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Single mothers, welfare, and reforms : oral histories of single mothers on welfare

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SINGLE MOTHERS, WELFARE, AND REFORMS:
ORAL HISTORIES OF SINGLE MOTHERS ON WELFARE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Sema Nicole Seyedi

December 2007

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ABSTRACT

SINGLE MOTHERS, WELFARE, AND REFORMS: ORAL HISTORIES OF SINGLE MOTHERS ON WELFARE

By

Sema Nicole Seyedi

This research explores, through oral histories, how time limitations imposed by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program impacted single mothers on welfare, causing punitive hardships and effectively keeping single mothers' families in poverty. The participants include single mothers who pursued higher education and either dropped out or stayed in school despite changes created by the 1996 welfare reforms. The participants were on Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and in the Greater Avenues for Independence program when it changed to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and CalWORKs. The research design includes a literature review, and content analysis of oral histories. These interviews allow the women to speak about what is significant to them as single mothers who have experienced welfare and higher education. Qualitative research shows that single mothers who stayed in school experienced fewer hardships than those who dropped out.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There was little evidence of single mothers in California in the Bay Area in the early 1960s. Women raising children on their own was not discussed, nor was divorce. In the 1960s it seemed most families were structured with the father as the primary bread-winner. The mother took care of the children, and the children were sheltered from any harsh realities of life. When a woman separated from her husband, it caused major upheaval; it was still not spoken of openly. A family would leave the neighborhood in what seemed like a flash: one day they were there; the next, they were gone.

Historically, women in the United States have not been empowered, inside or outside of the home. With the second wave of feminism came empowerment: the power to work for equal pay, to gain education, to control our own reproductive rights and much, much more. With this empowerment came frustration for women and girls. They were receiving mixed messages at home, at school and in the mass media. They were holding on to tradition sometimes, but being told to let their hair down. They were told to wear pants, but the rules at school had not caught up and they were required to wear dresses. They were judged feminine if they did wear dresses and masculine if they wore pants. There were messages such as, "You've come a long way baby," with cigarette advertising showing old Victorian ways, versus the new pants-wearing, cigarette-

smoking, modern woman. All these messages were confusing to some young girls who aspired to be good wives and mothers. At the same time, some women did not want what their mothers had: abusive relationships they could not leave, lack of financial independence, and lack of control over their own lives and education.

It was like fighting a battle: out of this battle came some casualties. The battle for feminist change left many women outside the mainstream. The traditional family paradigm was not working for these women, yet being a single mother trying to work in low-wage, dead end jobs where health and child-care were non-existent, did not seem like a positive option. All this and no education: how was a single mother going to gain meaningful employment?

The author and the interviewees are women who grew up in an historical time that demanded change from women. Women's work was changing. Being merely a mother and a homemaker was seen as a negative thing for poor women, and working was seen as a way out of poverty. Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s created mixed messages about roles for girls and women. There were messages about the family that came from television shows. *The Brady Bunch* showed a single mother marrying a man who takes over as sole provider for her and her three daughters while she offers him the convenience of being a wife and mother to him and his three sons. This show reinforced the idea that women should not stay single after divorce, but remarry to recreate a male-dominated household. In contrast, there were shows like *The Partridge*

Family, headed by a single mother. Even with her single status and artistic leadership of the band, she was often seen as subordinate to the family's manager, Mister Kinkaid. These images sent different messages and created a double conflict for young girls who faced discrimination and rejection for acting contrary to what those around them expected. Young girls were living in a borderland between traditionalism and modernism. The conflict heightened for girls as they grew and matured into young women. According to Dodson (1999) they faced teachers who did not understand them, parents trying to mold them, boyfriends who pressured them, and peers they had to please, amidst a welter of mixed messages from the media, religion, morality and ethics of the time.

Things changed radically from the 1960s and 1970s to the more conservative decades that followed. In the 1990s single women on welfare were a common sight on many college campuses. Single mothers on welfare (SMW) often sought higher education at community colleges. A single mother I knew was learning how to read beyond the most basic literacy skills. She had two daughters, who were three and five years old at the time. This mother made it through college and on to meaningful employment. It took her nearly seven years to get her degree, because she was so far behind academically. She has been off welfare for five years now. She started working for the college while she was attending school, and then got a job working for NASA. Now she is able to support her family, and her daughters are in high school, doing well and scheduled to graduate in the future. In another class there was a SMW who was

sure she could get a job in the computer industry if she had basic skills. She completed her Associate of Arts degree and got a job working in the computer industry. Recently she reported that she is making \$90,000 a year, her daughter is getting all A's and B's, and is scheduled to graduate from high school within the next academic year. This is a dramatic reversal from her mother's situation at a similar age and represents their family's entry into stable middle-class status.

These two women are representative of a large population of single mothers on welfare attending community college in the early 1990s. Not all SMW who attended community college had such outstanding outcomes. This research project tells the stories of five single mothers who had been on welfare and how time limitations of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) disrupted their goals. Some SMW made it and others were forced out. Terzieff (2006) reports that the 1996 welfare laws pushed many SMW out of college. She reports that the time limitations of the PRWORA imposed by the new laws have forced women out of higher education and that the number of SMW who return to college has declined. One single mother that Terzieff (2006) reports on had just about completed her school diploma, but knew it was not enough for her to sustain her family. She wanted a job that would offer her benefits. She felt that being on welfare was demeaning to her and her family. She reported that she did not want her daughters to grow up to be on welfare and felt that she provided a positive role model for her

daughters by being a college student. This SMW is a model of the aspirations that both feminist and welfare reformers encourage, yet her quest would be slowed by the so-called welfare reforms.

According to Terzieff (2006), a result of the 1996 "reform" meant women on welfare were no longer allowed to use higher education as job training. Enrollment of SMW in higher education has dropped by about 114,000 in New York. In the mea time, Terzieff (2006) reports that the population of SMW in the United States has increased from about eight million in 1994 to almost fourteen million in 2006. Holyfield (2002) reports similar increases in the welfare population. Both Terzieff (2006) and Holyfield (2002) report that welfare recipients are about ninety percent women. Holyfield (2002) suggests that time limitations on SMW are a symptom of a problem greater than just limiting single women's educational attainment. Holyfield (2002) and Cobert (2005) both suggest that limiting single mother's time on welfare constricts their time in higher education, creating a system of oppression that limits their ability to obtain skills for the jobs of the future. These restrictions have consequences across generations, as SMW cannot provide their children with a full range of educational options.

Terzieff (2006) reports that time limitations and the loss of higher education as a job training alternative make it harder for SMW to escape poverty. She reports that single mothers who earn higher education degrees earn about seventy-five percent more than those who do not. Terzieff (2006)

also reports that only ten percent of single mothers have degrees, while sixty-two percent have only a high school diploma and the rest have never graduated from high school. The structurally dangerous part is that in the future more jobs will require higher education. Tariff (2006) reports that by 2015 nearly sixty percent of all jobs will require a bachelor degree. What is alarming is how SMW are being denied the opportunities to engage in higher education as a way to prepare for these jobs. Thus, a downward spiral in earning potential is guaranteed for SMW.

In the early 1990s many SMW heard about a program that would help them go to college. How they became aware of the program differed for each woman, but they were all mothers on welfare wanting to improve their quality of life through higher education. These women got the chance to participate in higher education through the Greater Avenues for Independence Program (GAIN). Most of them did not get to reach their goal due to welfare reforms that mandated time limitations. A five-year maximum to receive benefits was imposed.

Every mother's journey is her own and each one is unique. Motherhood has been challenging for millions of women in late twentieth-century America as old traditions change and new types of families emerge. Mothers have found that old views of motherhood create a gap of understanding regarding who they are and what they are doing. They have realized that if the world does not adapt to them that they must adapt to it. Single mothers are doing just that: they do the

things they need to do to survive. Telling the stories of single mothers who have adapted through the welfare system is one way of empowering women.

As a result of the literature review, the historic accounts of single mothers on welfare (SMW) who leave welfare are largely untold (Dodson 1999), and SMW are having a hard time making the transition off welfare and into the work arena. Time limitations of the PRWORA and loss of the opportunity to use higher education as job training, are hurting their ability to leave welfare for employment. The research question is: are time limitations having an effect on educational attainment for SMW? A content analysis of oral histories of SMW will form the primary source from which to address this question. This research project intends to give voice to the personal stories of SMW.

Such stories illuminate the social facts in one's life that shape the options given to a person. This thesis concerns interlocking systems of oppression that attach to female bodies. More significantly, this thesis also considers self-validation for women who become mothers to children in America, amidst the feminization of poverty and the struggle to make ends meet. This thesis is about higher education as a vehicle out of poverty.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social science literature has largely ignored the issue of access to higher education for SMW. The histories of SMW who re-entered college are nearly non-existent. There are small samples of their stories (Rose 1997, Edin and Lein 1997, Polakow 1993, and Sharp 2004), but these say little of SMW who are dedicated to graduating from college and leaving poverty behind for good. The positive part about this is SMW sometimes become very productive people and these stories need to be told. For instance, Gene O'Connell was a SMW, but due to life-changing circumstances she became the first woman Executive Administrator appointed to San Francisco General Hospital. There are many other women who left welfare to work in jobs that are meaningful and these women are great role models for other SMW. Stories about single mothers who leave welfare and succeed can help change the way other SMW see themselves. Having positive role models is a major factor in success, whether it is in motherhood, sisterhood, education or in the work force. West Valley College has had many female role models such as the president, Marchel Fox, along with many of the teachers and counselors. Seeing women in these positions exposed other women to possibilities that they might not have seen before.

Background about Single Mothers on Welfare (SMW)

The 1996 welfare reforms (PR) were created when the economy was doing well and the need for trained employees was vast. Welfare reforms were working for some poor people at that time who took advantage of the training opportunities available to low-income people. However, with the recent and continuing changes in the economy, what are the ongoing effects of welfare reform for working class people of the USA going to be? Currently, there are jobs to be found, but for the most part those jobs require training and advanced education.

Their Stories: Poor, Welfare, Low-Wage Single Mothers and their Children

After reading the literature on SMW there are gaps between what has been written and the reality of their lives. Until recently, most of what has been written is very general and speaks of the most downtrodden groups of SMW. In the literature there is discussion of the history of motherhood and the lives of their children. There is also an exploration of the “other” mother (the “other” referring to mothers who live alternative life styles) and how this “other” exploits the safety net created to help her raise her children. There is a lot written about how SMW bridge the gap of poverty, and how welfare dehumanizes single mothers and their children, causing a stigma that keeps them in the cycle of poverty (McCuen 1996). Other authors explore the myths of the working poor in

general to give a more global view of poverty and the struggles to find employment.

Polakow (1993) approaches the issue of single mothers from a historical perspective that views SMW as the “other” mother. SMW are the “other” to mothers who have a husband. Polakow (1993) explores motherhood from a historical point of view and suggests that society as a whole has not always seen mothers as brightly as the new modern nuclear mother is viewed. Polakow (1993) writes about how in the past, mothers, at least in the upper class, were not seen as nurturers taking primary physical care for the family; servants and nursemaids would do such work. She suggests families are changing, but that there are myths about the family and motherhood. These myths are linked to the patriarchal structure that gives the husband the ultimate power over everything having to do with the family. Polakow (1993) suggests that in European-descent families this “in-charge” status took all power away from women and children. She goes into great details about the similarities of bourgeois and poor mothers and the roles of women in the industrial revolution. Historical accounts of childhood and motherhood help a reader to see how attitudes towards poor women and their children have evolved into how we now view SMW, putting them in the “undeserving poor” category.

Polakow (1993) opens the reader's eyes to the views of childhood that one might not have imagined. According to her research, childhood has not always been seen as it is today. In the Medieval and Renaissance periods

childhood was treated much the same as adulthood. Children lived in common quarters with adults and were exposed to, and interacted in, all the things that adults did. She goes on to report about children in the Industrial Revolution and how they were viewed as a commodity. Her analysis of children and the views of childhood are enhanced by her use of the theory of "otherness." The theory of the "other" found its strongest voice with Simone de Beauvoir (1999), who suggested that women are the "other" to men (Lemert 1999). Defining women as the other to men makes them subordinate in all ways. Woman could be the nurse, but never the doctor. She could be the teacher, but not the principal; she could be the secretary, but not the executive. De Beauvoir (1999) writes that women cannot think about themselves without comparing themselves to men. Her message implies that men have been the subject and women have been secondary. This attitude of "men-first, women-second" keeps emerging as feminist women tell their stories. Polakow (1993) uses it to compare the lives of rich children to poor. She writes that there is an Anglo-Saxon attitude of indifference toward poor children. Along with the individuals facing "other" status, the family as a whole also faces being compared to their counterparts. This has been the subject of quantitative research by Casper and Bianchi (2002). They compare women who are educated vs. those who are uneducated, and how education affects a woman's marital status, as well as her income potential.

Education is also imperative for women to staying off welfare. Erika Kates (2004) presents some uplifting facts. She reported that for each level of education a woman gained she was able to earn more, and thus education is pivotal in keeping women off welfare.

In California, a study of 1,500 recipients showed that their level of education was positively and directly correlated with leaving TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families]. Fifty-three percent of women with college degrees had left TANF, compared to 30 percent with some college, 25 percent with high school diplomas and 15 percent with no high school diploma. Even more reassuring is the acknowledgment that with each additional year of education the odds of staying off aid increased 20 percent.

In the twenty-first century the changing face of what constitutes a family is keenly debated. There are now single mothers and fathers, as well as gay and lesbian couples, and they are all facing a backlash, because conservative attitudes in the media and politics are attempting to restrict ideas of what a family is, should be, or can be. There is a big push by conservative politicians to exclude families that are different. Any type of family that challenges the stereotype is looked down upon and is given an "other" status. The alternative family faces discrimination even in their own neighborhoods. At the slightest sign of trouble for these "other" families, it will be reported that the family structure is at fault. SMW and their children challenge views of what a family is, because they threaten the male-dominated, patriarchal culture that remains the norm. Condemnatory attitudes about alternative families have been recorded by

mainstream culture, compounding the negative way some SMW feel about themselves as productive humans (Sidel 2006, and Riemer 2004).

According to Dodos (1999), SMW are stigmatized in ways that inhibit their progress. They are viewed as unworthy, lazy, drug addicts who are out for a free ride. This view keeps them out of jobs, because employers think they are a high risk. SMW know they are despised and they dislike being on welfare because the stereotypes of them often weaken their self-esteem. This can cause depression, making their lives even harder, as they encounter a self-loathing that tears them apart inside. Part of this self-loathing is in response to the inability to keep their families intact, safe, fed, housed and cared for on the minimal amount of support they receive from welfare. Zucchini (1997) reports that SMW recognized the hatred directed towards them from the public for wanting to raise their children. Zucchini (1997) finds this public opinion odd given the history of how welfare was created to shelter women from work and to encourage them to stay home to care for their children. He writes that welfare was previously seen as a positive solution to keeping children out of institutional care.

Current welfare reforms require mothers to leave their children for thirty-two hours a week to be cared for by someone. Previously welfare was seen as a positive motivation to keep children with their parents. Welfare support was supposed to keep families intact, helping develop a family where the parent was the primary person seeing to their children's needs. That was what the financial help of welfare was originally intended for: to help the family respond to the

absence of one parent. Today's welfare is different. Although the support is still given in response to an absent parent, a family on welfare is also in competition with the two-parent, two-income family. Most two-parent families find that they need both incomes to raise a family in today's economy. Keeping children with their parents was previously seen as a positive action by society to keep children healthy, safe and cared for. Currently, the compelling needs of the economy, and a desire to protect the nuclear family from the "other" represented by the SMW, undermine the very family values welfare proposed to maintain.

