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By

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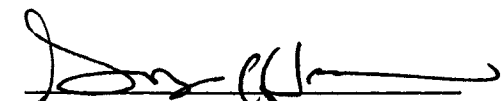
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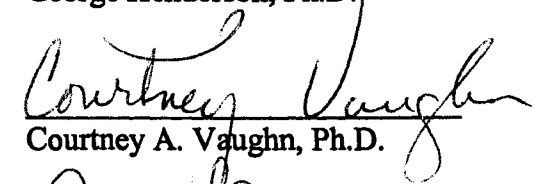
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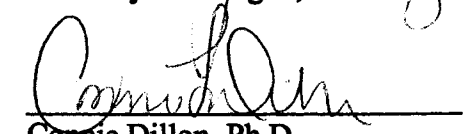
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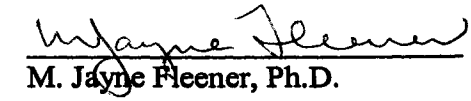
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ABSTRACT

Adult learners return to and participate in post-secondary education, many of whom are parents. Student-parents question the impact of their participation in higher education on their children. To address this issue, an interpretative inquiry explored the shared perceptions of 19 children between the ages of 10 and 13. A free-association, clustering exercise as well as one-on-one interviews allowed the researcher to hear the voice of the children. The study suggested that although the children largely supported their parents' endeavors, did not necessarily "like" their parents attending college. Periodical absences, inattentiveness of parents, and stress in the home contributed to this dissatisfaction. The study suggested several factors that impacted the children. It appeared as if the primary factor was the connection the child felt with the university. The connection to the university was closely associated with the distance the family resided from the university. Children whose parents commuted had little knowledge of the university culture and the individuals involved in that aspect of their parents lives. However, children who were familiar with the university felt as if they were a partner in their parent's education. The study suggested that children also tended to blame the university for stress and other negative factors that occur in the home. When the university is in session, home life is somewhat chaotic, resulting in a stressful environment. When school is not in session, however, home life is more relaxed, with parents using this opportunity to be more in tune with their child's needs. Each of the children interviewed were involved in extra-curricular activities. The study seemed to suggest that extra-curricular activities were used to not only provide the children with adult-supervised activities,

but also to provide an opportunity for children to be occupied while parents used their time to study or take care of other tasks. Children further appeared to feel as if there would be an immediate change in their life after their parents' graduation due to implied or promises of more money, new home, and vacations to their children. Various strategies were discussed to better prepare both child and parent for college.

DEDICATION

To Mel, Scott and Brent – you have all been Saints!

To Mom and Dad – thanks for allowing me to become who I am today.

A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO A CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE ON PARENT(S) ATTENDING UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I think there are a number of reasons why nobody had asked children before. I think one reason is that parents were really afraid to know what kids thought, because kids would be very critical of them. That's number one: and number two, I think there's a larger societal issue where we think that maybe children don't really know very much—that the way that it has typically been said to me is that if given a choice between broccoli and dessert, kids would choose dessert. I don't think that you can listen to the words of children without feeling that there is so much to learn from them. (Galinsky, 2000)

Galinsky (2000) reflects the essence of this study. There is much to learn from children regarding their perceptions of parent participation in higher education. Research has shown the advantages and disadvantages of participating adults pursuing higher education. Along with various social and psychological effects of education there is the issue of family support (Cross, 1981; Chartrand, 1996). Adult learners are unique from more traditional students in that they manage concurrent roles. These roles may include not only the role as a student, but also the role as an employee and a parent. Often an adult learner, who is also a parent, questions whether returning to college, is a sound decision. One question he/she may consider is: how is this affecting my child? Because it is often difficult to analyze such an affect due to cultural issues, family dynamics, and the uniqueness of children, a child's perspective would be beneficial. This is vitally important because when parents become students, "back to school" may mean a major life change for the entire family.

As a counselor, faculty member, returning student, and mother, the impact of parents returning to school has been a "burning question" of mine for quite some time. As

a rehabilitation counselor, I facilitated career choices and options for adults. Higher education was an option for a majority of the adults, many of whom had children. In my role as not only a faculty member, but as an academic advisor I was faced with the issues of student-parents. On a daily basis I heard of and was aware of the trials and tribulations uniquely faced by students who were also parents. The dilemmas they face are also ones that I faced as a returning student. In each roll, I have found the concerns to be universal. Does the choice to return to school, although positive for our vocational outlook, have a positive or a negative impact on the most important people in our lives – our children?

This section will discuss the influx of adult learners into higher education and how a changing society impacts adult learners individually, as well as socially. An interpretative inquiry study was conducted to hear the voices of the children regarding their parents' involvement in higher education.

Return of Adults to the Classroom

The National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education began to examine participation in adult learning activities in 1969. At that time, 10% of adults participated in part-time organized instruction. By 1999, this figure had risen to 15 % enrollment in higher education by adults (NCES, 2001). This consistent pattern of growth, according to the NCES, is projected to increase in the foreseeable future. The U.S. Bureau of Census confirms these figures. Overall statistics indicated that undergraduate enrollment increased from 301,000 students, ages 25 to 34, in 1970 to over 930,000 in 2000. For graduate students, the figure rose from 80,000 in 1970 to 230,000 in 2000.

Although there are a number of individual and societal reasons why adults benefit from further education, they most commonly seek out higher education for reasons related to employment (Merriam & Caffarela, 1999). Motives include interest in obtaining better jobs, potential advancement in their current jobs, and the desire to change careers (Merriam & Caffarela, 1999). Adults who participate in higher education to obtain better jobs are typically those who have been at entry-level positions and choose to seek a career with better pay or a greater challenge. These motives correspond to work place demands for higher education.

Trends and economic situations drastically affect workforce needs; as the economy changes, so does the labor market (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002). This has never been more apparent than after the September 11, 2001, tragedy in New York City. During the final reporting period of 2001, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that approximately 141,000 individuals had lost a job. Some of these jobs, especially in the financial and travel industries, may never be regained. Individuals, therefore, are forced to look at other types of employment.

Parents in the Classroom

A significant feature of returning adults is the life stage of the learner. As well as carrying out other work and community roles, the students may also be parents. Forty-eight percent of the students who are enrolled are also parents (Oklahoma Board of Regents for Higher Education, 1997). Additional statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, report that single females head 17.2% of all households in America, with children under the age of 18. It is interesting to note that statistics are not reported for the number

of male households with children under the age of 18; therefore, there might be a greater number of single-parent households than is documented with the U.S. Census Bureau.

Recently, in a graduate class of such a program, an informal survey was conducted to determine how many students were also parents. Of the 50 students surveyed, 42 had the dual responsibilities of being both a graduate student and a parent. One respondent, in particular, was the parent of six children. This informal survey vividly illustrates the prevalence (in this field) of the dual roles of parent and adult learner.

While there are varied reasons for adults to return to school, there are also many barriers of both social and psychological nature facing adult learners (Cross, 1981). As indicated above, among returning adult learners, 48% of the students are also parents (Oklahoma Board of Regents of Higher Education, 1997). Consequently, an increasing number of adults must manage concurrent roles in the university, the work place, the community, and in the family (Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989).

The institutions of higher education, themselves, may create and maintain formidable barriers to adult participation in adult education. Patricia Cross (1981) cited a number of these "institutional barriers." These barriers may include enrollment procedures, housing, and/or course scheduling. The researcher conducted a pilot study with three universities: a comprehensive state university, a regional university, and a community college.

According to student personnel officials, the presence of children on campus is becoming a more important issue for not only the students, but for the institution as well. It was further expressed by the individuals that universities were ill equipped to deal with the problem. Functions such as freshmen orientation, student activities, and student

services are directed toward the more traditional student. Freshmen orientation does little to discuss difficulties student-parents potentially face. Most student activities such as dances and homecoming are designed for the entertainment of twenty-year-olds, but not students who are in their thirties or forties – and certainly not those with children. The Student Services Office, for instance, provides counseling, but not parenting classes. Counseling center personnel expressed that one of the major areas of concern by the students who are also parents was the effect that their participation may have on their children.

The Return to School and it's Impact on Families

Just as the work place and workforce is changing in America, so is the term "family." Families may include more than the nuclear family of spouse and children, as well as extended family members, such as grandparents, in-laws, aunts or uncles, etc. (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). While studies have shown that families have been a major source of support for adult learners, (Chartrand, 1996), the family may also be a reason for adults withdrawing from universities (Scott, 1996). Family difficulties may be compounded by socioeconomic factors, such as difficulties with finances and time constraints (Cross, 1981). Worries concerning family issues can lead to dropout, especially for women (Coverman, 1989). Of importance to this study is the relationship between the family members, especially the student-parent's children and the adult learners' education.

Three areas of specific concern to parent-students are financial considerations, time issues, and the effects of the education process on their children. Financial concerns, which include cost of tuition, books and ancillary items, as well as those related to child

care (Cross, 1981), present major stresses for adult learners. The cost of attending an institution of higher education has been steadily increasing in recent years (Oklahoma Board of Regents of Higher Education, 2001). This increase includes not only tuition and fees, but also books, technology fees, and transportation costs. Even with Pell Gants and other financial aid, the family budget may be limited. Luxuries such as vacations and recreational activities are usually restricted due to limited funds.

Time, always problematic in today's society, is even more so for adult learners with children. In addition to their normal academic responsibilities, they also carry parental responsibilities. These will include participating and supporting the family's day-to-day and extracurricular activities, coping with unexpected health concerns and crises, and responding to developmental and behavioral issues of their children. Various children's events and activities may occur during class times or when an assignment or paper is due, forcing parents to make difficult decisions between their education and their child. In addition, parents are usually closely involved in their children's homework assignments and major projects. These demands are even more paramount in single parent households. Not only do single parents have the role of both mother and father, but the responsibilities of that parent are also doubled. The psychological and emotional effect that a parent's attending higher education has on the children in the family include concerns expressed by parents are the lack of ability to attend activities, deprivation of luxuries, and the stress level of the household.

Essentially, parents have to decide if the short-term difficulties will reap long-term benefits. The question is will the children resent or respect their parent's attempts to increase their educational goals? Are parents role models for higher education? The path

is difficult will the children become discouraged from education themselves? Is the time away from the family worth it in the long run? My work, as a counselor and academic advisor to adult learners, who are also parents, has shown me some of these parental concerns with respect to the effects on their children of their returning to school.

There is little research that addresses the effects on children from a child's perspective. Such a perspective could provide the insights with which parents could make informed decisions about whether to pursue their education, and if so, to what extent. As Ellen Galinsky indicated, there is much to learn from children. Listening to children is central to recognizing and respecting their worth as human beings. One clear reason for interviewing children, is to allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts, rather than relying solely on an adult interpretation of their lives, which may or may not be valid (Christensen & James, 2002).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to identify possible social and psychological factors related to children's experience of parents' participation in post secondary education. The study, using a interpretative inquiry approach, will explore how children between the ages of 10 and 13 perceive their situation of having parents who are also students. The interpretative inquiry approach may increase our understanding of the meaning of events and interactions of individuals in a particular setting (Bogdan & Biklen 1992). Children, between the ages of 10 and 13, have been identified for this study because they have the ability to analyze and evaluate their own perspectives as well as those of others (Selman 1980). Moreover, socially, children in this age range are becoming more independent and

more involved in peer activities, but they are still dependent on their parents for both social and emotional support (Orton, 1997).

Research Questions

The following questions will be addressed:

1. How do children, ages 10 to 13, experience the situation of their parents return to school?
2. How do children perceive their responsibilities, activities, and social life to be affected once the parent is in school?
3. In what ways do children imagine that their lives will be different after their parents graduate or complete their university studies?

Research Design

The questions posed by this research study are best addressed through an interpretative inquiry inquiry. The target population consisted of 10 to 15 children between the ages of 10 and 13 whose parents are enrolled at a local rural regional university geographically located in the southeastern part of the state. The university has a student population of 4,368, with 56% of the student body over the age of 22. The average age for undergraduate students is 24, and the average age of graduate students is 38 thus, providing a rich source of participants for the study.

Data was collected using several information-gathering methods: a) an interview with a possible follow-up group interview with the child participants and b) an interview with the parent(s) of the participants. The interview with the children were non-directive, coupled with a pen and paper exercise called "clustering" (Karpiak, 1990, 1997), in which children will be coached to free-associate their perceptions and experiences related

to their parents' return to school. The interview protocol will address specific questions related to the study. The interview with the parent(s), which will take place at their homes or at a neutral location, will provide background and related information concerning the family, academic goals, and related concerns. The parent interview segment will serve to clarify information obtained from the child and will offer triangulation of the data. If additional data or clarification from the children's interviews is needed, a group interview may be held.

All data will be audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher. The data will be analyzed and the emerging themes will be identified. The data will then be re-examined through the major themes. This study has received approval from the University of Oklahoma IRB (appendix A) as well as university administration and, accordingly, it assures that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained.

Significance of the Study

This study will serve three important purposes and three concerned populations. First, a major parental concern centers on the question: "Will attending college have a negative or a positive impact on my children?" There appears to be no documented research on children's perceptions regarding continued parental education. Research, therefore, could provide parents with pertinent information reflecting a child's perspective on this matter, and perhaps highlight those areas presenting particular pressure points for children. Having this kind of knowledge, may allow parents to make more constructive and balanced decisions regarding their personal, family and educational goals. Student-parents would be better equipped to evaluate what aspects of higher education are beneficial and which are perceived as hardships to their children. Coping mechanisms

and techniques to prepare themselves and their families for dual roles prior to undertaking higher education would make for an easier transition. Understanding the impact could lead to congruency between class scheduling/planning and family concerns, thus ending potential conflicts between the two.

Secondly, the non-traditional student's needs and lifestyles are not currently a focus in university student services and programs. Knowing the impact of higher education on families could assist the administration in the development of ancillary services, such as expanded day care centers, and considerations such as altered course scheduling that could facilitate student success and retention. In this way, the offices of student affairs could be assisted in providing appropriate and timely programs and activities to meet the needs of adult learners. The provision of services to meet the unmet needs of this population could increase the retention rates and provide an environment where students with children feel a connection with the more "traditional" college students and in turn, the university community as a whole.

