that the women in the program attributed their satisfaction with the program to the overall atmosphere in the classroom, which validated their emotions and life situations. These women also valued the support networks they were able to establish with other women in the program which motivated them to continue their studies.

After investigating the attitudes towards learning for 4 African-American single-parent women enrolled in a program designed to prepare low-income women for jobs through computer and communication training, Baird (1991) concluded that these learners wanted to work hard to build solid learning habits in order to improve their condition, primarily for their children. However, to do this they needed both guidance and counselling regarding the relevance of their education to realistic employment opportunities. Baird also echoes Luttrell's (1989, cited in Baird, 1991) stance that programs should reflect these women's ways of learning, which are rooted in community, family, and work relationships.

Another study by Baird (1995) involved interviews with a group of single mothers receiving income assistance enrolled in a government mandated ABE program. Baird found these women valued both textbook and common sense learning (gained through everyday

experience). However, Baird recommended that instructors start with the latter and move to the former in order to more successfully build a "positive perspective of self as person and learner" (p. 47).

These studies contribute to our understanding of learning environments that are reportedly favorable to student mothers in community-based Adult Basic and Literacy Education programs. However, because they were all conducted in learning sites where participants share similar life circumstances, it is not possible to determine whether the women's satisfaction was more a reflection of the program features or of the support networks that presumably exist between classmates who share so much in common.

Another one of the features of the programs described above is their emphasis on a "learner-centered" approach, which attempts to connect with the values and interests of the learner. Luttrell (1996) takes issue with the "learner-centred" approach because she believes it places so much attention on the learner that it neglects to incorporate two-way exchanges between the instructor and the learner. She favours a "*learning*-centred" approach, which has the learner and the instructor engaging in discussions about what each count as reading and writing, and how each goes about making judgements about the world. This latter approach gives value to the knowledge of both and gives higher regard for the learner's cognitive development by examining and challenging belief systems.

Mezirow's (1978) research, though not focused upon DVST learners but on a college preparation program for mature women, has nevertheless contributed to adult educators understanding of the critical reflection and action approach. Drawing upon the work of Paulo Freire (1970), Mezirow demonstrated how adult education may be used to critically evaluate the cultural assumptions upon which we come to depend, and how consciousness raising can

lead to perspective transformation, an emancipatory process based on dialogue and reflection. The subject matter in this kind of learning is the learner's experiences, the origins and consequences of which become revealed as the learner moves though the process. It is based upon the premise that when adults in democratic learning environments come to understand the basis and consequences of their beliefs, they will determine the need for change and will act accordingly (Mezirow, 1991). The instructor's responsibility in this process is to foster "critical reflection, which will lead students to correct the distortions in their reasoning and attitudes" (Dillon-Black, 1998) that inhibit them from full democratic participation in society.

Luttrell (1996) supports the consciousness-raising teaching form for mothers making transitions. She argues that literacy

> must put women's lives and concerns at the center of curricular change...and [focus] on issues about violence against women, women's health needs and body image, and women's needs for childcare and transportation, and [organize] instruction in ways that do not further isolate women from each other. [And] by exchanging our life stories and desires for change, literacy learners and teachers [might engage in] a mutual, critical, self-reflective and collective perception and naming of the 'illiteracy problem' [in order that] a set of solutions can emerge (p.359).

Dillon-Black (1998) conducted a case study to see whether her own practices in her role as a literacy instructor resulted in transformational learning outcomes like those espoused by Freire and Mezirow. Dillon-Black had noticed that many of the literacy students in her Atlanta, Georgia classroom were both "socially and politically disenfranchised" (p.20), and she believed transformative learning would play an important role in their literacy learning.

The case study was of a white 28-year-old married mother of young children named Rose who was a student in Dillon-Black's mixed-gender literacy classroom. Dillon-Black recognized Rose's abusive home life to be her greatest obstacle to literacy learning, and

attempted some transformative techniques introduced by Mezirow and Freire, hoping this would result in a liberating paradigm shift for Rose. One of the techniques she tried was having the whole class engage in discussions about the givens in their lives. On one occasion, she challenged Rose's beliefs of self-worthlessness by having her describe all the things she knew how to do in caring for her house and family. During these activities, ideas were written on the board as they came up, thus linking these exercises to literacy learning. Dillon-Black found only limited evidence that Rose had experienced a shift in her perspective. While Rose did come to have greater self-worth and eventually spoke up more in class, she did not leave her abusive home and did not stay in a job she had managed to secure after starting the program. Dillon-Black concluded transformation could only occur after economic, political, and social supports were in place.

These studies have focussed on community-based programs, which do not present the same kinds of complexities that community college sites do. Community colleges are typically much larger in population, require students to navigate through more bureaucracy, and bring together a more culturally, socio-economically, and academically diverse group of students. Some of these studies have also focussed on learners who have very basic literacy skills and who may consequently face learning issues that are more critical than those of some of the participants of this research, most of whom are nearing a college level of study.

Conclusion

This literature review has brought together literature from the areas of motherhood ideology, student-mother experiences, and ABE/DVST student experiences. The literature reviewed here indicates three general concepts: 1) the dominant white middle-class notion of

mothering in North America today is all-consuming and associated with numerous contradictions and difficulties, 2) student mothers in a variety of post-secondary contexts face difficulties participating in education, and 3) some Developmental Studies students may experience some level of "culture shock" when they start to pursue further education.

Studies of effective programs have emphasized the importance of a focus on the personal histories and experiences and a nurturing of the learners' interpersonal relationships as being instrumental in fostering favorable learning experiences. However, this review of the literature uncovered mostly university-based studies or studies that have focused on small community-based programs, which are not linked to larger institutions and are more socio-economically homogeneous than the Developmental Studies classrooms in the community college sites referred to here.

There is a need to investigate the experiences of mothers of young children within the context of the community college-based Developmental Studies Program where most program features are designed to meet the needs of both female and male participants, with a diversity of age, ethnicity, and educational history. The goal of this research is to learn as much information as possible about the DVST experience of participants in order to determine how educators can most effectively meet the educational needs of DVST student mothers.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN

Researcher Role

At the time of this study, I was an employee of the college where the research was conducted. I was working in the Learning Centre as the Services Co-ordinator, a para-professional position. The Learning Centre has a relationship with, but is not housed within the DVST program. Although students from the DVST program would frequently come into the Learning Centre for tutorial assistance, only one of these students ended up being a participant in this study. This student learned about the study from her DVST instructor, not from her involvement in the Learning Centre.

In my role in the Learning Centre, one of my activities was tutoring students individually. I had tutored a few student-mothers from the DVST program, which partially sparked my interest in doing this research. I had admired their determination to forge ahead on what would presumably a long academic journey. I had also noticed their feelings of insecurity over not being one of the bright 18-year-olds who had recently graduated from high school and who seemed to be more familiar with the student role.

Although I was not teaching in the department, I had a strong interest in Developmental Studies. I had completed a practicum in a DVST literacy-level classroom; had spent a portion of the research period teaching Adult Basic Education for the local public school district; and had focussed the better part of my Adult Education Master's Program on Developmental Studies and mature women students.

Being a "multiple role" mother myself also sparked my interest in this research. In addition to being a mother, I am married, a student, and a full-time employee. My only son is now 9 years old. Since he was just over 1 year old I have participated in the labour force,

mostly full-time. I added a master's program to my schedule when he was 4. I will not pretend to have had the same experiences as the women in this study. I cannot comprehend what it is like to be a single parent, holding the primary childcare responsibility everyday, all day. Neither can I imagine what it would like to raise children while living below the poverty line. Also, many of my best friends are mothers, and from the numerous parenting conversations I have had with them, I realize that each of us experiences mothering somewhat uniquely. Still, I feel my own experiences of being a mother in North American "intensive-mothering" society while carrying additional roles at least partly strengthened my connection with the women in the study.

My empathy grew out of my own experiences of day after day dropping off a child at daycare who was clinging to my leg as I headed off to work, swallowing the lump in my throat. I could relate to writing a paper while being interrupted numerous times for a snack, a game of peek-a-boo, or to provide first aid for a bicycling injury. I could also remember being expected for an important meeting after a night of cleaning up vomit and not having had a chance to arrange alternate childcare for a sick child. Motherhood for me represents a love more intense than I ever thought possible, and a series of challenges like none other I have had. I hope my own mothering experiences made me more compassionate to the experiences of the women in the study.

I came into this study assuming that mothering is, on average, qualitatively different than fathering, and that these differences are largely attributable to patriarchal social constructions. Even though I know a lot of fathers who are very involved in the raising of their children, my general experience has been that mothers, both married and single, assume greater practical and emotional responsibility for childrearing than fathers do.

In addition to my views on motherhood, I have a strong interest in learners who fall outside the mainstream. I attribute this in part to my own rather unconventional educational upbringing. Despite liking and doing well in elementary school, after a childhood of moving from school to school (13, to be exact), country to country (Taiwan, Canada, and the United States), school system to school system, and a moderately turbulent adolescent period, I left high school in grade 11. Then, in my early 20s, I wrote the GED exam and started taking college courses. Eventually I earned an undergraduate degree and, well, here I am writing a Master's thesis. I was raised primarily in a working-class home (my parents were missionaries until I was 10 years old), but our family experienced short bursts of middle-class living and other bursts of poverty after my father entered the construction field when I was 11. My mother has been in the paid labour force very little since we left Taiwan. University education was far from the norm in our family. I believe my own educational and socio-cultural background has contributed to my interest in other non-conventional backgrounds.

I have never believed educational attainment to equate with intellectual capacity. I have often observed brilliance and wisdom in people who have very little formal education. I also tend to think that a lot of very bright people fall by the wayside of the public school system because, for one reason or other, it is not a very good fit for them.

My primary role in this study was as interviewer. In this role, I attempted to engage participants in a comfortable conversation, consciously trying to provide a non-threatening interview setting. When participants came to the interview, they met a white, middle-class-looking woman in her late-thirties, wearing a wedding ring. They knew I was an employee of the college who was completing this research as part of my studies at the University of

British Columbia. Through our initial casual conversation, participants soon came to know that I too was a mother of one school-aged boy who had spent considerable time at the college daycare. I could only speculate about how any of this knowledge about me affected participants' comfort level while they were participating in the interview. I can only say that all of the participants seemed to feel comfortable during our interviews.

The perspective I brought to this research was shaped by these professional, academic, and personal experiences.

Research Setting

The site for this research project was the Developmental Studies (DVST) program at a community college in British Columbia. The college had a headcount of approximately 12,300 students in the 2000/2001 academic year (College Fact Book, online, July 2002). The college has three campuses. The largest is in an urban community. The mid-sized campus is in a suburban community. The smallest campus is in a suburban/rural community. When this study took place, in the summer 2001 semester, the largest urban campus had 2636 students and the mid-sized campus had 1322 students (College Fact Book, online, July 2002). The smallest campus was closed for the summer. However, some of the participants lived in the same community as the smallest campus and had previously taken courses there.

At the time of the study there were approximately 265 enrollments in the DVST program. Of these, 257 were students taking only one DVST course, the rest were taking two DVST courses. Data showing how many students were taking both a DVST course and a college level course were not available (e-mail and telephone communication, July 2002). There are approximately twice as many women as men in the DVST program (College Fact Book, online, July 2002). The number of student-mothers on income assistance at the

College during the research period is estimated to be about 80. There is no data telling how many student-mothers on income assistance were in the DVST program.

Sampling Procedure

Participant recruitment involved purposive strategies aimed at finding women who met the participant criteria of the study. Before I started recruiting participants, I met with the coordinator of the Developmental Studies Program to receive her informal approval for the study, as well as any suggestions she had for connecting with prospective participants. The coordinator also offered to introduce the study to all DVST instructors at their next DVST discipline meeting. The main method of recruitment was to send a memo to all DVST instructors teaching at both the urban and suburban campuses in the summer 2001 semester, asking them to inform eligible women in their classes about the study. Along with the letter were some posters (Appendix B) they could show to prospective participants. I also sent posters to the Women's Centre and the B.C. Benefits Office. To compensate participants for their time, they were offered their choice of $15 cash or a $15 gift certificate for the College bookstore.

Participant Criteria

Women who met the criteria for participation in this study were women who were enrolled in the DVST program while holding the primary parenting responsibilities for at least one child under the age of 13.

The financial arrangements and income levels of the prospective participants were not known prior to the study. Also, this study did not target women of a particular marital status. I hoped that leaving these participant criteria open would reveal something of the variety of economic conditions and family structures represented among DVST student mothers in the

research setting.

Sample Size

There were 8 participants in this study. Originally, I was hoping there would be 10 participants in the study; however, 8 is the total number of eligible participants who came forward within the time interviews were being conducted. This number of participants matches approximately that of other qualitative studies of similar scope and purpose (e.g., Dalien, 1998; Liversidge, 2000).

Interview Context

Participants were interviewed at a time and location of their choice. One participant chose to be interviewed at her home in the evening after she had put her daughter to bed. The remaining 7 participants chose to be interviewed on the campus they were attending, in a private office, usually immediately after class.

Permission

Once women agreed to participate in the study, interview appointment times were arranged either in person or by telephone. At the time of the interview, consent forms (see Appendix E) outlining the interview procedure, provisions for confidentiality, and the post-study handling of data was given to respondents. After participants read and agreed to the conditions of the study, they signed two copies of the consent form. Participants were given one copy of the consent form for their records. The form contained my phone number in case participants wanted to contact me after the interview. The form also contained the phone numbers of my research supervisor and the ethics committee chairs for both the research site and the university responsible for the research, in case participants had any ethical concerns about the study.