Roberts (2002) reports that welfare reforms have made it harder for SMW to maintain their families' health, safety and care. One major issue is finding child-care that is affordable for their children. Poor SMW are not only competing with other poor mothers for available child-care, but with mothers from two-parent families who have larger incomes that allow them the luxury of paying more for care. Child-care that is affordable diminishes when there is competition for that care. This creates a gap in the available care at an affordable price. The care will go to the two-parent families who have more income to spend, over the low-income/no-income mother who has less money to spend. Along with the competition for child-care, social welfare funds are being capped and future spending will not meet the needs of all low-income working women. Roberts (2002) suggests this will cause serious problems for poor mothers who will either have to rely on inadequate child-care or quit their jobs. Roberts (2002) argues that a major problem with this is that these kids are at risk of unwelcome

intervention from child protective agencies. The 1996 welfare reforms may also affect families who take over child-care for other family members' children. If a grandmother is required to participate in a work program where she goes out and works away from the family, she may find herself in the same situation as the SMW. This may mean that she, too, is unable to meet the demands of that program. Like the SMW, she will risk having her children taken out of her care.

Taking children out of the care of parents or other available relatives is hard on children in many ways, and the cost of taking them out of the care of their families is often more than the welfare aid that keeps them with family. The cost of group-home care versus welfare, where the child can stay with biological family, in dollars, is about ten to one (Roberts 2002). In other words it costs approximately \$5,234 a month to place a child in a group-home setting in Santa Clara County as compared to paying a SMW \$534 dollars for herself and one child. That is just for the cost of housing the child. Once a child ends up in the social service system the costs increase. There are the social workers, therapists, clothing allowances and ongoing medical insurance. According to Roberts (2002), in Mississippi foster parents receive \$510 monthly, per child. In contrast, welfare for two children is about \$435 in cash and food stamps benefits for a month. It would cost an average of one to three dollars an hour to find child-care for these same children. At that rate a SMW could be paying \$128 to \$384 per month, per child, for care while she works thirty-two hours a week. This is a low estimate and does not include hours for travel to and from work. If

the single mother is on welfare these costs may be subsidized. The implication of this is that the state will still be paying for the care of the child. In most cases the cost of subsidized child-care will outweigh the TANF benefits.

AFDC was created to allow mothers to stay at home with their children to insure their safety, development and care. Roberts (2002) writes about welfare that helps some but hinders others by creating a family unit that can not care for their children due to child-care services not being available. This makes it impossible for the SMW to find work. This is a “catch-22” situation that makes the mother seem unwilling to work. This is then used as an excuse to reduce or stop the aid she is receiving. This downward spiral leaves mothers without aid, creating a system that ends up hurting the children. According to Roberts (2002), this is a near total reversal of welfare’s original intent. She notes that if “welfare was created to avoid the removal of needy children from their mothers, then eliminating welfare must have implications for child welfare policy” (177). In short, taking money away from already needy families creates bigger problems for more than just the mother. The whole family is penalized. This trickles down to others who are asked for support in desperate times, such as grandparents and/or non-profits.

Families' needs are in the forefront of most single mothers' minds. Single mothers are resourceful at making the seams of everyday life come together. The issues of how single mothers fulfill their families' needs are addressed by Edin and Lein (1997) and Polakow (1993). These authors write about single

mothers who face concerns in the areas of child-care, networking, health-care insurance, transportation and housing. One major concern for single mothers examined by these authors was the availability of good affordable child-care. Child-care was the determining factor that made it possible for most single mothers to go to school and/or work; mothers who lacked dependable child-care experienced more difficulties staying in school or keeping a job. The women who had a reliable family member to help with child-care seemed to have the easiest time fulfilling work and school goals.

In contrast, Dodson (1999) addresses the issue of child-care and comes up with a different perspective about relying on family members for child-care. According to Dodson (1999) a theme that comes up for poor girls and women who want to go to college is that they are often discouraged from going. They are presented with the fact that there is not enough money to go to college, or if they were already in school and became mothers, it was seen as neglectful of their children and family if they stayed in school. Dodson (1999) told of how families would show their disapproval of a SMW going to college by sabotaging her efforts: showing up late for baby-sitting obligations, or telling her that she was never going to make it. These attitudes make SMW question their decisions and motivation.

Since the 1996 reforms, welfare is no longer seen as a charity to help poor mothers, but as a way to modify their lifestyles and character. One example of this is the over-powering expectation of welfare-to-work. This

program is focused on changing the attitudes of SMW toward work, but is this really the problem? Edin and Lein (1997) argue that almost all mothers in their sample supplemented welfare benefits with work. Roberts (2002) also suggests that SMW are being taught to devalue their role as mothers, putting work in front of their families. Roberts (2002) writes that "Welfare-to-work programs send a message to recipients that contradict the importance they themselves place on mothering" (196). This causes a conflict between work and welfare that is even more pressing for poor mothers who worry about their children while working. Most mothers worry about their children when they are not there to care for them, but poor single mothers have a higher risk when leaving their children in the care of others due to the fact that good affordable child-care is not available to them. They also worry more about their children's safety due to the nature of their life on the edge. There is more risk to their children while they are at work because of their low-income status. They wonder who will keep their children safe from crime, drugs and gangs, and who will be there to help them with homework. As a result, SMW who want to leave welfare for work will have special needs when finding work. They have the need to know their children are safe and cared for by a responsible person.

Ginzberg (1999) reports that the plight of poor women entering the work force has been familiar to him for a long time. Ginzberg (1999) tells how he has been a major player in the labor market for the last sixty years, through six presidents, from Roosevelt to Clinton. He was the chairman of ManPower for a

year, and he has insight to the conditions of the working poor in America.

Ginzberg (1999) suggests that single mothers have the hardest time being employed when their children are younger, until the first child attends school. He adds that a SMW also faces problems in the areas of education and skills, juggling work and home, health-care, finding extra money for clothing for work, traveling to and from work, meals away from home and other incidentals of acquiring and keeping a job.

A key survival skill that single mothers use is networking. Polakow (1993) writes about one mother who felt deserted and exhausted when she faced a break-up. She tried to make it on her own, but had to depend on family and friends for help. In Edin and Lein's (1997) sample, many women used family and friends to help bridge the gap of poverty. According to Polakow (1993) and Edin and Lein (1997), many single mothers turned to agency-based strategies to help make it. These agencies are places that help the poor with essentials, such as food and money for utilities or rent. These are agencies such as churches, outreach programs, women's shelters, food pantries, the Salvation Army and other community resources. Single mothers often relied on charitable organizations to help them make it through the end of the month.

Polakow (1993) and Edin and Lein (1997) found that another major issue for single mothers is health-care insurance. Sometimes women will report staying on aid because they need health-care benefits that were not available at their low-wage and unreliable jobs. Health-care as an issue has been on the

minds of most Americans in the last few decades, debated in every election cycle. One's class, race and/or gender may affect what level of concern a person holds for health-care issues. Sidel (2006) and Edin and Lein (1997) report that many women face extreme hardships in this area as they are primarily in positions that do not include health-care insurance. The jobs that do include health-care insurance can have a co-payment. The co-payment will be taken from the woman's paycheck, leaving her with less money to support her family. According to Newman (1999) there is a gap in meeting the needs of poor people's health-care issues. Newman (1999) reports nearly half of the people in the United States that work earn below the current poverty line and have no health-care insurance. There is a tremendous inequality between the care of patients who do not have insurance compared to people who have higher economic status. SMW and their children who have pre-existing medical conditions find it hard to take a low-wage job with no health-care insurance for fear that when they try to purchase health-care insurance they will be denied due to pre-existing conditions. Health-care insurance is a major concern for SMW and can often be the determining factor in their ability to accept a job.

Two other major concerns for SMW are transportation and housing. Polakow (1993) and Edin and Lein (1997) address the difficulties SMW face when it comes to transportation and housing. Transportation issues can either make or break a SMW's effort. SMW face hardships in relation to transportation that others may look at as just another obstacle. One traffic ticket or flat tire can

cause a SMW to lose her home or job. The financial hardship can mean not having enough money for gas, food, rent or other essentials. Also, most SMW find it hard to pay for the upkeep on a car; this is where the myth of the Cadillac-driving welfare queen comes to an end. First of all, to qualify for welfare the recipient must own next to nothing. If she owns a car, its value cannot exceed the limits. Currently, welfare recipients in Santa Clara County can own a car valued at no more than four thousand, six hundred dollars. If they own one worth more, they will not be eligible for services unless they sell the car and spend the money. According to Edin and Lein (1997), most single mothers report using public transit as their main means of transportation.

Both samples show single mothers relocating to more affordable housing. Relocation is a theme that comes up for different reasons. Sometimes the women are forced to move because they need to be closer to a job, or because they cannot afford a rent increase. When rents are increased, single mothers express the need to double up or move in with family or friends. In contrast, Zucchini (1997) writes about SMW who organized a tent city in response to welfare reforms and homelessness. Some SMW joined because they were homeless and the tent city offered them a free home. This freed up their welfare checks for food, diapers and clothing. Two of the SMW in the tent city shared a shack with their six children. They both had dreams of having a nice home, day care and a job after leaving welfare.

Many authors reviewed for this project focused on the derogatory myths about working SMW and low-wage workers in the United States of America. Polakow (1993) and Edin and Lein (1997) dismiss the myths that single mothers do not work. Every single mother in their samples was either working or had recently held a job. Most single mothers were also enrolled in school or had talked about going back to school. These stories are told in the hopes that they will change how single mothers and their children are viewed. Despite the fact that most single mothers worked, they still had trouble making a better life for their families and remained in poverty (Polakow 1993, and Danziger, Corcoran and Heflin 2000).

Even when SMW work they still experience hardships and still have to rely on supportive networks to provide for their families. Danziger, Corcoran and Heflin (2000) suggested that welfare reforms were positively received because most people believed that work would raise SMW out of poverty. This myth has been dispelled by the research of McCrate and Smith (1998), who suggest current welfare reforms do not work. They argue that the constructions of welfare reforms emanate from an ideology of assumptions that are contradictory to the lives of low-income single mothers and they dispel these popular assumptions in an effort to actively correct a punitive situation that threatens single mothers and their children. They recognize that a call for mandatory work and time limitations set forth in a bill presented by the governor of Vermont was punitive to SMW. Their research orientation was to challenge the harsh reality of

welfare reforms by empowering and liberating single mothers from the assumptions that there is viable employment, that work will end poverty and that child support along with earned income credit will bridge the gap of poverty (McCrate and Smith 1998).

McCrate and Smith (1998) used existing data bases to show that single mothers, when employment is available, usually end up in service jobs where low wages and unreliable hours threaten their ability to fight hardships. Their research explored the needs of a single mother with two children. They used Renwick and Bergmenn's approach to the "basic needs budget." Renwick and Bergmenn developed a measure of expenditures that include such expenses as shelter, transportation, food, clothing, personal needs items, taxes, medical care and child-care. They then calculated the needs of a single employed mother compared to those who are not employed. McCrate and Smith (1998) acquired a five percent sample from the Microdata Sample for the 1990 Census to analyze the jobs that women held and their hours and earnings in Vermont. They used the average wages for women in three occupations and multiplied that by 1,000 to represent part-time wages earned. For example if women earned \$6.25 an hour they would earn \$6,250.00 for that year working part-time. These calculations gave them the base numbers for determining the unmet needs of single mothers who worked part-time compared to single mothers who were unemployed. The unmet needs for employed single mothers who held jobs in positions such as sales and administrative services ranged from \$223 to \$1,395

per month. For those that had no jobs, unmet needs were \$3,095 per month. This shows that women who worked part-time will be better off financially, but at what cost to their families and their futures? If working low-wage jobs keeps women in poverty, then what are the answers to relieving poverty? Can education help these single mothers achieve independence conclusively and prosperously?

Peterson (1995) explores how work affects SMW and examines what factors affect single mothers' length of time on welfare by assessing how welfare reforms assist them. She uses statistical data to demonstrate how different variables affect single mothers who are trying to leave welfare. Petersen (1995) approaches the problem of time limits by examining data on "demographic, economic and other factors that affect the rate at which such families leave welfare" (1995, 19). Peterson (1995) challenges the punitive nature inherent in time limits put on welfare recipients. Danziger, Corcoran and Heflin (2000) also explore what it takes to get SMW out of poverty in their article, "Work, Income, and Material Hardship after Welfare Reform." Their conclusion is that declining caseloads for social workers do not equal improvement in quality of life for SMW and their families. The resulting conclusion of these three works is that single mothers who leave welfare for work are not necessarily, or even predominantly, leaving poverty.

Perceptions and History of Welfare

When the topic of welfare comes up in a conversation, the first thing that pops into some people's minds is a single mother they know. This will spark a story and the person will tell how the welfare mother they know has taken advantage of the system. The stigma of the single mother on welfare seems to always be the same. She is a woman who has too many kids, yet keeps having more; she has a nice car and buys steaks. She spends all her money on drugs and getting her fingernails manicured each week at the salon. All the while, her kids are running around the neighborhood smoking, drinking and doing drugs; they are hoodlums. Her kids never go to school and she gets money from her boyfriend. Some of these images have been constructed from imagination, others are from some women people claim to know personally, but more often than not, they are images that are fueled by the media.

Evans and Swift (1999) explore the role that media plays in shaping people's perceptions of single mothers on welfare by comparing newspaper articles from the early 1980s and 1994-96 to examine how the perceptions of single mothers changed. They found that the earlier articles were considered "soft" news compared to the later ones that were considered "hard" news. Soft news shows single mothers on welfare as needy and worthy of support. The earlier articles were considered soft news, because they focused on the fact that single mothers are people who should be pitied or are hapless. In contrast, the

later articles were considered hard news. The hard news focused on single mothers as bad, irresponsible and undeserving of any help or assistance. Evans and Swift (1999) concluded that this is evidence that the changing perceptions of single mothers are fueled by the media. They suggest that this media attention has created fear and hatred directed at this group of socially needy people. Although public benefits are much more than aid for needy families headed by single mothers, the most popular image is that of the SMW. Most people can refer to the popular myth of the welfare queen driving a Cadillac, but if the truth be told, welfare in the United States is actually a social contract with everyone who lives here.

Most of the citizens of the United States use welfare at some point in their lives, whether it is unemployment benefits, Social Security or TANF. The United States has had social contracts with its people for a long time and these are always being re-examined. Many people benefit in ways they are not even aware of, such as corporate subsidies that trickle down into their wages. Unfortunately, there is an attitude that some types of welfare recipients are more deserving than others; valued groups include veterans and the elderly. The idea of the deserving and undeserving poor is explored by Schorr (1999), who argues that the mania over work ethics is not consistent with family values. Schorr (1999) is not downplaying work, but observes that paid work is not required of all people. He notes that upper-class mothers have no stigma put on them for not working outside the home. Schorr (1999) even notes that retired

people on pensions who may be receiving medical aid and Social Security face no stigma for not working and getting aid. In great contrast, the recipients of TANF who attend college do get stigmatized as non-worthy. Schorr (1999) finds this ironic and sees the flaws of spending considerable money on early childhood development as counter-productive when society denies the importance of parenting over paid work. These same types of arguments are used by Hewlett and West (1998). Schorr (1999) and Hewlett and West (1998) have concerns for children's well being in a world where it is normal for women to return to work before their child is six months old. Schorr (1999) cites a Carnegie study on children that reports they are receiving substandard care that is hurting their development.