Finally, university counselors involved with the personal adjustment and academic success of adult students may gain greater insight into what students who are also parents are facing on a psychological level. Through an understanding and appreciation of the additional stress factors that confront a parent pursuing post secondary education, educators and counselors in higher education settings could develop approaches and interventions directed toward parental concerns. Such intervention, when applied, could have the effect of reducing the stress and facilitating a smoother family existence as well as increase student retention.

Definition of Terms

For clarification, the following terms and the context in which they will be used in the study are defined below.

Adult education, according to Cross (1981), is any activity or program deliberately designed to satisfy learning in any stage of life by a person who is over the normal school leaving age. For the purpose of this study, adult education will refer specifically to that which occurs in institutions of higher education.

Adult learning is a major, continuing mode of adult behavior permeating the major categories of human experience and the major sectors of society (Delker, 1974, p24).

Adult learner is an individual who is actively involved in pursuing adult learning through formal or informal methods (Cross, 1981). This study is also using adult learner in the context of an adult who is also a parent and incorporates the term student-parent to refer to this particular circumstance. Adult learners might also be defined as one for whom education is not their primary role.

Organization of Study

This chapter defines the problem and describes the significance of the problem for the various populations related to institutions of higher education. The following chapter will examine the literature in relationship to a child's perception of their parents participating in adult education. Specifically retention issues of student-parents, child development of children between 10 and 13, issues of working parents, and current services offered by the university will be examined. The methodology chapter will detail

the research design and population to be examined and the method by which the data will be analyzed. It will also detail possible limitations of the study.

Summary

This study is being undertaken to redress the dirth of knowledge on the impacts that arise for children when their parents embark on the process of furthering their education. Knowledge of these dynamics will assist parents in making more informed decisions concerning their education, assist administrators to develop services to better serve the population of student-parents, and assist counselors in their support. A qualitative, interpretive study is being undertaken in order to increase our understanding of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to identify related literature that pertains to this study. The paucity of research would lead one to believe that a child's perspective is not considered a viable issue. Student-parents, however, have indicated that this is a factor in not only their retention, but also their success in their educational endeavors.

The study of adult participation in higher education has proven to be valuable to the field of adult education, universities and to adults, themselves. This growing interest in adult students reflects the changing demographics of university and college student populations. Nationally, the 1970s and 1980s saw a marked increased in higher education enrollment among adult learners. By 1987, full time students under the age of 25 comprised fewer than half the students in America's colleges and universities (NCES, 2002). The enrollment of the adult learners has been welcomed, because such students add to the diversity and vitality of educational institutions. Those adults returning to school have assisted to offset the decline in numbers of the traditional (18 to 24 year old) college-enrollment (Senter & Senter, 1998). Kerka states that the presence of adult learners in higher education is no longer an emerging trend, but a reality (1989). The adult learners come with a wide variety of variables that may affect the learning experience. Since many of these adult learners are also parents, many of these "student-parents" have responsibilities not only to the learning environment but also to their children.

Even though there has been much research related to adults participating in higher education, I have found no studies related to the experiences of children once their parents begin to participate in higher education. Although possible variables are vast and could constitute a multiplicity of studies, I selected three areas of related literature to serve as the basis for this study: retention issues of adult learners, a developmental overview of children between the ages of 10 and 13, and a look at significant issues of children when their parents are employed outside of the home. Retention issues in adult education explore the reasons why adults leave formal learning, with a particular focus on issues pertaining to the family. Children between the ages of 10 and 13 are unique in their stages of development. An insight as to where children between 10 and 13 are developmentally will allow me to disseminate information and create a higher level of understanding of the children. Likewise, a focus on the similar issues those children may experience when parents work outside the home may provide an insight to the experiences that children encounter when their parents are also students.

Retention Issues for Student-Parents

Adult students have a variety of life circumstances and characteristics that affect their retention in education (Kerka, 1989). Dropout rates for female adult learners are especially high for single women who have children (Scott, 1996). Concerns for a child's emotional well-being, lack of quality time spent between parent and child, and the effects of limited financial resources may cause extreme stress. This stress can, at times, prove to be more than the adult student can handle (Coverman, 1989). Further, role conflict, family support, economics, time management and logistics are frequent issues faced by

learners who are also parents. These issues often place the role of a student as secondary to other roles the individual may have.

Role Conflict

A study that examined role conflict (Home, 1996) indicated that adult women experience "role contagion," or thinking about another role while engaging in an activity. This occurred most often where their children were concerned (p. 96). While a woman is sitting in a class, for instance, most often she is thinking about a "to do" list that involves what should be prepared for supper, or which child needs to be where that evening. During class, the woman may also be thinking of what needs to be accomplished at her job, phone calls to make, or appointments. Role contagion is also present while the woman is at home in the evenings or on weekends. While helping with homework assignments or taking the children to various activities, thoughts are on preparation for exams or research needed for papers at school. Thoughts may also extend to what should have been accomplished that day at the employment site. The same overlap is present at work, where the woman is thinking about her family, or her classes. For female student-parents, a feeling of constantly being overwhelmed exists, often causing something to give: and often that means dropping out of school (Home, 1996).

Feelings of role contagion, as described above, might be relieved, however, if there is family support. The need of adult learners to have family support to be successful in their educational endeavors is critical (Cross, 1981). Family support can be manifested in several ways. Support includes not only a verbalization of a sincere and genuine backing of what the student-parent is attempting to accomplish, but also the demonstration that the family is supportive of the individual (Aisenberg & Harrington,

1988). The spouse, children, and extended family may verbally support the educational endeavors but may not be congruent in their physical support. For example, a spouse may remark, "Honey, what I think you are doing is great." But then, that spouse does not assist in general household chores while the student is completing academic assignments, hence, not alleviating the student's feeling of pressure.

Extended family members often have a difficult time understanding why the student-parent feels the need to further their education (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988). This is especially true for women. Some culture groups place little value on education for women. A cultural-norm attitude exists that women should "stay at home and raise the children" or that if women are to work outside the home, then it is merely to supplement the husband's income. Often the need for higher education is not considered critical for women (Zunker, 2002). However, it is critical for women's feelings of self-efficacy to be a vital member of society, hence another conflict arises.

By the same token, for first generation college students, attending an institution of higher education can distance them from their families (Zunker, 2002). There is a sense from the extended family that they are no longer "good enough" for their roots. As an individual grows as a person while pursuing higher education, the extended family may feel as though the student (because of the increase in vocabulary and knowledge of the world), no longer has the same values and ideals as their family members. These feelings are compounded due to the limited time available to spend with extended family members. Weekends, holidays and other traditional family time may be limited due to assignments and other university activities. These factors may lead to a sense of loss for

the student-parent, when conflicts between family and student life becomes increasingly apparent.

Time Constraints

Scott (1996) stated that time constraints are a leading factor in retention problems for students. Elements that contribute to time constraints for the student-parent include their own homework, helping the children with their homework, extra-curricular activities required of the adult learner by the college, and routine home responsibilities (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1989). Time constraints resulting from the children's extra-curricular activities present further demands. In addition to the aforementioned time constraints, a majority of adults also work on a part-time basis (Oklahoma Board of Regents of Higher Education, 2001). All of these factors may create additional stress in the family environment. Parents report that there are never enough hours in the day to accomplish all that needs to be done. The term "supermom" or "superdad" is often used in conjunction with adults who try to be everything to everyone.

Time management is a favorite topic in hallways of colleges and universities. Various and sundry methods of short-cuts and tried-and-true methods of handling family, home, school and at times work, are passed from student to student. Time constraints on students appear to be especially prevalent at the end of each semester. The fall term not only has final exams, but also includes holidays with their associated stresses. The spring semester has final exams for adults, achievement tests for children and other exams, as well as plans for the year to come. The normal educational process tends to create stress, and this stress may lead to an adult student dropping out of formal education (Scott, 1996).

Financial Burdens

Cross, (1981) indicated that in most surveys, the lack of time vies with cost and financial difficulties for first place among other obstacles to education, thus creating financial difficulties for adult learners' families. The constant pressure of not having enough money to make ends meet is a mitigating factor in adult learners dropping out of school. The rising cost of tuition, books, fees and transportation cost may prohibit "extras" in many families such as vacations, camps, etc. (Ainsbery, Harrington, 1981). Such extras may not be the only expenditures affected. Items that are life's necessities like new clothes and personal items, for adults as well as children, also become a financial strain, and a "balancing act" may be a monthly concern. Which bills get paid, and which bills can be delayed is a stressful monthly routine for all too many families, and particularly for student-parents.

Women are especially constrained by finances because social mores can make them feel guilty about spending "family" funds for their own education (Cross, 1981 p.101). There are times when children go without that special birthday present or cannot attend a school trip because of lack of funds. Senter and Senter (1998) found that a majority of "non-traditional" students felt the need for part-time campus jobs and flexible methods of payment to assist in alleviating the financial constraints they find while seeking to broaden their education.

To summarize, adults who also participate in higher education activities have what has been described, as "the burden of the world" placed on their shoulders. Time constraints, economic issues that impact the family, and personal conflicts about their

needs over the needs of their children, often cause a student-parent to withdraw from school.

Child Development

An overall developmental perspective of children between the ages of 10 and 13 will assist in of the study. During this age, children are entering a new phase of development in which there is an expanding horizon of peers and activities (Orton, 1997). Children this age typically make many developmental leaps in their cognitive, motor and social skills. Their social world has expanded due to their ability to communicate and to handle relationships (Carter & McGoldrick 1999). These factors combine to allow a child between the ages of 10 and 13 the opportunity to find their place in the world, where their talents and abilities are beginning to bud (Erickson, 1950).

Motor Development

The school age child of this age has physically developed to the point that tasks, such as daily living skills, are easier to accomplish, and has expanded due to gross motor development. Increased physical skills and coordination between the ages of 10 and 13 have developed past the stage of climbing, balancing and running to an integration of skills that have social meaning (Orton, 1997). Team sports such as soccer, football, baseball, or group dance provide not only social interaction, but also the opportunity to compete with their peers. Fine motor skills, such as writing, drawing and playing a musical instrument further refine their skills. Intellectual games are also popular with children in upper elementary school. This period of late childhood and early adolescence is transitional to the major changes of adolescence.

Cognitive Ability

Checkers, chess and card games provide a framework of not only challenging motor skills, but also developing cognitive ability. Intellectually, children in this state of development are beginning to be able to think logically and apply rules systematically in order to obtain new information (Orton, 1997). At about the age of 12, children will be able to form hypotheses, use inference and deductive reasoning to arrive at the solution of problems and to generalize their conclusions to similar problems (Piaget 1950). Science projects and fairs are popular venues for this activity. The idea of either inventing a new product or improving an existing product is exciting. Additionally, solving their own mystery books and doing art or other creative activities provide an avenue for their imagination. The increased ability to read, write and think conceptually and mathematically provides the beginnings of independent thinking for children at this age.

Culture, in the context of intellectual development, provides two types of contributions. Vygotsky, in his social cognition theory, contends that through culture, children acquire much of the content of their knowledge and the surrounding culture provides a child with the processes or means of their thinking (Vygotsky, 1927). When the child is in the culture of higher education, the problem solving and learning will reflect that culture. Intellectual stimuli may come from university held continuing education classes or personal contact with various faculty members. This exposure will increase social expression and provide a diversity of thought that might otherwise not exist.

Socialization

The pre-teenage years are ages when children tend to be heavily involved in school activities, such as band, sports, and academic clubs (Orton, 1997). In addition, extra-curricular activities outside of the school system such as little league sports, scouts, church or dance lessons may require a great deal of parental support. For many of these activities, transportation often requires parental involvement. The focus of attention shifts from a family orientation to a peer orientation.

Pre-adolescents, the pre-driving age, are also significant times for "latch-key" situations (Department of Human Service Juvenile Report, 2000). The children are of the age where baby-sitters and after school programs are either not available or not considered. Many, therefore, are left to their own activities after school. Documentation indicates that children in this age group have expressed frustration concerning the need for independence, but they are not quite ready for the responsibility (Dworelsky, 1987).

Erik Erikson's (1950) stage of *industry versus inferiority* suggested that this is a time for children to achieve a sense of accomplishment, to develop a sense of competence or inadequacy. Children at this stage perceive and are confronted with social issues of acceptance and rejection, fairness and injustice, right and wrong. There is an increased understanding of self in relation to family, peers and community. Individuals this age have a sufficient expressive language level to relay feelings, perspectives and opinions, thereby, making it an ideal age from which to obtain information (Smart & Smart, 1977).

In summary, children in this age group are developing their sense of identity through participation in extra-curricular activities. Their focus is changing from family to friends, still needing much parental guidance. Children between the ages of 10 and 13 are beginning to see their way in the world. They are able to verbalize their thoughts and

opinions, making this an appropriate age for interviewing increased self-awareness and self-efficacy, students are able to self-monitor activities and have increasing responsibility at home.

Issues of Working Parents

It is assumed, at this point, that the absence of a parent, regardless of the reason, can have an impact upon the socialization of a child. Therefore, there should be some correlation to socialization in this development regardless of whether the parent is attending school or working. Children typically begin spending unsupervised time by the age of 10 or 11 (Belle, 1999). A survey of mid-western families foundthat three quarters of the parents surveyed believed that most children were ready for regular self-care between the ages of 10 and 12 (Steinbergy & Riley, cited in Belle, 1999).

The same study indicated that children between the age of 10 and 12 were typically allowed to be self-cared, in other words, were not provided with babysitting or day care assistance. Gray (1987), notes that although it has become commonplace in our society for children to take care of themselves for periods of time every day while their parents work, not much is known about the adequacy or effects of these self-care arrangements.