Data Collection

Information was gathered via a semi-structured in-person interview that I developed specifically for this study (see Appendix C). Interview questions came out of the focal questions for the study and from concepts highlighted in related literature. Questions were open-ended and general enough that they did not suggest a particular response. Also, I attempted to keep the interviews loose enough that participants were not bound to a rigid interview schedule. Prior to beginning the study, I conducted a pilot interview with a former DVST student-mother. The pilot interview allowed me to work out logistical issues and to assess the quality of the questions in the interview. The interviews lasted between 45 and 100 minutes. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

The interview had three general sections. The first section involved a series of questions pertaining to respondents' current and past educational experiences. In the second section, I asked a series of questions about how respondents' school lives impacted on other parts of their lives, such as home. The third section focussed on any stressors or barriers to participation in education that existed in respondents' lives, and any supports either within or outside the college that participants considered helpful.

After the interviews were complete, a feedback form detailing the themes and details taken from participants' interviews (see Appendix D) was mailed to respective participants. The form also supplied themes taken from other interviews, giving participants a chance to comment on these. Six participants were available for follow-up. (Two participants had previously declined to be contacted at home for reasons of confidentiality.) A cover letter invited participants to provide feedback by returning the form to me in a postage-paid envelope I had supplied or by calling me at home. Five of the participants responded. The

sixth called to say that she had had a family emergency and could not respond at the time. In all cases, participants agreed with the interpretations outlined in the form. In a few cases participants said that they could relate to themes that came up in other participants' interviews.

Confidentiality

In order to protect participant anonymity, participants' names, addresses, and phone numbers were kept on a list separate from interview transcripts, which included no participant identifiers. Only a number coding system linked the list of names with interview audiocassettes and transcripts. The coded list of names was stored separately from the audiocassettes and interview transcripts. Interview transcripts have been stored in my office for possible follow-up research. Only my thesis supervisor and myself have access to the data.

Pseudonyms have been used to refer to participants in the research report and all identifying information has been removed. Four participants chose their own pseudonyms when they returned the follow-up form. I chose the remaining four, either because these participants opted to have me do this or because they were not available to respond to the follow-up form.

Transcription and Data Analysis

Interview audiotapes were transcribed as soon as possible following interviews. I chose to transcribe the interviews myself so that I could listen to the interviews in detail, noticing participants' intonation and emotionality. I read each transcription several times, initially marking with pencil any utterances (words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) that seemed to highlight important elements of the participant's experiences and making notes in

the margin. I also wrote a summary of each interview in an attempt to capture a portrait of each participant. After I had read all the transcripts several times, and I could start to see themes and categories emerging between and among them, I began working through each transcript with coloured highlighters. I used a blue highlighter to indicate the beginning of a new idea, which usually represented the general category of the details to follow. Sometimes new ideas were sparked by one of the interview questions, but other times they came from outside of the questions. I used an orange highlighter to capture all of the utterances that supplied the supporting detail for a particular general category.

Once I had highlighted all the transcripts, I transferred the data into charts I had created on large poster paper. Down the left column of the charts I listed each participant's number code. Across the top of the chart I named all of the general categories that had emerged from the data. Within the cells of the chart I put the details given by each participant for each category. This allowed me to look for consensus and contradiction between responses. This also allowed me to look for categories that could be collapsed together – cases where two or more categories had responses that overlapped so much that they could be combined into one.

Soundness

All research must be able to answer questions about the soundness, or trustworthiness, of the project. According to Marshall and Rossman (2000), there are four criteria for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

To answer questions about the credibility of research, the researcher must demonstrate that an accurate identification and description of the subject matter has been provided (Marshall and Rossman, 2000). In this study, credibility was established by two means. First, after an initial analysis of the transcripts, detailed analysis summaries including vignettes and quotes (see Appendix D) were mailed to participants along with a cover letter asking them to provide feedback to my interpretations. Second, the findings report includes numerous quotes from each of the participants and for each of the themes in order to show that the findings are valid.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings are applicable to the general population from which the sample was drawn or to other similar settings. Transferability can really only be tested after attempts to transfer findings have been made. Therefore, the greater onus for transferability rests with the researcher conducting the transfer (Marshall and Rossman, 2000). The findings of this study might be transferable to student-mothers with like backgrounds in DVST programs at comparable community colleges in British Columbia and perhaps elsewhere in Canada where similar social programs and funding exist.

Dependability

The third criteria of soundness identified by Marshall and Rossman (2000) is dependability. This construct rests on the assumption that the social world is always being constructed and conditions are always changing. This assumption contrasts sharply with the positivist notion that in order for research to be reliable it must be replicable. Instead, in

qualitative research, the researcher's responsibility is to acknowledge and account for changing conditions.

All of the interviews for this study took place in July 2001, within approximately a 3-week period, toward the end of the semester. However, follow-up contact with participants asking them to verify my interpretations of what they had said was obtained about 6 months later. It is difficult to know whether this time lapse affected participants' ability to recall their meaning at the time of the interview. None of the participants indicated that this was the case.

In an effort to enhance the dependability of this study, I have kept notebooks in which I have recorded questions, ideas, and dilemmas as I have thought of them. I have stored all coded transcripts, notebooks, data analysis charts, and drafts of chapters, in case they should need to be recovered.

Confirmability

The question of confirmability asks whether a different researcher would arrive at the same findings as the present researcher. It asks how much of the findings was a result of researcher characteristics or biases. Confirmability is enhanced by the extent to which the data themselves lead to the conclusions and implications of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2000). In this study, confirmability rests with the provision of ample, lengthy quotes and follow-up feedback from participants.

This study was informed by certain bodies of literature and was therefore based upon certain assumptions. Based on the literature I reviewed for this study, I assumed motherhood to be a social construction characterized by intense demands and contradictions, student-mothering to have unique complexities, and DVST participation to sometimes follow negative high school experiences. Another researcher who is informed by other bodies of

literature and who develops a study based upon different assumptions may arrive at different findings than those of this study.

Summary

Participants for this study were women holding the primary live-in parenting responsibilities of one or more children aged 12 or younger while taking DVST coursework at Lower Mainland College in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia. Participants were recruited mostly via their instructors. To compensate participants for their time, they were offered their choice of $15 cash or a $15 gift certificate for the College bookstore. Eight participants were in the study. Information was gathered via a semi-structured in-person interview (see Appendix C), which lasted between 45 and 100 minutes. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for themes across interviews. After an initial analysis of the transcripts, detailed feedback forms (see Appendix D) were mailed to participants so that they would have an opportunity to provide feedback to my interpretations.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

I begin this section with a mini-narrative of each of the participants. Then I detail each of the themes that surfaced in the interviews.

Participants

There were 8 participants in this study. As Table 1 (Appendix F) shows, participants ranged in age from 22 to 44 years of age. Four participants were in their early twenties, two were in their mid-thirties, and two were in their early forties. The 5 youngest women in the study each had one child of a pre-school age; the 3 elder women each had either two or three school-aged children. Three of the women had never been married. Four were divorced or nearly divorced. One was married. None of the women spoke about their sexual orientation. Six of the women were born and raised in Canada, 2 of these in French-Canadian communities. Two of the participants were women of colour and not born in Canada; 1 of these women was a Black woman from the West Indies, and the other was from Iran. The length of time participants had already been at the college ranged from a few months to 2 years. Five of the participants were taking DVST English, 2 were taking DVST math, while 1 participant was taking both. Six of the women had graduated from high school, 2 had not but had met some of the grade 12 requirements. None of the women were at a literacy level (100 level) of study. Following is summary of their stories.

Daniella

Daniella is a 24-year old single parent of a 2-year old son. She describes her cultural heritage as "half-Czech/half-Canadian." She was divorced shortly after her son was born. She

recalls how having her son and then going through the divorce led her to a "big realization" that she "needed to do something with [her] life."

> Being a single mom, I want to be able to support my son without having to fall back on the system. I wanted something that might be secure and something that I could support myself and him and get further, instead of... behind, and get trapped into the system.

Daniella is taking 300-level DVST English and Math in preparation for the Nursing Program. Her career plan is to become a registered nurse and specialize in public health. Daniella has a strong work ethic and finds being on social assistance "really degrading." She and her son are living in a basement suite in her parents' house and her mother is her primary childcare provider.

Brooke

Brooke is a white Canadian 22-year old mother of 1 son, aged 2 ½ years. She has never been married. Brooke was in a long-term relationship with the father of her son, but he left the relationship when he found out she was pregnant and has not paid child support. She remembers that relationship as "verbally abusive" and "controlling". Brooke lives in a room in her parents' house and her mother supplies childcare for no charge. She resents the fact that having a family member provide childcare disqualifies her for a childcare subsidy through the government. Brooke supports herself and her son with the wages she receives from a part-time job in a fast-food restaurant. She decided to come back to school because she was tired of "working at a dead-end job" that would never allow her to be financially independent from her parents.

> Every time I tried to look for a job, they would look at me because I was young and I had just graduated high school and I was a single mom, I just got a lot of judgmental things. And I was like, "I'm not going anywhere, I've tried that route. I'm going to decide to go back to school and make something of myself." ... I don't wanna' be stuck in a fast food restaurant for the rest of my life. I want to be able to prove to myself that I can do it... I heard there were so many opportunities for single moms when they go back to school so I decided to go. One day I just said, "I gotta' do this."

Brooke is taking DVST English in preparation for the Home Support Program, which will qualify her to work with seniors.

Meesha

Meesha is a 44-year old sole live-in parent of two boys, aged 8 and 10. She is recently divorced. She is a black woman originally from the West Indies. Together she and her boys live in a "clean and orderly" one-bedroom apartment. At the time of the interview Meesha was taking 300-level DVST English to meet one of the entrance requirements for the Classroom and Community Support Program, which will qualify her to work as a special needs teaching assistant in the public school system. This type of work will allow her to work roughly the same hours her children are in school, so she'll be "available for the children" when they're getting ready in the mornings and shortly after school. Meesha really never wanted to go back to school, always preferring to stay home to "be a mom". However, she felt she needed to "get off income assistance," so she looked for a career path that would allow her to be available to her children as much as possible.

> What I want to do is get a diploma in Classroom & Community Support. And the reason why I chose that is because I have a 10-year-old...and an 8-year-old. So I was looking for something, with regards to their school hours... since I am a single parent and I don't have the support of their father... so I'm basically on my own. And so therefore I need to look for something that will [allow me] to see them off in the mornings then go to work. And then if not be there shortly before they come back, shortly thereafter.

Meesha is "the one who does the doing" for her aging mother, her three adult siblings, and her children. Going back to school has made it necessary for her to try to offload some of this responsibility to other members of the family, but this continues to be a struggle. In addition to her schooling and multiple family responsibilities, Meesha holds two part-time jobs[2] to supplement her income. She is raising her children to be independent and has chosen not to arrange childcare for them while she is away attending classes during their summer break, but she admits to feeling uneasy about this.

Sunny

Sunny is a 22-year old sole parent of her 3-year-old son. She is a white Canadian woman of Dutch background. She and her son live together in an apartment. She has never been married. Sunny is in her second semester at the college and is currently taking 400-level math in the DVST Program and first year biology through the university-transfer program at the college. She plans to eventually transfer to university to earn a teaching degree. Sunny decided to come back to school after ending a relationship with her son's father.

> Before I came to College, I had ended a 2 ½-year long relationship with my son's father and wasn't really going anywhere... And then I just decided that I wanted to do something. I was sitting at home on welfare and not enjoying it too much so I wanted to do something with my life.

She had left high school in the middle of grade 12 when she became pregnant. Sunny is "sick of" people seeing her as a stereotypical "single mother on welfare" and she doesn't want to be identified at the college as such.

[2] At the time of this interview, single parents on income assistance were allowed to earn $200 without penalty. This earnings exemption was eliminated January 2002 (Klein, 2002).

> I am a mother but...I don't want to be the outcast...I don't want to be known as the single mother of the class...When I'm at school, I'm just a student...I wouldn't want...instructors to think that I need special attention.

Sunny is really proud of the positive changes she is making in her life right now.

Zahra

Zahra is a married 37-year old mother of a 12-year-old son and a 15-year-old daughter. She is Iranian. Her career goal is to complete a diploma in Computer Information Systems and she is upgrading math in preparation for one of the courses in the program. She is also taking a writing course through the English as a Second Language department. Zahra has chosen Computer Information Systems because her husband encouraged her in that direction, but she would really rather study interior design. Zahra and her family moved to Canada from her native Iran just a few years ago. They have no other family or any close friends in Canada. Zahra returned to school because she wants to achieve financial independence for herself and her children. She has always wanted a university education but did not have the chance to return to school until now because it was not easily available for women in her home country.

> I had a plan. I had a plan even when I was in my country because in my country there are a lot of barriers for women to continue their education because they have to cover themselves. And it's very hard and difficult to get into university. And also at my time there was a revolution in my country so most of the universities were closed at that time. And the Gulf War started and there was lots of difficulty so I didn't have any chance to study in the university. And so I decided to move to Canada and continue my education, even after my children.

Before Zahra moved to Canada she was a full-time mother and homemaker. Now she finds dividing her time between her studies and her children often leaves her feeling conflicted and guilty. She wants to produce high quality work at school so spends countless hours on her

homework every evening and weekend. This drive to work hard on her studies is sometimes hard to reconcile with her belief that, in order to raise "good children", a mother needs to be there to help guide their choices.