Hewlett and West (1998) write about how the devaluation of poor women and children is running over into attitudes towards poor, two-parent, and working class families. Hewlett and West (1998) write about two societies, one that they were raised in, and the one in which they are trying to raise their children. They note the contrast in how families are viewed, and report that the media does its best to put pressure on parents by denigrating them. In the past, a family took pride in its achievements as a family unit, yet now it is not enough to be proud of achievements if they do not provide earnings. Even though parenting is a tremendously important job, the work outside the home is seen as more significant than that of being a parent. Hewlett and West (1998) write that no one looks at what type of parent a person is; the focus is on how much money a

family earns, spends and has. They argue that this is in sharp contrast to the values of the 1880s and 1890s, when feminists like Jane Addams were looking to secure a woman's right to care for her children and home rather than working outside of it. Historically, a woman's job was seen as helping humanity through the proper care of her children. Hewlett and West (1998) suggest that maybe Addams foresaw what the 1980s and 1990s held, with sky-rocketing crime rates and poverty. Children who are left alone have little guidance from their parents, creating an atmosphere of chaos. Hewlett and West (1998) report that the United States has a high rate of poverty, about twenty-three percent for those under six years of age. Schorr (1999) suggests poverty is to blame for the fact that a full-time, minimum wage position can not support a family of two at the poverty level. He reports that this problem is compounded by welfare reforms that add more low-wage workers to the work force, depressing wages further.

The turning point for welfare in the United States was the Great Depression. Kronenwetter (1993) reports that for the first time since the Industrial Revolution Americans were experiencing extreme poverty. Kronenwetter (1993) reports that during the Depression many investors lost everything. This caused a chain reaction through all levels of income. This created a situation where loans could not be paid back and people were losing their homes along with their livelihoods. There was no safety net, so those who lost everything had extreme situations of pain and suffering due to hunger, lack of shelter, and lack of education. At that time, President Hoover felt that money

should go to the big businesses, to generate more jobs. This form of welfare was not enough. The jobs generated only helped a few of the people who needed it. Things started to change dramatically for the poor when Franklin D. Roosevelt became president. In his New Deal programs, more jobs were created, but his plan also held consideration for the unemployed. The face of welfare was changing. Welfare was now being seen as a war on poverty with its main emphasis on employment for poor men as a way out of poverty. During this era most women were not expected to work outside the home.

Even as recently as the 1960s there have been debates about requiring SMW to work outside the home. Nancy Rose (1997) explores some of the social welfare programs for families on AFDC in her article "History Lessons." In 1967 Work INcentive (WIN) encouraged mostly men from two-parent families, on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), to participate by seeking employment or educational training. The primary difference between the WIN program and the ones in place now is that there were incentives for men to work. Realistic incentives were needed to attract men's attention to work. One such incentive was to let the family keep more income by protecting part of the monetary benefits. The WIN program placed a high emphasis on education and training and remained in place until the Reagan era. According to Rose (1997), Reagan's focus was on a new welfare that was driven by workfare. In 1981, Reagan pushed for mandatory workfare. Workfare places demands on all participants receiving AFDC or TANF. It meant that each participant must work

for her aid. If a SMW cannot find a paid position/job on her own, she is expected to volunteer her services in return for cash aid. When she takes a non-paid position, she will not receive credit for her work with Social Security, workmen's compensation, or unemployment. This is problematic for poor women's futures, creating a culture of poverty that targets women because of their reproductive abilities. Women who opt to have children may limit their options to earn and save money for their future. Out of Workfare came programs like California's GAIN program. GAIN helped welfare recipients get off welfare and out of poverty through education and training. It was mandatory for recipients to participate once their children were two years of age.

According to Rose (1997), one of the most successful components of the GAIN program was the self-initiated person (SIP) program that helped recipients obtain a college education. Being a SIP sometimes created problems, but the ultimate goal was educational training that would lead to employment. Once a SIP entered the GAIN program, she would have two years during which she was eligible to receive services. This is problematic, since college takes four years at the very best. One creative action many SMW used was deferments to help buy some extra time. Deferment helped SMW stay out of the GAIN program. A deferment could be an illness that lasted more than thirty days, being a caretaker to an elderly parent, or being in an abusive relationship and seeking help to leave the relationship. Some women could not avoid GAIN and found themselves in situations where they did not have enough time to finish their

educational goals, while others managed with deferments. Rose (1997) gives an example of how one of her students, with the help of an activist, got an extension to finish her B. A. degree and then started a graduate program. She managed to get her Masters in Social Work and now no longer needs welfare. Although some SMW make it through their educational goals, Rose (1997) found that most women who were in the GAIN program struggled to stay in school, and time limitations were the main problem. Rose (1997) reports that as a result of time limitations, many SMW no longer considered college as an option. GAIN initially seemed to be on the right track, but with welfare reform, programs like GAIN were rendered less effective

Rose (1997) explores how welfare reforms are changing SMW behaviors. She suggests that the reforms are a new experiment with behavior modification, using such tactics as Learnfare and family caps to control and manipulate women's behaviors. Learnfare is a program that monitors children's school attendance. If it is deemed that children are not attending school on a regular basis, money will be deducted from the family's aid. Another behavior modification is family caps. Family caps put a maximum on the amount of aid a family can receive regardless of new births. When there are new family members, the family can not receive additional money. This modification is to discourage women from getting pregnant, but it hurts all members of the family. When a new child is born the family has to make do with the aid it received before the birth. Whether social welfare focus is on education, training, workfare

or behavior modification, the government claims that their goal is to reduce poverty. Yet the effect often reinforces poverty by pushing SMW into low-wage jobs with no health-care and extremely high costs for child-care.

Self-sufficiency through employment is not a new concept in combating poverty. There have been different programs to help AFDC and TANF recipients to get jobs. One program, called Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS), helped provide training, education, work experience and support services (Petersen, 1995). These services were seen as a way to increase the employability of people on aid, but like most programs created to help, their funds and resources were not sufficient. The most popular type of participation in JOBS was in educational programs. Education, for the most part, has always been seen as a positive force to combat poverty, until the 1996 welfare reforms.

CalWORKs (2002) is an employment services program created after the 1996 welfare reforms, called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) that Congress passed under President Bill Clinton (McCrate and Smith 1998) to help SMW in California. CalWORKs' program replaced the GAIN program. The primary goal of CalWORKs (2002) is to help SMW prepare for self-sufficiency through employment. This program is mandatory for all adults who receive cash aid. Each participant is expected to attend an orientation for employment services and must keep all appointments with her employment worker. Each SMW will have her own contract, or what is called a self-sufficiency plan, which gives the details of what she has to do for

her activity, along with what she must do to meet other CalWORKs (2002) requirements. Once a SMW gets a job, she can not quit for any reason or take another job for lower pay. She must submit proof of progress when it is requested, and maintain a log of the hours that she participates in her required activity. The main focus of CalWORKs (2002) is employment. The process of gaining employment through the CalWORKs (2002) program consists of meetings to hype the advantages of working to the SMW. She is told that she will have more money for her family and improved self-esteem. When a woman applies for cash aid, CalWORKs (2002) decides if she must participate in the program. Some people will be exempt from participation depending on their status. Not every person who is in CalWORKs (2002) will have to participate.

There are allowances for certain SMW. One exemption would be for younger mothers who are sixteen years old or younger, and those over sixty. If a SMW is sixteen to eighteen and is going to high school full-time, or is pregnant, and the doctor determines she can not participate, she will be exempt. SMW may also be exempt if they have a disability that lasts for thirty days or more, or if actively seeking medical attention to help with a condition. Non-parent relatives who care for children, such as a foster parent, are not expected to participate. Finally, if the SMW is the parent or caretaker of someone under a year old, or someone who can not take care of themselves, such as an elderly parent or disabled person, she does not have to participate in CalWORKs (2002)

Employment Services. The importance of an exemption is that when a person is exempt, it does not count against their time limitations.

CalWORKs (2002) is a temporary needs program that provides benefits to assist people in need. There are time limitations on how long a person can receive cash benefits and CalWORKs (2002) employment services. Effective January 1, 1998, all existing and new CalWORKs (2002) recipients can receive aid for sixty months. Employment services last for twenty-four months, after signing a self-sufficiency plan. The program offers different paths to participants depending on their job history and education. There is a job club that prepares SMW by instructing them on how to search and network for employment. Employment counselors work with SMW on accessing job lists and other resources. There are fax machines, typewriters, telephones and computers available for them to use. There are still some SIP programs that allow a SMW to go to a pre-approved educational program or vocational training as needed. If she can not finish the program within twenty-four months, she will have to do what CalWORKs (2002) requires of her through community service or unsubsidized employment.

CalWORKs (2002) has strict guidelines and rules for monitoring progress and activity. A SIP must submit grades each term and those participating in a basic education program must be evaluated every three or four months for satisfactory progress. Those who are seeking employment or who are employed must submit verification of attendance and wages each month to prove that they

are working the required hours. A participant must work thirty-two hours in a week if she is a single parent. In two-parent families, both parents must work a combined total of thirty-five hours. The SMW is penalized with an unfair amount of participation compared to the two-parent family. There are only a few good reasons a SMW might have for not participating in the CalWORKs (2002) program. These include temporary illness, either physical or mental. She may not have to participate if she is in jail, or has a family crisis, such as an ill child, ill parent or spouse, no available transportation, or no child-care for her children ages twelve and under who need assistance, or if she is a domestic abuse victim. CalWORKs (2002) also recognizes that there may be job-related problems, such as discrimination, having to travel far to get to work, job requirements that are more than normal job conditions, such as health or hazard standards that are bad, lack of workers' compensation, work that would violate terms of a union membership, or a job that would interfere with approved training or education.

If a SMW refuses to participate in the CalWORKs (2002) program, the county will try to determine why. The client will have twenty days to comply in which no penalties will accrue. If the SMW refuses or fails to comply, her cash aid will be lowered until she meets the requirements. The second time she does not comply, her cash aid will be lowered for three months, then she can apply for CalWORKs (2002) and do what is required for her to receive benefits. Each time after that the aid will be lowered for six months. CalWORKs (2002) also

monitors children's school attendance. If school age children do not attend school regularly cash aid will be lowered. All these measures are to help SMW become more self-sufficient through employment. However, as previously mentioned, these practices amount to behavior modification.

Both AFDC and TANF entitlements provide support for children who are missing the support of a parent, mainly the support of a father. Their families are often scrutinized because they have no father. It's a double-bind situation for families that are left fatherless. The full responsibility of caring for the family is left on one person, the mother. This creates a situation of bondage on the remaining parent. She must care for the children twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. She must provide shelter, food, clothing and other incidentals such as diapers, toilet paper, medications and school supplies. She must also be the supportive parent with all the love to give as well as the disciplinarian of the family.

Even with all this constant responsibility and pressure, SMW are penalized when they receive support. If the father does pay child support, the SMW only receives fifty dollars. The welfare department gets the rest. The welfare department sees the child-support payment as money due to it, since it is supporting the child all year around. It is pay-back to the welfare department. On top of the welfare department taking all but fifty dollars, there is a deduction of about twenty-four dollars from the SMW's food stamp allotment, because the money is seen as income, and her wages are adjusted accordingly. In some

instances, such as divorce, where the single divorced mother takes a job, her support order from the child's father, bestowed by the court, does not get reduced. The divorced single mother is not penalized when she receives a little extra money or takes a job. This means that a SMW is at a distinct disadvantage; being on welfare means the government can constantly monitor all assets of SMWs.

AFDC and TANF are programs that are set up to provide child support for families that do not have the participation of two parents and those who are low-income. These programs have created a system that encourages poor families to split up and fathers not to support their families. A single mother is more likely to qualify when the father is absent, because she is less likely to own property, such as a car. If these programs did not encourage the break up of families, the effects would be less drastic for families on welfare. Having the second parent in the family not only costs more, it also gives the family more support. The parents can split paid work inside and outside of the home. If the parents can work together, there is more support for everyone. This support is not always measured in dollars and cents. Most of women's work is not necessarily accounted for. No one puts a price on food preparation, laundry service, family transportation, cleaning, child-care and care of elderly parents who may be disabled and need their homes cleaned and food prepared. Welfare does not account for this and society at large does not acknowledge these services that are performed mainly by women (Edin and Lein 1997). A woman, single or

otherwise, might work most of her life performing chores for her family, leaving a gap in unemployment and Social Security benefits, as well as retirement and health-care insurance. This is particularly true of women who divorce after the children leave the nest.

Searching for the answer to economic independence for single mothers through education is analyzed by Payne-Adler (1998) in a collaboration created as a social action project at California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) in conjunction with the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) at Monterey Peninsula College. This book was one of the first books written that focused on single mothers on welfare who are in higher education, presenting a human face to these women who are stigmatized by their status as poor, single mothers on welfare.

In Payne-Adler (1998), Lasquade shares her knowledge of welfare reforms from the point of view of a community college EOPS and CARE counselor, who at one time had been on welfare herself. As of January 1, 1998, in California the welfare system, in response to federal reforms, changed GAIN into CalWORKs. CalWORKs stands for California's Work Opportunities and Responsibility to Kids program. This new program requires SMW to work or risk losing benefits. SMW are limited in the length of time they can receive benefits. There is a twenty-four month cumulative aid and sixty month lifetime restriction. These new changes are impacting single mother students who are trying to

break the cycle of welfare dependence through higher education. Having mandatory work and time limitations on educational attainment is punitive to poor single mothers.

Lasquade saw the effects it had on her students. Prior to the 1996 welfare reforms, SMW were encouraged to enter the realm of higher education as a means to elevate themselves. Many SMW jumped at the chance to upgrade their skills and education. They also discovered that school paid in more ways than one. For many SMW education helped them make ends meet by offering grants and loans available to all students, including them. These education grants were a great way to subsidize their lives. Not only did SMW receive cash grants, but they also had child-care available to them through community college daycare programs. This made higher education a very important vehicle for raising SMW out of poverty. Through education SMW were not only becoming emancipated from poverty, but education became a catalyst to open their minds as they had never been invited to do so before.

The Questions

What had happened to SMW who had started school as a result of their entrance into the GAIN program? The evidence has been minimal thus far. In the process of my research the discovery that SMW are having a hard time making the transition off welfare and into work appears ever so present. The focus of my research suggests that welfare to work is not bringing SMW out of

poverty and that time limitations are punitive not only to mothers, but also to their children.

What is the answer to ending the cycle of welfare dependence for single mothers? As suggested by McCrate and Smith (1998), there is no easy answer for single mothers regarding aid. There is still no national standard of child-care or health-care insurance. These two factors can keep a mother bonded to welfare, because they are very important to the survival of single mothers and their children. Another major theme that is addressed again and again is education (Harris 1997, Whitman and Gest 1995, and Tweedie 1999). Where are the SMW who were in the GAIN program? Who accounts for them?

The literature does not turn up much on re-entry students. K. S. Petersen's (1997) master's thesis explored the GAIN program and documented the success of students in the program at De Anza Community College. She reports that not all who wanted to participate in the GAIN program could do so, due to lack of funding. According to Petersen (1997), in the academic year 1995-96, De Anza had one hundred and sixty-one participants. Records for students who were in the EOP program at De Anza Community College show that about ninety-three percent of students who were in the program completed their educational objectives and went on to be gainfully employed. Although there has not been much focus on the educational success of SMW, education has been examined in the literature for its advantages to the teenage mother.