Galamos and Garbarino (1983) found no difference in academic achievement or school adjustment between small-town fifth and seventh graders in self-care and their adult-supervised peers. It should be noted, however, that this study was limited to communities that were small, less than 25,000, and in the time that the study was done, were felt to be safe.

In a study to analyze self-esteem and sense of control over their lives, Rodman, Pratto and Nelson (1985) found that there were no significant differences in self-esteem between fourth grade students who were considered to be latch-key, and those fourth graders who were supervised by their parents after school. The study went on to determine that likewise there was no significant differences in the social skills of those fourth graders who went home to parents, and those who were considered to be latchkey children.

In a similar study, Vandell (as cited in Gray, 1987) studied 349 third graders from Dallas, Texas in 1986 to determine if social and study skills varied between those children who went home to their parents as opposed to those in latch key situations. The study, which used ratings of parents, peers and children also indicated no significant differences between the social and study skills.

Other studies have reported different conclusions. For example, Woods (1972) reported that the low –income urban fifth graders in self-care had more academic and social problems than their peers who go home to parental care. Likewise, children who spend more time unattended in their homes have a higher incidence of experimentation with alcohol and sex than their counterparts (Long & Long, 1983).

A study of fifth through ninth graders indicated that the more removed from adult supervision adolescents are; the more they are susceptible to peer pressure and to commit anti-social acts. There are, however, some children who, when self-supervised, are prohibited from contact with others outside the home until the absent parent returns. Deborah Belle (1999) researched a child's perspective of self-supervision or latchkey. Many of the children were limited to staying at home once they returned from school.

Parents placed limitations on visitors, telephone calls, etc. The children reported that they often felt isolated from friends and school activities.

In conclusion, it is clear that many children are currently in self-care. The exact number is not known, or varies depending upon the reporting source. However self-care or "latchkey" situations are now a necessary aspect of our culture. All levels of the public and the private sector are responding to the needs, such as safety and adult supervision, of school-age children, but the response is slow and inadequate. The entire issue of latchkey children is a sensitive one, and promises to continue to be for years to come.

The issue of parental employment effects on children is still undetermined. The primary difference between those students whose parents are employed full-time outside of the home and children whose parents are also students may be the inconsistency of scheduling and evening activities. Whereas an employed a parent will usually have a consistent schedule, the student-parent may have a complete schedule change every semester. A student-parent may have evening responsibilities, such as studying and research papers to write, in contrast to parents who work, who may have no additional evening responsibilities.

Universities Services to Student-Parents

As a prelude to this study, I conducted a survey to determine services currently being provided to student-parents by universities. Three Oklahoma institutions were contacted: a comprehensive state university, a regional university, and a community college. Campus life or student personnel officials indicated the issue of student-parents was becoming more important. These institutions of higher learning, however, stated they are ill equipped to deal with the situation. All three had child development facilities for

the younger children available to faculty, staff and students; however no services were proved to children above the age of eight.

The comprehensive university has support groups available for adult learners, including shared childcare for older students, and a "used clothing room" for the children of students. According to university medical staff, they are considering adding a pediatrician to their medical facilities. In addition, they indicated a large community education program geared to children over the age of eight. The comprehensive university has added a Family Day to their fall schedule.

The regional university has a child development center available to students; however, it is not open for evening classes. Community enrichment programs, such as science camp, various sports camps and art programs were open to children of students at a minimal cost. The community college offered no real programs to children of student-parents.

Campus counseling centers personnel stated that the one major area of student-parent concern was the effect their participation in education may have on their children. Time and financial constraints and issues that could be considered as neglect are also of concern. The comprehensive university is considering various programs for these issues. Individuals contacted indicate that this is an area that warrants further investigation.

The University of California at Berkeley recently began a campus support service to respond to the needs of students who are combining school with parenting. The Student Parent Center attempts to provide support services to enhance the retention and academic success by providing workshops, social events and courses to assist this population. Chat room and faculty help desks are available to further lend support to the

parent-students. In a conversation held with the director of the facility, it was learned that retention rates have dropped considerably since the creation of the facility

The aforementioned research indicates that parents are indeed concerned about what the impact of their participation in higher education will be on their children. It is evident that there is a "missing link" related to the issues of retention rates and academic success of adult learners. This missing link is the examination of the impact on children.

There has been no research on the specific question of a child's perception or feelings related to the issue of their parents participating in higher education. There has been, however, research to indicate that family support is vital to an adult learner's success and that parents are concerned as to how their participation is affecting their children. There has also been considerable research on the specific developmental stages of the 10 to 13 year old children, and much information gathered regarding the cultural shift toward latchkey children. Further, universities are indicating that this is an issue that needs to be addressed for their adult learners. This study offers the potential for unique observations into the impact that adult learning has on children's lives.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine how children experience parental return to higher education. Prior research addressed the issue of why adult learners return to school and the related social and psychological factors on the adult. However, no research has been conducted to determine the effects of adult participation in post-secondary education on their children. An interpretative inquiry approach provided a qualitative interpretation of issues relevant to the research questions. An interpretative inquiry study is one that examines perspectives (Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994). The perspectives of children, the "out of the mouths of babes" aspect, provided us with their thoughts, feelings and reactions to their parents' participating in higher education. Since the best source of information about issues pertaining to children is children, it follows logically the children, themselves, are the best source of information (Scott, 2000). The following questions were addressed:

1. How do children, ages 10 to 13, experience the situation of their parents' return to school?
2. How do children perceive their responsibilities, activities, and social life to be affected once the parent is in school?
3. In what ways do children imagine that their lives will be different after their parents graduate or complete their university studies?

This chapter will discuss the specific design of the project. It will further discuss protocol questions that participants will be asked. In addition, the procedure for the data

collection and the method of data analysis will be discussed. The limitations of the study will also be detailed.

Design

The questions posed by this research study were best addressed through interpretative inquiry inquiry. Interpretative inquiry as described by Patton (1990) focuses on the following question: "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (p.69). A dimension of interpretative inquiry is an assumption that an essence of shared experiences exists among the research participants. Although different individuals will be asked to speak of their personal experiences, a similar experience exists and the emerging themes can be identified (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1992). Many factors may shape the participants' experiences such as race, age, and personal history. The assumption underlying this research is that children, whose parents are attending a college or university, are linked by some shared, common perception. Each child share common experiences when parents are spending home time in studying or attending class. Each child has parents who juggle not only the role of parent but also that of student, and in some cases that of employee, as well.

The research will attempt to uncover the issues that present themselves for children between the ages of 10 and 13 who are being raised during the years when their parents participate in adult education experiences, specifically at a college or university. The issues that children perceived within these circumstances will be ascertained by examining the various aspects of typical days in the family life, by noting extra curricular activities in which the children are involved, observing the social life of the children, and noting the relationships between parents and children.

Sample

The target population for this study consisted of children between the ages of 10 and 13, whose parents were enrolled on a full-time basis at a local rural regional university, on either the graduate or undergraduate level. This university was selected because of its easy accessibility to me and because of its historically large population of adult learners with children.

Participants were selected via notice on the university electronic mailbox, posters, and in the campus newspaper. The request included the purpose of the research, time requirements and assurance of confidentiality. Criteria for participants were children between the ages of 10 and 13 who were willing to be interviewed. Individuals whose parents had a direct relationship with me were not included in the study. This included students who were enrolled in classes or were advisees. The sample size consisted of 19 children. There was no predetermined selection of gender, race or geographic origin, other than the criteria that parents were enrolled on a full time basis at the university.

Data Collection

The 19 participants and their parents were contacted and interviews scheduled. Two information-gathering methods were used. A non-directive interview with the child participants and in-depth interview with the parents of the participants were conducted (appendix B). All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed to assist in the analysis of the data.

Interviews with the children were conducted at a location where the children typically felt the most comfortable. Scott (2000) indicated that the location of the interviews is quite likely to influence the way children respond (p.104). She further

indicated that the interview setting is vital because of the social meaning children that will attach to environments such as home or school.

The initial contact with the children was a one-on-one informal interview. The reason for the study, confidentiality, and informed consent were discussed with both the parents and the children. After a rapport was established, the child was provided with a paper with empty balloon (as in cartoons) and was asked to place in the balloons the thoughts they had about their parents attending school (appendix C) This method, known as "clustering," generated ideas and thoughts that children may not have previously voiced (Rico, 1983). Rico indicated that clustering is a nonlinear brainstorming process akin to free association. Through clustering, individuals naturally come up with a multitude of choices from a part of the mind where experiences of a lifetime mill and mingle (p. 28). Clustering has also been used successfully as facilitation to the interview process (Karpiak, 1990, 1997). This method allowed the children to react to and express their perceptions without direction, thus establishing the phenomenon that is occurring (Carney, 1987). The participants were asked to cluster to the question, "What are some thoughts or feelings you have about your parents going to school?" The participants were then asked to discuss their clusters.

Multiple data sources have been deemed vital when obtaining information from children (Eder, 1995). Christensen and James (2000), in their studies with children, emphasized that visual tools can often provide a medium for talking. Letting children visually express, through drawing, doodling or copying, their own perceptions, offered a basis in children's own cultural practice (Rapport, 1993 as cited in Christensen & James, 2000)). These tools provided a rich, multilayered and mediated form of communication

that facilitated information from the participants (Christensen & James, 2000). The information from the clustering was used to direct the interview. Interviewing techniques of reframing and paraphrasing allowed me to refine and clarify what the child was actually voicing.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) described an in-depth interview as "a conversation with a purpose" (cited by Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994, p. 268). The interview was an informal, interactive exchange using open-ended questions. The purpose was to "find out what is in and on someone else's mind . . . to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). An interview guide was formulated to assist in the structuring of the interview. The interviews in this research probed participants' experiences with their everyday lives, their feelings about their parents attending college, and their thoughts on their family situation.

Interview questions for the children not only included those that were developed based on the drawings, but also included questions that asked: "What changes will occur in your life after your parents graduate?" "What is your current social life like?" "What are the negative or positive aspects about your parents attending college?"

Direct interviewing of the child provides a far more complete account of a child's life than from other sources (Scott, 2000). Because rapport is necessary for children to give careful and truthful answers, a great deal of time was spent prior to the clustering experience and the interview to put the children at ease (Scott, 2000). It should be noted that the interviews varied in length from one hour to two hours, and often conducted while shooting basketball, grooming a horse and other activities where the children felt the most comfortable. The children would engage in very candid conversations while

participating in such activities. It is felt that the children also felt safe to disclose information when out of the home. It should be noted that often audio-taping presented a challenge, especially when activities involved physical activity such as jumping rope. Since I have experience in working with children of this age group, this familiarity allowed me to acknowledge reference points to which the children referred (Mayall, 2000). These reference points included information about school settings, extra-curricular activities, and mutual acquaintances. Briggs (1986) encouraged researchers to know that when working with children, the importance of understanding children's conversational norms and patterns, since they may differ substantially from adults. Since I have experienced extensive interactions with children of this age through volunteer activities with Boys and Girls Clubs, Soccer Association, and as a Sunday school teacher with this age group, I felt that I understood the sociolinguistic factors

Additional interviews occurred with the participant's parents. These interviews provided contextual information for the children's themes. In addition, further explanation was needed to fill in the "gaps" that the children were unable to articulate. This added another perspective to the research.

I hold a license as a Professional Counselor (LPC), and am thereby, subject to the Code of Ethics of confidentiality. Further, I have over twenty-five years experience. This training and experience assisted in establishing a rapport with children, parents, and in various interviewing techniques.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the collected data was to search through the pages of transcribed interviews and field notes to discern meaning units (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998,

Moustakas, 1994). I was cognizant of not only what was said, but also of how the information was said. In interviewing both the parents and the children, non-verbal language was noted. This, coupled with the method of clustering, allowed the themes to emerge.

The technique of open coding was utilized to discover what experiences occurred. Once the particular experience had been identified, the information was categorized into groups, which allowed the concepts or emerging themes to surface. By utilizing the methods of clustering, interviewing with the child, as well as interviewing the parents, triangulation of the data further validated the results.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. The sample size consisted of a rural, primarily white population at a small university. Great care, therefore, should be made to acknowledge that although emerging themes were identified, generalizations to other populations should be avoided.

I guarded against unintentional subjectivity. I am a student who also works full-time as a faculty member and has two children ages, 20 and 17. I took care to represent accurately and clearly in an objective and reflective manner what was actually being said and implied.

Summary

To summarize, the purpose of this study was to determine what social and psychological factors existed for children whose parents were adult learners at a post secondary institution. This research was intended to enlarge our understanding of how children experience the return of their parents to school. The research topic lent itself to a

qualitative interpretative inquiry study. To accomplish this, 19 participants were studied. Clustering was adapted to encourage non-directive responses from children. To substantiate historical information and to obtain information to "fill in the gaps," an in-depth interview was also conducted with the parents of the participants.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This study examined the perspective of children whose parents participate in post-secondary education. The interpretative inquiry approach provided a means by which 19 children between the ages of 10 and 13 could express their views. The participants were first asked to generate thoughts and ideas through a "clustering" exercise that encouraged non-directive responses. Using paper and pencil, the participants were asked to write down their thoughts and experiences concerning parent participation in higher education. During the second part of the interview, participants were asked a series of protocol questions. It should be noted that some of the protocol questions were addressed during the clustering exercise and therefore were not repeated. Parents of the participants were interviewed to confirm and provide triangulation of data. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The data was sorted and synthesized into common categories, which were then organized according to emerging themes.

Children expressed both positive and negative responses in this study. Children expressed support and even pride in the efforts their parents put toward their education. As a result of a parent's participation, children are learning self-efficacy and are exposed to a diverse view of the world that perhaps may not have been available to them. However, the study also revealed that in the context of that education, parents carry multiple, often conflicting roles, which make it difficult for them to provide the attention that children in this age range. As a result, although the children appear to support the parent's efforts, they do not necessarily *like* it. The children provided fresh insights into

this phenomenon. I was pleasantly surprised with the perspective the children provided, not only as a researcher, but also as a mother and a counselor.