> It's lots of responsibility. In terms of raising children, it's *more* than responsibility. It's very difficult because [as] a mother you have to be aware of their feelings, you have to be aware of their needs. I mean emotional needs and *everything.* If you want to have good children, yes it's difficult.

Kimberly

Kimberly is a white Canadian 24-year old lone parent of her 3-year old daughter. She has never been married and has been on her own since the beginning of her pregnancy. Kimberly is in her second semester in the DVST program, currently taking 300-level English in preparation for the Child and Youth Care Counselling Program. The CYCC diploma will allow her to work with "youth at risk", a population Kimberly feels she will be able to relate to after surviving a turbulent adolescence herself. Kimberly also wants to qualify for work other than the "dead-end jobs" she was working in before she had her daughter. Even though Kimberly doesn't particularly like being on income assistance, she says it has offered her a "second chance" to pursue fulfilling work and she is grateful for this opportunity.

> I'm not saying I'm proud to be on welfare right now, but everybody deserves a second chance. My parents have never been financially stable enough to support me...I was never allowed [to rely on my parents financially]. It's like, "That's it, you're 21, you're out."

Mae

Mae is a 40-year-old mother of three children: a daughter aged 7, and two sons aged 11 and 15. She is a white woman who spent her early childhood in a French-Canadian community and later moved to an Anglo-Canadian community. She is in her third semester at the college, taking 300-level DVST English in preparation for the Therapeutic Recreation

Program. Her career goal is to work with seniors, planning and delivering recreational programs. Mae came back to school to enhance her earning power after her husband ended their marriage rather suddenly. She still continues to work through the details of her divorce. The separation of her marriage meant making an abrupt life transition for Mae. Prior to the separation Mae was a full-time homemaker who was very involved in her children's schools. Now, in addition to running the house, attending class and doing her homework, Mae holds two part-time jobs to supplement the support payments she is receiving, does volunteer work in preparation for the Therapeutic Recreation Program, and is involved in several support activities to see herself and her children through the divorce. One of Mae's current struggles is guiding her children toward changing their expectations of her. For example, she is no longer in the position to attend school field trips.

> I've had to be a lot more selfish about some of my time than I've had to be in the past. I very rarely missed a field trip. I would be one of the moms that would drive or be there for the classroom. The teachers could rely on me. Well, it just worked out that I couldn't go to any of [my middle son's] field trips last year. So even in grade 5, I didn't go on any of his field trips. And [my daughter], I've only been on one.

Mae can also no longer continue to be in charge of everyone's laundry or dirty dishes. However, the children resist this shift, so it's a battle for her.

Marie

Marie is 34 years old and the sole parent of a 3 ½-year old daughter. She is a white woman of French-Canadian background. She is in her second semester at the college taking 200-level English in preparation for either the Resident Care Attendant or Mental Health Worker Program. It was hard for Marie to decide to come back to school. First of all, not knowing about funding options available to her, she didn't think she would be able to afford

to go back to school on her fixed income. Second of all, she struggled with the idea of having her daughter in daycare at such a young age. At the same time, she felt she would need to further her education in order to feel good about herself.

> I just want to get back to work and I just want to feel good about myself ...I need the education.... I guess I just got sick of just staying home and watching TV...Meet people too, you know, because when you go back to school...you get to meet people... and the atmosphere.

Marie wants to get off income assistance and she wants a career, not just a "job". The transition to college was overwhelming at first. By the time her daughter went to bed at night she was exhausted and she knew she had homework to finish. However, now that she has survived a whole semester, she is starting to relax about school. Marie is actually starting to enjoy reading, something she always avoided in the past.

Results from the Interviews

When I analyzed the interview transcripts, several broad themes emerged. First, going back to school signified a major turning point in the lives of the women in this study. Second, participants identified several positive aspects of combining motherhood with their studies. Third, participants were adapting to new time pressures. Fourth, the women in the study were redefining their roles in their relationships with their children and other family members. This redefinition led to feelings of guilt over not living up to cultural ideals. Fifth, childcare and finances were key potential barriers to success. Sixth, the women' s views about college support services, both positive and negative, related to their needs for childcare, financial assistance, and emotional support.

Developmental Studies as a Turning Point.

For the women in this study, the decision to enroll at the college was not a light one, but one full of promise and dread. For all of the women, going back to school was precipitated by life changing events. For several of them, the decision was made out of a strong desire for a better life for themselves and their children and would mean moving away from rougher times, including "welfare-mom" stereotypes and negative schooling experiences. Several participants talked about the apprehensions they had had as they were deciding whether to enroll or not. Participants had been careful to see that reliable support networks were in place before they enrolled at the college. Many of them also talked about wanting to be careful to pursue vocations that would allow them to be available for their children. For all of the women, going back to school symbolized independence, for which they all strove.

Strong Desire for a Better Life.

All of the participants returned to school to secure employment that would be meaningful and lucrative enough to support a family and achieve economic independence from welfare, a spouse, or parents. Without further education, they saw themselves working in jobs with low wages, low levels of satisfaction and little opportunity for advancement. Kimberly and Mae both remembered employment counsellors telling them that most jobs worth having required some post-secondary education.

> Kimberly: I had basically worked at dead-end jobs. And my life wasn't going anywhere. Then my daughter happened and I guess she motivated me to go back to school because I wasn't gonna' provide for a child working at Subway...I wanted a real job. I wanted a career. As my Career Links worker says, "You want a career, not a job – something where you wake up every morning and you want to go. Not where you drag your butt out of bed and say, 'I have to go to work.' "

A brighter financial future was not the only reason women decided to come back to school. Going back to school promised to build self-confidence and self-respect. They thought they would feel better about themselves if they could ensure a brighter economic and educational future for their children.

> Kimberly: I don't feel ashamed...I have changed inside a lot because I feel more pride within myself that I am doing this. Not only being a single mom, but also going to school, and getting a career for my daughter.

Daniella, Sunny, Kimberly, and Marie all express similar sentiments, which are captured in the quotes in their vignettes (see above).

Negative Stereotype of Being a Single Mom on Social Assistance.

The 5 women who were on income assistance were highly motivated to get off the system. Not only did it have them in a perpetual state of financial struggle, but it was also associated with a negative stereotype. Catalfamo (1998) has written about this stereotype and describes it as a societal perception that low-income single mothers rely too heavily on the system. She asserts that, whereas middle-income women are praised for staying home and raising their children, women on welfare are seen as lazy and as leeching off of society for the duration of time they are home with their children. It was striking how several of the women had internalized the negative perceptions people seem to have of them.

> Daniella: Sometimes the fact that I'm on social assistance is really hard for me to accept and sometimes I would rather go without milk for a day...than go in and get a voucher. It's been made really degrading to be on social assistance.

Women who were receiving income assistance felt unproductive and lacking in direction before they enrolled in school. Even though the women could have, by provincial

welfare policy, chosen to stay home until their youngest child was 7 years old [3], all of the women with toddlers said receiving income assistance was so demoralizing that they were anxious to get going on a career.

> Marie: I guess I shouldn't be embarrassed to say this but I'm on social assistance right now and I want to get off of it and ...get back into working. [Before I came back to school] I was raising my daughter...on my own and not doing anything and getting bored. I just wanted to do something with my life.

Negative Previous Schooling Experience

Six of the 8 women in this study remembered high school as a negative experience. Two of these women remembered it as moderately negative, saying that high school was a place where they got in with the "wrong crowd" and didn't challenge themselves enough.

> Sunny: I was a pretty good student starting in high school then I got stuck into all the peer pressure. That kind of spiraled me downwards - I got with the wrong crowd. I wasn't doing very well in school. I cared more about my friends than I did about my education...then I got with my ex-boyfriend and then I found out I was pregnant and that was it for school for a while.

> Daniella: I didn't challenge myself enough, so I don't look at it as very positive... just because I think there's a lot of extra freedom that you get, and there's a lot of decision-making too at that point where you have to decide if you want to go on to college or what you want to do for the rest of your life. I think it's a little bit of pressure at that age when you have so many other things going on with your hormones and stuff like that.

The remaining 4 women remembered high in school in intensely negative terms, recalling feeling like an outcast and being teased or bullied.

[3] This policy has recently changed. As of January 2002, single parents will now be considered "employable" after their youngest child reaches 3 years of age (down from 7) (Klein, 2002).

> Brooke: A lot of people judged you because if you're not smart enough, if you're not up to their level...they kind of put you down. They look at you very differently...It was hard. I was too ashamed to go and ask the teacher for help because I thought it would make me look stupid.... My first high school that I went to there was a lot of gangs and a lot of violence. So you couldn't talk to the teachers. You would be too afraid to. You'd be afraid for your life every single day going to school. You wouldn't know what would happen.

Several participants recalled always having difficulty with reading and writing. Some felt they might have had a learning disability. They also could not connect with teachers, feeling too shy or ashamed to ask for help. Mae always had difficulty in school because of a learning disability that went undiagnosed until she was 14.

> I [graduated]...by the skin of my teeth... I ran away from home before I finished grade 11. And my dad always said I was too stupid to graduate...And so it was really, really important to me to graduate.... I have a bit of a learning disability [dyslexia] and of course in the '70s they didn't know anything about it...So I'm very slow at reading.

Two of these women attributed their inability to integrate into the school environment to very difficult home lives they felt obliged to hide.

> Mae: Life at home was awful and it was just way too much for me to try and cope with at the time. So it was just easier to skip and not deal with it. When I did run away from home, my dad just hit me the last time and I couldn't take any more...There was one teacher in grade 11 and 12 who was really good and if I had been honest with him, I probably would have gotten a lot more help than I did...[but] I was brought up you don't air out the dirty laundry.
>
> Kimberly: I had a very complicated family life – very rough, rough family life...[alcoholic mother, verbally abusive stepmother]. So of course I [was] missing school all the time... I was no self-esteem; I was suicidal; I was the whole nine yards with drugs and everything.... And then...I was viciously made fun of...I was a loner... Basically I had it everywhere around me...I never went home basically until nighttime.... I would stay out all day.

These memories resemble those described by ABE-level participants in Quigley's

(1992) and Luttrell's (1997) research who recalled their previous school as a place where they felt alienated, ignored, and traumatized. However, whereas the people in Quigley's research chose not to go back to school because of their negative past experiences, the women in this study have chosen to re-enter education despite their histories. Also, whereas the low income mothers in Luttrell's research chose a community-based ABE program over a closer college-based ABE program in order to avoid the more formal setting, the women in this study described feeling comfortable in the formal college DVST setting (more on that below).

Life Changing Events

Typically, a life-changing event precipitated the decision to pursue further education. For several of the women, having a baby or going through a break-up triggered the desire to upgrade their education. Two of the newer mothers shared how becoming a mother launched them into adult womanhood.

> Brooke: If I didn't have him, I probably wouldn't be grown up. He makes you think about what you're doing.
>
> Sunny: My parents always say that my son kind of saved my life. As soon as he was born he steered me in the right direction...He helped me take the right steps to my future in actually helping me to make positive changes in my life.

The decision to enroll in college was sometimes triggered by the termination of long-term relationships with the children's fathers. For example, Daniella described how having her baby and then going through a divorce sparked a sense of ultimate responsibility for her son.

> Daniella: After he was born, I realized that I had to grow up and my husband left and that was really difficult. And at that point, just after he left, I was watching my son sleep one day, and I thought to myself, it's not fair for him that I'm upset. And, I mean, that affects the way that our relationship is, between my son and I. Because little things would stress me out or upset me or frustrate me. And one day I just said that, I had to do something, I'm going to be the only one who's going to provide for him. I'm gonna' be the only person that he has really to learn (from). I don't want to be on the system.

Some of these relationships had been controlling or abusive:

> Brooke: I was in a very verbally controlling abusive relationship. My ex was very, very controlling to the fact that he told me what to wear, who to hang out with. He accused me all the time of cheating on him. It was very, very stressful. I found that my friends, people would just say, "What happened to you? You used to be so happy." It took me about 9 months to get out of the relationship...I just realized that I didn't want to be with him anymore. I had had enough. I just broke down. And then I found out I was pregnant and he left.

For Mae and Meesha, who both had school-aged children, divorce meant having to stop being full-time mothers and homemakers in order to support themselves and their children.

> Mae: ...Just over a year ago my husband left me for his secretary and I was a stay-at-home mom for 13 years. And the only thing I ever really did the first part of our marriage and before I was married was being a cashier.

Zahra had recently moved to Canada where she would learn a new language and culture, would stop being a stay-at-home mother, and would suffer a downward economic shift.

Apprehensions about Coming Back to School

For most of these women, making the decision to enroll in school was a long, difficult one. All of the women had been home with their children prior to starting studies at the college. Although all but one participant said they had wanted to go back to school, they had

worried about the impact their studies would have on their children. They had also worried about arranging finances and childcare so that they *could* go to school.

> Marie: At first I thought it was going to be kind of hard because she's so young. And going back to school, she has to go to daycare and I don't drive, I don't work, so there was kind of barriers...But I thought, well, you have to do these things. It was a big choice. And a big issue was money.

They further worried about what the college experience would be like – whether they would fit in or be able to keep up with the work.

> Meesha: I went through several stages. First, I was afraid, I was scared, all of this was new to me. It was a matter if I would fit in. The whole thing was...am I capable of doing this? Am I able to still retain after doing years of....organizing...manual stuff...and little nursery rhymes...