Harris (1997) addresses education for a different population, teen SMWs. I realized that single mothers are not a homogenous group; about the only thing homogeneous about them is the fact that they all have used their wombs to have children. Due to the differences among single mothers, they need to be researched using a paradigm of interlocking variables, such as where they live, what resources are available to them, their age and education. Harris (1997) and Hammerslough's (1997) findings suggest that education of single teen mothers is a bigger problem than originally anticipated. Their research on teen mothers shows that they truncate their education before giving birth or after. This means that they are dropping out of high school. What hopes do they have for college if their time on aid is used to finish high school? The ironic thing is that the very same president who introduced welfare reforms was the same one who promised that all Americans would have the right to get a college education. How can teenage mothers have dreams of going to college if they are locked in low-wage, unreliable jobs? Petersen (1995) points out that single mothers' success or failure in leaving welfare hinges on variables such as their education, work experience, working when entering AFDC and the age of their children. If education is a key to welfare mothers' success, then their stories need to be told.

CHAPTER 3

THEORY

According to Zulke (1995), theory is “a comprehensive explanation of apparent relationships or underlying principles of a certain observed phenomena” (538). Theory helps social scientists study aspects of social phenomena by giving a framework for a systematic explanation as to why something happens.

A new study could change a theoretical paradigm. “The researcher tends to focus on accumulating or clarifying particular findings rather than considering how the study’s findings fit into a more general understanding of the social world” (Schutt 1996, 19). When social scientists study social phenomena they often expect to find specific occurrences, but more important is how research explains the significance the findings have and how those findings can be used to change society. Social theories tend to build on one another through replication, either strengthening or refuting existing theory. In replication, social scientists seek to use others’ theories and methods, while also developing new insights to test a new hypothesis. When a new theory is suggested, the old one may not die, but it is refined in light of the new findings. Conducting oral histories of single mothers on welfare (SMW) will add to the existing body of theory about their lives by offering an alternative way of exploring their actions more holistically. This may provide a picture of interlocking systems of oppression that can impact

SMW, such as disabilities, poor elementary education, negative family and religious experiences.

Examining the literature of different disciplines helps show what core theories are available to explain social phenomena from a more holistic view. There are many different angles from which to study poverty in the United States. One crucial approach is to examine the lives of single mothers who are on welfare. These women, singled out as welfare queens, are demonized compared to other socio-economically challenged groups. Sociologists, psychologists, economists, feminists and other researchers have studied welfare, welfare reforms, and single mothers. Theories have been used to explain why people are poor. Feminist research has developed perspectives on poverty, single mothers and their children (Guernsey 1996). There have been many different methodological treatments, qualitative and quantitative, used to explore these subjects. This research project is an extension of research conducted to explain the lives of poor women. The lives of marginalized women, whose stories are largely untold, form the basis for this research, revealed in oral histories. This thesis seeks to connect traditional theory and methodology with a feminist perspective on the lives of single mothers on welfare. It will use several theories such as social facts paradigms, "outsider within" perspective, "experience as knowledge," and "symbolic interaction," to examine the lives of SMW. The methodology will be a qualitative approach. The research findings will not result in a collection of data with statistical analysis, but will feature

quotations from the oral histories with content analyses, to present alternative stories of marginalized women who are demonized by the media.

Durkheim's (1982) social facts theory is intriguing on a feminist level. Social facts theory explores all aspects of individual and group behavior from the facts of the situations. Durkheim's (1982) theory states that social facts are the commitments a person enters that are separate from themselves; some examples are religion, education, family, and laws. Durkheim's (1982) social facts theory explains that forces outside the self may go unnoticed unless a person resists them. Social facts theory states that social structures are external to the individual, because the expected behavior is outside the control of the individual. Durkheim (1982) suggests that an individual is part of the society they live in and they are not constituted by their own consciousness as much as by the forces around them. Durkheim (1982) alleges that the social facts are the result of organizations that have been in place and well-established throughout history. They are the practices, tendencies and beliefs of a common group, a social phenomenon with extraneous elements. These structures can be coercive to a person based on things such as gender, age, height, weight, hair color, eye color, where someone lives, or goes to school, how much money they earn, and the type of clothing they wear.

I suggest that the oral histories of the lives of SMW will show social facts different from the general view of the mythological welfare queen. In our own time, the family of the new millennium is seeing changes in structure that need

explaining. This can be effectively done through Durkheim's (1982) social facts paradigm (Jones 1986 and Karady 1996). Exploring the work of Emile Durkheim (1982) on social facts theory, it is easy to see how it can be used as a method to describe social and behavioral issues in the present society and within the lives of SMW who face welfare reforms. The social facts paradigm opened a gate to social research that is more holistic, allowing for a larger part of the story to be told. It is much more inclusive, providing a more diverse look at the social world. The social facts paradigm is also complementary to the questions presented in William G. Hartley's (1976) "Preparing a Personal History." Hartley's (1976) questions focus on the social facts of life and life's experiences. Adaptations of Hartley's (1976) questions were utilized in the oral histories for this research project.

As each situation is different, an outcome can vary depending on the situation and the demand characteristics at any given time. Demand characteristics, according to Hewitt (1988), constitute the setting in the social structure, larger than the exact place of an individual's behavior. SMW are not restricted to their low-income, single mother status. They belong to many structures in society. They are members of the PTA, students at universities, employees at companies, and participants in other institutions. This means that SMW are parts of social structures larger than the expectations they place on themselves. Welfare officers, teachers, family members and others can have expectations from the SMW, depending on their relation to her. SMW also

depend on the social systems they belong to and that affect them. A larger social structure controls an SMW outside of her status as a single woman and mother. Her race, class and gender are demand characteristics in her life, as well as the larger and more patriarchal society she belongs to. A society that demands women behave in one way and men in another creates inequalities.

Exploring the lives of SMW using socioeconomic data collected from oral history questions is complimentary to Durkheim's (1982) social facts theory, and can be employed with other theories, such as symbolic interaction theories, and many test hypotheses can be formulated. Goffman's (1959) symbolic interaction theory of dramaturgy is a framework for understanding the social lives of SMW. Goffman (1959) explores how certain groups are socialized to follow certain scripts. He suggests that these scripts result in a performance based on social standing in society. Similarly, Eric Berne (1964) implies that the performance is a script assigned us by our parents, and that it is set for us by the age of three. Goffman (1959) implies that the "dramaturgical plays" are handed down to us from myths and nursery rhymes and will vary between cultures and genders. Berne (1964) also suggests that they create a script that is determined by our parents, based on their standing within a given society. Yet all people behave differently based on their individual lives and their opportunities. As education increases, new opportunities and ways of viewing self come into view. What are the demand characteristics and scripts of SMW and can they change with education?

If demand characteristics and scripts play an important role in women's lives, then how women interpret them is important. Exploring women's issues from a feminist perspective and with feminist methodologies will help create a more holistic picture. The traditional framework of studies on SMW has been very limited in design, and even though the study may be replicated, the data and the facts will change with each study. No two SMW will be the same. My research project is biased in seeking out the stories of some SMW exceptional in their success. These SMW have succeeded either in college and/or in employment after leaving college.

I consider myself an "outsider within." According to Patricia Hill Collins (1999) the "outsider within" creates a specific view point on society, speaking or writing from the unique conditions of specific individual circumstances. For me, this "outsider within" perspective starts from the unique condition of being on welfare, and a graduate student with a sociology background. Being an "outsider within" creates a unique perception based on a foundation of theories, methods, and perspectives. This perspective is a view of welfare and its reforms that are not common to most social scientists who do research on SMW. It is a unique location that allows this research to have a specific standpoint. The sharing of personal experiences becomes the evidence (Collins 1999).

Experience is a suitable base of knowledge. The "social facts" (Durkheim 1982) and lived realities of SMW constitute evidence. Joan W. Scott (1999) explores the use of experiences as an authentic source of knowledge. She

takes a cue from Raymond Williams that experiences are closely related to experiment. Experience is the teacher. It is where learning takes place, thus knowledge is found. Experience is the test, and the knowledge is the lesson that comes from the test. This connection between experiences and experiment shows how knowledge or the facts can be similar to “testing and observation” (Hesse-Biber, Gilmartin and Lydenberg 1999). Experiences are the test, and the objectifying of the experiences is the observation. In this way, my life and those participating in the oral histories are the experiences, observations and/or tests that undergo the experiment in social welfare reforms. The oral histories thus become the observations. Scott (1999) also looks at the works of R. G. Collingwood, who suggests that experience, or the reflection of one’s own thoughts, are a foundation for knowledge. Thus my experience and these oral histories are the foundation for knowledge that will shed light on the dilemma of SMW and their struggle to leave welfare for work. Experience creates an observation that traditional social scientists might overlook, yet experience is a location from which the story of intertwining systems of oppression can be told. Living through the shared experiences led to the position of expertise or mastering of knowledge.

Similar to experience as knowledge, the theory of symbolic interaction encompasses the point of view of the person being explored. Lal (1995) discusses the idea that experience or symbolic interaction is concerned with the point of view of the person who is experiencing an event (the actor) and the

situation where the action takes place. In the case of this research project the actor is the SMW and the action takes place in the institution of higher education. Lal (1995) suggests that the actor is able to reason, express preference, and exercise choice despite constraints or lack of information. A SMW is able to do these things, but ultimately there is a social structure larger than her freewill that can impose on her ability to perform.

Lal (1995) writes “a symbolic interaction is a subjectivist sociology that makes the point of view of the actor and their definition of the situation the central feature of the analysis of collective action” (422). In this research project that is concentrated in the oral histories. According to Lal (1995), symbolic interaction’s main concerns are with social process. In this research project it is the social process of welfare reforms. Symbolic interaction does not look at social structures as the driving force of social interaction. For SMW the social interaction comes in the form of their experience with other actors within the institution of higher education where she learns that she can be a player and finds that she often succeeds in the social interaction. But the structural forces larger than herself demand that she rethink her social interaction, and she questions her ability to fight the social structures that are not there to support her individual actions. Lal (1995) writes, “Any analysis...should include consideration of context, that is, the particular historical and social setting and the particular cultural features of groups to understand the environment in which collective action is organized and in which experience takes place” (423). SMW’s analysis

of self comes from the experiences they have had whether as mothers, college students in CalWORKs or as employees. Each individual has a script that is her own and those can be explored through these oral histories.

Lal (1995) explains that acquisition of culture is crucial in the orientation of individuals and their activity. She implies that through acquisition of culture the actor gains patterns that she/he can use to communicate. This gives them a language of their own, which creates an experience for a group or groups that “directs individual effort and activity” (Lal 1995, 423). She calls this “collective action” and implies that it is socially constructed. Similarly, Gramsci (1999) clearly states that each human is capable of intelligence, and thus a philosopher in his or her own right, thus having a conscious mind and a moral code of conduct. This enables them to contribute to sustaining the status quo or changing it, but at the same time they are at the mercy of the superstructures. Gramsci (1999) implies there are two levels to the superstructure, one the “civil society that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private’ and that of ‘political society’ or ‘the State.’ These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of hegemony,” (260) that is the dominant group throughout society (either direct domination or juridical). This dominance is seen in the events that have taken place due to welfare reforms. Many SMW who were looking to higher education found that new laws restricted their ability to continue. The conversation about education among SMW, the institutional structure to assist SMW in their college careers, and the new laws that essentially closed these

opportunities, are all examples of socially constructed collective action. Lal (1995) writes that the actor sees the world through social objects, whether they are physical things, concepts or emotions. The actor places meaning on the objects based on “past socialization and social interactions” (Lal 1995, 423). The meaning can change in relation to imagination, as well as old and emergent meanings based on current and/or future social interactions. The object gains meaning through the actor’s interpretation of the situation and includes past experiences, interests, goals, norms, values and more. Thus welfare reforms have tremendous power over women due to past experiences that have had similar repressive effects. Foucault writes that (1999)

Doctrine is, permanently, the sign, the manifestation and the instrument of prior adherence - adherence to a class, to a social or racial status, to a nationality or an interest, to struggle, a revolt, resistance or acceptance. Doctrine links individuals to certain types of utterance while consequently barring them from all others (417).

In short how “the actor accounts for how they will construct their activity in concert with real or imaginary others can never be predicted” (Lal 1995, 423). Their behavior will be affected by change. Change for a SMW could include such distinct events as relocation to a new school, city, or marrying someone of a different religion, race or class.

For women as a whole it is important to hear positive stories of how other women are succeeding. Lal (1995) writes about the importance of the self as an object. She suggests this self is constructed by the way “the actor has been treated by significant others” (Lal 1995, 423). She takes from Goffman the

notion that the “self is on-loan from society” (Lal 1995, 423). This on-loan self is “successively defined and redefined by waves of significant others” (Lal 1995, 423). The self is also affected by opportunities, as well as the constraints and imagination of the meaning a person attaches to them.

Lal (1995) takes from Blumer the ideas that “sociological ethnography and the analysis of human documents are two of the research strategies that correspond to the theoretical requirements of symbolic interactions” (424). She writes that ethnography is a systematic way to describe the experience of groups and/or the actor. This is done in the natural setting, in field work and participant observation. Fieldwork gives the researcher the ability to acquire knowledge that is available to the actor. Participant observation and fieldwork mandate that the sociologist “take the role of the other” (424). This helps them construct explanations. Symbolic interaction also uses human documents. Lal (1995) borrows from Plummer, Thomas and Znaniecki that human documents are “autobiography, biography, letters, newspapers, sermons, and other material that reveals the subjective life of the actor from his own point of view” (424). Like these human documents, the oral histories in this study explore the experiences of SMW through their eyes. Lal’s (1995) discussion of symbolic interactions leads to the conclusion that the construction of identity falls on the actor at the individual level. An important issue confronting SMW is their identity and how it manifests. SMW continue to face negative stereotypes, poor educational opportunities, and other challenges that lower their self-esteem. Symbolic

interaction and “outsider within” approaches share a positive evaluation of women’s subjective experience.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Most traditional social scientists claim to do research from a non-biased perspective. This may cause them to miss things that feminist research may see as important and viable information. Whether data is quantitative or qualitative depends on the type of research questions being asked, the theories and methods utilized, and the perspective and nature of the data that is considered. According to Leedy (1997), quantitative and qualitative methods have characteristics that distinguish them from each other. Manipulations of numbers and facts that organize, reduce and describe the data qualify as quantitative analysis (Schwandt 1997). Social scientists usually start by isolating the specific variables and control them from other, more extraneous variables. The collection process is usually a large sample, and the data is then analyzed in a way that will support or refute the original hypothesis. By looking at one group, the social scientist deduces what will occur in a similar group, using their theory to generalize to another population. They use numbers and statistics to analyze the data that is presented in a formal scientific voice (Leedy 1997). In my review of the literature, this is the usual and normal process to explain the lives of single mothers on welfare (Casper and Bianchi 2002). They reduce her to an age, the number of children she has, the years she was employed or unemployed, her work experience, the years she was on welfare, and so on. This reduction of the

SMW's life opens the way to objectify her by taking away her human face and story, making her a number.