Several themes or areas of concern emerged. The first theme concerns the issue of distance between the family residence and the university the parent or parents attend. The second theme concerns the difference in home life between the periods when school is in session and the periods when school is on break. The third theme, and perhaps the most surprising concern, was an awareness the children had of the family financial situation. The fourth theme concerns how little knowledge the children had regarding how long their parents had been participating in higher education. This theme concludes the children's opinions regarding the difference between graduate and undergraduate education and their perception of times that classes were available. The fifth theme concerns children's involvement in school and extra-curricular activities and the impact of those activities in their lives and the lives of their parents. Finally, the last theme concerns the children's support of their parents' efforts to continue their education.

This chapter focuses on these emergent themes; it also introduces some of the participants of the study and provides a voice to their perceptions. The chapter closes with a discussion of these major findings that were based on the interviews with these delightful participants.

What a Difference Distance Makes

The role of distance appeared to be a dominant theme for the participants. The participants' perceptions of their parent's involvement in higher education differed in relation to the distance the student-parent resided from the university. Those families who resided further than 30 miles had a much different experience from those who resided

closer to the university campus. The significance of distance was manifested in two areas: knowledge of the university culture and access to parents.

Children's Understanding of the University Culture

Knowledge of the university culture and the benefits of living close to the campus was a subject discussed by all of the participants. Eight of the individuals interviewed lived at least 30 miles away from the campus, among which four individuals had parents who commuted at least an hour to and from the university. The five remaining participants resided in or in close proximity to the town where the university was located. Clearly, this distance affected the sense of connection that children felt toward the university. Children whose parents commuted the greatest distance appeared to be the least connected to their parent's activities at the university. The "disconnect" feeling relates to two areas. The first is the physical aspect, being able to physically be on campus at certain times, such as attending class with parents or participating in community activities. The second concerns the opportunity to relate on a personal basis with individuals involved in campus life. The campus life each student, in this case the student-parent, consists of involvement with faculty members, student clubs and activities, as well as other students. Children who reside a distance from the university may have little or no opportunity to put a face with a name, and may never be certain who or what the parent may be discussing. With the exception of one participant, none of the children whose parents commuted had ever been to the university. The university atmosphere appeared to be an enigma to them. Parents would talk about a specific building or having to "walk the hill" yet their children, who had never been on campus, had no concept that the facility was a classroom building, or that the university is perched

on a hill. On the other hand, the children who resided in close proximity to the university felt a close kinship, as well as a sense of participation in the culture of the university.

The Case of Scotty

Scotty is a 13-year-old, blond-haired, blue-eyed boy of above average height, who resides with his mother and two younger siblings in a small town in eastern Oklahoma. Scotty has a passion for basketball and has collected many souvenirs and jerseys with various National Basketball Association teams, which he showed off with great pride. He is also very active in his church youth group and plays baseball during the summer, which he admitted he did not care for since he "sucked" at it. Scotty was particularly talkative and easily expressed his thoughts during two games of HORSE, which he handily won.

Scotty's mother, Anne, who is an education major, has been commuting the hour and half to the university and back for five semesters. His mother indicated that she commutes every day, and she has especially long days on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Scotty is quite proud of his expertise in meal preparation. His specialties include Ramen Noodles and frozen pizza. Although his grandparents live nearby, Scotty announced with a whine that his grandmother made him "do homework and crap" right after school, and he preferred to "chill out" after his hard day at school. He rather likes the fact that he has time to himself and it was obvious that he felt mature in staying home alone, since his sisters went to his Granny's.

Scotty indicated that his mother speaks a great deal of the university but confessed that he was "clueless" about what she was talking about most of the time. He further admitted that he really was not sure what college was, and what "some of the

words are" that his mother uses. He specifically was interested in the meaning of "psych" and "bio" and what was meant by 15 hours. Scotty had never been to the university, although he claimed that he once saw a picture of a building that looked like a dome. It was interesting to note that his perception of the university was a larger version of his local elementary school, only with "like, maybe two buildings." Scotty expressed an interest in seeing the university, however, he stated with some frustration in his voice, that when he asked his mother if they could go, she responded that she was "tired of that long drive and didn't want to go unless she had to."

Scotty, through his comments and questions, expressed a need to "see" where his mother goes every day. He had a curiosity about many aspects of the university, such as how many seats the basketball arena held and the type of flooring it had. He, in his own words, "just wanted to see it, university."

The Case of Kelly

Kelly, a somewhat shy girl of 11, with long dark-brown hair pulled back in a ponytail, resides with her parents on a ranch in southern Oklahoma, where her father has a cattle operation and her mother is obtaining a degree in social work. At first she was hesitant to be interviewed, but once rapport was established, she asked many questions. Kelly has a love of horses and proudly showed off her barrel-racing arena. Prior to leaving, I was treated to a demonstration of her equestrian aptitude, and was very impressed.

An only child, Kelly expressed feelings of sadness that her mother was not always around when she got home from school. She quickly pointed out however that her father was always home and she didn't have to stay there by her "lonesome." Her mother, an

undergraduate student, commutes to the university four days a week. The commute takes approximately 45 minutes, depending upon traffic and trains.

Kelly had a number of questions about the university, and like Scotty, indicated that she was often confused when her mother discussed the university. She couldn't seem to grasp the concept of the university and, like Scotty, appeared to equate the environment to that of an elementary school. Kelly asked, "...can you tell me something? Does Mom's classroom look like ours? I mean, is there a stick board? And are there cattle in the north forty? 'Cause Mom says she has to park there all the time if she gets late."

The two children discussed above, shared concerns with other participants whose parents also commuted. There was a need for the children to have a mental picture of where their parents were spending their time. The university was almost a surreal place in their minds, a place where parents went, discussed matters, and spent time; however, it did not appear to be a "real" place to them. On the other hand, children whose parents resided either in the community or nearby the university seemed to have an easy familiarity with the university. These children had been on campus numerous times, knew the names of the various buildings, and could find their way around campus. In addition, the children who lived in close proximity to the university appeared to take greater advantage of continuing education and other community programs. Participants participated in science and math camps, music and drama classes, as well as sports and special interest activities.

The Case of Wade

Wade, age 12, is an energetic boy with dark hair and eyes, who has a love of soccer, football, rock collecting and participating in youth activities through a local recreational facility. He resides with his mother and younger sister in a home approximately two blocks from the campus. His mother, who is majoring in mass communications moved to the university community two years ago to avoid the cost of commuting. Gayla, Wade's mother, explained that she returned to college after her divorce to provide a means to support her children in the future. She stated that with the cost of gasoline, she did not think she could make it financially if she had to drive any significant distance. Gayla remarked that after her divorce she felt a need to be close to her extended family, who resides in a nearby town.

Wade seemed very familiar with the university, displaying his knowledge of the university by describing exactly where my office was, and questioning the progress of the remodeling project in the building. Wade even admitted that he had occasionally "gotten in trouble" for skateboarding on campus with the group of boys that he "hangs" with. Wade exclaimed," It [the university] is a way cool place! You can look at the rock collection in the new science building, and me and the guys can go running around the football field if we want." It was evident that Wade felt the university was almost a second home to him, feeling comfortable with the ambiance that surrounds a university. He demonstrated that when children are not only familiar with the bricks and mortar aspect of the university, they also have easier access to university programs and activities. Wade reported involvement in university activities such as attending athletic events, especially football and baseball games. He proudly showed certificates of

involvement in various continuing education programs. As he said, "Yeah, they all know me over there."

The Case of Elizabeth

Elizabeth, age 12, is a sixth grader at the elementary school located two blocks from the university campus. She is a bright girl with a quick smile and vivacious personality. She was particularly excited that her blond hair was finally long enough to be French braided for the interview. Elizabeth enjoys many activities. She especially enjoys dance classes, Girl Scouts, soccer and basketball. Elizabeth resides with her father and older brother in married student housing on the university campus. According to her father, Russ, living on campus made transportation easier in their situation. Russ returned to college two years ago after sustaining a spinal cord injury in an industrial accident. He is completing a degree in environmental science. Like Wade, Elizabeth not only seems to feel at ease in the university setting, but also said she enjoys many of the activities that the university offers. Programs presented through continuing education provide Elizabeth an opportunity to enjoy diverse cultural and educational experiences. Elizabeth spoke with great enthusiasm about her activities at the university:

> I mean I just LOVVVVE my dance teacher, she's a cheerleader and everything, and I've been to gifted and talented lyceum (or something like that that starts with an I –I forget) – oh and I think Berktan is way cool – he taught our soccer camp last year.

Elizabeth's involvement in the activities of the university, as well as her comfort with the surroundings of the campus, was similar to the experiences of other participants who reside in or near the community of the university. Like Wade and Elizabeth they too seem to feel comfortable with being on campus and to enjoy activities that are open to

individuals in their age group. When parents discussed a certain aspect of the campus, the children who resided nearby were able to visualize the reference. This is in contrast to those children whose parents commuted over 30 miles from campus. These students had little or no personal knowledge of the campus or activities associated with the university. The issue of connect versus disconnect with regard to the children's involvement with the physical aspect of the campus also extended to the sense of connect versus disconnect with the university personnel. The culture of the university is comprised not only of places and activities, but also of the individuals involved in the lives of their parents. Children whose parents commute had a curiosity about the people that their parents discussed--the individuals, faculty members, and classmates, as well as university staff members and offices. This curiosity was rarely satisfied.

The Case of Becky

Becky, a perky, imaginative girl of 11, with short brown hair and eyes, resides with her mother and two brothers in a small town approximately an hour drive away from the university. Becky, who was interviewed jointly with her brothers, Matt, age 12, and David, age 10, was very interested in the people her mother referred to. According to her brothers, Becky spends a great deal of her time talking on the telephone. However, according to Becky, much of her time is involved in basketball, youth group, and 4-H. She enjoys singing in the school choir and listening to country and western music.

Terri, Becky's mother, is a Service to Deaf major with an interest in becoming an interpreter. Because of financial hardships, the family recently moved to a home owned by another family member. Becky and her brothers have a close relationship with their maternal grandparents, who provide emotional and custodial care for the children when

Terri is at school. Becky indicated that after her parents divorce, which apparently was "high profile," she very much wanted to move. However, her mother felt that the family support was more readily available in their current location.

Becky stated that she had never been to the university campus; however, she was more interested in the people that her mother spoke of than the physical appearance of the university. She said she liked to imagine what people looked like when her mother talked of certain people. Becky was very creative in her descriptions of people and had very vivid ideas of how faculty and her mother's peers acted and what they looked like. It was especially amusing to compare Becky's descriptions with my knowledge of the people. Matt and David, Becky's brothers, also stated that they would someday like to meet the people their mom talks about, but they did not have quite the curiosity about it that Becky had. The three had definite opinions about those individuals, especially faculty members, that were "nice" and those that were "mean." This perception obviously stemmed from Terri's interaction with those mentioned. Becky inquired:

> Do you know Dr. Smith? Is she really, really mean like my Mom says? She sounds mean because if you are late to her class she ah, ah, locks the door and won't let people in and if you almost make an A she won't give it to you, even if study really hard.

Becky also felt she had personal knowledge of the instructors. She voiced, "I think I'd really like Ms. Jones, she lets Mom be late on bad days and lets her students turn in stuff late and don't [sic] make Mom feel bad." Becky also had interesting comments about her mother's peers and discussed them as though she were close to them, although had never met them. For example, she knew whether the peers were "good" or "bad" students, the names of their children and where the student-parents were employed. Becky had a

tentative grasp of the culture of the people connected with her mother at the university; however she had no face-to-face knowledge of those individuals. This was in contrast to those participants who resided near the university had a personal knowledge of and were acquainted with faculty members and peers involved in the academic life of their parents.

The Case of Spencer

Spencer, a poised, articulate, but somewhat impish, 13-year-old male with short brown hair and hazel eyes, is well acquainted with individuals in the university culture since his parents are both from the same community where the university is located. Spencer is active in several organizations including Boy Scouts, and is hoping to obtain the rank of Eagle Scout within two years. He is a member of the church orchestra where he plays the trumpet. He also hopes to make the junior high tennis team, and is currently ranked in the state for singles and doubles in his age category in Oklahoma.

Both of Spencer's parents, Cindy and Joe, are graduate students in education counseling and criminal justice respectively. Cindy is employed with a nearby public school as a teacher and Joe is employed with the local police department. Spencer is the youngest of three boys; the older two reside outside of the home, making Spencer in essence an only child.

Spencer, having been born and raised in the community, knows many of the individuals associated with the university. However, he probably has a more intimate knowledge of the children of the faculty and staff. As Spencer implied, he is a friend of several "important" people's kids. He routinely visits the home of several faculty members and is tennis partner with the grandson of one of the department chairs. In fact, he explained that one of the faculty members is his Scout leader and has been for several

years. With this personal contact comes a familiarly and casualness with the people involved with the university. Spencer affirmed that this casualness often upsets his mother, especially since she feels that adults should be treated with the respect accorded their position at the university. As Spencer recounted:

> Boy did I get in trouble from my Mom. I didn't know Bryan's dad was a doctor or anything important and I called him John....Mom says I better call him Dr. Brown...at least until she gets her grades. But he said I can call him John if I want to, he doesn't care.

This comfortable feeling is one shared by participants who had access to the university and the individuals associated with it. They were acquainted with, or had association with, many of the staff, faculty and students at the university. In addition to the feelings of connect or disconnect to the university and associated people, those participants who resided closer to the university had more opportunities to spend time with their parents. Those who resided a distance from the university did not have the flexibility of brief parent contact or access to parents that their counterparts who lived nearer to the university did.

Children's Perception of Time with Parents

As previously stated, families who resided in close proximity to the university noted that they enjoyed brief interludes with their parents, whereas those children whose parents commuted had limited access to their parents while they were in school. Brief interludes included parent availability to attend their child's school functions during the day, meet with their children during lunch and other breaks and be able to at least attend part of their child's activities. Access to parents may also include availability to parents in mornings or after school. Access before and after school largely depended upon the

parent's course schedule. If a parent was commuting, then at times they must leave for class before children rise and prepare for school.