Meesha's concern that her "nursery rhyme" background (spending a lot of time talking to young children using childlike language) may not transfer well to the formal educational environment hints at a similar notion to one observed by Luttrell (1997). In her work as a literacy instructor with working-class mothers of young children, Luttrell noticed the women had come to develop a kind of common sense intelligence that is linked to caregiving activities and is not acquired through formal education.

Choosing the Right Career Path

All of the women in this study were taking DVST courses to upgrade their reading, writing or math in preparation for further studies (as opposed to preparing for the GED or some other reason). By the time of the interview, all of the participants had specific career goals. But this had not always been the case. Choosing a career path was often a very difficult process. Sometimes it involved choosing one that would allow participants to continue to have adequate time for their children.

> Meesha: [Going back to school] was not something that I wanted to do. I always thought that I wanted to, you know, be a mom. Then I was looking at the avenue of, since I love children, having a daycare or running a daycare from home. And I found once I started looking into that there were obstacles in my way... you're only supposed to have so many children, you're living in an apartment, you don't have this, so on and so forth.... So when I was speaking to [the woman] in B. C. Benefits she suggested [the Classroom and Community Support Program].

Mae also thought she would like to study Early Childhood Education so that she could have an in-home daycare and be more available for her children. However, she was advised against this by a career counsellor.

> What I thought for sure I would be going to school for was the ECE. Because I thought it wouldn't interfere with the kids lives as much because then I could be at home and have a daycare at home and I would still be home with my kids. But when I went to the Aware Program, they said... "Just sort of picture the future here. You're a single mom with three kids. From 6 to 6 you're gonna be looking after your own kids and then four of other people's kids. And then after 6 you're gonna have to deal with your own kids. And you're all by yourself. You'll burnout in like 2 years because you won't have a sounding board. It'll just all be you dealing with all these kids all day." So they advised me against it.

Most of the participants chose careers in education, health and social service fields. Zahra was the only woman not going into these fields; she had chosen computer information systems. Education and health fields may have particular appeal to women because they allow for scheduling that is flexible enough to be combined reasonably well with mothering. Education fields' schedules, in particular, often match the hours and months that children are in school, so childcare is not as difficult to arrange. Also, education, health and the social services are "helping" fields, which had appeal for many of the women in this study.

> Kimberly: Well, at first I wanted to be a P. E. teacher because I love Phys Ed and I love working with teens. But then I figured, well maybe I could help out more by working with troubled youth, or "youth at risk" is how my instructor told me to say it. So I decided to go through CYCC [Child and Youth Care Counsellor]. Like I've been through so much experience of being a youth at risk myself. ...I think that's what brings a lot of people to these jobs is that experience is through their lives. There's already two other students in my class that have the same backgrounds as I do and their backgrounds are worse than mine. But they've turned their lives around and now they want to help other teens as well.

Supports Were in Place

Prior to enrolling in the DVST program, most participants were careful to have supports in place. Zahra was the only woman who seemed to have very little practical support – she had no family or close friends living in the province. Most of the women received some practical and/or emotional support from family members. Six of the women were receiving varying degrees of practical help, usually childcare, from their own mothers.

> Daniella: ...I don't know what I would do if I didn't have the support of my family. I have a lot of friends who are truly single, they're truly on their own, and they have no support from family. And just knowing the struggles they go through...I go home and I kiss my mom and dad everyday and tell them how much I appreciate them doing what they're doing for me.

The finding that women in this study received substantial family support is consistent with other literature. Phoenix and Woollette (1991) found that low-income single mothers in their study were more likely than married or middle-class mothers to rely on family for social support and to form informal support networks with other women. Middle-class women, on the other hand, were more likely to rely on paid help from childcare providers or housekeepers. Also, Straus (1988) has found that, in general, a woman's contact with her family of origin will increase in the period immediately following divorce.

Kimberly did not have support from family because she had dissociated from them. However, both she and Mae had created sophisticated support networks for themselves before they came to the college. Both of them said that these support networks helped them to find their way back to school.

> Kimberly: I go to young moms' group, so I've had lots of support there. And then I went to Directions. And now I've been in a moms' group for almost 2 ½ years now – ever since my daughter was 1 month old.

Kimberly was also very involved in her church. For Mae participating in an informal "coffee klatch" and seeing a counsellor were just two of her many supports.

> Mae: I took a workshop called Divorce Care. It's a Christian-based workshop and it helps you do deal with the emotions that you go through.... And then I took a course on boundaries, one of my biggest things. And I just finished doing that. ...And I'm very active in my church.... So I have a large network of women that I know and I can count on if I need something. And then I've got some really, really good friends...I have done a lot of networking. And then I did the Aware Program and.... I'm still supposed to be doing follow-ups with the counsellor I had there...and I can get support there... And whether you want to call it luck or God, I've always been really lucky that way.

Striving for Independence

Earlier I described how the women receiving income assistance were eager to gain independence from being on the "system". These were not the only women who were striving for increased independence. All of the women in this study looked forward to a day when they would not have to rely on someone else economically, whether it was income assistance, parents, an ex-spouse, or a current spouse.

> Mae: I have three kids and there's no way I could...I'd either always be indebted to [my ex-husband] if I went and got that job now because there's no way I'd be able to support three kids on a cashier's wage. Or I try and better myself, get a good job so that I will only be under his influence for a short period of time, and then I can cut the cord and let go.
>
> Marie: Sometimes I run out [of groceries] ...a week before my next check or two weeks if it's really bad and then [my mom] helps me out...if I need bread or milk or something like that. It is a struggle though. So that's why I keep saying to myself, "This is why I'm here in school so that I don't have to put myself in that position anymore." And I can be working and find a good job where I don't have to be depending on someone for help.

Zahra explains how, now that she is in Canada, she depends on her husband's income.

> In my country I was independent in terms of economic stuff because I got a lot of money from my father in his will...And the economic conditions [are] completely different from Canada – we can invest lots of money in the bank and take from the interest...and now in this country, I'm not independent.

Being a DVST Student-Mother is a Positive Experience

In general, the women in this study had very positive feelings both about being mothers, being DVST students, and combining the two.

> Brooke: I feel proud of myself that I can go to school and still have time to go home and spend time with my son. It just makes you feel really proud that you can do this and you can show your son..."Hey, I had you at a young age but I went to school and I did something with my life and you can do that. You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it..." It gives me a lot of pride to say, "Hey, I'm going to [college] and I'm a single mom."

All of the women described their college experience in positive terms with only 2 of them saying their experience was merely "fine". When asked how their college experience had been so far, the remaining 6 used such phrases as "positive, positive, positive!" "absolutely wonderful," "the light of my personal life"," and "my getaway."

> Kimberly: When I'm in school, I'm in my own little world. I think of nothing but school. It's like my get-away. I don't even think of my daughter. I have a cell phone in case there's an emergency. But there's nothing else on my mind but school. That's what I love about it. Nothing makes me happier than going to school except my daughter. Nothing makes me happier than having that self-fulfillment...that you're doing something rather than just being a single mom on welfare.

Several women offered that they felt more competent, comfortable, respected, and willing to express their opinions in the college environment than they ever did in high school.

> Brooke: I'm finding that I'm more opinionated now, that I can speak up and say, "Hey, I don't agree with that but what about this idea?" And even if it's a stupid answer, I'm glad I spoke up.

One participant said, "There are a lot of people like me [here]," and another, "I don't feel like an outcast."

Motivation

Participants said they were motivated by their children to go to school. They were also motivated by the belief that going to school would allow them to eventually improve their own and their children's material circumstances.

> Sunny: He's what kind of gets me out of bed in the morning. I'm doing it for myself, don't get me wrong. But in a sense I'm…doing it for him too…because I want him to have a better future.

Kimberly said that being a mother also causes her to bring a thoroughness to her studies that she has learned from taking care of a child and managing a household.

> Being a mother you're forced to…cook meals, clean your place, make sure your child's clean – responsibilities that maintain the health and safety of your child at home…and you have to do everything thoroughly as well. So when you're doing your homework, you kind of act upon it the same way…Most of the time I do everything thoroughly.

Furthermore, they felt like the sense of accomplishment they were getting from going to

school was bringing a positive energy into the home. They also felt motivated by the sense that they were providing a positive role model for their children.

Redefining Relationships

Not everything about combining motherhood with being a student was positive. Participants of older school-aged children especially shared how they were going through frustrating times with their children.

> Meesha: You know I would be lying if I said, "Oh, it's just so wonderful." Most of it is. There are some days that I lose it. I go, "Rah, I can't take this anymore!"
>
> Mae: What I find the most trying is...discipline...I have more time-outs than they do. But they [parenting course instructors] said that's a good thing. If you feel like you're going to lose control – go away...But I hate having to repeat myself over and over again. "If you would pick up the dishes they would be washed. It's very simple."

Taking on the added responsibilities of school alerted some of the women of the need to have their children take on some household duties. All 3 of the women with school-aged children talked about how they were starting to delegate household responsibilities to their children and were working toward their children being more independent.

> Meesha: Last week was when I started delegating more and working on them doing the bathroom and this type of thing, but it's still foreign to them...Basically I don't have that time to allot for all of them is how it's affected them...As far as time goes, I'm not as... (cellular phone rings – it's her son)

Mae's children, who along with her were dealing with her recent marriage breakup, were sometimes openly hostile toward her because she required them to change their expectations of her.

> They can be very mentally abusive to me...saying things like I'm not a real mother because I don't wash the boys' clothes anymore and a real mother would wash everyone's clothes... I feel that [my ex]...treated me like an indentured slave ...And he expected me to follow behind him and pick up after him as he dropped things. And the kids have picked up that attitude and they expect the same from me. They don't have to cleanup after themselves because that's what mothers do – a "real" mother. ...But now I just don't have time... to do the extra stuff. And they have to pick up the slack.

Mae said her ex-husband believed she was going to school just to spite him, and this contributed to conflict with her son.

> [My ex-husband is] not very happy with me...I'm wasting everybody's time and I'm always trying to get him ...by going back to school. And my 15-year old...is really buying into that mentality and it's quite difficult at home at times.

Mae tried to have her 15-year-old son baby-sit her younger children while she was away at school, but this didn't work out very well.

> And (my son) being 15, I said, "You know, you're not usually getting going until 12 or 1 o'clock anyway. It should be no problem for you to look after your brother and sister while I'm in school in the morning." Well it's become a big issue. I can never be sure that he's there. I came home one time and he wasn't there and he had left the two of them by themselves. And he said, "Well you were late." And I said, "So?" "Well, I wanted to go, it was time to go and you were late. So that was my reason for leaving." I can't be sure that they are being taken care of properly.

Straus (1988) found divorced custodial mothers to face greater parenting challenges than non-divorced mothers. The stress of assuming most or all of the economic, household, emotional, and social responsibilities of the family may temporarily disrupt the dynamics of the mother-child relationship shared previously. However, most mothers get through this period quickly and many find their relationships with their children to improve with the waning of marital conflict.

The women with school children were also especially likely to express regret over no

longer being able to live up to ideal mothering images, which often lead to feelings of guilt. For example, Meesha felt guilty about leaving her children home alone to supervise themselves when she was away at school. (Recall this interview took place in the summer months when the children were not in school but the mothers were. None of the school-aged children were with sitters.) Meesha's guilty feelings were not being helped by her mother, who apparently also had ideal images of how Meesha should mother.

> My children being home alone is a concern of mine. I've raised them so that they're independent and responsible. And Mother tends to differ because she raised all six of us; she stayed at home...She's concerned that I shouldn't be leaving the children at home alone and she rags me about it. And I said, "Mother, they're fine, I have the phone." So I have to deal with that and also what I feel is right, growing up and living in this time...But I do feel guilty...being at school when they're at home. I pacify myself by saying, "Well, at least we have Mondays and Fridays available," or "Once I'm done school, then we have that time to be together." But there is that guilty thing: You should be there when they're there.

These mothers also felt guilty about not being able to spend time with their children in activities and on outings. They wanted their children to have fun and to be involved in enriching activities but the time they had for this was limited. This was pronounced for women who had previously been home with school-aged children.

> Zahra: Guilty! [Big laugh] Because in my country I was completely a housewife. I spent almost [all my] time with my children. And they are closer to me than their father...they ask me and they want me to participate in their activities. That's why I feel guilty.

Mae said these guilty feelings didn't go away when her children were in school. Whereas she had previously attended all of her children's field trips and assemblies, sat on parent advisory committees, and provided baked gifts for teachers, she was now having to reduce drastically her involvement in these kinds of activities.

> Some of the focus has been taken off [my children]. A lot more focus has been put onto me: What my needs are, what I need to do in the future…I've had to be a lot more selfish about some of my time than I've had to be in the past.

Once, for Mae, attempting to combine ideal mothering with being a student resulted in an interesting outcome.

> For the end of the year and Christmas I would make cinnamon buns for the teachers. Well here I am Thursday night making all these cinnamon buns and trying to do my homework at the same time. And one pan sort of got left in there a little longer than it should have been but I didn't have time to make more so the teachers got a couple of burnt cinnamon buns. And that's just pressure that I'm putting on me. I know that. I try and keep some expectations that I had of what I would be doing for my kids' lives and through school. There up as high as I had them before and then try and keep my school level up which is a whole new thing. So it's been difficult. But I do realize that most of it's just the pressure I'm putting on myself.