In contrast to quantitative collection of data, Leedy (1997) suggests that qualitative research builds on theories more than testing them for scientific validity. This involves questions that tend to be more general, and then the researcher collects large amounts of text-based data from a small group of participants. Qualitative research seeks to accumulate information about a research project. Oral histories are a qualitative collection of carefully selected questions that reveal a holistic picture of the lives of the participants. The findings are often presented with words or descriptions that seek to accurately express the phenomena. Using qualitative data collection and a feminist perspective allows room for a more holistic picture, allowing the participant more freedom by not limiting the questions. Using open-ended questions lets the participants direct their answers instead of forcing one direction. Claiming a feminist perspective in research also allows me to claim my bias as a woman, mother, graduate student and welfare recipient. This in turn opens a new view on being a SMW. As a result of my interest on the effects of policy change in the lives of SMW and their children, I have developed an original feminist perspective, being an "outsider within."

Social science research tends to be taught from a very male-dominated perspective, but could be taught from a feminist perspective. Research in most disciplines tends to be a very exacting process that limits creativity in design,

word usage, format, theory and methodology. It is implied through this discipline that social scientists must stay neutral and non-biased when conducting research. Feminist research, according to Gluck and Patai (1991), is research done by women, about women and for the most part for women, eliminating the pretense that a social scientist is not involved in the research they conduct. This research is about me and other women like me and explores the question of how single mothers on welfare are demonized by the popular media, creating a poor script for women who need to use social welfare systems to bridge the gap of poverty, and overcome interlocking systems of oppression.

Original research engages a passion that sparks interest in accruing new knowledge. My first research project "The Effects of Negative and Positive Stimuli on Implicit and Explicit Memory" was very exact; everything was accounted for such as the sample, how the sample was randomized, how the stimuli was presented, and the order in which things were done. There were clear-cut independent and dependent variables. There were considerations for how the participants were treated, what the atmosphere of the room was, how the directions were read and so on. This exacting methodology impressed me and followed me into every project I did. I wanted to control every variable and follow an exact procedure in all my research projects. After reading about feminist research, my views of how research could be conducted changed. Having a cookie cutter mold no longer seemed as important as the individual stories that women could tell. Women were no longer merely independent

variables to be compared to men. They were the center of the research and the most important focus in the investigation.

When I first started doing research projects, they always revolved around comparing two genders. This was interesting, but still left the man as normative and the woman as the exception. When I surveyed only women for a research project on gender differences in computer-mediated communications, I was left wondering how they compared to men. After being exposed to feminist perspectives, I realized that women could be the center of the investigation. The outcome was that women became the independent variable. They became the center of the investigation. The systems of oppression and the social facts that controlled some of the outcomes in their lives were dependent variables. Instead of collecting a mass of statistical data, oral histories appeared a more congenial way to explore individual outcomes.

Oral histories are one way to give tone, expression and life to the reality of marginalized peoples. According to Moyer (1993), they are a systematic way to let people share their testimonials of their own life experiences. She reports that oral histories are more than just folklore or gossip, that they are a way to verify and analyze the historical context of each individual's life story. Shopes (2006) writes that they open up views from the past. She reports that they help make sense of everyday experiences from the context of the actor and not that of preexisting analysis.¹ Oral histories give voice to women's stories that are vivid

¹ Examples of this can be read in Byerly (1986), Morantz, Pomerleau and Fenichel (1982).

and authentic. It was as if their lives jumped off the page and into the heart of the reader. These women's stories were not reduced to statistics, but were detailed accounts of how they saw their own lives.

Gluck and Patai (1991) both embraced oral history as a method to recover the words of women. They suggest oral histories embody feminist research by being research that is conducted by women, about the lives of women, and for women in general. They suggest that oral histories are a body of work that can become the data for critical analysis. Gluck and Patai (1991) present the challenge of the interviewer shaping the direction of the narrative, but also acknowledge that often the stories empower the speaker, thus validating her life. The control that the scholar maintains is often secondary to the ethical obligation owed to the women being interviewed. The oral history methodology is not without difficulties. The most difficult part of presenting oral histories in the context of this research project is doing a content analysis. Content analysis demands a reduction of words, taking away from the holistic view of these marginalized women.

For this oral history research project semi-structured interviews were utilized. This research project was a situation where there was only one chance to conduct an interview, thus semi-structured interviews offered a framework. A guideline of questions was used. According to Bernard (1995), semi-structured interviews assure more control, by maintaining order in the collection of information. This keeping order helps maintain the internal validity of a set of

interviews. Maintaining internal validity is important because it demonstrates that the order in which questions are asked does affect the answer that the participant gives. The order will also make it easier to find the themes as the content analysis is conducted.

According to Krippendorff (1980), content analysis was used in the 1600s and the “first well-documented case of quantitative analysis of printed material occurred in eighteenth-century Sweden” (13). Krippendorff (1980) suggests content analysis gained notoriety in “the German Sociological Society in 1910” (13). According to Krippendorff (1980), Max Weber analyzed print materials through content analysis and it became a powerful tool in sociological inquiry of mass media.

Content analysis has had its critics from its inception (Krippendorff 1980, West 2001, Gluck and Patai 1991). Krippendorff (1980) reports that part of the criticism concerns the way the content is obtained. Another criticism, according to Walberg et al. (2001), was the actual process of the analysis of verbal data in qualitative research. Walberg et al. (2001) and Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) suggest that content analysis is a redaction of words that must be obtained by coding and labeling. Walberg et al. (2001) offers methods using computers to replace the more traditional process of manual coding and labeling to determine common themes. For this research project the themes were grouped together through the process of the semi-structured interview which focused on the historical events in these women’s lives.

Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) provides a framework for analysis of women's words using "an interpretive model focusing... on the analysis of narrative and textual structures and...on the socio-symbolic content these structures bring into play" (77). Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) suggests the story is the participant's experience and that it is not only about the temporal facts, but the life experience. She also suggests that the answer to the question may not be as important as the over-all narrative, and gives a view of how the past connects to the social situation being explored. Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) suggests feminist methodology draws meaning from the woman's story, which does not just have a place in the social situation, but in relationship to her social condition that has been shaped by her relative placement within society. Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) reports that there has been some discontent with analysis of oral histories, due to a reduction of words. She offers content analysis as an approach to oral histories and suggests that the reduction of words makes it "possible to compare the life courses of members of a particular social group" (78).

Using Chanfrault-Duchet's (1991) framework to analyze the oral histories in this research project was not easy. It caused conflict of the self to remove the words of these participants, but ultimately, the themes were there and they represented similar courses in the women's lives that may explain how these women ended up in a historical context where they were faced with welfare reforms that limited their time to obtain higher education. This is not to say that every woman that has experienced abuse, low self-esteem and poor elementary

education will end up on welfare, but in this historic time-frame some of these women did.

Choosing oral histories as a method increased the likelihood that women's lives would not be reduced to mere dependent variables. They offer an opportunity to present a more holistic view of the lives of SMW. Oral histories are a culmination of life systems and the picture they present is vivid and expressive. There is not a reduction of variables to provide only a small glimpse into their lives, as is so often the case in traditional social science research.

Participants: Historically Specific Stories

Colleen² went to community college with the hopes of learning things she had not been able to learn before, because as a fourth grader her learning process had been shut down due to humiliation at the hands of her teacher. Colleen was hopeful when her first semester was successful, but that changed when social structures more imposing than her free will came in and dictated a course of action that she could not perform.

Sarah, by contrast, is a free spirit who has lived an exciting life. She experienced the delights of living on the central coast of California in the counter-cultural 1960s and 1970s. In mid-life she found herself a single mother on welfare (SMW) wondering how she would provide for her daughter and herself. At her age she felt that she needed to have a college education in order to

² The names of participants have been changed.

secure her future. She faced welfare reforms that were trying to squeeze her out of school before she reached her goals.

Jacqueline found herself without the skills and the training she needed to support her family after a marriage that failed and a short military career.

Jacqueline served the nation in the military, but when she decided to educate herself she found that her support was cut off. She lost her financial aid before she could complete her goal, forcing her into a low-paying service job.

Leah was different from the other single mothers who had been on welfare; she was not seeking a full college degree, just specific skills. She just wanted to learn how to use computers and how to speak Spanish. She was confident that if she had these skills she could earn enough money to stay off welfare. Her plans worked.

Laura is a tenacious single mother. She took advantage of all the resources available to her until she was forced off welfare. She had hoped to graduate with a B. A. degree, but due to time limitations she started to work full-time instead. She is still planning to go back to school one day.

These five oral histories represent multiple experiences of single mothers who have been on welfare in a historically specific time: the 1990s. They present a glimpse into the lives of single mothers who have been on welfare, and their journeys to leave welfare through obtaining a higher education.

Like these women, my journey as a SMW is part of the reason I am able to present a feminist perspective. My interest in women on welfare started in

1993 as a result of being a SMW in college. The courage to tell my story came out of an upper division Women's Studies course called "Women, Race and Class." The professor started the first class with a small speech about what to expect. She told the class that this was not the place to debate whether there was discrimination based on race, class and gender, but that this was a class to discuss the impact of social structures on the reality of the lives of marginalized peoples. Similar to that course, this thesis is designed to share a feminist perspective, with a sociological framework, on the realities of the lives of women who have used the existing social welfare systems of the United States. SMW utilize the system to advance their lives and the lives of their families through education, employment, basic skills and/or job training. The purpose of this research is to present a direct view of SMW who utilized social aid. SMW who attend college take advantage of the same federal aid opportunities that middle-class parents use to send their children to school. When social welfare grants money to educate all people, Americans are better off economically, emotionally, physically and spiritually. My education has left me better able to explore the experiences of other SMW and to tell their stories. It is in telling the story that insight is gained, and others in comparable situations can learn from our experiences. My experience and education has enabled me to offer a feminist perspective, and has left me with some enduring questions about welfare and its reforms.

The participants in this research project were single mothers who had been on welfare between 1994 and 2001 and attended college in California. At the time of the interview the average age was 39, with a range of 29 to 47. The self-identity of the participants is Hispanic, Jewish, White, Irish and mixed. The average number of kids was 2.2 with a range of one to four. At the time of the interviews, two women were still working on their B. A. degrees, one had received her A. A. degree, and the other two had left school. Three of the participants were no longer attending college and two were still attending and working on their B. A. degrees. At the time of the interviews none of the women were married or in a male/female relationship. The interviews were conducted in May, 2003.

Procedures

The questions for this research project are adapted from William G. Hartley's (1976) "Preparing a Personal History." Hartley's (1976) questions are a guide with the focus on social facts related to life experiences. The participants were also asked about their experiences in higher education and how time limitations on welfare affected them.

Conducting oral history is very time-consuming and laborious. Arranging interviews can be maddening, but once they are arranged, an interview can be an amazing event. My first experience conducting an oral history was with Leah. We set a time and I met her at her home. I explained to her that we

needed a quiet place since the interview would be taped. At the time her mother was watching television, so we opted to conduct the interview on the patio. She provided sodas and we sat down. I had her read the "Letter to the Participants" (see appendix 1) and the "Informed Consent" (see appendix 2). She read and signed them and then I turned on the tape recorder. I started to read my questions. It was awkward since this was my first interview. I would read a question and she would answer. Then I would read another question. The interview lasted for about two hours and then I came to the end of my list of questions. I felt that I did not get what I really wanted, but was not sure where to take it. I thanked her and told her I would try to contact her later when I had a better idea of what I felt was missing. She said that would be okay.

The next interview was a bit different. I arranged to meet Sarah at the university, in the student union. She was given the "Letter to the Participants" and "Informed Consent." She read and signed them. I started the tape and read the questions from my list. She started to talk. She talked, and talked, and talked. I hardly had to prompt her. Her story unfolded as if it was a book that she had already written. This was interesting to me and I left the interview thinking that her time in college had prepared her to tell her story. I felt that her education had contributed to her being able to talk more frankly about her life than Leah, who had only attended college for one semester. Leah had been vaguer and less precise.

By the third interview I was sure I wanted more than what Leah had given me, but maybe a little less than what Sarah had contributed. My third interview took place at my home at the kitchen table. It was the shortest interview, lasting about one hour. Colleen knew about my research and had thought about what she wanted to say. After she signed the paper work I turned on the tape recorder. I went through my questions more loosely than with Leah, but more exactly than with Sarah. Colleen told her story in her own words. Later she told me that she had more to say, but that she was confident that I knew her and her story enough to represent her in the best way possible.

After these three interviews I changed my method of asking questions. For the last two interviews I read a complete list of questions before allowing the interviewee to speak. There was some protest. They would say things like, "I can't remember all that," or "Oh, my God, that is too much," and "Where did you get these questions?" Although there were protests, the interviews were natural and not forced. The interview became less about the questions and more about the general subject being asked, and therefore more open-ended. I felt that the last two interviews were the best and if I had to do it over again, I would do all of the interviews the same way. They were the most consistent, producing a flow that is very readable. If the oral histories were not such a laborious type of interview, I would have considered throwing out the first three interviews and trying to either re-interview the initial women or finding others to interview. However, because this project was not funded, I had to consider the information

in the first three interviews as valid and meaningful even if I thought that their readability was not as strong as the last two.

CHAPTER 5

ORAL HISTORIES

Life Circumstances for Single Mothers on Welfare

All five interviewees made explicit points about the way that the social facts of their lives affected their self-esteem, learning, and abilities to gain meaningful relationships and employment. So even though the methodology evolved across the life of the project, the findings are valid, especially in their historical content.

Childhood Struggles

The women who participated in the oral histories shared many common struggles in their lives. Most of the women talked about early childhood abuse. The abuse came in different forms, such as spankings, alcoholic parents, and humiliation from teachers and peers, leaving them educationally disadvantaged.

Colleen had a particularly hard time in her early childhood with her parental figures. She felt abandoned by her father. She explained that her father had left her as a baby, "He split when I was six weeks old, but I've seen him once and I know of his characteristics. Six foot four, two-hundred fifty pounds, Marine. Divorced my mom. Never wrote me." She also felt her mother did not give her the guidance she needed. She told of a mother who was there, but not for her, "She always stayed home. The house was spotless, dinner was on the table, clothes were clean. She never sat down and read me a book or

anything. That's what I would consider a mother." Then there was her step-father whom she described as "aggressive, loud, alcoholic, six foot one, he was in my life for ten years, so he would be the longest father figure. Controlling. Abusive, physically. He would spank, hit, stab with a fork at the table. Abusive! Would become emotionally and sexually abusive. I ran away from home. It affected me greatly."

Similarly to Colleen, Leah faced issues of childhood abuse in the family. They both experienced divorce and alcohol abuse in the family at an early age. Leah tells of her father's problems with alcohol and infidelity:

My dad had a drinking problem and it caused a lot of hostility in the house. A lot of arguments between my parents because of it. He quit drinking. Things changed, but then it was too late 'cause my mom was tired of it and she left him. The drinking caused a lot of it. He was very violent when he was drinking. Yeah, well what caused it, of course was my dad, not only drinking, but his infidelity. My dad was the one that handled everything. My dad paid the bills, was the one who worked most of our growing up, handled everything. My mom didn't do anything, not even discipline. We wouldn't listen to my mom; she was too soft. My dad was real hard. You didn't mess with him. I think my dad had a lot to do with how I came out or whatever, because my dad always pushed for us to do better. They fought, fought and fought and when they got a divorce, everyone was happy, including me and my brother.

Each woman interviewed had a view of her mother that sheds light onto their view of motherhood. Laura tells of her mother's strong ways, "My mom is a domineering kind of woman sometimes, but she has a lot of good skills and a lot of love. She's not just domineering; don't get me wrong. She's the kind of woman who knows what she wants and she just kind of does it. She expects

other people to do the same.” Leah viewed her mother as someone who was a housewife, because she had to be.