The Case of Brandon

Brandon, age 12, is a quiet, independent boy with dark eyes and long dark hair. Most of Brandon's time is spent playing baseball, fishing, and playing video games. He proudly showed off a fishing boat he had purchased with money he earned mowing lawns and doing miscellaneous yard work. Brandon also earned the money for and purchased a Playstation 2, which he plays with several of his friends. He especially enjoys racing games and World Federation Wrestling matches.

Brandon resides with his mother, Vicki, and father, Zeke, and an older sister in a small community approximately 90 miles from the university. His mother, Vicki is a second year graduate student in business administration. His father, Zeke, is employed by and a large manufacturing company. It is the family's dream to eventually open their own business in the community, hence Vicki's involvement in higher education. Vicki's classes are primarily in the evening and her husband works 10-hour days. Because of the commute, Vicki is often absent in the evenings and on the occasional weekend.

Brandon very quietly and softly communicated his frustrations and sadness over the fact of his mother's frequent absences from his baseball games. While he appears to realize that it is difficult for his mother to miss classes; it was obvious by this statement that he wished for more involvement by his mother.

> I don't like it that Mom can't see me play. Even though the other parents are good about yelling for me and taking me to the games, - I just wish my Mom could be like all the other parents and be there. I'm the only one whose Mom can't go.

Brandon, like other children whose parents commute, appeared to intellectually understand why parents were unable to attend the games and activities, but emotionally he conveyed a sense of abandonment that was not noted among those children whose parents were able to attend at least a portion of their children's activities.

The Case of Shannon

Shannon is a delightful, athletic 13-year-old girl with curly light-brown hair, and blue eyes. She admitted to being somewhat of a tomboy, enjoying outdoor activities and participating in many athletic events. Shannon has taken part in almost every sport available and enjoys the fact that, until this year, she was the only girl in the Kiwanis baseball program. In addition, she plays soccer and plays in a basketball league in a larger community. Shannon reports that although she is probably a better athlete than some of her male peers, she doesn't try to "show off because then she won't have a boyfriend."

Shannon resides in the same town as the university, with her parents, Karen and William, and two younger sisters' ages 8 and 6. Karen, Shannon's mother, is a nurse at a local hospital, working various shifts as needed. William, Shannon's father, is a graduate student in the criminal justice program. William explained that he returned to school after an automobile accident left him unable to return to his previous employment as a carpenter. The majority of his classes are in the evening and a few are on the weekend.

The family as a unit enjoys all types of athletic events. When one member of the family has an activity or event, the whole family attends. This could be a difficult situation due to William's class schedule, and Shannon appreciated the efforts that her father made to attend his daughter's various activities. It was important to Shannon that

her father and mother attended as many of her basketball, soccer, and baseball games as they possibly could. Realizing that often her father's class schedule interfered with her activities, she was especially delighted when her father could make at least a portion of her activities. Shannon related, "Sometimes Dad can't stay for the whole game (basketball) because he has school at 7:00, but he always gets to see me play some and never misses a part of the game." Her father's attendance at Shannon's games is possible because the family lives in the same town as the university; this would not be so if the family resided a distance from the campus.

For those who commuted, availability to children's activities was limited to evenings or weekends. A related aspect concerned the fact that those students whose parents were undergraduate students and attended classes primarily during the day were disadvantaged with respect to attending school events such as school conferences, plays, parties, etc. that took place during regular school hours. On the other hand, those who resided nearby were able to run to their child's school between classes, go to lunch with them, and assist with class parties. Elizabeth, who was introduced earlier, was one of many children who indicated that they enjoyed brief visits at their elementary school with their parents. Elizabeth, whose school is two blocks away from the campus, described special moments with her father that appeared to be most precious not only to the children but also to their parents:

> When my Dad can, he wheels across the [parking] lot and brings me a sub from that place at his school, and teacher lets me sit under the tree and eat lunch with him, and I'm glad 'cause the cafeteria food really sucks. Sometimes my friends like to talk with him, too and they ask questions on science and wheelchairs and stuff. He even came to my class once and told them what it was like to be a paraplegic.

Due to class schedules, parents may not be available or at home with their children either in the mornings or after school. "Latchkey" arrangements present a complex issue. Children between the ages of 10 and 13 are often too old for an after school program, but too young to remain at home unattended. After school programs in the community for pre-teens, such as Boys and Girls Club, are available if one lives in a large enough community for the program to exist. However, in rural or smaller communities, these programs may or may not be available. A problem also exists if parents must leave before the facility opens and return after the facility is closed. If the student-parent commute is a distance, however, must often leave the children for an extended period of time. Seven of the participants who reside 30 miles away or further from campus, acknowledge they are responsible for getting themselves up and ready for school at least two days a week or more. Participants further report they come home from school to an empty house at least two to five days a week.

The Case of Jacey

Jacey, age 10, has bright blue eyes and red hair and a love of art and music. She has been in art classes for several years, and has been taking piano lessons since the age of 6. Jacey is especially good at painting landscapes, and several pieces of her artwork are on display in the home. Although somewhat shy, and hesitant (possibly due to an articulation problem) she spoke freely about her perceptions of her mother attending college.

Jacey's mother, Betty, is a sophomore majoring in special education. An ammunition depot that has him working 10-hour and longer days employs her father, Tom. Jacey, an only child, resides in a safe neighborhood in a small community

approximately 40 miles away from the university. Her mother often leaves home at 6:30 am. for an 8:00 a.m. class. Because of her parent's schedule, Jacey is responsible for getting up on her own, readying herself for school, and meeting the bus.

Feelings of anxiety were evident when Jacey spoke of being alone on those three days. Whereas she expressed had no fear of physical harm, she revealed her anxiety about getting herself up and meeting the school bus on time, and not missing it. There is a neighbor next door that she can call in case of an emergency, however, Jacey explained that the neighbor is "old" and she doesn't want to bother her should she miss the bus. She also suggested that her mother would be angry if she failed to get up. In Jacey's words, "I sometimes get scared at home. I'm afraid I'm going to forget to wake up in time and miss the bus – then I'm in real trouble."

Although Jacey is at times concerned that she will miss the bus, she is at the same time gaining competence in developing daily living skills. In this regard, Jacey has employed several ideas such as setting two alarm clocks with one across the room to help her get up on time. Apparently, other students who are alone in the mornings have similar strategies. A common strategy is to place a telephone in the child's room and the parent calls via a cellular phone to wake up their child. This can result in some difficulty, however, depending upon the telephone reception. Another common strategy was to have extended family members, such as grandparents or neighbors, call for the wake-up.

Even as some children are capable of managing in the alone mornings, they may also come home to empty houses. A house can seem a lonely place when there is no one to greet the child, and no one to inquire if the day went well. Children prepare their own snacks and may have chores to complete or homework to start. Even when children were

thought to be capable, precautions were taken for their safety. Every child who was interviewed described a safety procedure that was followed once he or she returned home from school. Typically, this entailed a phone call to parents and/or a neighbor. A common concern expressed by the children was that because the use of cellular telephones is prohibited in most classrooms, if an emergency were to occur, the parent was not likely to be in a position to respond quickly. Therefore, homes had backup numbers of friends, relatives, and neighbors who could be contacted in case of an emergency.

Interestingly, although there was some concern on the part of the participants about the demands of the morning preparations for school, there were mixed feelings about coming home alone after school. As stated above, to some home is a sad, lonely place described by at least one as "boring." On child aptly described coming home to an empty house by declaring, "It's like the house is sad and becomes glad when Mom comes home." On the other hand, to others it was a joyful escape from a hectic schedule. Scotty, mentioned earlier, comes home by himself two days a week while his sisters go to their Grandmothers'. He sensed that it was a rite of passage for him to be able to "chill out" at home without sisters or others around. There was a sense that this time alone was valuable to him. But regardless of how children felt about being alone either before or after school, one instance in which children wanted their parents to be at home was during times of illness.

When a child is ill there are no easy solutions. At these times, parents face difficult decisions around whether to attend classes or stay home with the ill children. During times of illness, children typically want to stay home and have parents care for

them. This issue of what occurred during times of illness was discussed by 8 of the children. For the most part it appeared that illness consisted of the flu, colds, or the occasional injury. The children seemed to sense that it was difficult for a parent to decide whether to remain home with their children or allow someone else to see to their child's welfare. The solution appeared to be easy if the child was seriously ill. It was interesting to note that when I inquired what they defined as seriously ill terms such as "throwing up," or "running a high fever," and "fainting" were used. Another term children used to identify how ill they were was "sick enough to go to the doctor." Mostly illness was handled in one of three ways. If the child was seriously ill, then the parent would stay home with her or him, however, if the child was "kinda sick" the parent would either ask a relative or friend to care for the child, or take the child to school with them. Jacey, like other children whose mother commuted, would go to her grandmother's house. And she grumbled, "I hate it when I'm sick – you know – not sick sick, but just a little sick and I can't stay home by myself, I have to go to my Grams.... It's not the same as being with my Mom at home on the couch." Another child, Elizabeth, had similar feelings about illness; however, since her parent did not commute, the family had another option available that of attending class with her father.

> When I'm just kinda sick, ya know, I can't go to school, but Dad doesn't want me to stay at home, I just go to school with him if he only has one class and as long as I'm quiet and don't throw up or anything, it's okay. One of the teachers even bought me a Sprite. I really like her, but I don't know her name.

Evidently, when children are ill, it causes concern and a disruption of a regular routine, however, it is of greater concern when parents can neither run home briefly to check on their children nor have the option of taking their child to class with them. This

is another instance where children had a particular insightfulness depending upon whether parents commuted or resided close to the campus.

As is evident from the above, proximity of the family to the university where the parent or parents attend emerged as a significant issue for these children. From the parents' perspective, they choose to commute to the university for a variety of reasons that include: lack of funds to move, a support system of family and friends for children where they currently reside, and a desire to not uproot their families to an environment that is unfamiliar to them. Further, they may have a financial investment in a home, making relocation a financially losing situation, or employment situations that make relocation difficult. In addition, parents may not wish to move children from an environment that is comfortable and familiar, assuming that a change in the environment of school, friends, church, and family can often be a difficult adjustment for children to make. Finally, commuters report that, at times, the time spent driving may be the only "alone" time they get. Commuting gives them an opportunity to listen to taped lectures, or provide an opportunity to think and meditate (Ortman, 1995). The cost of gasoline, wear and tear on vehicles, and inconvenience of rising early and getting home late are often outweighed by the these considerations.

A child, however, looks at this situation from a different perspective. Children, whose parents commute, especially a great distance, have less awareness of the physical setting and environment of the university. As one child, Becky, voiced, the people and places parents discuss can only be imagined. When children have no real facts or faces to provide a reference, children are unable to truly grasp what parents are dealing with. It is difficult to participate in and converse about a situation that one knows nothing about, but

can only imagine. In addition, they appear to experience loneliness and sadness when parents are unable to attend school and extracurricular activities. It is difficult for a parent to "run" home 30 miles to have lunch with their children, or attend a school play that be scheduled during a day that the parents have three classes. In addition, because of class scheduling, children may have to either be responsible for getting themselves ready in the morning, or come home to an empty house. This can cause anxiety for some, or lead to a feeling of independence for others. These issues are compounded when the child is ill. During illness, children want and feel they need their parents. However, it is difficult due to class absentee policies for parents to stay home with children unless it is a severe illness. On the other hand, children who live in close proximity to the university are able to enjoy the atmosphere of the university, become familiar with the bricks and mortar, as well as feel comfortable with faculty and staff at the university. In addition, they had quick access to parents when they need it, if even for a brief time.

There are, however, times that children look forward to, when parents are present to wake them up, are there when they home from school, and times when the university and academia is not on the parents minds. That time is when the university is not in session.

Difference in Family Routine

An unexpected theme that appeared from the interviews concerned how differently children perceived their home life at those times when the university was in session and at those times when the university was not in session. Each participant interviewed made a distinction concerning "when Mom/Dad is in school" and "when Mom/Dad is not in school." When asked for clarification, each participant indicated that

"in school" did not refer to the academic status of their parents, but rather was a term used to indicate the school semester, while "not in school" referred to fall and spring breaks. Universally, the participants highlighted the difference in atmosphere in the home when school was out of session and when school was in session. When participants discussed these school breaks, it was observed that the children's body language relaxed and smiles appeared on faces. It was almost as if the stress was leaving their bodies to be replaced by fond memories. The children spoke fondly of leisure time spent with parents. Activities, such as family game night and outings which were halted during the semester, were reactivated, and rigid schedules that attempted to facilitate a smooth operation of a home during the busy semester were relaxed. The breaks were anxiously anticipated; on the other hand, when school was in session, a more chaotic environment was present. Various and sundry methods were employed to keep the household organized. Three sub-themes emerged...centering on family routine, meals, and stress level.

Comparison of Family Routine

Daily routine, such as times for getting up in the morning, bedtime, mealtime, homework and free time, were discussed by 10 of the participants. The children indicated that their parents had a set time for rising in the morning and going to bed at night. Each of the 10 children, suspected that they had a set bedtime so that their parents had time to accomplish tasks, especially homework. Brent's reasoning was that bedtimes were set so that, "Mom could get stuff done and so I won't bug her." Each person in the household had certain responsibilities and when those chores should be completed. Kimmie provides a fair representation of the routines used in the families of student-parents

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The Case of Kimmie

Kimmie is a 10-year-old girl with wide, dark eyes, and an outgoing personality. Kimmie, who, in her words would "like to be the next Monica," loves dancing and music. She resides in a spacious house, with her parents and her brother, age 8, and sister, age 6. Her mother, expecting her fourth child, is a nursing major at the university and is juggling a clinical rotation at the local hospital, as well as the activities of her three children. Kimmie's father is a student in the graduate program in education counseling and is employed as a youth minister in a local church.