Zahra, who is taking DVST math and ESL writing and holding a part-time job, shared similar feelings.

> Sometimes…I say to myself, okay enough, stop here and get involved with your children. And then I come to that I need money…There's a conflict in my mind.

The women with toddlers also had some guilt about being away from their children. For instance, Kimberly felt like she was missing some of her daughter's developmental milestones. Sunny talked about how at first it was it difficult leaving her son at daycare.

> I felt really bad when I first started school – dumping him in daycare. I didn't want him to feel that, "Oh, after all this time you're just gonna' dump me. Why are you doing this?" So I try to make those days off just our time together and to spend with my family as well.

However, all of the women coped with guilt by reminding themselves of the benefits their schooling would have for their children.

> Zahra: Of course, especially my children don't like their mother to be student. I mean this kind of student – hard work student. But when they come to this point that, no, their mother has to study so things get less difficult for them. Also if I get money for myself, for example, if I get a job, it will help my children as well. I can meet their needs in everything; it's helpful for them. It's not just for myself to be independent.

What these participants express is consistent with what was expressed by women in studies by Dalien (1998) and Sears (1999). The student-mothers in their research also felt guilty and inadequate over not being able to live up to ideal mother images. Also, Hochschild (1997) found both working mothers and fathers to feel they needed to compensate for the time they spent away from their children. Hochschild says that after working parents get home from their jobs, and then complete routine household and childcare responsibilities, they frequently put in a "third shift" (p. 214) dealing with the emotional consequences of their time-deprived family lives.

Relationships with other family members also had to be re-defined, especially when these family members had come to depend upon participants too much. For example, Meesha's mother and adult siblings relied on her for many things including transportation to medical appointments and grocery shopping. When she started going to school, she realized that her level of involvement with them was going to have to slow down, but weaning them of her help was difficult.

> I'm the one who does the doing for everybody else in the family, so if someone needs a ride here or if somebody... And last year mom broke her arm, so...when I left in the morning before I came here, I was a going concern...It became rather hectic.... I have to really push some of the responsibilities out there, and not feel guilty about doing so 'cause she's a very independent person, but having that broken arm and not being able to do a lot of things, she counted on me more and that gets kind of comfortable after a while. But then I do get the little...mother thing: "You know, you're spending a lot of time at school now." ... She doesn't quite understand that she's making me feel guilty about it.

Zahra, the only married participant, said that while her husband is supportive of her going to school, she notices their relationship changing.

> He spends a lot of time in front of the TV and I spend lots of time with my desk. Our communication is getting low and low and low.

The women receiving family support said they appreciated all the help they received, however they sometimes also worried that the help they were getting would strain their relationships with family members. For instance, Daniella worried that her mother was doing too much baby-sitting for her.

> It's a little bit of stress with my mom and I because she's looking after my son all day and if I need extra time to study, like I had a math test today and yesterday, I asked her for a few hours in the evening to study and I guess it's a little bit stressful for her 'cause my son's wondering where I am and what I'm doing. He cries and gets upset, which I guess can sometimes frustrate her. So, it makes it a little bit difficult, but we work around it. She understands that I'm going to school and I need the time to study.

Two women spoke about a funding policy that put them, and their family members, in difficult circumstances. Daniella and Brooke, whose mothers were providing daycare for them, didn't qualify for a daycare subsidy because they had relatives providing their childcare. Consequently, they could not afford to pay their mothers for childcare. They both said they felt they should have been paying their mothers because it was taking them away

from time they could have used to make money elsewhere. Daniella said she felt like she was "running a tab" with her mother and that made her feel guilty.

New Time Pressures

In addition to having to re-define their close relationships, participants said there were some other difficulties associated with being a student who is also a mother – most notably, adapting to new time pressures. According to Silver (2000), Canadian married mothers working full-time spend an average of 6 ½ hours per day with children under 5-years old, 5 hours per day with children between 5- and 8-years old, and almost 4 hours per day with children between 9- and 12-years old. Taking care of children under age 5 is particularly labour intensive because it involves personal care as well as playing. The number of hours lone mothers spend per day would presumably be greater than these because they do not have another parent to share childcare responsibilities.

The time pressures of the women in this study became very apparent when they tried to find a good time to do homework. All but one of the women said it was difficult to find a good time to do homework. Marie added that this is especially true for lone parents who do not have another parent to watch the children while they go off to work on an assignment. Most said they did not even attempt to do homework when their children were awake.

> Daniella: I guess maybe [the most difficult part is] being out for so long and then finding the time to do my homework when my son is... I get home and he's like, "Mommy!" He hasn't seen me all day, so he wants to play and sometimes it's a little bit difficult to try and find the time to get the homework done. Because by the time he goes to bed, I'm tired.

The women with toddlers described scenes of 2-year-olds ripping school papers and adorning homework with crayon drawings.

> Brooke: It's hard.... You have to find time to do [homework]. I do [homework] at night. Or...when he's napping. I find it's easier to do it that way. 'Cause if you try to study when he's around he'll want your attention and he'll try to draw on your papers. ...You've gotta' have a couple of days for yourself cause if you keep going into your studies, your son's gonna' be like, "Hey, what about me?"

The mothers of older children talked about how their kids would routinely interrupt them.

> Meesha: Homework? I *cannot* do a thing until they're in bed...I usually don't start homework 'til they're in bed...[but] if my 8-year old has had a nap and he's wide awake, I say, "Okay, I'm going to do homework, I don't want to be disturbed..." he'll come out, "How's it going, Mom?"...Or he'll come and he'll give me a little kiss...That distracts me.

To avoid being interrupted, the women tended to start working on their homework after they had put their children to bed at night and continued late into the evening or early morning hours. This was less than ideal because by the time they started doing their homework they were tired from having put in a full day of parenting, school, and household activities.

The one woman who felt good about her homework schedule, Sunny, had arranged her week so she could do her homework when her son was in daycare. Rather than having him in daycare only to cover her class times, she would have him there all day on her school days so that she could spend time in the library or lab after class. This way she could concentrate on her homework in an environment free from the distractions of home. Then, when she got home, she had little homework left to do. This in turn freed her up to focus on her son.

When I asked participants what a typical week was like for them, I heard many different answers. The women were on campus either 3 or 4 days a week, for between 2 and 6 hours a day. Most of them talked about how they no longer had the time to get together

with friends that they once did, opting instead to stay home and do homework or spend time with their children. Still, a few of the women said easing into school by going part-time made for quite a manageable schedule.

> Daniella: I actually really enjoy it. I really enjoy it because as I said...it's only a few hours, it's not 8, 9 hours a day, which it will be. But I think my son and I will both be a little more used to that by the time that we're going [to school full-time].

However, at the other extreme, a few of the women said a typical week was "hectic" and "sometimes overwhelming". Meesha and Mae, who have two and three school-aged children respectively, were both holding two part-time jobs, doing volunteer work to meet admission requirements for future programs, and carrying a variety of other family and household responsibilities, as well as going to school and finding time for homework. Not surprisingly, the more roles and responsibilities the women had in a week, the more stressful they described the week to be.

> Meesha: The other day, my sister was here, I was driving her...back [home]. Then my brother called...and needed me to do [something else]. And then my kids... "Mommy, we need you." And so it's like OR-GAN-I-ZA-TION! ...I'm trying to make everybody happy.

> Zahra: Always it's stressful, always I'm busy, and always I have to schedule my time. Sometimes I don't pay attention to the weather or anything.

Potential Obstacles to Participation

For the women in this study, the greatest potential obstacles to steady participation were childcare and financial crises.

Childcare

Some of the women with younger children felt like no matter how motivated they were to go to school, they would not be able to continue if reliable childcare were suddenly not available.

> Daniella: For all single mothers going back to school...you want to have peace of mind knowing that your child is well taken care of so that you can come to school and fully concentrate on what you're doing. I think that if you don't have that then...you can't necessarily come every day and when you are here you're preoccupied with how your child is doing.

Marie recalled a recent time when she suddenly did not have childcare.

> For instance last week, my daycare lady...was sick and I had no one to watch my daughter. Now at the College here, if they had somewhere...besides the daycare, somewhere... I couldn't come because I didn't have a babysitter... Especially a single parent because...I had no one to watch her so I had to miss class.

Finances

Home and Hinds' (2000) found that, because of the strain and energy that had to be put into figuring out how to make ends meet, having a low-income was the most important stressor for student mothers. All of the participants in this study were struggling with their finances. Five of them were receiving income assistance. One was living on wages from her part-time job in a fast-food restaurant. Two of the women were supplementing their incomes with two part-time jobs and the other relied on grants and a part-time job to supplement her husband's income. Several women told stories of not being able to buy toys for their children or new clothes for themselves when they needed them. Several of them did not have a car and one woman who had a car often did not use it in order to save money.

> Meesha: And then I also look for bargains or where things are and then I go there. And thank goodness they're right in the vicinity, so I walk. I do have a car, but I don't drive it all the time, so that helps. Where the bargains are, that's where you'll find me. Because of school now, before I would go to the food bank, but I can't do that any more because I'm at school [on the day that the food bank is open].

A few of the participants lived in quarters that were too small for their families. For example, Zahra's four-person family lived in a two-bedroom apartment and Meesha's three-person family lived in a one-bedroom apartment. Some also quite routinely ran out of milk or bread and had relied on friends, family members, or the food bank for more groceries. Marie described how she ran out of paper for her schoolwork but had no money to buy more and so borrowed some paper from a classmate.

Lavell (1998) found that single mothers with low incomes faced greater challenges than other students because of having to deal with financial crises and the stressful, time-consuming "foundational work" (p. 196) involved in meeting the survival needs of themselves and their children. Sunny described the stressful and complicated process she must go through at the end of each semester to set up funding for the upcoming semester.

> Going for all the [daycare] subsidy – that was really stressful – registering in school, and filling out Canada Study Grant forms...I find that at the end of each semester...for about a week...during my two to three week break...I find that quite a stressful period. You'd think it'd be relaxing because it would be a couple of weeks off school, but that's the most stressful because I have to get everything all organized and I don't want to forget anything.

Participants said that grants and other forms of financial assistance have made it possible for them to go to school.

> Sunny: I knew that I needed to upgrade to get Math 11 and Chemistry and Biology, so I probably would have taken those courses through the school district. If I had done that they run about $250 per course, if I'm not mistaken, plus your books. In my situation, that's something that I couldn't have even looked at. I don't have the finances. Even if I save $10 a month, it would have been another few years before I even got there. So it's definitely an advantage that I can come here for the upgrading that I need and it doesn't cost anything.
>
> Zahra: Financial Aid [is the most important support to my program]...Because if they don't help me, I can't afford my education. Not at all.

Brooke found that because she lives in her parents' home, she did not qualify for daycare subsidy or other funding.

> I find the government is very judgmental. Because you're a single mom, you're living at home, yet you're working and you're not paying rent. That...since you live at home, your parents should pay for everything.

Lochhead and Scott (2000) have also found that welfare and childcare-subsidy policies force women to rely on family members while they are striving to secure economic independence.

Support Services

As part of the interview, I listed all of the support services available at the college for students and asked participants which of the services they had accessed. In general participants had used very few college support services. Several women had not even heard of most of the services. Not surprisingly, the women' s views about college support services, both positive and negative, related to their needs for childcare, financial assistance, and emotional support. All but one of the women had been to the Financial Aid office to discuss funding options and to apply for funding. A few had also been to the Learning Centre for tutoring a couple of times and others had seen academic advisors for help with course planning. The B.C. Benefits Office, a bridge-in course, and the classroom environment and

instructor were identified as the best supports. The Women's Centre, college daycare, and information about funding were viewed as appealing but inaccessible.

The B.C. Benefits Office

The college service identified more than any other as being key to assisting the women to re-enter school was the B.C. Benefits Office. This office centralized student administrative processes for students on income assistance. Five of the women had used the service extensively and most of these women had used no other service on campus. Through B.C. Benefits participants received help navigating the paperwork processes associated with securing funding, applying to programs, course planning, scheduling intake assessments, and other administrative processes. Typically the B.C. Benefits Office was the first point of contact for these women and helped them make the transition into the college. It was through the B.C. Benefits office that many of the women discovered it was even possible for them to go to school.

> Daniella: I would have to say the [B. C. Benefits Office has] been tremendous support because of the financial help and the piecing together the plans for going back to school... Had I not received that support, I don't think I would be here right now.
>
> Marie: If you have any problems or if you want to get into a certain course... they see if it's funded or how to go about it. ...They told me that for the Resident Care course you have to pass a test and if you don't have a certain English level...they're the ones who told me to take these...upgrading courses for English. And they told me, "This would be helpful for you and you'd feel more comfortable if you would take the RCA course or the Mental Health Worker [Program], you should have that behind your belt." So they've kind of helped me out with that... 'Cause I don't always like to go to a counsellor...it makes you feel like you're not capable...to do it on your own.

> Meesha: Well, B.C. Benefits is great because you go in there and you talk to those guys or if you have a problem or if you're not sure about something, they're great. They're there. There's always a resolution. They always have information to give you. And if not, they direct you to where you need to go, what you need to do. For instance, I needed to do 100 volunteer hours and [the woman at B.C. Benefits Office] suggested somebody.

Marie said that what she appreciated most about the B.C. Benefits Office is she did not have to identify herself as being on income assistance when she entered the office, as this was already assumed. In contrast, when she went to other offices for various reasons, she would often have to start by saying that she was on income assistance, which was humiliating and awkward.