My mom didn’t work until later, when we were teenagers, as a nurse. She was a housewife. I don’t think she liked being a housewife. I think she would rather be out in the world than being at home taking care of stuff. She’s not that way; she didn’t like to cook, she didn’t like to clean, she didn’t like to take care of the kids. It was something she had to do because my dad was at work taking care of the other end. She had no choice. The only employment she had is as a nurse. She did go to college when we were small. I think I was in grade school when she started going. She was a good mother. She’s real nice and friendly and didn’t like to yell at us. She didn’t want to do anything bad to us, ‘cause she loved us, cared about us.

Sarah’s mother was a source of anguish and contributed to her low-self esteem. Sarah explains:

There were lots of mixed messages in my family and when I went shopping with my mom it was a very negative experience. She never complemented me, she never told me I looked nice, she never told me anything looked nice, she was just “Come on hurry up, get done, make up your mind....” She had lots of problems. She was on anti-depressants for a few years. I think that was because my brother kind of shredded her. He had lots of problems and he left home and got married and didn’t do so great. He had a couple of kids and gave them up, gave up his kids, and that was hard for my mom to handle.

Colleen also had a hard time in school. “Elementary school was a nice school, it was kind of small. I got a spanking for talking in the library in first grade. Got my name put on a paddle. Very humiliating.” For Colleen this humiliation created a sense of low self-esteem that shut down her learning process. When asked about the teachers she remembered who had affected

her, only one she could remember was a fourth grade teacher who had a negative effect on her. She explained:

Oh yeah, only teacher's name I can remember, Mrs. Reese, fourth grade she made me embarrassed in front of the whole class. She asked a question and I got it a little bit wrong and she made a joke out of me in front of the other kids. Report cards weren't very good right after fourth grade.

This humiliation carried on for the rest of her life until she re-entered college. In college she began to have more confidence in herself.

The first couple of semesters were really easy. I actually thought there was a system out there that would help single women. I got into the system really easily, got my grant, qualified. I had to take a test to prove that I was capable of receiving their help and benefiting from it. Passed my test, went to my counseling class, began seeing a self-esteem rise in my self immediately.

Sarah felt that there was a lack of influence from school, but it was a place where she could get away from the dysfunction of her home life.

I don't remember a whole lot of influence from the teachers in the early grades. I always did really well in school. They were pretty good schools. They were public. School was kind of a refuge 'cause my parents were a little emotionally dysfunctional and stuff, so I always excelled in school and liked to do school a lot, so no one ever had to tell me to get my homework done. I always excelled in school.

Sarah felt that school was a place that was safe, so as she grew older she found herself back at community college, upgrading her skills. For her, community college offered her the support she needed to take the next step. Sarah explains that "Community college was great, there's so much support there." Things were different for her when she transferred to a university. At the university there was not the same support for her that she had at community

college, but that need created a gap that offered her an opportunity to start a program for women. She reported she was “even toying with the idea to do a women’s program here at this school. There isn’t support, there isn’t that many of us that are older, there isn’t that many women with children over thirty here, like there is, I guess, probably, at community college.”

Having a broken family was part of three of the women’s lives. In the families where divorce happened, each mother who left her husband remarried. It is interesting to note that all the mothers of the participants were in marriages. None became single mothers until their children had reached their middle teens. The mothers also often married out of need. Two of the mothers married because they were pregnant. Two others married again after divorce, having a blended family.

What these women would not talk about in their interviews was their history of sexual abuse. The subject would come up after the interview process when the tape recorder was shut off during the debriefing session. This does not surprise me, having survived childhood molestation myself. This topic is still taboo in many ways. Some survivors are learning how to talk about their sexual abuse, but it is still hard to commit to talking about what happened to them, as a result of social taboos. What was reported in the interview was abuse within their relationships with parents, husbands and boyfriends. Alcohol abuse was prevalent in three of the five women’s families. The alcohol abuse was so extreme that it broke up the family.

Body Image and Self-Esteem

One issue that affected some of the women in this research project is low self-esteem. The cause of the low self-esteem was sometimes a result of poor body image, other times due to abuse by family, teachers, boyfriends and husbands. Poor body image and low self-worth sometimes affected their academic progress.

Colleen tells about feelings of poor body image, "My clothes weren't fitting and I started to withdraw a little bit around middle school. Then at eleven I got acne and I didn't enjoy that. That affected me, my self-esteem for a long time." Colleen also felt as if she did not fit inside the family unit. This made her feel like an outsider. She reports that she was treated different from her siblings because she was a stepchild.

Karen and I were stepchildren, so we were treated a little bit differently. Mike and Sue came from this father, so they were treated differently. There was a lot of difference between all four of us. When a very wealthy family member died, Sue and Mike got an inheritance and we didn't. When we would go to visit them in the summers, which we did a lot, they would get things and we wouldn't. We would be spoken about in front of the family as the stepchildren.

For Colleen this disconnect played into her sense of self-worth, as did her experiences in school. When her mother was forced to move due to divorce Colleen found herself in a school situation where she did not fit in. She reports, "My mom was divorced and we lived in a low-income housing. I was shipped to

an all-black high school where I was not accepted and I was not going to be accepted. I was the new kid on the block. I just went in and out of the classroom as fast as I could and didn't try to make any friends."

Later in Colleen's life she reported that she had a clear choice, "depend on a man again, or to build my self-esteem." She was ready for a change and felt that college was a start. Colleen reported that she wanted "to start back where the fourth grade left me off! Start up again! Start my real life! The life I deserve." She was hopeful, but her hopes were stopped short due to welfare changes.

Similar to Colleen, Sarah experienced issues with self-esteem due to her looks. Sarah reports,

I did have a problem being chubby most of my life. It was quite a problem, but I went to a doctor in the summer before that physical for the seventh grade and I think he gave me diet pills, which probably was not a good thing at the time although they worked. I became normal for the first time in my life at age thirteen. I was like ninety pounds soaking wet and I did not know how to handle all the attention. I hadn't gotten any attention at all from boys in my whole life. The attention I got was negative, because I was chubby and clumsy and all that. All of a sudden, I was thirteen and starting to develop and I was slim, trim and I was getting attention. I did not know how to handle it.

It took diet pills and weight loss for Sarah to feel "normal," but it was also confusing to her. Sarah was receiving attention that she did not know what to do with and it frightened her. Eventually, she would gain the weight back, because she felt that would make the problems go away. In reality it created a struggle with body image that followed her throughout her life. Sarah reports,

I got beaten up in my life, didn't get enough encouragement. It took me years to get self-esteem. I didn't get any self-esteem, didn't feel self-esteem till about ten years back, not even then it wasn't till I first made a commitment that I was gonna overcome certain things. Then I actually did it! It had a lot to do with my weight. I've gained a lot of weight again recently, but I was about thirty pounds lighter than I am now.

Jackie had body image issues; she explains, "I had a different self-esteem. Felt kind of sad, but I always had lots of friends, accepted by everyone. In ninth grade I started getting pimples and stuff like that and I hated that part of changing." Jackie struggled with body image and in high school she would eat only salad. Later on when she was in the military she gained weight. This created issues for her and she reported using laxatives and becoming addicted to them to help her lose weight. She used laxatives for over a year and a half. Jackie felt that it affected her body permanently and that she will never be normal again.

Leah had body image issues. She explained that she was always chunky and had developed at an early age. Leah reported her weight "created a few problems, because you know guys can't keep their eyes in their heads. I don't know, it was hard, especially if your maturity level isn't mature enough, and I was pretty immature, so it was pretty hard on me." For Leah being young and well-developed created a situation where she was not comfortable in her own body. Having a poor body image can be devastating for women and young girls, and can be linked to eating disorders, low self-worth, and poor performance in school.

Adult Relationships with Men

Stressful relationships with adult men have been reported by most of the women in this research project. The abuse they faced at the hands of the men in their lives have, in some instances, created the very situations that put these women on welfare and at an educational disadvantage.

Some of the women in this research project report being married more than once. Colleen reported that she was married when she was sixteen and that it only lasted eight months. Later on in life she got pregnant and had to delay beauty school. She did not marry her child's father until her second "child was fifteen months old." After this relationship became abusive she reports that she "got a divorce after two and a half years and then I had to support two kids alone." She finished her beautician's certificate and worked.

Forty hours a week for a two hundred dollar pay check a week and the day care was a hundred dollars. I had to sell marijuana. That was a little easier than going hungry. Then I went back to my husband, because it seemed to be the thing to do, because it wasn't a family anymore. It was hard to do that. You never get to see your kids. We got back together for a year. Then I got pregnant with my third child and after I had her we got divorced for final.

Colleen felt that selling marijuana was a way out of poverty. She did not instinctively think of education as a way out of poverty. She put her life on the line and risked freedom to stay out of an abusive relationship with her second husband. Colleen never married again.

Like Colleen, Sarah was involved in several adult male/female relationships that were abusive. She was also married at a young age. Sarah reports, "I got married at seventeen and we divorced a couple years later. I got divorced and I just kept trying to stay in school and try to stay away from men." For Sarah her relationships were driving her crazy and she reports going from "One disastrous relationship to another. I had been with an alcoholic boyfriend for a while and I knew I just had to get away from this guy. The guy kind of abandoned me out near Half Moon Bay and he started to work on a horse ranch." Even though Sarah knew she had to get away from her boyfriend she held on until he left her. Later on she found she had become pregnant, she reports. "What happened was I had gotten pregnant with my business partner. I had a tubular pregnancy and had to go in the hospital." Although she lost her own child, she helped her partner raise his son until they broke up, and this gave her a taste of motherhood that she then longed for.

Sarah found herself again in an abusive relationship with the man who would become the father of her child, and although it was not a great relationship, she felt a kinship with this man and they became very good friends. Sarah reports that they were "on and off again friends that just happened to have sex. It's just one of those things. What do you do? I didn't see any direction for the relationship, and then it was the most hysterical thing, I got pregnant." At age 37 Sarah found herself pregnant again; she tells of this experience:

I don't know what made me think I should have this child. I had been pregnant before and had a miscarriage, had a tubular pregnancy, had a couple abortions. It wasn't right for me, and this, for some reason, this was the child I was going to have. My biological clock had been on alarm for a long time and I just decided that this is the child I need to have. This child needs to be born, so I decided to have her and there was no turning back. I didn't have any thought whether he was going to take care of us or what. He just totally disowned me after that, totally disowned me, lied to his family, and said it wasn't his. I was thirty-seven when I had my daughter.

Sarah was fighting her biological clock and it won. She had been a mother to a son who was not her biological child. She had ignored her biological clock in the past, but this time things were different for her and even though she knew that her relationship with this man was abusive, she could no longer ignore her need to have this child.

Unlike Colleen and Sarah, Leah was never married. She did find herself in a "bad relationship with the man who fathered her child." She met him in a bar when she was twenty-first, got pregnant and had a baby, because she felt it "would bring them together, but it did not." She reports, "(h)e's possessive and insecure, causes us a lot of problems."

Laura on the other hand was married very young; she reports, "We got together when I was seventeen. I was pregnant at eighteen. Had my first one at nineteen, so I was pretty much the wife. I thought he was a really nice guy. He was until he got involved in the relationship and then he became very abusive." Laura reported that she did not learn from her first marriage.

Then I met John and I got pregnant again and here's another one. The second marriage was a little worse, because I was pregnant

again with my fourth child and he had just gotten arrested. Anyway, so we got married in jail behind the glass. He was on one side of the glass; I was on the other side of the glass. He made all the arrangements; once again I did nothing. I just showed up and got married. I was an idiot. Things couldn't work out, because he became very abusive too. He would get jealous over a guy walking down the street and he would drink a lot and when he drank, it got really abusive and I said "Oh, that's it." I went back on welfare at that point and I moved back to my parent's house. It was very difficult still, because there was eight hundred dollars a month and maybe \$200 in food stamps. It does not go very far when you're raising, or you're supporting five people, and even though my parents let me pay a little bit of money for rent, it just didn't help.

Looking back, Laura can see her actions as futile, but again higher education as a solution was not part of the culture she grew up in.

Higher Education

Each woman in this project learned about higher education through the GAIN program. One thing that each woman in this research project had in common was the desire to obtain higher education as a solution to staying off welfare and out of poverty. The outcome was different for each woman.

In her early years Colleen went to beauty college and obtained her hair dresser license. She reported that she qualified for financial aid because she was a poor, white, and single, female. For Colleen, being a barber was a good job that she enjoyed, but as she grew older it left her feeling that there must be more. She was tired of living in poverty. She had no savings, retirement funds, property, and always had to buy used cars. She had a difficult time supporting

her children. Then she discovered higher education as a way out of poverty.

She was eager to attend college. Colleen reports:

The first couple of semesters were really easy. I actually thought there was a system out there that would help single women. I got into the system really easily, got my grant, qualified. I had to take a test to prove that I was capable of receiving their help and benefiting from it. Passed my test, went to my counseling class, began seeing a self-esteem rise in my self immediately. It felt good, looked good, happier! Second semester was a little tougher. A little hard to live off a low-income while going to school.

Colleen was enjoying her college experience. She was succeeding academically and building a foundation of knowledge that would increase her ability to move forward. But things changed drastically when the external influences dictated her course of action.

I was receiving welfare in order to go to school. So, welfare was cutting back this and cutting back that. Informed me I need to go on the GAIN program which stopped all my classes. I had to switch to what they wanted me to take. That was just the rules, the GAIN program. They want me to be a medical assistant or a dental assistant and have a certificate in twelve months or nothing. I could only go to school for a year and that was all they were going to help me with.

When GAIN dictated what Colleen could do, the program failed to see that she was an individual who had previously had negative experiences in education.

The GAIN program reinforced her negative views of the educational system, and diminished her motivation. GAIN also failed Colleen by not looking at the learning disabilities that left her less than prepared for higher education. Colleen felt trapped and defeated.

I had to quit school and go back to work as a hairdresser. I wasn't going to have the GAIN program tell me where I was going in my life when I've already had society tell me for forty some years. I'm not going to take it any more. I feel like I would be better off with my own mind instead of them telling me what to do. I wanted to be in control of my own education goals. I think they hurt me, because I was well on my way to feeling like society was not going to keep me back.

The setback for Colleen was devastating and made her feel as if she did not matter. For her the demands of the federal welfare system were fine, but when they were transferred to the state, the new stricter rules failed her. The state was now in charge of welfare and they had to make changes due to funding. Each state faced its welfare reform in different ways, but across the board it seemed that single mothers on welfare were being told they could not receive higher education as part of the new plan. This left Colleen feeling defeated.

I am a forty-five year old female where you were seen, not heard, you were spoken to, you speak when you're spoken to. You didn't speak up first. Now at the age of forty-five I'd like to see somewhere in society where I'm not being pushed back. When I was in the school system I felt defeated. If you're failed by your federal welfare system, your country failed me, treated me inferior. Failed me in my elementary education and my adult education. Since I have read a lot of books on my own and do a lot of self-teaching, I feel pushed back from what other people can have, held back.

Colleen to date has never returned to higher education. She continued to live for a while in poverty and at one point even lived in her truck. Eventually she went back into a relationship where she depends on a man to put a roof over her head. For Colleen the effects of welfare reform were disastrous. She explains how welfare reforms have trickled down and had a multi-generation effect.

I've lived paycheck to paycheck and I won't be able to send my kids to college. I need to be in a dentist's office! I have no savings. I live day to day. No health insurance. My kids are now grown and they're pretty much in the same boat. They need to be more educated as well. Trickled down into my children.