Kimmie attends dance lessons twice a week with her sister, and enjoys being involved in the honor choir at her school. Her siblings are also involved in activities that include dance, flag football, and scouting. The family is also very active in their church.

Various charts are posted on the refrigerator outlining each child's activities and responsibilities for the week. A dry erase board mounted on the wall allowed for easy communication. Kimmie explained that if any member of the family went anywhere, if anyone called, or if an item was needed at Wal-Mart, then it was noted on the board. A master calendar with the months' activities detailed provided for long-range planning. It was explained that when a member of the family was given a schedule, such as dance practice and recitals, scout meetings, etc., it was noted on the calendar. A pen on a string allowed for quick access to note doctor appointments, school parties, and other events in the life of the family. Kimmie indicated that although there were many charts, at times their home was "cluttered" and it was "difficult to find anything." With a big sigh, Kimmie pronounced:

> She [mother] has a schedule and we better stick with it or else...If we don't have our stuff done before she gets home-it's watch out 'cause she gets sooo mad-and it's no telephone. But by Fridays she's so tired we get away with stuff.

The attempt to organize the busy lives of the family was evident in every household but one. The exception was a young man who indicated that his father had decided, "I'll clean the house when I graduate." Families, by having a set schedule, made sense out of a possible chaotic existence. Routines were discussed in great detail. There was a set time for each family member to wake up, depending upon who needed to be where at what time. One home had a rotation for preparation of breakfast, with Fridays being called "McDonald's Day." When home, children had chores, such as keeping his/her room clean, limited cooking, doing dishes, and care of family pets. It was noticed that most families had an evening routine. Most children, for example, had to immediately begin homework after school. After homework, there was typically a set amount of time for watching television, talking on the telephone, or using the computer. The bedtime ritual may include activities such as reading bedtime stories or simply nightly talks with each child.

The variety of creative solutions families utilized to organize their lives when the university was in session was very impressive. One family had a unique system they called the "room responsibility." Each child was responsible for a room a week – such as living room, dining room, den, etc. that changed on a weekly basis. Another family described the "laundry basket" system. Each room had three laundry baskets placed in the room. One basket was for dishes, one for toys, and the other for any item that did not belong in that room. At the end of the day, the baskets were dealt with appropriately. Another approach used by a family was pronounced as "the whistle and timer." At 6:30

every evening (unless another activity was occurring) the mother would set the kitchen timer at 15 minutes. She would then blow a referee whistle and the children would have 15 minutes to accomplish a pre-set task to clean the home. The whistle would blow again when the fifteen minutes were up. The child who completed his/her task within that time frame could stay up 15 minutes later than their normal bedtime. Evidently, whatever system a family employed, it was formulated to allow for a smoother operation of the household.

With this being noted, it should be clarified that although children spoke of these systems, it was also admitted that occasionally the system fell apart. The children were honest enough to disclose that although a system existed, near the end of the week each member of the family was "tired" and some chores and systems often fell by the wayside, only to be revitalized during the next week. When the semester was in session, the family whose parent(s) are involved in higher education employed a mechanism enabling the family to function. However, it was with great anticipation that the family looks toward semester, fall, and spring breaks.

A change in household routine was observed as both a refreshing change of pace and an opportunity for families to be revitalized. Participants announced the reason university breaks were enjoyed was because of how "laid back" or fun their home life could be. Families took this opportunity to participate in activities that, because of busy schedules, they were unable to be involved in during the semester. The children spoke of family vacations, visiting relatives, attending movies, etc. As one child pronounced with excitement, "Going to the real movies, not the ones we watch at home." Participants reported that parents took time to play board games, "hang" with them, or go shopping.

Parents appeared not to be concerned about a schedule, especially during the brief breaks, between semesters and fall and spring breaks. Children noted that parents were more lenient on chores. Beds did not have to be made in the morning, parents fed the family pets, and the adults in the family washed dishes. Wake up times and bedtimes were not enforced. Participants said that they could sleep as late or stay up as late as they wanted. As Kimmie enthusiastically explained it:

> I just lovvve [with great exaggeration] it when it's Christmas – but not, not just for the presents, but Mom doesn't have to go nowhere [sic] – I mean to school – we just ah sleep late and ah stay in our pajamas all day and eat junk food and watch TV – we don't have to make our beds or nothing...:

The brief breaks that occur in the university schedule, specifically the break between fall and spring semesters, and the short breaks such as spring and fall break, offer a time when home life is not as structured. This is especially beneficial when breaks are coordinated with the local public schools. This allows additional family time together to enjoy each other and to offer a much needed respite. One of the activities during such breaks is the increase in the number of home-cooked meals.

Comparison of Food and Meals

Food and meals comprised an interesting sub-theme mentioned by all but two of the participants. It should be noted that the boys spoke at greater length about this subject than the girls. During the ages of 10 to 13, boys are developing physically and appear to have a greater interest in eating. Children were often responsible for either preparing or assisting in the preparation of meals when the university was in session. The children were, for the most part, allowed use of the microwave and toaster, but had limited use of the oven or stove.

Breakfast was a meal that many of the children prepared independently. Cereal, oatmeal, and EggO's were common foods that children prepared. For the most part, lunch, especially when school was in session, was either eaten in the school cafeteria, or a lunch was packed, with parents typically responsible for the evening meals. However, because of a limited amount of time and a busy schedule, families seldom had the opportunity to sit down together and enjoy a home-cooked meal. When asked to describe what a "home-cooked meal" was, phrases such as "anything with mashed potatoes" or "you have to use a pot and pan" and "where there is meat, vegetables, and bread" to "a big meal" was used. The participants reported that at times their parents were simply too tired after school and, in some situations after working, to prepare meals. An easy alternative was eating out. Eating out or take-out meals was an option that occurred as many as two to four times during the week, and in some households it was an option used more frequently. Hamburgers, submarine sandwiches, and other fast foods were mentioned as quick meals before evening activities. The participants also noted that many meals were prepared in crock-pots. Parents could easily prepare a meal in the crock-pot and have a wholesome meal ready for quick evening meals. However, as Brandon confided, "You can only eat so much roast."

An interesting note was that each participant discussed pizza. Pizza was discussed as both a favorite as well as an item they grew tired of. As the interviewees explained it, when their parents were tired, they often ordered or prepared a frozen pizza. As Brandon stated, "At least it has vegetables on it!" Scotty further elaborated by saying that in his home, "home cookin' was a frozen pizza you had to put in the oven." Conversely, the interviewees grew tired of pizza as the semester progressed. On the other hand, the

practice of ordering pizza and other fast foods changed during the breaks. Not only was pizza not served, but also meals changed.

Participants reported that during the semester break parents prepared "big meals" or their children's favorite meals. The children enjoyed big breakfasts with "homemade" pancakes and French toast. They spoke of the family sitting around the table and eating a large meal and enjoying each other's company. Dessert, such as pies and cakes, was a special treat during this time. The three siblings, Matt, David and Becky, illustrated the special quality of school breaks. During semester breaks, their mother prepared each child's favorite food throughout the week. They good-naturedly bantered back and forth with comments about each other's favorite foods and the strange combinations of foods each would choose. This practice was anxiously anticipated and became a family tradition. This and other practices were employed by many of the other families to "make up" for lost meals.

Just as parents make up for the lack of homemade food preparation when the semester is out, one of the primary reasons fast food is purchased is because of the stress at home when school is in session.

Comparison of Stress Level in the Home

An additional perception by the children was the change in stress level in the home when the semester was in session versus when it is not. Stress is defined as any type of physical, mental, or emotional strains or tension on an individual (Zastrow, Kirst-Ashman, 1997). Student-parents have not only physical and mental, but also emotional strain, in their everyday life. Academic life, with the necessity of studying, reading, and taking examinations can be mentally, as well as emotionally, taxing. Parenthood is by

nature an emotional, physical, and mental strain on adults. In addition to parenthood and academics, adult learners may also be juggling a job, finances, and, in some situations, marriage difficulties. When school is in session these factors join together to produce stress.

A consistent theme in the interviews with the participants concerned the identification and acknowledgement of stress in their parents' lives. When parents are experiencing stress and strain, there is a trickle down effect to the children. A needlepoint framed in one of the homes summed this up. It read: "If Mama ain't happy – ain't nobody going to be happy." Participants reported that stress was manifested in several ways. They reported that the parents exhibited a general irritability, and a distraction that was manifested in non-verbal actions and behaviors.

The children described parents as impatient and upset with matters that would normally be a part of everyday life. A term that was used consistently by the participants was "gripey." The word was used to describe when parents nagged, complained, or were annoyed, irritated, or simply out of sorts. Children often felt that parents were angry with them, and in many situations removed themselves from their parents by staying in their bedrooms, going to a friend's or grandparent's home. Participants articulated that their parents were irritated by almost everything. It was often the little incidents that produced the most irritability. Many of the participants related stories about fixations and complaints parents made about seemingly inconsequential matters, or at least they appeared to be inconsequential to the children. Becky related the story of how her mother became very upset because a spoon and bowl had been left in the living room. Becky and her siblings were grounded for a week. The grounding, however, was removed when her

mother realized that she might have overreacted. This overreaction was one aspect that was noted by the children. Parents tended to hand out harsher punishments, only to recant them, when they felt stressed or pressured. The participants also described that, when irritated, parents tended to "yell" at them. To children between ages of 10 and 13, yelling by parents did not necessarily mean that parents raised their voices. Yelling meant that parents spoke harshly or was stern to their children.

The Case of Michael

Michael, age 10, is a quiet, unassuming boy with dark hair and eyes and is proud of Native American heritage. Michael has wrestled since the age of four, and has run track for two years. Many coaches are already heavily recruiting him because of his athletic ability. He enjoys school a great deal, with his favorite subjects being math and "anything but English and spelling."

Michael resides with his parents and older brother, a junior in high school, in a community close to the university. Both he and his brother are involved in multiple activities. His mother, Aileen, is seeking a master's degree in human resources administration, and is currently enrolled in 12 credit hours. Aileen, who is employed with the local tribal government, not only works full time, but also is responsible for her elderly parents who are in poor health. Michael's father is employed as a long distance truck driver and spends most of the week on the road.

Michael stated that his mother is often very busy and is under pressure to keep the home functional, be primary care giver to his grandparents, and still attend the many activities of him and his brother. Although his father resides in the home, during the week his mother is essentially a single parent. Michael indicated that feelings were "intense"

around his home when his mother was in school. He complained, "Mom is so, like you know, stressed out – I mean it's the pits. She yells all the time and is gripey. When she's like that we just stay in our rooms – but sometimes she gripes about that!"

Michael acknowledged that at times there was little to make his mother happy; her irritability makes him and his brother stay away from her, but that leaving may not be a solution to the problem either. Michael further indicated that when examinations come around it is even more stressful:

> Sometimes before a test, she gets really gripey. The badest, I mean worst thing that she's really not around a lot. Even when she's there, she doesn't pay a lot of attention to us. She acts like she is paying attention, but she really isn't. Know what I mean?

Sentiment such as this was repeated by many of the participants. Being anxious about an examination was an aspect that several children could relate to, since it is a shared experience with all students, regardless of age. In this regard, despite the distresses they felt, the children had empathy for their parents when it came to examinations.

Participants further reported that their parents often had a difficult time focusing in on their environment. Examples of inattentiveness and poor memory skills were described in detail. As Michael stated above, children indicated that often parents heard what children said– but that the parents were not really listening and therefore did not process what was verbalized. Parents tended to repeat or ask the same question many times. One of the observations made was that if parents were focusing on studies, a child could ask them anything, and parents would answer in the affirmative or with a "we'll see" or a "later" response. Several of the participants found it humorous to make outrageous requests and listen for standard answers. One story had the children asking if they could have a pet alligator with the parent answering in the affirmative.

According to the participants, not only do parents not really hear what is being said, but are also often forgetful. Parents often have their minds so full of details, that they overlook or forget other details or duties. Half of the children reported that they had been "forgotten" to be picked up at one time or another. One student was embarrassed to say that his teacher had taken him home from school twice after he was not picked up. They further indicate that little details such as lunch money, cookies for school parties, and other matters were often forgotten. Several children reported that utilities had been disconnected because parents forgot to pay their bills. Absentmindedness or lack of attention was observed in other forms in their parents. One child gleefully reported that his mother poured orange juice in his cereal one morning, instead of milk. This lack of attention and forgetfulness become more prevalent as the semester progressed.

Levels of stress were also manifested behaviorally. Participants noticed that parents displayed behaviors that either amused or irritated them. Elizabeth indicated that when the university was in session her father smoked cigarettes and attempted to hide it from her. Children reported that parents may pace the floor, drum their fingers on tables and steering wheels, and are generally unable to sit still. Scotty spoke of his mother having a secret "stash of Snickers" that the family supposedly knows nothing about. Kelly and other children reported that parents have an occasional glass of wine or beer when feeling pressure from their many responsibilities. The children noticed these behaviors, and some were of some concern to them. For example, children whose parents smoke were concerned about cancer and other medical problems that may result from smoking, and one child voiced his concern over of the number of beers his father consumes when under pressure. On the other hand, children report that some of the

behaviors are humorous. Kimmie asserted with a giggle that her father had a difficult time sitting still through the sermon at church. She explained, "He says he has to go check on something, but Mom says he can't sit still through the Benediction, much less the sermon."

In contrast, when the university is not in session, the children perceive little or no stress in their homes. It was assumed by the participants that the primary source of stress for their parent was the university. It is, therefore, the perception of the children that parents no longer have stress to deal with when the school is between semesters. Children failed to mention any other stress that may exist for parents such as finances, work problems, or other aspects of adulthood. Participants reported that parents are more attentive and less irritable when school is between semesters. The little things that would cause a parent distress no longer did. As David said, "What used to get me griped out – doesn't – it's hard to know." Parents were described as "less gripey" and more fun to be with. Parents were reported to be more relaxed and tolerant of their children's behaviors. The participants indicated that they could "get away with more" when school was out. In other words, there was a general consensus that parents used this time to "make up" for parental mis-actions during the times when school was in session. An interesting note was that the participants recognized these reactions as a pattern. They recognize that at the end of the semester parents would typically feel relief and will attempt to spend more time and be more considerate of their children. Wade, put it this way:

> I think Mom is trying [between semesters] to make it up so for being so gripey...She threw a bunch of notebooks in the trash and yelled, "thank God." It's funny and then she does this big thing every time about how sorry she is for being gripey and she'll never be that way again.... I like it 'cause we can do anything we want.