> I guess it's because you're on assistance and they deal with people who are on assistance all the time so... it just makes me feel better that I don't have to go and I don't have to ask because there's certain restrictions because I'm on social assistance. It's already out there so then they tell you.... They already know your situation.

Classroom Environment and Instructor

The women in this study tended not to integrate a lot into the larger college community. Instead, the classroom and instructor was mostly their central focus at the college. Most of the participants described a comfortable, respectful and supportive social atmosphere in their DVST classrooms.

> Brooke: I've never felt as comfortable. In high school I'd be really shy. I wouldn't want to read...It's been good...When I'm taking this DVST 355, I realize that there's people like me out there that aren't always good in English and stuff....Everybody's at the same level. Nobody judges people. We're all there in a team. We work together in a group. And it makes me feel like, wow, I can actually put in my input and people aren't gonna' look at me like I'm stupid.

Mae said when she first came into the program she was relieved to find she wasn't the only person over 35.

> I'm not the only person in similar circumstances...there's been some men and women who for one reason or another have gone back to school...I thought I would feel like an outcast a little bit... And everyone...young or old, they all sort of look up to each other as mentors and a support system.

Classmates supported and shared with each other around issues both related and unrelated to course content. Some of these social networks were starting to extend beyond the classroom. For example, several of the women talked about how they carpooled with classmates.

However, not everyone wanted friendships to cross over into their personal lives. Meesha, for example, didn't feel she had the time to devote to friendships that they would require.

> Everyone in class, you know you're friendly with. However, I don't take it outside the classroom... I'm not asking for anybody's phone number...I'm keeping it strictly...because for me, I have a full enough life. I don't have a social life, so anything that takes me away from everything that I'm doing... I don't have time. So therefore, what would be the point of my getting involved with other people? So as far as my schoolmates go, you know we joke, we chat...in the confinement of school.

Meesha also said she was troubled about how school felt compartmentalized from the rest of her life.

> For some reason I look at school, my life at school separate from home. I'm thinking that perhaps I should be incorporating it. You know, it's...my life. I'm not my school life and my home life. I'm wondering if when I get more immersed in school - like when I do it more – if I would consider it as part of my life. I'm not sure yet.

Sunny said she also preferred to keep to herself but for different reasons.

> I kind of prefer to work on my own. I haven't really met anybody in any of my classes where there's a...friend relationship. I don't want anybody to perceive me as the stereotype of a single mother on welfare... Also, I find it really hard, after being in my relationship with my boyfriend...where I wasn't allowed to have friends, then making the transition of going back to school and trying to meet people.

Participants described a number of instructor characteristics that they felt helped to promote a supportive classroom atmosphere and a good learning environment. First, they appreciated how instructors gave honest feedback without making them feel stupid. Second, they were pleased that their instructors expected high quality work – sometimes making students redo a written piece over and over again. They also liked how their instructors demonstrated respect for diverse student opinions on topics discussed in class.

> Meesha: I find the way the instructors teach, because the classroom is with different people – different age groups, different everything – the manner in which they teach is pretty acceptable to me.... He told us what type of environment he wanted to create – he wanted to be respectful of everybody's feelings...He tries to include everyone in the discussion.

> Daniella: The teachers are really, really good in that they really explain, you know, if you're doing something wrong or if you have problems, they're there. They make themselves available to help you. The teachers that I have had experience with, they don't make you feel bad for coming and asking for help. They encourage it. And they don't make you feel like you should know this stuff. They really encourage you if you have any problems and they make themselves available, like, you have their phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and what not.

Another quality the women in this study appreciated was how their DVST instructors showed their humanness. One of the ways this was shown was by drawing wisdom from the adult life experiences of students in the class.

> Mae: [The instructors] really appreciate our life experience. So, when we happen to be talking about a subject, we can throw in, well, when I was...or, this happened to me...because we've lived life. We've all done several different things so it's not just the teacher trying to explain a life experience that maybe she hasn't gone through.

Mae also described how one of her instructors shared her own experiences of being a parent and understood the need to be away from class on occasion to attend her child's school functions.

> My teacher, she's a mom too... so she kind of appreciated what I was going through, said, "You know, you can take time off. You can go and do those things for the kids when it needs to be."

Another way that instructors showed humanness was sharing of themselves personally.

> Marie: She tells you about how her week went or just something about her life. Because we're all human beings, you know, we all have a life outside of school, you know, and she shares that. I guess some instructors don't do that. They're just like, "Okay, this is what we have to do," and they don't even say hi...bye, how are you.

The participants taking math classes really appreciated the instructor setting up a lab time after class so that they could work on their homework and get clarification as necessary. This helped to alleviate some of the homework load that had to be done at home, where it was much more difficult to concentrate, especially when the children were awake.

Bridge-in Course

Mae and Meesha were referred by the B.C. Benefits Office directly into the DVST bridge-in course (DVST 245) and found the course excellent for making the transition back to school. Only women who had taken courses at the main campus mentioned this course. Women from the smaller campuses had apparently not heard of it.

> Meesha: It was an introduction into the system, which was absolutely wonderful. There's an orientation whereby you familiarize yourself with where the Library is or where the cafeteria is...or this type of thing. On Fridays we did Counsellor and Student Services, and that was good because a lot of us were...mothers and were going through the same thing. Some were dealing with childcare, some were dealing with getting back to school after years of not being into it...So we spoke with regards to time management, anxiety, what things were bothering us...It was a nice introduction to college life.

The Women's Centre

Several women said they wished they were more familiar with what services were available through the Women's Centre. Others said they had wanted to attend Women's Centre workshops but could not because of time conflicts, lack of childcare arrangements, or because they could not make it into the main campus, where the majority of Women's Centre activities were held. (Many of the participants were attending a secondary campus, which has a Women's Centre that operates only a few hours a week in the fall and winter and is closed in the summer.)

> Marie: I've actually thought about the Women's Centre...seminars... on...women and self-esteem [but] with the buses being on strike I couldn't really get anywhere. And sometimes my daycare...I don't think it would be appreciated if I have to bring my 3-year-old with me. So that's...the only reason why that I don't always go 'cause I have to drag her along.

> Mae: [The main campus] has a women's course called Women's Success and I didn't take it [when I was there] but a couple of women in my 245 class were taking it and they really enjoyed it. And I...thought...when I'm [at this campus] I'll take it...but they don't offer it here. So I would *really* like something like that.... And even this Women's Centre offer[ed] "Nurturing the Woman", but it was the wrong [time]. I have some issues still...I'm really interested in women's issues... I would do more with the Women's Centre if they offered more.

Several of the women said they would be interested in participating in a support group for single mothers.

> Sunny: It would be nice to meet some other single mothers that are going through the same thing that I'm going through...at the school. Not just to be friends with them, but just to see someone else who is right now seeing things the same way I am.
>
> Marie: A support group, maybe single parents, women being a single parent with young children or something like that...would interest me. I would feel better about myself and school probably would be better.
>
> Zahra: I think it's very helpful especially for some of the students who are mothers and they have lots of baggage in terms of family...deal with their children and everything. It can be helpful for them. They can talk to others and take their suggestion and then they will feel better. If you can talk to somebody and if you have someone to listen to your difficulties, it's very helpful.

Dalien (1998) also found there to be demand for student-mother support groups in the university setting. However, Home and Hinds (2000) found student-mothers to not have enough time to attend extra activities such as support groups.

Daycare

When I asked participants what else they thought the college could do better for student-mothers, 4 of the women with toddlers said they wished there were more flexible and affordable daycare available on campus. There is a daycare on campus, however none of the women had their children in it. The college daycare is for 3- to 5-year olds, which made several of the children ineligible.

> Brooke: I don't know what the daycare thing is over here but [your child has] to be a certain age. Why [does your child] have to be a certain age...? If a person has a 6-month old baby, I think they should have the right to say, "Is it possible to take care of my kid while I'm in school?" And it shouldn't matter how old your kid is. 'Cause if that person's willing to say. "Hey, I'm gonna go back to school when my child's a baby," then go for it...I think that would help probably encourage a lot more single moms to [come here].

The on-campus daycare is also more expensive than many private in-home daycares, and although many of the women qualified for a daycare subsidy, they would have to have paid extra to have their children in the on-campus daycare. A few women said they had tried to get their children into the daycare on campus, but learned that there is a long waiting list and so made other arrangements.

> Sunny: I had 2 or 3 months before I started here to find a daycare and I thought, "oh no problem, I'll just go to that daycare right on campus, no problem." I called them and like, "Oh, sorry, we're booked up." And I was like, "Oh my God." And that was really stressful... They said, "Oh, you're supposed to register with us...a couple of months earlier." And I'm like, "What are you talking about?" ... I thought you called them and said, "I'd like to bring my son in." That was really stressful.

All of these women said they had satisfactory daycare arrangement already in place, but some of them were worried about what would happen if their daycare providers were suddenly unavailable. A few of them had already experienced being without daycare at short notice and had to miss class. They wished there were a daycare on campus or nearby where they could take their children on short notice. (See quote from Maria in *Childcare* section above.)

Information

Participants also felt that the college could do a better job of getting information out to low-income women about services and funding options. The day of our interview, Kimberly had just learned from her classmates about a grant for which she was eligible. If her classmates had not told her about it, she would have missed out on the funding.

> I'm just signing out this application today and I'm gonna' be putting it in...I just found out about it only because some of the students in my class are taking it...I mean like, a $1200 grant? ...You know, what would be really nice...to know about all of the services. Where do I go? What do I do? How do I get there? They need to put a big bulletin up saying, "Services for Low Income Students."

Brooke adds that more information could get out to prospective low-income student-mothers:

> I think when you're advertising, just say, "We offer this for single moms." Because a lot of people don't know if you go to school you could get so much help. I didn't know until one girl said, "Why don't you go to school, you'll get all this financial help." And I was like, "Oh, really? I never knew that." And it got me thinking and that's when I went.

Summary

The participants in this were highly motivated to participate in the DVST program because it would allow them to pursue further studies and ultimately secure a brighter future for themselves and their children. Participants receiving income assistance were driven to get off the system, largely because of the negative stereotypes associated with it. Overall, participants described their participation in the DVST program in positive terms and were happy that they were back in school. There were, however, a number challenges associated with being DVST student-mothers, and these mostly concerned finances, childcare, and time

constraints. Most of the women in the study felt they had good support networks both outside and within the program, and they identified some supports that were crucial to their participation, including instructors, funding, and childcare. They especially valued the support they had received through the B.C. Benefits Office. Finally, participants offered suggestions for improving service for DVST student-mothers at the college, including increased offerings through the Women's Centre, more accessible daycare services, and better access to information about funding options.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences of mothers of young children attending a community college-based Developmental Studies Program. It also aimed to identify any institutional or non-institutional barriers or supports to their participation. Participants were 8 women enrolled in the program while at same time assuming the primary live-in parenting responsibility for at least one child 12 years old or younger. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the participants. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed six themes. Participating in the DVST Program as a student-mother (1) signified a major life turning point, (2) was a positive experience, (3) involved adapting to new time pressures, (4) involved redefining roles in relationships with children and other family members, which led to feelings of guilt, (5) made one vulnerable to childcare and financial crises, and (6) was best supported by services related to childcare, financial assistance, and connections with women in like circumstances.

Findings and Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this research suggest that the Developmental Studies student-mothers in this study were going through a noteworthy transition period, which would potentially involve economic, psychological, and socio-cultural changes in their lives. The women in this study were moving from a place of poverty and economic dependence, societal disenfranchisement, and personal dissatisfaction, toward a place of economic and emotional independence, societal belonging, and enhanced self-esteem. Participants were highly motivated to make these changes in their lives both for themselves and their children. However, the successful navigation of this transition depended upon the existence of a

reliable financial and childcare infrastructure. Grants, daycare subsidies, and income assistance allowed the women in this study to minimally support themselves and their children while they were going to school.

Many of the women in this study were hoping to leave behind negative schooling experiences. The socio-cultural challenges highlighted by the women in this study are consistent with those identified by other Adult Basic Education researchers. For example, just as the women in this study said they had experienced high school as a place where they felt alienated and incapable, so have participants in research by Luttrell (1997), Quigley (1992), and Tett (2000). The negative memories the women in this study had of their previous schooling days indicate the need for high school policies and practices that identify and support students who are struggling academically and emotionally. High school Career and Academic Preparation Programs (CAPP) are well situated to identify and provide help to students who face barriers to academic and personal success.

The women in this study faced unique challenges because they were mothers. Some of these women, especially those whose children were school-aged, were also re-evaluating what it meant to be a mother. They were sensitive to current North American messages about "ideal" motherhood and were struggling to define their own experience of motherhood in the face of these messages. They felt pressure from themselves and others to be involved in their children's schools and activities. They made schooling and career choices based on what kind of impact there would be for their children. They felt guilty about being away from their children too much.

Many of the women in this study faced the added challenge of coping with negative stereotypes about low-income single mothers being inadequate parents. These experiences

matched those of the women in Kelly's (2000) research. Furthermore, just as the young women in Kelly's study wanted to be seen in an empowering light rather than one of victimization, so too did the women in this study.