Sarah's journey started in a community college where she found herself caught in the effects of welfare reforms. Sarah's experience at community college was a positive experience for her. She reports, "My first semester I got five A's and two B's." Like Colleen, Sarah experienced the joy of doing well in an academic environment, but that changed, "I was there for like three years and I didn't get my A. A. degree." Sarah was well aware of what an education could do for her. She felt that she needed a four-year degree. She knew that her age would greatly influence her ability to get a job in the career of her choice and after attending community college for three years she was well on her way when welfare reforms began to dictate her course of action. Sarah reports:

They told me I couldn't go to a four-year. I said, "you know what? I am in my forties, there's no way I am going to be able to get a job with an A. A. degree. I am sorry, I am going to a four-year and you're not going to stop me." So, I just went. They told me that was what was happening. Welfare reform was brewing at the time and all that. They would not approve me. I couldn't be on welfare; I couldn't stay on the program, and go. I would still have to work thirty-two hours a week.

Welfare reforms were placing regulations on Sarah, but she was determined to stay in higher education and receive her degree. Sarah had support from the Extended Opportunities Program (EOP). Sarah explains:

EOP never told me I couldn't do anything. So anyhow community college was great. You know, in fact I had an EOP counselor there

that helped me work through my results on my loans from back in the seventies. It was really great. She helped me get my financial aid back in the spring of 1998. Oh God, my bills were backed up for so long. You have no clue. I finally got even and started to feel like a human being again and what do I do, I get my self backed up with college again.

In the spring of 1998 Sarah left community college. Sarah felt that the community college was there to support her, even if her social worker was telling her she could not go to a university. When Sarah transferred to a university, she reports, "My first semester was fall of ninety-eight. I wasn't really ready to come here at the time. I hadn't quite healed my second wounded child. I fell on my face the first semester here, my last semester, three or four semesters, because there is no guidance here, but I know what to do now." Sarah experienced hardship from the inception of her transfer to the university, because there was a lack of support services for her. EOP was nearly non-existent. The university was experiencing growing pains and that trickled down to some of the students, but Sarah was tenacious. Sarah reports, "I push myself, this is my philosophy, if you have a goal you have to set your goal just a little bit higher than what you think you can do so you can rise to it. Otherwise, you'll stay stuck in a mediocre level; you won't ever progress if you stay in your comfort zone, you're never going to get anywhere." Sarah had troubles at the university partly because it was a new environment: the support services were lacking, social welfare programs were pushing her, illness and finances plagued her. If Sarah had not

been pushed to move forward so quickly she may have had a different outcome.

Sarah reports:

I lost my financial aid in 1999 and I just got it back last spring, but then I lost it again this last semester, because I got sick. I couldn't keep up, so that's what happens when you get overly stressed. Your body wears down to the point where other things can attack you and make you ill. People have to understand that what you need to do to help people, especially in this situation, is not to force them to do anything if they can't. They have to have all the resources that they need to do it. The more resources that are available, the more people will have. They will be able to get off the system. I don't think people want to be on the system. Who could live on \$548 a month? I can't live on it. If you're not on Section Eight, how do people do it? Where do you live? In a shoe box?

Sarah experienced the pressure of welfare reforms and the effects were almost debilitating. Sarah explains how hard her journey has been, trying to work, go to school and raise a family. She tells of her troubles.

You can't do both, it's impossible. I've tried. It's impossible to do both at the same time. The internship was a job. It was a job I was working six, seven, eight hours a day. In summer it was full-time. It was crazy. In fact, I didn't even get paid from March 2000, till July. That's when I got my parking ticket and my car impounded. This is where people that are on the bottom rung, people that are suffering financially, struggling financially, get shot down. Here you are poor, you can't afford to pay your parking ticket, so they take your car away. What logic is that? It doesn't make any sense.

Sarah was one parking ticket away from failure, but she managed to bounce back. Sarah reports:

It's just like I got real backed up with my work and I am behind the eight ball, but I am just about done. I realized the process of what you have to do. I was saying to somebody the other day, "Well I've been a stressed out single parent," but you know what stress is? A choice? You don't have to stress, but nobody tells you that, just like

nobody tells you, you have choices. You've got to figure it out. That's what's really hard about this school. You really have to be a ferret in this school to figure things, but since I have always been a natural-born ferret, it doesn't hurt me too much. I could have done a lot better if someone had directed me a little bit more, if a counselor had sat down and said, "Okay, you need this, this, this and this and don't worry about that," and helped me stay on track. Now I have a faculty mentor.

Sarah's experience was her own, but other women have felt the effects of not having support services.

Like Colleen and Sarah, Jackie started her journey at a community college; she found a lot of support and an atmosphere that worked for her.

Jackie reports:

It really helped me out with everything, financially, books and everything. That was very helpful and they actually got me enrolled in the CalWORKs there. I got a job on the campus as a receptionist and that was awesome. I had a great co-worker there. I graduated in 2000. I think I went full-time for one year there. I think that was it. That's all I had to do 'cause I had taken care of a lot of other classes already. I worked in the bookstore there for a little while; that was kind of a cool job, and then I worked for the athletic section. I had done that before and then I graduated with my A. A. That was really something special for me and my family.

After receiving her A. A. degree at community college Jackie found herself attending a university where welfare reforms started to affect her. Jackie reports:

What sucks for me is I have to meet the thirty-two hours. The laws have changed, you have to work thirty hours, so I said, "You know what, it's impossible. I am going to school full-time; you know I can't do it. Either I am going to suck as a student, or I am going to suck as mom, because I have to work thirty-two hours a week plus go to school everyday and work." How am I going to have time for everything?

Jackie was able to work while she was at community college; there were no required amount of hours. After welfare reforms the demand of thirty-two hours a week greatly impacted Jackie. She was well aware of her limitations. She knew that work, school and her family obligations combined to create an overload. She faced the same problems that plagued Sarah and the women in Kahn and Polakow's research (2004). Jackie tells of how her social worker treated her and the effects of welfare reforms.

I was talking to my worker, she kind of helped me string it along, but it ended and I had only started using the benefits of the mileage and all that like this past year. They said, because I had so many months on it or something they had to cut me off. So, I am not getting mileage anymore, 'cause I am not meeting the thirty-two hours of work. I could actually now, but now the kids are going to be off for summer school. So, I don't get any of that any more. I could get my child support, but I get fifty dollars for my dependents, I get medical and food stamps and I work as a waitress.

To add insult to injury Jackie received only fifty dollars of child support due to the way welfare calculates the amount of child support a SMW receives. In California, a SMW receives fifty dollars and the state takes the rest. The child support is considered earned income, thus there is an adjustment in the amount of food stamps received. Jackie still had to face the demeaning demands of the new reforms and report her educational process. Jackie reports:

It's really hard and even my instructor at my school gets pissed off, 'cause every month she had to sign that I was in school. She was like, "You know this is pathetic, you're a grown woman you shouldn't have to do this." She would get really irritated, so when the last paper was due she wrote something about it.

Like Sarah, Jackie was determined to graduate. She knew she would have to work around the expectations of the social structures outside herself. The setbacks did not hold her back from getting the degree she had been working on. Jackie reports:

I am a senior. I should have graduated already 'cause at first I was trying to work full-time and go to school when I first entered, so I messed up on a few classes here and there. I had to re-take a couple of classes. Now I am a senior and I will graduate. I was going to try to graduate this summer, but then I decided I didn't want to go to summer school. I felt too rushed with everything that had happened relationship-wise. I felt, I need to take some time to relax. I will graduate in December with my Bachelor's of Arts in Liberal Studies.

Jackie's determination has taken her far. Not only did Jackie face reduction in welfare support, she also faced cuts in her federal financial aid. Jackie had taken too many units. Originally, she had planned on a different major, so she took courses that did not count toward the degree she was working on. The impact of this was no financial aid. Jackie reports:

They were not going to help me with financial aid anymore, 'cause I had gone over my units. I didn't even realize, but they tell me the week before school that they weren't going to give me my financial aid. I thought, I am about to graduate this year and I have to stop school 'cause I can't afford it. I was really depressed about that, so they held on giving me money. I had to do an appeal and everything like that.

Although Jackie faced setbacks with financial aid, her persistence got her the aid she needed. Jackie tells about the reinstatement of her Pell Grants, "It was approved, but it took a few weeks. I didn't have the books; I didn't have anything, so that sucked. Now it's going to happen regardless of if they want to

help me, or whatever. It's going to happen, I will make it." She faced more hardships when she was in an accident: "I was in an accident in April. My car was totaled. I didn't go to school for a couple of weeks. My grades are B pluses and an A. I can't complain; I knew I could have had an A." This is yet another example of where having or not having a reliable car can make a big difference.

Jackie is now a waitress and she feels that it is not meaningful, but fun. She has plans to go on and get a graduate degree. She wanted to attend Mills College and become a Women's Studies major, but feels that it is an unsafe environment for her to raise her kids.

At Mills the housing, I mean awesome school, but the housing for families, twelve units is all they have. Crappy, crappy housing. So, if you lived outside the gate you're in downtown Oakland. I wasn't about to raise, you know I had my kids going there. Then I decided I want to go to San José State, but I don't like a lot of crowds.

Jackie's dreams of going to graduate school are on hold for now. Being in college was very demanding on her financially, emotionally and physically.

Jackie reports:

My credit's screwed right now, but I can get off welfare. I know it can happen. Give me a couple of years once I graduate. I do want to continue, definitely go to Mills. I want to get a women's studies degree and I would love to do school administration or something eventually down the line. I am not done with school yet. I am addicted to school. I am, now that I have been going, even though I can't wait for this to be over. I do want to continue, I do want to be something. I will be a teacher for a while, but I would love to be a principal or something. So we will see about that.

Jackie has done so much in her life and she has a long way to go. She has plans for the future. She is a role model for other women. She has served her

country in the military, been a single mother, received a degree in higher education and has plans to work in education.

Unlike Colleen, Sarah and Jackie, Leah did not have big plans in higher education. She did not like school and thought high school was a “big joke, it was too boring.” She could not stand to listen to the lectures and she did not finish high school. Leah did graduate eventually by going to continuation school and doing home schooling. Leah felt higher education would help her gain computer skills that she needed. Leah reports that she was influenced to go to school by another SMW. “I went to West Valley for a short period of time. A friend influenced me to go. It was in a good area in Saratoga. It was really nice. Nice campus, nice people, nice teachers, everything was really nice there.” Leah explains, “It’s not the class or anything like that, it’s just I don’t have the patience, number one, number two, I work, I have a child, I have a lot going on at home and it’s hard to handle both at the same time. I am tired and again lack of interest.” Like the other women Leah found the commitment of school, work and family were too much combined. Leah attended one semester. She had financial aid, but that was not enough. She needed to work. Leah took Spanish, English, and some computer classes. Leah thought the process helped her learn things, but she did not like having to report to her welfare worker.

You feel like you’re being monitored. I didn’t like that. For everything you have such a long either waiting period, or paper work, just pure hell. It was hard and they hardly give you any money for all that stuff you do. It was really hard. Like the paper work, paper and the waiting and all that. It’s like you’re begging. You’re literally begging

for that money and it was really hard. Helped me get more money and helped me to get a better job, because I didn't plan to be on welfare forever. To make more money, I felt I had skills, but not good enough skills to make it in the real world. I do think about taking on-line class. I could never sit in the classroom. I couldn't. I don't have the time to go, but if it was something at home...? I'm kind of thinking about it. Nothing official yet.

For Leah the whole welfare process was demeaning, so she opted to work. She worked forty hours a week. The courses helped get her a raise. She reported that because of the skills she learned on the computer, she was able to make three more dollars an hour. Even though Leah spent only one semester in school the lessons she learned helped her earn more money and taught her how to manage working through bureaucratic systems: those of higher education and welfare.

Leah and Colleen's early distaste for school was reflected in other women's experience. Laura did not have a good word to say about her elementary education. She reports, "Kindergarten through twelfth grade was a waste of time, shall we say that. I was definitely not a good student. I was very distracted in school. I never excelled. It was not the place I wanted to be. I just kind of existed while I was there and I daydreamed a lot. It didn't thrill me." Things for her did not change once she got to high school. Laura explains, "Westmont, known as Wastemont. I honestly don't remember too much about school, because it was not an exciting place for me. Like I said, I just existed there. No graduation, no awards." When Laura was ready to make her move to higher education she was apprehensive. She explains, "When I first went to

school I was so scared and GAIN said they were going to pay for all my books and my classes. I wasn't eligible for financial aid, because I had gone to school years before to get a nursing degree and I didn't pay them. I defaulted on the loan." Laura was not new to higher education, but going to school while on welfare was new to her. Laura reports, "It was kind of nice, but I still was struggling a little bit and then GAIN said, 'Oh, that's it, we're not gonna pay for any more books. You used all your book money, we're not going to help you out with anything else anymore. We're really sorry, but you're done.'"

Laura found that the GAIN program was going to dictate what she could do. "Welfare said, 'you have to work thirty-seven and a half hours a week to be eligible for benefits.'" This was hard on Laura, but she started to work in some of the offices on campus. Laura tells about the changes "in order to still be eligible for benefits and everything, I had to work thirty-seven and a half hours. I can't remember exactly what that was, but thirty-seven and a half hour a week, plus school full-time, plus taking care of four kids." Laura faced the same worries as Sarah and Jackie: how to manage it all. Laura came up with a solution. She reports,

What I would do is in-between classes I would work. I worked in three different offices. I worked in the Educational Transition Adult Re-entry Program, I worked in the disabled students program and then I worked for the fashion designs program. I had taken so many computer classes I got pretty good at the computer, so I could do stuff for them in the different departments.

Laura was playing a balancing act. The act went on, but eventually it caught up with her, as did the welfare changes. She reports, "At one point I thought I was going to have to drop out of school. I couldn't afford books or anything else, because this GAIN Program said, 'You're done,' so you were done. They just didn't give you any more help." Laura didn't need child-care, because all of her kids were in school, but she did need financial help. Laura reports:

I really needed something, so eventually I got my loan back in good standing. I could get financial aid, which is the only thing that saved me, because definitely GAIN wasn't gonna do anything else. They have said, I think I had gone the allotted amount of time or something like that and that is why I had to work the thirty-seven hours, but then the changes started coming. It started going to the CalWORKs and I think I was pretty much off of it by that time, but I started seeing the changes that happened with the other people that were on it and how bad it was for them.

Laura had a strong opinion about how welfare reforms affected her.

As far as GAIN goes, I think GAIN did hurt me in some aspects, because it limited me to what courses I could take. It limited me on the amount of money that I could spend for books. Even though the classes were allowed, I couldn't buy the books and accounting books are pretty expensive. I wasn't allowed to take an accounting program. I was taking a computer program, but computer books are pretty expensive too. Five hundred dollars for books was nothing. That part did hurt me and like I said, I was gonna have to drop out.

The GAIN program was a determining structure outside Laura's self that had an effect on what she could do, but Laura's school gave her options. Since Laura worked in different offices on campus she had a lot of information available to her that other SMW did not. Part of the impact of welfare reforms came from the lack of knowledge of other options. Laura reports:

I went to the ET (Educational Transition) program and they told me about different options I had on campus. I got involved with EOPS and anything I could find that could give money. I started writing grants. I got a few scholarships. I got really good at writing those things and get money to keep my education going until I got my loans in good standing. Then I got the financial aid, so that really helped a lot. I did end up continuing with my school and working the whole time and earning two degrees, one in business and one in speech and communications.