It is obvious from the statement above and similar statements that the participants know parents may be experiencing a certain amount of guilt and often do not hesitate to manipulate the situation to their benefit. Manipulation is used to get parents to purchase items the children desire, or take them places they want to go, and to get parents to agree to other typical pre-teen activities.

It was unanimous among the participants that the most positive aspect of school breaks was the undivided attention they received from their parents. Parents took time to not only, as one interviewee stated, "really listen" to him/her, but managed leisure time with their children also. Family time was important to the participants. There were many stories related about taking vacations – both large and small. Children spoke of weekend trips to the lake or to "the city." Visiting relatives in other states was another trip that many of them took with families. All in all, the students reported that parents were more relaxed, more attentive, and under less pressure than when school was in session.

To summarize, the participants interviewed raised a common theme pertaining to the variations of home life when the university is in session and when the university is between sessions. Children perceive the impact of academia to be the primary stressor in their parents' lives. This assumption, leads children to blame parents' participation in higher education as a culprit in a home where tension resides. A central theme concerned the difference in the daily routine or life of the family, meals and stress level in the home.

When the university is in session, although home life is somewhat chaotic, parents strive to be organized through the use of charts and calendars and various ingenious strategies. It was admitted, however, that often these good intentions fall by the wayside by the end of the week when parents and children alike are tired from their busy

schedules and activities. Meals and food, always of interest to children in this age range, emerged as a concern of the children. When the university is in session, there is a limited amount of time for prepared meals. Fast foods, particularly pizza, are used because of time constraints.

Children often worry about behaviors that their parents may exhibit when parents have a limited amount of time, and suffer from the additional stress that may be placed on the parent. Some parents begin exhibiting nervous habits such as pacing, smoking, or occasionally drinking. Parents do not realize children observe this behavior, and except for the occasional plea for parents to quit smoking, children remain silent. While the semester is in session, parents tend to react in a way that is indicative of a high level of stress. Children report that parents may be irritable and difficult to please. Parents often take out their frustration on their children by "yelling" or being "gripey" and short tempered. During this high stress level, parents tend to become absent minded, and although physically present for their children, may not be there emotionally or mentally.

On the other hand, children look forward to semester breaks as well to spring and fall breaks. Although the period in between may be only a week, it is an almost utopian time for children. During this period, the primary stressor, the university, is a non-issue. The household takes on an almost holiday atmosphere. The phase "make up" is applicable to this period. This break creates an opportunity for the family to make up lost time together. Family routines are forgotten with those most important to the children – such as bedtime, not enforced. Children are allowed to sleep in, and are excused from household chores. Many families allow children to pick favorite meals, and large meals are prepared and enjoyed together. Activities that the families have no time for during the

semester are resumed. Special activities such as going to movies, vacations, and visiting families in other towns and states occur.

Interestingly, children seem to feel that this is the way their lives would be if their parent were not attending school. Even though parents may be employed and work during the breaks, this atmosphere of change takes place.

Children between the ages of 10 and 13 developmentally are beginning to focus on themselves and their relationships with their family (Erickson, 1950). Therefore, this is the period in their lives where they begin to evaluate their lives in an abstract way. They are able to organize tasks around the house and have developed opinions about what they would like their home life to be. Because of their developmental stage, they are able to discern the differences in their home when the parent is either in or out of school. Parents are also able to discern the difference when school is in session and when it is not. When school is in session, it appears as if there are never enough hours in the day. Parents react to the stress and acknowledge that they may be short tempered and distracted. Parents do feel guilt when they have a limited amount of time to spend with their children. Therefore, it comes as a welcome relief when, during breaks, there is one less item on their plate and there is an opportunity to rekindle a relationship with their children.

Distance from the university and a change in the home when school is or is not in session were themes that were discussed by the participants. It came as a surprise that many of the children were not only aware of, but also concerned, with family financial constraints when school was in session.

Children's Insights into Family Finances

A theme that was discussed by 16 of the individuals interviewed was the awareness of family finances. Comments from the children ranged from a rudimentary knowledge of what financial aid was, to simply an awareness of the lack of money in the household. The latter was especially noticeable to those participants whose parents were in a higher economic bracket prior to returning to school.

The three siblings, Matt, David, and Becky, appeared to have the most knowledge about financial aid. For instance, they were aware that once financial aid (Stafford Loan) was distributed, then they would be able to purchase new clothes and shoes. Additionally, they were also aware that their mother would pay for the rent four months in advance when her university foundation scholarship was released. The children voiced concern that their mother would have to attend school for an additional semester, because the agency paying her tuition would only pay for 12 hours a semester due to budget cuts. It was quite interesting to note that terms such as rehab, loan and scholarship were all familiar to the children, although perhaps not the details of such programs. Becky was very aware of how her mother handled financial aid. She clarified, "[Mom] uses the money to pay college, and the loan will pay the rent and her books were pretty good because she and another lady are sharing and one class doesn't have a book."

Five of the other participants were not as familiar with the intricacies of such programs, but at least knew there was financial assistance that their parents were relying on to defray the cost of their education. The children also knew that those funds could be personally beneficial. For example, Jacey wished that her elementary school would begin later than the university so that she would be able to purchase her school clothes prior to

her school beginning in the fall. Brent was aware that they "eat a lot of macaroni and cheese and Ramen Noodles when school first starts." Almost all of the children announced that the day financial aid was distributed; parents would splurge on a meal at a restaurant, or provide other treats.

On the other hand, the other participants were not as familiar with financial aid. They knew, however, that monetary resources were limited in the family and that sacrifices or cost cutting measures were employed.

Cost cutting measures were a way of life for most of the children interviewed. Children were quick to mention measures or strategies that are performed on a routine basis to save money. Because these measures occur on a daily basis for the children, some were surprised to hear that there were individuals who were not in the same financial situation. David, for example, with an incredulous look, exclaimed that there were some people "who actually buy bags for the trash ... what a waste – just use Wal-Mart bags." Yard sales or garage sales were a frequent weekend activity for many of the families. At yard or garage sales, children's clothing could be purchased for pennies on the dollar. Books, toys, and other household items of a good quality could furnish the home and provide entertainment at a reasonable price. The children were especially thrilled when "name brand" clothes and items could be found at such sales. As one child proclaimed, "I found two Nike shirts and a pair of Gap jeans at just one house!"

Not all of the children however, appreciated or accepted the limitation of funds. Children whose parents had been attending college for several years had adapted to the lifestyle and were accepting of it. On the other hand, for some children, their parents returning to school required a change in lifestyle that made adjustment more difficult.

The Case of Pat

Pat, a 12-year-old boy with very short dark hair and green eyes, resides with his parents in a modest neighborhood. Pat, who also has an older sister, enjoys listening to various types of music, especially Metallica. He plays several instruments, including percussion and guitar, having taken several years of private lessons in both. Most of his time is spent with two friends and their band, in which he plays lead guitar and occasionally the drums. His bedroom was decorated with a black light and with various posters of bands, guitars. According to his family, he is a talented musician.

Pat's father, Larry has completed his first year as a graduate student in business administration. Prior to beginning school, Larry was employed by a rather large firm as human resource director. The family had a tremendous drop in income when the company folded. His mother, Leigh, prior to her job as a secretary, was a stay-at-home mother. The family had to make some adjustments due to their change in income. Pat particularly had a difficult time adjusting to the changes in finances. He said, with some rancor, "The worst part is yellow. I hate yellow." When questioned about this he explained:

> Everything we have now is no name yellow...now we can't have real food, it's all no name and I don't like it. I don't want my friends to hang here cause they'll see we're poor and the food in yellow don't taste near as good. But don't tell Dad, I don't want to hurt his feelings.

Although this may appear to be a trivial matter to some, to Pat it was a life change that he had yet to adjust to. Pat, and others whose parents are recent return students, sustained a life style change that remains difficult for not only parents, but children also. The children went from having, in this case, two private music lessons a week, to one lesson every other week. Additionally, benefits such as belonging to county clubs or the

Elks Lodge, subscribing to cable television and second phone lines were no longer feasible due to the cost. Many participants noted changes in the amount of allowance they received, and other extras such as eating at nice restaurants, attending ball games, etc. Although the change in family finances was more noticeable in student-parents recently returning to school, each child was interested in increasing their family income.

To supplement their family income, many of the children had part-time jobs. These part-time jobs allowed the children to have their "own" money to be used for their own purposes. The participants who reported having some capacity to earn money were proud of the amount of money they had saved and the sense of empowerment it provided. Jobs such as mowing lawns, raking leaves, feeding or walking neighbors' animals, picking up pecans, and even paper routes provided a sense of contribution to those children. Activities such as these gave the children a sense that they are contributing to the efforts of the home.

It is known that financial considerations are a concern to adult learners (Cross, 1981). However, financial matters are also of concern to children of adult learners. Galinsky (1999), in her study looking at children's views of working parents, also found that children were aware and concerned about family finances. She found however, that the children were not as worried about finances as they were concerned about how finances would affect them personally. Developmentally, children between the ages of 10 and 13 are beginning the "brand name" period of their life. Most children this age are concerned with peer's opinions and the ensuing pressures to "be like everyone else." Therefore, the children interviewed for this study were well aware of how parents' financial situation affected them. There was mention of the lack of extras, such as cable

television, their own phone lines, and name brand clothing. For the most part, however, if parents had been attending school for several years, the children were acclimated to cost saving measures and, although they didn't have every luxury they wanted, they did not seem to be particularly upset by the situation. It was a way of life to them. However, for those individuals interviewed whose parents were recently returning to school, the family financial situation caused greater unease. The children were frustrated that they did not have as many of the perks as they previously had, and, in addition, seemed to feel almost deprived. With this being noted one method that children, especially those in the 12 to 13 age groups, engaged in efforts to obtain spending money through part time work. This was beneficial in that it empowered the children and taught them money skills at an early age.

In summary, the children mentioned the financial situations of their family as being somewhat tight, although they were not actually worried about the family finances. For many, they have become accustomed to learning how to cut back and save money, although it was their wish to have items their peers owned. It should also be noted that I had the feeling that the children felt that this is a temporary situation and that once their parents graduated from college, it would no longer be an issue.

The length of time a parent had been in school changed the adaptability of children to the family financial situation, so does the perception of children regarding the length of time their parents had been attending the university and the classification, graduate or undergraduate.

Child's Knowledge of Duration of Parents' Participation

Children appeared to have an erroneous view of the length of time their parents had been participating in higher education. Children construed that parents had been involved in higher education for a longer period of time then they actually had been. The parents of the participants in this study reported attending classes for at least a year, or three semesters, with the longest period of time being six years. However, most children felt the time had been much longer.

When questioned, "How long has your parent been going to school," only one participant knew exactly how long their parent had been attending the university. Pat, who was introduced earlier, knew that his father had been attending one year. The other participants were unaware of exactly how long their parents had been enrolled. Sixteen of the children interviewed estimated that their parents had been attending school much longer than their parent had actually been enrolled. Typical responses varied from Elizabeth's response of "I dunno – I think maybe five or six years." Her father reported that he had been enrolled for two years, to Wade's response of, "Humm (placing his finger on his chin and thinking awhile) I think she's been in school forever, I mean as long as I can remember." Although Wade felt as if his mother had been attending college for many years, she actually had been attending five semesters.

Perception of time is different for a child than it is for an adult. Holmes (1996) reported that adults and children perceive time differently. Children are positioned in the present, whereas adults are positioned in the past and concerned with the future. Days and time during childhood appear to move slowly, however, as people mature, days and time appear to move more quickly (Carrell, 1935). This indicates that while adults feel that

time passes very quickly, especially when they are involved in multiple roles such as attending classes, maintaining a home and family and, at times work, children feel that time passes slowly. Because children live in the present, and because time does appear to move slowly to them, what is a year to an adult may feel like two years to the children.

The implication is that to a parent the years spent participating in higher education may be worth sacrificing in order to obtain an education that will benefit the family in the long run. After all, for example, three years spent in the endeavor will be worth the 20 years of better pay, better job, etc. However, to a child, those same three years had a different relevance. Consider that a child develops and matures at a rapid growth during that time. Taking the example of three years, a child will have gone through three grade levels at school. They may have gone from learning the alphabet to reading books, and have gone from total dependence on parents to one where they are now able to cross the street alone.

To summarize, what to an adult may seem like a short period of time, the children may feel has been a great deal longer. The times spent while parents are attending college are ones of large developmental changes for children. This period of remembering may depend upon the participation level of the parent, graduate or undergraduate studies.

Children's Views of Graduate versus Undergraduate Studies

Perceptions of parents' involvement in either graduate or undergraduate education provided an interesting dichotomy. It was fascinating to note that those children, whose parents had participated in both undergraduate and graduate studies, indicated they preferred it when their parents were undergraduate students. Seven of the nine children interviewed had parents that progressed directly from undergraduate school to graduate

school. This preference was based on availability of parents during the evening hours and on weekends. At the institution parents were attending all but one graduate program offered classes only in the evening and during weekends. The one exception is the graduate program I am involved in, and therefore due to the dual relationship issues, was unable to interview their children. Graduate classes at the university begin at 4:24 p.m. and end at 10:05 in the evenings. The end of school day in the area is at 3:30 p.m., giving little time between the end of the child's school and the beginning of parent's class. In situations where parents were employed, they did not see their child until after 10:00 p.m., often past the child's bedtime. Therefore, there were days when the child saw their parent for only a brief time in the morning. Michael, who was profiled earlier, reflected the sentiments of other children when he stated, "It's like I never see her [his mother], she's always at work or at school. I forget what I'm supposed to tell her."