The inner-struggle that single mothers face because of negative stereotyping, and that mothers in general face because of societal pressure, is not addressed adequately in the public sphere. In its role as an educational institution, the college environment would seem to be an appropriate medium for challenging traditional notions of motherhood that serve to oppress women. There are a number of ways that educational institutions could help to combat oppressive mothering discourses, including the negative stereotypes associated with mothers who are unmarried and poor. For example, course curricula could involve studying alternative (non-North American 21st century) mothering beliefs and practices. Lavell (1998) argues that institutions could explore ways of more explicitly expressing appreciation for the life experiences that poor lone parents contribute to the institution. Instructors could also be involved in creating language and concepts that make women's work visible (McMahon, 1995). Feminist researchers in the social sciences could work to increase the scarcity of research concerning the needs and circumstances of poor and working-class women (Little, 1998; Long & Cox, 2000). According to Long and Cox (2000), many poor and working-class women face "a complex array of stressors and are the most vulnerable to this stress because of the very limited access they have to resources that...would help them to respond effectively" (p. 117). Yet, little is known about their ways of coping with these stressors.

Another way that colleges could recognize and value the experiences mothers bring to the institution is by developing policies and procedures for waiving the requirement for volunteer hours many programs have. Many mothers bring a wealth of experiences that may

be even more valuable than the experiences that are gained from volunteering. As we have seen, the student-mothers in this study faced time constraints, both in terms of hours in a week and in terms of years to devote to education, which are being further constrained by the requirement to fulfill volunteer requirements.

This study confirmed the advantages of centralized services for low-income students. First, such services help students to navigate the cumbersome bureaucratic processes required to apply for funding. Second, when we consider how negative stereotypes emotionally impact low-income single mothers, it is easy to understand why women would not want to go door to door identifying themselves as "single mothers on welfare," and how having to do this could discourage participation.

Sadly, recent provincial government initiatives have resulted in the closure of the B.C. Benefits Office, increased tuition fees of 30%, reduced daycare subsidies, and reduced income assistance. Seth Klein, Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Analysis (January 21, 2002) has listed some of the cuts to income assistance as follows:

- Shelter allowances for families with two or more kids will be cut.
- Welfare benefits for single parent families will be cut $70 a month (affecting approximately 60,000 children).
- Single parents receiving child support will no longer be able to keep $100 of this money as they were before.
- People on welfare who have children will no longer be able to keep $200 from employment earnings as they were before. Those found guilty of "fraud" will be banned from receiving welfare.

- Single parents will now be considered "employable" after their youngest child reaches 3 years of age (down from 7). First Call (the B.C. Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition) reports that approximately 15,000 children will be affected by this move.
- "Employable" parents (with children older than 3 years) will only receive full benefits for 2 out of 5 years, after which time they will see their benefits cut by 11%.
- Full-time post-secondary students will no longer be eligible for welfare. They will have to turn exclusively to student financial assistance.

These cuts follow the troubling Ontario case of Kimberly Rogers, who died in her sweltering hot apartment last summer, 8 months pregnant, while on a 6-month house arrest for welfare fraud. Ms. Rogers's had collected welfare while receiving student loans to attend the social services program at Cambrian College. Even though she had graduated with top marks and had excellent prospects for entering the paid labour force, she was allowed to leave her house only 3 hours per week and was denied benefits for 3 months, thus forcing her into destitution during her pregnancy. Subsequently, repayments for her debt were deducted from each welfare cheque, reducing her monthly income from $520 to $468. After paying $450 rent, she was left with $18 for groceries and other expenses. Her death will be investigated this October (Frenschkowski, 2002).

The present funding reductions resemble the welfare "wars" Fraser (1989, p. 144) referred to more than a decade ago. As Fraser (1989) and Gaskell and McLaren (1991) have highlighted, when governments reduce funding for education, health, and social service programs, women are hit hardest. Women are more likely to work, or aspire to work, in these

fields than men are. Women are more likely to be poor, to rely on income assistance, and to be lone parents than men are. Also, lone mothers tend to be younger, and consequently have less employment experience and less formal education, than lone fathers (Oderkirk & Lochhead, 1992). Furthermore, lone mothers tend to have lower incomes than parents in two-parent families do (Oderkirk, 1992). Finally, Townson (2000) and Lochhead and Scott (2000) point out how even women in intact two-parent families may have unequal access to family income.

According to Townson (2000), approximately 2.2 million Canadian women have a low income. Also, more than half (56%) of all families headed by mothers are poor, having household incomes that are on average $9000 below the poverty line. The depth of their poverty will no doubt increase as a result of cuts in welfare payments.

These cuts are likely to have long-term effects for the children of women relying on income assistance while raising children alone. McLanahan (1985) reports that children of families headed by lone mothers are at heightened risk of experiencing persistent poverty in adulthood, and this is due more to economic deprivation than any other factor. Therefore, policies that are aimed at increasing the incomes of female lone parent families "may be quite successful in eliminating some of the intergenerational disadvantages currently attributed to family structure and single mothers" (p. 898).

Many of the cuts to education will start to impact in the fall 2002 semester. Therefore, at the time of this report, it is too soon to know what kind of consequences these spending reductions will have for the women in this study and others in similar circumstances. However, a recent report by the president of the college where this study occurred predicts that, due the recent cancellation of the B.C. Benefits grant (and consequent closure of the

B.C. Benefits Office), the college expects " a significant reduction in the numbers of income-assistance students at the college" (e-mail document, 2002). The Ministry of Education has indicated that the educational needs of income-assistance students will not necessarily continue to be met through public sector institutions.

Since the closure of the B.C. Benefits Office, students receiving income assistance have been re-directed to the Women's Centre, Student Services, or First Nation's Student Services. Even when the B.C. Benefits Office was open, women in this study talked about how they sometimes missed important information about such things as applying for funding. They also spoke about the onerous foundational work they had to do to secure funding for living, educational, and daycare costs. Decentralizing this service would seem to heighten these problems. The B.C. Benefits Office was a sort of home base for low-income students, so at least they were confident going there to ask questions and could find out when and where to fill out which form. It will be necessary to consider effective ways of supporting and communicating with low-income students.

Given that the women in this study faced several challenges that were unique to them, it is understandable that they wanted opportunities to connect with women in like circumstances. They wanted to be able to talk about the challenges associated with being a single parent, to explore ways of feeling more empowered, and to share information about such things as funding options. As Rossiter (1988) has found, many women value the opportunity to participate in a consciousness-raising type of group where they can challenge oppressive discourse.

Perhaps the reason the women in this study emphasized their desire for a support group was that, like women in Edwards' (1993) study, they found it difficult to meet and

form friendships with women in similar circumstances. Also, most of the women at the satellite campus were either not aware of, or were not able to, participate in Women's Centre activities. They were not in a position to travel to the main campus, nor were they able to arrange childcare very easily outside of their regular daycare hours. Several of the women at the satellite campus were not even aware that a Women's Centre existed. In contrast, women who had taken a course at the main campus at some point were more likely to be aware of Women's Centre offerings. There is a need to explore ways that women at satellite campuses can be involved in Women's Centre workshops and support groups. Also, the fact that many of the women in this study were somewhat disconnected from the larger campus community speaks to a need to involve instructors and their classrooms in the planning of such events. This could perhaps involve integrating these activities into the curriculum.

This study has reinforced findings in other studies (e.g. Andres, et al, 1996) that classroom instructors have the capacity to impact substantially the successful program participation of students. By participant account, DVST instructors were in tune with the non-academic issues faced by student-mothers. Participants found their instructors to be sympathetic to their circumstances and to create a respectful learning environment. Also, participants indicated that the classroom represented their primary connection to the college - they did not access a lot of support services or participate in many campus activities outside the classroom. These findings reinforce the prominent role played by DVST instructors and suggest their potential role as conveyors of information, coordinators of support networks, and links with other services. These findings also highlight the importance of strong linkages between instructors and support service departments.

Other implications for policy and practice coming out of this study relate to the fact

that 7out of 8 participants were entering careers that were in traditionally female fields, many of which would offer low pay and little chance for advancement. On one hand, the participants in this study are a monument of higher education's potential to enhance quality of life; on the other hand, however, their experiences remind us how only a very narrow and low-paying range of options is accessible for women raising young children. Implied again is the crucial role of instructors in empowering women to consider careers that will truly allow them to achieve financial independence. Career counsellors and high school teachers share this responsibility.

Townson (2000) has found that, increasingly, women are working in fields characterized by part-time, contract work which does not offer financial security. Women accept this kind of work because they lack better employment options and adequate childcare, and because society still expects they will assume most of the childcare and homemaking responsibilities (Long & Cox, 2000). Employment policies are required that recognize how many women (and men) must combine employment with caregiving responsibilities. Policies that increase accessibility and affordability of daycare for Canadian women in general are also required in order to enhance women's access to secure jobs that pay enough to support a family (Townson, 2000).

Lochhead and Scott (2000) emphasize how, although education and employment experience are the best ways to escape poverty, short-term education programs often do nothing more than prepare women for low-wage positions. In order for women raising children to really escape poverty, long-term educational programs aimed at employment in high-demand secure fields are required. Then, not only is it enough to help women find employment, but "bridging" (p. 50) programs, such as those that would continue to help

women with childcare and medical expenses, must be available until women manage to establish secure footing in the labour market.

Lochhead and Scott (2000) also stress how policies should be developed in such a way that women are not dependent upon other family members as they move toward achieving financial independence. Current policies assume that family income is distributed equally among all members of a family and do not consider the needs of individuals in the family. Two of the women in this study were not eligible for daycare subsidies because their mothers were providing care for their children. This resulted in at least three problems. First, the work the participants' mothers were doing in providing childcare (when they could have been doing other work) was not valued economically. Second, the participants were put in the awkward position of relying too heavily on their families, which strained their relationships. Third, the participants did not have, and could not afford, back-up childcare arrangements should their mothers suddenly not be available. This policy reinforces young mothers' reliance on their families of origin rather than assisting them in their endeavors to secure financial independence.

This study has also revealed the pressing need for more comprehensive daycare on college campuses. None of the women in this study could make use of the daycare on campus because of age restrictions, waitlists, or prohibitive fees. Some of the women in this study had missed classes and other important college events because their childcare arrangements were suddenly not available. Caring for a young child should not restrict one's participation in the world (Rossiter, 1988). Hornosty (1998) also found many university daycares to be too restrictive to meet the needs of most women on campus. She has argued that, in order to create a "woman-friendly" (p. 192) institution, there is a need for affordable

daycare centres with evening, weekend, before and after school, summer, sick, emergency care with flexible hours for children aged newborn to 12 years (especially for special functions). Daycare policy and planning must involve student-parents in planning discussions in order to offer services that match their needs.

Future Research Directions

The results of this study indicate some future research directions. The data from this study could be used to develop a survey for distribution to a wider Developmental Studies student-mother population at the college. For instance, since Women's Centre offerings, daycare services, and funding information surfaced as important issues, these could be expanded upon in a survey. Findings from this study could also act as a starting place for discussions in focus groups or support-group action research.

Another important direction for further research would be to look at how the children of the women in this study are impacted by their mothers' decision to participate in further education. Lareau's (2000) research suggests that children raised in working-class homes may have less favourable grade school experiences than children raised in middle-class homes. This is partly because working-class parents have less experience with post-secondary education than middle-class parents do and are consequently less likely to pass "cultural capital" along to their children. It would be worthwhile finding out how the children of the women in this study will benefit from their mothers having pursued higher education.

There is a need for research that focuses on mothers who are eligible for Developmental Studies participation but who have not enrolled in DVST programs. Without such research, the current study provides only half of a story at best. The women in this study were remarkably motivated to continue their studies. Most of the women in this study also

had good support networks in place before they decided to enroll in the program. It could be that other women have thought about enrolling but have not had adequate supports in place, or have had too many obstacles to do so. For similar reasons, it would also be revealing to interview women who have left the program. Finally, it would be worthwhile to follow up with the women from this study in a few years to see what impact education had on their lives.

Limitations of the Study

This study had a number of limitations related to sampling. Potential sampling bias stemmed from the fact that this study took place in the summer semester, when there is only about one-third of the usual number of students at the college. The summertime is also unique because it is when children are home from school. Whereas the women in this study with school-aged children had chosen to take courses despite their children being home, it seems highly plausible that a number of women chose not to take courses in the summer because their children were home from school.

It is also the case that 7 of the 8 participants were taking courses at the smaller satellite campus and only 1 was taking a course at the main campus. There was also a disproportionate number (5) taking DVST 355, 4 in the same classroom. It is difficult to know why this profile occurred. It could be that news about the study spread by word-of-mouth in this particular class. It could also be that one instructor promoted the study more than others. Whatever the reason, it is important to note that the campus and course distribution represented in this study was by no means representative of the larger Developmental Studies Program distribution.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to learn about the experiences of Developmental Studies student-mothers in a community college from the voices of student-mothers themselves. In the end this study provided a glimpse not only into the world of women finding time to do their homework and scheduling their classes around daycare and school schedules. It also provided a glimpse of women living in poverty and raising children, mostly alone, while attempting to secure a brighter future for themselves and their children. This study also added to the body of literature that has heard women talk about the challenges of attempting to simultaneously enact the contradictory ideals of motherhood and public sphere participation. It is hoped that this study will help to promote policies, practices and research that consider the perspectives of Developmental Studies student mothers, in order that they can be supported in their endeavors to enjoy both motherhood and public sphere participation more fully.

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APPENDIX A: DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Note: This is not a comprehensive list. It contains course descriptions only for courses women in the study were taking or referred to taking previously.