Laura experienced success partly because she had support services available to her. Riemer (2004) addresses the issue of how race and class impact how low-income single mothers face demoralization. Like Laura, Sarah and Jackie, the women in Riemer's (2004) research experienced hardships in continuing their education due to lack of time, lack of funding, or qualifying for funding due to outstanding educational debt or missed payments. Similarly both groups expressed interest in continuing their education and were making plans to do that when time, money and opportunity presented itself. Laura has plans to continue her education. Laura explains, "Yes, I would like to continue my education to get up to a master's, but at this point in time I don't find it possible."

Leaving Welfare

At the time of this research three of the women are no longer on welfare. Leah and Laura would never again need welfare assistance to support their families. Colleen would no longer need the support for her family, but both of her daughters were on TANF. Laura had made it off welfare to work before the interview and was able to share her feelings.

It's not like I can go back on welfare or anything. I did end up going off of welfare, because I couldn't stand reporting to them anymore. I started working the thirty-seven and a half hours a week. I got used to it and I was actually offered a position that would pay me enough to get off welfare. I would actually earn more than I was earning when I was on welfare, which you know was very important. With the financial aid I could actually get off. The position I got didn't have benefits, but they let me continue my medical for a while. That part helped and then I actually got a permanent job at the college that actually took care of the benefits portion too.

Laura was able to get off welfare by working; the transition was hard on her, but being on welfare was not any easier. "When I first went off welfare and I got the job and everything it was very difficult. When I was on welfare it was even more difficult. I don't know how anybody survives, especially in this area. There is no way. I think I was getting \$865 a month." Laura had four kids and herself to support and she could not have done that without outside help. She explains,

There is no way in this area that you can find a place to live for you and four kids, let alone just yourself. There is no way you could find a place to live and be able to buy food, pay the bills and everything else on what they give you. It is absolutely impossible. I would say you would have to either do something illegal, under the table or whatever, or you live with your family. There's no other way to do it. It was very difficult and even though I was living with my family there were several months I had to go to the food bank or whatever to ask for food and things like that. I didn't have transportation; any transportation that I had was given to me. There was no way I would have owned a vehicle if it hadn't been given to me. There is just no way, let alone putting gas in the thing. Let's see, gas or food, which one do you do? So, that wasn't possible.

Laura reported feeling "scared to death to go off welfare, at the same time I remember that it was the most liberating experience I had." For her it was freedom. She reports, "I didn't have to fill out those forms every month." Laura

was also able to take full advantage of the child support that was being paid. She states: "I actually got my full child support whenever it came. Still have problems with that, but before you only got fifty dollars extra if you got child support, even though they are paying." Laura was very happy to get child support; she remembers getting that little bit of extra money every month. But ultimately getting off welfare was a liberating experience for her.

Thoughts on Welfare Reforms

Both Sarah and Laura had some well thought-out feelings about welfare reforms that they wanted to share. Sarah reports, "I think they're doing a really big disservice trying to push mothers in the wrong direction. They should encourage them to get their education, because pushing them to get any kind of job is going to keep them in the cycle of poverty, no matter what." Sarah recognized the need for education for herself, and she also recognized her need to work while gaining an education. Sarah also acknowledged that a SMW can not take just any job to get her out of poverty. She debates:

You can't tell me that just any job is going to help them make a living. There's no entry-level job now where you start out that you can progress. Most jobs at the base level, they're the base level, that's where they are, and that's where they stay. You're not going to be able to go from a job making \$6.75 an hour to making \$15.00 an hour, which is barely livable. \$15.00 an hour isn't even livable. You can't get anywhere.

Sarah's real world experience tells her that a SMW can not make ends meet without an education. Sarah also had some after-thoughts that she felt were important enough to send me in an email after the fact.

I would add some things for your report on welfare moms...That THE most difficult thing in trying to rise above the public assistance program is the volume of paperwork needed for everything...and that when one earns even a minimum of dollars, they immediately cut food stamps...so you just cannot make ends meet enough to maintain a strong enough sense of self-esteem to pull one's self up by the bootstraps...it creates a stressful situation that can permeate a mother's personality so as to render her forever stressed out, struggling to provide basics for her family. The program needs to transform itself again and again toward supporting HIGHER educational goals and skills, so that these mothers can make the transition into the mainstream a true and permanent reality without penalizing them for the minuscule earnings they try to create to supplement the poverty level of public assistance.

Laura also had some strong feelings about welfare reforms, "I really think that the way things are going with the GAIN or the CalWORKs program is devastating to single mothers, or single parents I should say." Laura also feels that the time limitations are punitive to SMW.

My understanding of the law now is that welfare recipients, unless there is some major thing, they are only allowed to stay on it five years, lifetime benefits. The CalWORKs program is not going to pay for child-care anymore. I think that would be absolutely devastating to our economy, to the parents. I think it's an injustice to our single parents, because you offer them this bone. You say, okay, we're going to take care of your child-care, and you go to school, you get to better yourself, learn a little bit, so you can get a decent job instead of minimum wage. I think that they must do everything in their power, the government I am talking, to help single parent get off. If you're gonna force them to get off, then you got to help them to get off. You got to help them to get off in a way that they are going to be successful. You can not just throw them out to the

wolves and say, "Oh, well you've had your five years, sorry, do whatever."

Laura herself never needed child-care. Her children were old enough that this would not affect her, but she is still empathetic to other SMW's needs. She has seen the effects of welfare reforms firsthand working at a community college where many women were forced to quit school. Laura foresees the future for women on welfare if time limitations are retained: "I think if you do that, you're going to see the crime rate rise, you're gonna see our own kids starving on the streets, you're gonna see more homelessness, you're gonna see...it's gonna be devastating." Would welfare reforms that limited time for SMW to receive benefits actually raise crime rates and cause more homelessness? This can be a new research project to tackle now that welfare reforms have been in effect for about ten years.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Each woman interviewed had an interesting story to tell. They each faced different types of hardships while seeking higher education as single mothers on welfare. For some SMW, the social facts of the structures outside themselves were the determining factors in their success or failure, be it the actual welfare reforms, the school they attended, and/or the service they received. Kahn and Polakow's study (2004) researched programs where each woman was faced with social facts similar to those Sarah faced. Sarah and the women in Kahn and Polakow's (2004) research faced social workers misrepresenting the requirements, denials of funding, threats of losses of funding and penalties for not complying, such as added work hours. Like Sarah these women were tenacious and did not take the worker's words as final. They followed their own agency that allowed them to work through some of the confusion. They would do their research, ask questions and follow through to find loopholes or the truth about the laws. Like Sarah they were often successful, but this success came at a price. The price included stress, sleep deprivation, illness, lower grades, or having to withdraw from classes in the final months. All this made their journeys longer and more drawn out, but ultimately some of them reached their goals! Sarah, unlike Colleen, recognized that she had to go after what she needed. Colleen did not have the agency to work through the social facts that intruded themselves into her journey in higher education due to the social facts that had

guided her life as a younger girl. In contrast, Sarah had a reportedly more positive childhood development, that is, early education. She was better able to understand what she needed to do, to be one step ahead. Sarah knew that there were no stupid questions. Sarah compared herself to a ferret and recognized that she needed to be one in order to figure things out. Ultimately, women like Sarah were able to make it, but women with less time, effort, and drive were more likely to fail, because the system was set up to fail them.

Similar to Sarah, Jackie felt the pressure to do it all, but Jackie put her aid in jeopardy. She could not meet the work requirements of welfare reform and as a result of that her aid was cut. She no longer received monetary support for herself. She also lost out on child-care, books and supplies allowance, and gas money. Despite the fact that Jackie's determination carried her through, these actions by the state were punitive to her success.

Reflections

Each interview prompted a certain amount of personal debriefing. It is amazing how once the tape stopped, the process of the interview remained alive and the women continued to talk. It had occurred to me that it would be great to have these sessions on tape, but I know that the level of intimacy that occurred after the tape was off would never have happened if the tape was still running. Intimacy is an important aspect of this type of interview. I believe that the rapport I had with these women opened them up to doing the interviews; that these

stories would not have been told in the same way for someone who had not walked in similar shoes.

Due to hectic lives, getting these women to do the interview was a challenge. They were already trying to juggle being head of household and all that entails, along with work, school, and being a mother. Their time is stretched. They often give up sleep and multi-task as many things as possible to stretch their limited time. Once they did schedule interviews, they kept their commitment. Every woman interviewed was an acquaintance from one of the colleges I attended. This helped build rapport quickly, but for every woman I interviewed, there was another who said she would be willing, and then was not. They were either too busy with school, tests, work, family, or they could no longer be located. One just stopped reading the emails I sent, another one had changed her email address, one's phone was disconnected and the contact person she had was not answering my calls. The women who did do the interviews had different reasons for doing them. A few of them did the interview as a favor to me. The others seemed really interested in telling their stories. Most of them expressed satisfaction after the interview saying, "It felt empowering." For me that was what it was all about: empowerment!

Many single mothers want to keep their life stories a secret, but some feel that telling their stories will help enlighten others to their situation. They are doing the best they know how and most want the world to know that until you walk in their shoes, you should not judge them. Women already have a fear of

being judged by society and this fear can be compounded by being a single mother (even more so if they are on welfare). Motherhood is a hard job and mothers can make it easier by opening up to each other, to support each other, and to understand their shared conditions.

It has been more than ten years since the implementation of major welfare reforms and it has been about twelve years since I first became aware of single mothers who were on welfare and seeking higher education as a way out of poverty. When I first started this research project, the literature did not produce the quality reports I was looking for. I found very little information on how persons on welfare were doing in higher education. I found few reports on welfare reforms and their effect on single mothers who had been on welfare. A decade later, the story of single mothers on welfare is being told. It is reassuring to know that the journeys that so many single mothers have traveled are being analyzed and synthesized. The journeys of single mothers who have been on welfare and seeking higher education are being looked at through the critical eyes of social scientists, some of whom have taken the journey of a single mother on welfare themselves (Polakow et al 2004, and Petersen 1995). It is through the experience gained on the journey that knowledge is shared and hopefully the stories reach audiences that can and will vote for social reforms that include funding for the pursuit of higher education for all groups of low-income students, regardless of their race, class, gender, or parental status.

“Education is emancipation” is a phrase that has just become familiar to me. As an adult re-entry student, I have always maintained that education is power and power is freedom. Each semester that passes is one more stepping stone that brings me closer to my goal of independence. What I had not realized was that my goal was not power, but freedom, emancipation through independent living, by supporting myself and my family through meaningful and gainful employment. I was being set free from the restraints of welfare that had held me back for so long by providing so minimally. As a result of my education, I am free to tell my story in hopes of adding another piece of evidence to the stories of all SMWs.

Every mother's journey is her own and each one is unique. In this thesis, the reader has seen how SMW have realized that they must adapt to the world, while also trying to change their lives for the better. Single mothers are doing just that: they do the things they need to do to survive. Telling the stories of single mothers who have gotten off welfare is a way of empowering women.

Recommendations, Programs, and Policies

Although SMW are no longer afforded time to work on their higher educational degrees, all is not lost. SMW can still get their education, but they must work harder than ever. Single mothers on welfare can apply for scholarships, Cal Grant, Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant, The Board of Governors Fee Waiver, Federal Work Study,

Federal Student Loans and Extended Opportunity Programs and Services to help pay for their education. They can also look to the community for support with child-care, transportation and food. These support services can help, but ultimately SMW need to weigh their educational options.

One thing that can be done to assist these women is a scholarship fund program that helps SMW by awarding them financial and emotional support, such as the program that was started in Alabama (Holyfield 2002). Although the financial support of the Alabama program was not a large sum, the knowledge that someone cared enough about SMW was enough to help them make it through another semester. The financial support was key to many of the women. It would give them that little extra that would keep the car running or put milk in the refrigerator. SMW can also look for support from community partners who are in the job of helping low-income disadvantaged workers get training and employment. There are many places to get help and training such as the Department of Rehabilitation, Goodwill Industries, and The One Stop employment service. Most importantly, as a nation we need to educate our daughters about finances. For the most part young girls are being told that someone will take care of them. If a woman is to become independent, then we must not teach dependency to them as children.

Future Research

It has been over ten years since the welfare reforms of 1996. The impact of the reforms has greatly affected the lives of the women in this report. As for single mothers on welfare who are trying to gain higher education as a way out of poverty, the research implications are many. One possible research project is a census of SMW who are enrolled at the community college level. This could potentially show that enrollment of SMW are down from 1996. Another research project could be a continuation of the current project that looks for single mothers who were on welfare in 1996 in comparison to how they are doing now. Do they still live in poverty? Are they married? Do they have meaningful employment? Do they have retirement plans? How do they feel welfare reforms affected their efforts to gain higher education? Did they finish their degree or training objective? Will they continue higher education in the future? Whatever the answers to these future research questions might be, giving the women in this study the opportunity to speak with their own voices, assures that their immediate experiences of the welfare reforms of 1996 will not be forgotten.

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APPENDIX 1

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT: SINGLE MOTHERS ON WELFARE

To: Participants

My name is Sema Nicole Seyedi and I am a candidate for a master's degree in Social Science with an emphasis in Women's Studies at San Jose State University.

This is an oral history research project and your participation is needed and appreciated. Your participation is completely anonymous. All materials will be coded to guarantee that you will not be identified. Please take a few minutes to go over the informed consent and ask any questions that you have.

This oral history research project is designed to measure single mother's attitudes towards being on welfare either as an Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipient. The knowledge you have concerning welfare and the 1996 reforms is important information that could enlighten people about the plight of single mothers.

Your participation in this ground-breaking research is important as it sets a precedent for other researchers in the social sciences who look to explore the effects of welfare reforms on women in higher education. This is one of the first research projects exploring what single mothers who have been on welfare and in higher education feel about the changes that took place when GAIN changed to CalWorks.

If you would like additional information concerning this interview before or after it is completed please contact me by email at sema_seyedi@csumb.edu or call 408-379-5942.

If you want to confirm my research you may contact my thesis committee chairperson Dr. Victoria Byerly at the Social Science Department at San Jose State University. Her office phone number is (408) 924-5754. You may also contact Dr. Maria Alaniz, the chair of the Social Science Department at San Jose State University at (408) 924-5543. Questions about the rights of subjects may be presented to Dr. Nabil Ibrahim, Academic Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 924-2480.

Thank you for your time!
Respectfully,

Sema Nicole Seyedi

APPENDIX 2

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

Investigator: Sema Nicole Seyedi

Research Project: Oral history Project: Effects of 1996 Welfare Reforms on Single Mothers in Higher Education.

Participants in an Oral History Project are entitled to certain rights. These rights include, but are not limited to:

1. You have been asked to participate in an oral history project to examine your attitudes towards the 1996 welfare reforms.
2. You will be asked to spend approximately an hour and a half being interviewed by me. Your interview will be taped.
3. There is no foreseeable risk to the participants. All transactions such as tapes and files, will be coded to guarantee anonymity.
4. Although the results of this study may be published, no information that could identify you will be included.
5. Be informed that this project could be used for publication and that there will be no payment or compensation for your participation.
6. Your consent is being given voluntarily. You may refuse to participate in the entire study or in any part of the study. If you do not wish to participate in the study, you can withdraw any time without any negative effect on your relations with San Jose State University or with any other participating institutions or agencies. You will not lose any services in anyway.
7. You will be given a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the above information and that your decision to participate is based on the information provided.

Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date