DVST 245 Reading and Writing for Student Success
(1.5 credits)

This is a seven week reading, writing and study skills course designed to assist those needing preparation for 200 and 300 level course work. Skills introduced/reviewed will include basic reading strategies appropriate to success and guided writing experiences designed to develop greater volume, clarity and precision of expression. Attention will be given to developing attitudes and behaviours appropriate to academic success. Reading materials will include newspaper and periodical articles and published essays as well as student essays.

DVST 255 Reading/Writing – Fundamental Level (6 credits)

This is an integrated reading and writing course. It is designed for students who need to develop and improve basic skills with composing and comprehending written texts. The course focuses on reading and writing as processes, and attention is given to spelling and vocabulary development. Assignments and exercises focus on current events and issues relevant to the students' lives.

DVST 355 Reading/Writing Intermediate Level (6 credits)

This is an integrated reading and writing course. It is designed for students who need to develop comprehension of academic text and the expression of ideas in a variety of formats including academic essays and reports. The course is appropriate for students who are preparing to write the GED exams, to enter vocational or career programs at a college level, or to enter the sequence of preparatory courses for university transfer reading and writing work. Reading work in this course will emphasize summing up main points, analyzing points of view, and responding critically. Reading material used will be at an introductory college level. Writing work will require students to make use of information, concepts and analyses from their reading work and to employ these in developing academic organization, content and language in their writing.
Prerequisites: DVST 250 and DVST 260, or DVST 255, or DVST Assessment *

DVST 310 Mathematics I (3 credits)

The course deals with a variety of topics in algebra and geometry. It is designed for students with no previous experience in Algebra. Algebra topics include operations with rational numbers; order of operations; roots; powers; rules for exponents; polynomial operations; factoring; solving linear equations in one variable; problem solving and solving linear equations by graphing. Geometry topics include perimeter, area and volume of geometric figures and forms; lines, angles and triangles.
Prerequisites: DVST 210 or instructor permission

DVST 410 Mathematics II (4.5 credits)

This course deals with a variety of topics in algebra and analytic geometry including number and number operations; roots and powers; integer and rational exponents; monomials and polynomials including operations and factoring of combined types; operations with rational expressions; equation-solving and problems leading to linear, quadratic, and rational equations; graphs of linear equations; systems of linear equations solved by substitution or elimination; functions and function notation, and the graphing and analysis of linear and quadratic functions.
Prerequisite: DVST 310 or instructor permission

DVST 411 Mathematics III (4.5 credits)

This course deals with a variety of topics in geometry, trigonometry, and algebra – including relations and functions – and follows the curriculum for BC Schools Mathematics 11. It is designed for students who plan to take further courses in mathematics for transfer credit. Topics include: quadratics, factoring expressions requiring grouping, rational expressions and complex fractions, quadratic equations using the quadratic formula, rational equations and formula rearrangement, radical equations, exponential equations with related bases, relations and functions, direct and inverse variation, sketching graphs and functions, graphing techniques and the determination of equations, and trigonometry.
Prerequisite: DVST 410 or instructor permission.

Source: Lower Mainland Calendar (online, 2002).

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW

To start off the interview, I'd like to learn some things about your studies

How long have you been taking courses here?

What are you taking this semester?

At this point, do you have any plans to take more courses after this semester?

What made you decide to start taking courses here?

What was going on in your life in the few years before you came to the College?

When was the last time that you were in school before you came to the College? How long ago was that? What kind of schooling was that?

Overall, how was that experience for you?

Overall, how do you feel about your experience here so far?

How do feel you're doing in your courses?

How about your assignments – how useful are they to you?

...And the classroom – how comfortable do you feel there?

What does the instructor do to create that atmosphere?

Next, I'd like to sense of the relationship between your school life and other parts of your life, such as home and friends.

How would you describe a typical week in your life right now?

How does it feel to have a week like that?

How would you describe your current living arrangement?

What does it take to manage your finances?

How are the household and childcare responsibilities taken care of in your house?

How would you describe your personal experience of being a mother right now?

How does being a student affect the way you feel about being a mother?

And how much does having children affect your studies?

How do your friends and family feel about you coming to school?

How, if at all, have your relationships with family and friends changed since you started taking courses here?

Next, I'd like to find out what kind of support you find most helpful.

What, if any, college services have you used since you started taking courses at the College?

(E.g., Counselling Services
Centre for Students with Disabilities
Learning Centre
Academic Advisors
Women's Centre
First Nations Students Services
B.C. Benefits Office
Peer Support Services
Student Finance
I-CARE Program)

How helpful have you found these college services?

What or who has been the best source of support for you at the College?

Overall, how well would you say the College meets your needs as a student who is also a mother?

In your opinion, is there something that the College could do better to help a student mother achieve her educational pursuits? What is that?

Who else, if anyone, is a source of support for you right now?

E.g., Friends you know from outside College
Your husband/partner
Your children
Your parents
Other family members
Friends you have met at college
Other people from outside of college

What kind of support does _____ provide you?

Does anybody try to offer you help that you'd rather not have? (If yes) Please say more about that.

What kinds of supports will most help you to meet your educational goals?

I'd like to finish off by asking you some very general questions.

How old are you?

Have you ever been married?

How old are your children?

Do you have any health concerns (physical or emotional) that might complicate going to school for you?

What is your first language?

How would you describe your cultural background?

I don't have any more questions. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your experience as a mother and student?

Anything you think I should have asked that I didn't?

FEEDBACK FORM (APPENDIX D, cont.)

Please think back to the time of your interview and answer the following questions according to what was true at *that* time.

Pseudonym

In order to protect participants' anonymity in my report, I will refer to participants by a first name that is not their real first name. Is there a name you would prefer to be called? Or would you like me to come up with one for you?
(Here's your chance to have an alter ego!)

I think a good name for me would be_____ Pick a name for me ____

Participants Portraits

I will begin my report with a brief portrait of each of the participants. This is what I was planning to write about you. Please write below whether you feel this paragraph portrays you accurately. If you don't think it does, please write a few notes about how you think it should be changed. (Note that I won't be calling you "Participant #1", as I do below. Instead I will be calling you by the name you indicate above, or if you prefer, one that I choose for you.)

Participant #1 is a twenty-four year old lone parent of a two-year old son. She is of Czech-Canadian background. She was divorced shortly after her son was born. She recalls how having her son and then going through the divorce led her to a "big realization" that she "needed to do something with (her) life." Participant #1 is taking third level developmental studies English and Math in preparation for the nursing program. Her career plan is to become a registered nurse and specialize in public health. Participant #1 has a strong work ethic and so finds being on social assistance "really degrading." She and her son are living in a basement suite in her parents' house and her mother is her primary childcare provider.

- ❑ I agree with how this is worded
- ❑ I would like to make these changes:

Results from Your Interview (Appendix D, cont.)

Following is a summary of what I thought were the main themes in your interview. Please read each of these summaries and indicate underneath them in the space provided whether you "Agree" that they accurately portray your feeling at the time of the interview.

Events Leading to Your Enrollment in the DVST Program

Strong Desire to Improve Your Life

One of the main reasons you decided to further your education was because you wanted a brighter future for yourself and your son. You wanted to be able to support your son "without falling back on the system."

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Negative Stereotype of Being a "Single Mom on Social Assistance"

Being on the system made you feel degraded. You felt that if people knew you were on the system they might see you as lazy, when in fact you are a hard worker.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Life Changing Events

Having your son and going through a divorce were life-changing events for you. They led you to the realization, "I need to do something with my life." This, in turn, led you to thinking about going back to school.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Previous Schooling Experience

High school was not horrible for you, but it wasn't great either. You didn't feel motivated to challenge yourself in high school. You also found some of the decisions you had to make at that time rather overwhelming.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Good Supports Were In Place

Before you went back to school, you had already in place a good support network, involving your parents and friends.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

Your Overall Experience of Being a DVST Student-Mother

A Positive Experience

Overall, being a student-mother at the College was a very positive experience for you. You were especially proud of how you were doing academically.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

Being a Mother Made Finding Time for Homework More Difficult

You found it hard to do homework when your son was awake because he wanted your attention, but you also found it hard to do homework when he was asleep because then you were tired too.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

Being a Mother Motivates You to Do Well in School

Knowing that you will be able to better provide for your son was a strong motivation for you to continue and do well in school. You also wanted to be a good role for your son, so this motivated you too.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

Guilt

Sometimes you felt guilty leaving your son to go to school and to do homework. You sometimes felt you should be spending more time with him or doing more for him.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Managing Time

Even though it was difficult to find time to do your homework, you felt you could handle the schedule of combining parenting with your part-time school schedule.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Your Barriers to Going to School

Childcare

Even though your mother was providing childcare for your son and you found this arrangement quite agreeable, you were worried about what would happen if she were ever not available. Having quality childcare was essential to your being able to continue going to school.

You also believed that you should have qualified for a daycare subsidy to pay your mother for the daycare she was providing – that you should not have had to go elsewhere for daycare just so that you could qualify for the subsidy. You further felt that even if you did qualify for a daycare subsidy, it might not be enough to cover the cost of a quality daycare.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Finances

It was a struggle to manage your finances. You had to go without some things, like clothes for yourself and toys for your son, and do some compromising. You relied on grants and social services to go to school. If these sources of funding were discontinued, you would have had to take student loans, which would result in a large debt at the end of your program.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Your Supports System

Family and Friends

You found your parents to be very excited for you and to offer a lot of practical support. However, at times your relationship with your mother was a little strained because you were not able to pay her for childcare. You also found that living in the basement suite at their house gave you very little privacy. In sum, even though you really appreciated everything your parents were doing for you, you would have preferred to be more independent.

You didn't have a lot of time to spend with friends, but the fact that some of your friends had already gone a back to school after they had become mothers was motivating for you.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

College services

You weren't too familiar with the support services available at the College. However, you had been to BC Benefits several times and found them very helpful. They helped you get started at the College by giving you information about funding and how to plan your coursework. You also found the academic advisors to be a great resource for planning your coursework. Both of these services helped you plan your future and set goals.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Classroom Support Network and Instructor

You found the group work in the classroom made for a supportive atmosphere and helped you learn. You felt comfortable there. You also found your instructor to offer feedback in a way that made you feel supported and not bad about your learning.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Your Recommendations to the College

Daycare

You felt it should be easier than it was to get a space in the daycare at the College, especially for children under three.

❑ Agree, or Change the following details:

_____

_____

Themes from Other Participants

Following is a list of some of the themes that came up in other participants' interviews. I have included them here simply for your interest and to show you how your answers fit into the "big picture" of this study. However, feel free to comment on them if you wish. For instance, if you see that other participants talked about something you now wish you had said, feel free to add that comment. Or if you see that other participants said something that doesn't describe your feeling, feel free to comment on that, too. I have provided space at the end of the form for these additional comments.

Apprehensions about Going Back to School - *Some participants said they were nervous and had mixed feelings about going back to school.*

Delegating Housework and Other Responsibilities– *This applied mainly to participants with older children who said that after they went back to school they needed to get their children and other people to help out more.*

Scheduling Classes – *Some participants mentioned restrictions on when they could take classes because they had to get their children to and from school.*

Difficult Transition Period - *Some participants said they had gone through a difficult transition period before they started attending college. Deciding on a career goal, doing the paperwork for funding, getting mentally prepared, and arranging daycare was stressful.*

The Paperwork – *Some participants said that at the end of each semester, they had to spend about two weeks doing all of the paperwork to arrange funding and daycare, and to register for the next semester. This is a time when they should have been relaxing after the semester, but instead they were busy making sure they had arranged everything. They found this quite stressful.*

Bridge-in Course - *Some participants said how much they valued taking a course (DVST 245) that helped students in their first semester make the transition to College.*

Family Functions - *Some participants said they liked College events, such as bar-be-cues, that children could attend.*

The Women's Centre – *Other participants commented that they wished they had better access to the Women's Centre or that the Women's Centre would offer more in the way of support groups or workshops for student-mothers, especially at the David Lam Campus.*

Getting Information Out to Students – *Some participants felt that the College could have done a better job of getting information out to students regarding support services and funding.*

Additional Comments: (*e.g. anything you thought I missed or your reactions to the themes from other participants, anything you wish you had said during the interview - Feel free to continue writing on the back of the page if you need more room):*

APPENDIX F

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Name	Age	# Children	Children's Ages	Course (Campus)	Semesters at College	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Educational Goal
Daniella	24	1 son	2 yrs.	DVST 355 (Satellite)	1	Half-Czech/Half-Canadian	Divorcing	Nursing
Brooke	22	1 son	2 ½ yrs.	DVST 355 (Satellite)	1	Canadian	Single	Home Support Attendant
Meesha	44	2 sons	8 yrs. 10 yrs.	DVST 355 (Main)	3	West Indies/ Canadian	Divorced	Classroom & Community Support
Sunny	22	1 son	3 yrs.	DVST 411 Biology (Satellite)	2	Dutch-Canadian	Single	Elementary School Teacher
Zahra	37	1 son 1 daughter	12 yrs. 15 yrs.	DVST 410 ESL (Satellite)	5	Iranian	Married	Computer information Systems
Kimberly	24	1 daughter	3 yrs.	DVST 355 (Satellite)	2	European-Canadian	Single	Child & Youth Care Counsellor
Mae	40	1 daughter 2 sons	7 yrs. 11 yrs. 15 yrs.	DVST 355 (Satellite)	3	French-Canadian	Divorcing	Therapeutic Recreation
Marie	34	1 daughter	3 ½ yrs.	DVST 255 (Satellite)	2	French-Canadian	Divorced	Resident Care Attendant