The Case of Allison

Allison, a 12-year-old, thoughtful, articulate young lady with light-brown hair and blue eyes resides in a modest home near the campus with her mother and grandmother. Allison's interest in music was evidenced by the grand piano in the living room and keyboard in her room. Allison and her grandmother, a former piano teacher, spend a great deal of time together developing their mutual interest in music. Allison also expressed her love of cooking. I was privileged to both hear her play a complicated piano piece and sample her apple dumplings. Allison and her mother, Jill, have resided with her maternal grandmother since her father was deployed to Afghanistan. Jill has been attending the university on a continual basis for six years. Her masters in psychology will be completed next semester.

Allison articulated that there were days that she did not see her mother. While Allison was in undergraduate studies, her mother was home evenings and weekends to see to her daughter's needs. She was able to assist with homework, discuss problems and other issues of import, and generally have time to spend together. Allison reported that the highlight of her day was her mother listened to her practice and they would have "pretend concerts." Jill's classes in graduate school are scheduled in the evening hours and weekends. Allison was quick to discuss her feelings on the matter. Allison asserted:

> I used to didn't [sic] mind Mom going to school –but I don't like it now. She's gone on Mondays and Thursdays nights and I don't see her 'til the next morning...Sometimes she takes those classes on Saturday and Sundays and I really don't like that...

Allison reflects the sentiments of other children whose parents are enrolled in evening courses. When parents are involved in evening classes, children feel the time they have with their parents are reduced even more than they usually are. When their parents were involved in undergraduate studies, although time constraint was an issue, there were bits and pieces of moments that children had to spend time with their parents. When children only see their parents for a brief time in the morning, and then not see them again until late in the evening when everyone is tired, or until the next morning, it is a frustrating situation for them. Ky, provides another reason why she preferred her father attending classes during the day rather than at night.

The Case of Ky

Ky is a precocious girl of 12 with straight brown hair and eyes and a quick wit. She claims to be the "clown" of her class and enjoys having, as she put it – "a sense of humor adults appreciate." Ky enjoys reading and is quite the old-movie buff. It is her inclination to someday be a research scientist so she may develop a cure for muscular

dystrophy. Ky is somewhat limited in her activities due to her muscular dystrophy, but is well known in the community for her participation in her church, and appreciated for her positive attitude.

She resides with her father Jon and older sister, age 19, in a community approximately 30 miles away from the university. Her father is currently in his second year of graduate work in school counseling. He received his teaching certificate from the university two years ago. In addition to attending classes two nights a week, he is a second year special education teacher at the local high school. Ky lost her mother to cancer five years ago. As a result, she voiced a concern that other participants expressed.

Ky is not only concerned with not seeing her father every night and the interaction they enjoy, but is concerned for his safety as well. Because of the 30-mile commute one way, she often has a concern for his safety driving home at night. When asked to clarify, she indicated that this was not a concern of hers when her father "Went to school during the day." In a distressed tone, Ky said, "...like the other day, it was raining and raining and there have been a bunch of wrecks on that road...but I pray really hard for Dad to come home. I don't want to be an orphan."

It is natural for children have feelings of anxiety when parents are away from them, especially when they are between the fourth and sixth grades (Hurlock, 1978). This anxiety and worry may stem from a sense of foreboding and helplessness, such as when parents are driving, or their whereabouts unknown. Therefore, when parents are away from their children, especially at night, this anxiety exists. The daytime hours, a time when most undergraduate classes are held, are filled with activities such as school. School and other extracurricular affairs keep a child's mind occupied. Anxiety comes to

surface in the evening when there are no structured activities, such as school, to keep their minds occupied.

Graduate students, for the most part, are excited when they are told that classes will be held primarily in the evening. When classes are held in the evenings, it is easier for students to find employment and there are opportunities for study time when children are in school. As one parent stated, "I enjoy night classes. After all I'm only gone two nights a week and can take nine hours." In contradiction to their parents' viewpoint, the children do not view night classes in the same positive light.

The participants whose parents who were involved in undergraduate studies and continued on to graduate school had a unique perception of the difference between parents being primarily absent from the home during the day compared to when their parents were absent at night to attend classes. Children missed interaction with their parents in the evenings. In addition, there were days that children may not see their parents one morning and not sees them again until the next day because of work and class schedules. This causes anxiety in children who need to guidance from parents to help with developmental issues such as discussing problems pertinent to their age, for example peer pressures and friendship issues (Zastrow, Kirst-Ashman, 1997). Additionally, children worry for their parents' safety while commuting to and from classes. Automobile accidents and the failure to arrive home are primary concerns of their children. There is a sense of security for children when parents are home with them. Simply put, they want their parent home at night. Since many of the children have activities in the evenings such as ball games and organization meetings, parents who attend classes at night miss out on these activities. As one child wistfully proclaimed,

"Why should I bother going out for anything –it's not like she'll [mother] be there to watch."

This would bring to question the feasibility of evening classes for student-parents. From personal experience in teaching graduate night classes, there are parent-students who consistently leave the room to answer pagers, or glance at cell phones programmed to ring silent to respond to issues of children. Children are brought into the classroom or left to their own devices in the hallway when baby-sitters are unavailable. This creates a stressful situation for not only the children, but for parents and other graduate students. To conclude, children would prefer parents be at home with them in the evenings, especially when they have school and extra-curricular activities to attend.

Participants' Involvement in Extra-curricular and School Activities

As the children were interviewed, one factor stood out with the participants—their high involvement in school and extra-curricular activities. All children were involved in at least one extra-curricular activity, with 15 involved in more than one activity. Children listed involvement in sports such soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis and softball. Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H, and other civic organizations provided opportunities for group and leadership opportunities. Fine arts were also represented with participants' involvement in various forms of music, band, and dance classes. Religious organizations such as youth groups and children's choir were also popular activities for children's involvement.

Involvement in activities such as in music, sports, religious or civic activities required attendance at meetings or practice. It was not unusual for children to practice two and three times a week and then have games one or two nights a week. Many of the children went from one sporting season to another. Michael virtually went from one sport

to another. In the fall he reported he was involved in flag football, moved to basketball in the winter, played soccer in the spring, and baseball in the summer. Michael, like others that were involved in multiple sports, explained this high involvement with a shrug of his shoulders, "I just like all sports...Mom says it's it keeps me out of trouble." He later explained that when he "gets to junior high he'll have to pick." This exposure to a variety of activities was a similar story with the other participants.

The concern of the children appeared to be the presence or lack of presence by their parents in their activities. Each of the parents attempted to attend as many games or practices possible. Parents, however, learned to use this time to their benefit. Brent related, "I think Mom likes to watch me practice. She takes her books and reads while I'm there. Sometimes she sits with other ladies that go to school and they study together." This statement and others relayed by the participants seem to suggest that parents perhaps encourage involvement in activities to provide respite and/or study opportunities for parents. Vicki, mother of Brandon, acknowledged that she was relieved when children went to practice or meetings because it provided her with "some alone time to read or work on papers."

Children hinted at their enlightenment on the matter. Elizabeth knowingly disclosed that her father appreciates her involvement in Camp Fire Girls. "I think Dad likes my campouts. He doesn't go 'cause it's only girls in my group-so he spends the day studying." Parents are in an interesting dilemma. On one hand, they feel guilty when they are studying and unable to give undivided attention, however, on the other hand, if a child is involved in an activity, that guilt is relieved. After all, if the child is busy in an activity they enjoy, then parents feel free to utilize that time for university-related work. Ten to

13 year olds are developmentally at the stage where they are defining their interests and developing peer groups (Erickson, 1950). Extra-curricular activities can be a mechanism for the children to develop areas of interests and skills with others who enjoy the same activities (Orton, 1996). Children strive for a need to be accomplished and recognized by their peers. Sports, fine arts and other programs can increase self-awareness, and develop a sense of connection to their peers. The only caveat is that while participation in extra-curricular activities is mutually satisfying for both parent and child, there is disappointment when, due to university issues, parents are unable to attend games and other programs. Children recognized this absence as a necessity at times, and although they wished parents could attend, they supported their parents in their educational endeavors.

Children's Support of Parents' Participation in Higher Education

One apparent theme that emerged from the interviews was the overwhelming support children had for their parents' participation in post-secondary education. With this said, it should be noted that a conflict existed. On one hand the children supported their parents efforts, however many of the children did not "like" their parents attending school. It was interesting that these contradictions existed and more fascinating that the participants distinguished between supports and like. The terms "like and dislike" in the children's vernacular were separated from support. In their language the words were more akin to approve and disapprove. It appeared, however, that each participant indicated that although life may not be perfect now, that upon graduation everything would be better. Another interesting aspect was that although the participants appreciate their parent's efforts, they may not be aware of what their parents were majoring in and

plans after graduation. Simply put, although all of the children supported their parents' endeavors, many of them, especially the boys did not approve or like their parent's participation.

The voice of disapproval was first observed in the clustering exercise. The question "what are some thoughts about your parent going to school," provided an insight to the children's opinions. Perhaps the most poignant was what Matt penned. He wrote only one phase – "I miss her very much." When asked for clarification he explained, "I mean I think it's good what she's [mother] is doing for us--I just miss her."

Some of the participants were more concrete in their opinion. Scotty also had just one discussion point on his clustering, "You should go to college before you have kids." This animosity, although written on paper, did not lessen his support for his mother. He reflected, "It's just that there's times that people should do stuff and you should go to college right after you graduate." Scotty, and other children interviewed, had a difficult time understanding why parents were attending college at this particular stage in their life. To them, the natural progression was to attend high school and then as one girl put it, "Straight to college, get a degree, get a job, get married, and get kids." The children did not understand interruptions in this progression such as early marriage and pregnancy, or lack of financial assistance to attend college. An interesting note was that gender of parents did not seem to change the children's views. Children made similar comments whether it was their mother or their father that was attending college.

On the other hand, two of the children declared that they "liked" their parent's participation in college. These reasons stemmed from a pride they had for their parent's accomplishment. Of particular note was Elizabeth's insight was into the change that has

taken place in her father. Recall that her father, Russ, sustained a spinal cord injury in an industrial accident. She expounded with understanding:

> I'm really proud of my Dad...he stayed sad all the time after his accident I mean he would just sit in the chair [wheelchair] and look like this [imitating a long face, looking despondent]...he wouldn't talk or see me or anything...he's [Dad} is like his old self. He makes stupid jokes all the time and let's me hug him now and I like him again.

She, like others cognitively realized that participation in higher education might lead to positive results, not only in employment, but in an affective context also. Increased confidence and self-esteem can be by products of adult education. This "blossoming" effect is visible for children to see in their parents.

Children supported their parent's efforts to attend college. This support was gained when parents explained to children the benefits of their pursuing a degree. Most often it was explained to children that a degree would provide a higher level of employment for the parents and consequently, additional money in to the family coffers. Children, therefore, supported their parents based on the bright future promised to them. As a result, the expectation is that as soon as mom/dad walk across the stage, there will be immediate results and celebration. As Jacey elucidated, "...I can't wait [drawn out with hands outstretched] for her to finish. She will get a great job and it will be so much fun because we'll have all kinds of money and things will be so much better then."

Other participants looked at not only the long-range plans, but also the short term. For example, rather than look at future plans for the family, the participants indicated immediate plans. These plans included everything from going to Disney World, to, as Becky enthusiastically projected:

> Well, I know one thing, we're going on a long expensive vacation and stay in a hotel that has a restaurant and a swimming pool. And, I think we're going to

> move to a different house. It will be a two-story house. And my brothers will get convertibles and I'm going to get new clothes and not hand me downs.

These statements indicated that there is an inference by the children that life will get immediately better and that, perhaps all of their problems will be taken care of. In a way, it is similar to adage that the end of the rainbow will be the day mom/dad graduates from college.

Although support for parent's participation in higher education was not verbalized to parents, was evident in the actions of the children. Examples of these actions varied from family to family. However, examples of this support included screening phone calls for parents, playing outside when parents were trying to study, to providing technical assistance for the computer. One child indicated that he asked for clarification on a math problem with his teacher, because his mother could not remember how to do fractions. Brandon, who wanted assurances that this would not be repeated to his mother, related the most heartwarming story:

> You know how Moms reads books when she's at a game and their kids not in? [sic] Well, Mom, she got really mad at the coach 'cause he took me out after the second inning. But really what happened is that she had a test and if I play all the time she doesn't get to read and it was a double header – so I asked Coach if he would take me out so Mom could study.

Other participants echoed this illustration of support. Just as Brandon requested that this story not be relayed to his mother, the methods of showing support were not always noticed or appreciated by their parents. Parents tend to sensitive to the disapproval that may be voiced by their children, but are not aware of the little nuances and show of support.

An interesting side note was that although the children supported their parent's endeavors and looked forward to the eminent jobs and money, they were, for the most

part uncertain what their parents were majoring in. There were vague ideas, such as Becky who thought, moving her hands around, "She's [mother] is going to be an interpreter somewhere for deaf people." Or Wade "...someone who helps people –I'm not sure." When parents were interviewed, a number could not remember telling their children specifically what their major was, with one parent exclaiming, "You know, I don't think they care what I'm majoring in." Information from the children would belay that comment. Children do indeed, want and possibly need information to better understand what parent's activities are.

To summarize, support by family for adult learners is monumental to their success in higher education (Chartrand, 1991), however parent's are uncertain whether that support actually exist. Children do unconditionally support their parent's efforts, however, may not actually "like" the idea of their participation. This is most likely due to the reasons discussed earlier in the paper, that of periodical absences and inattentiveness of parents. Parents tend to feel that they must "bribe" support for their educational activities, by a promise of improved family lifestyle. Parents also tend to focus on the negative behaviors and attitudes of their children, when in actuality there is support and pride in their parent's accomplishments. Children were under the opinion that their life would undergo a drastic change as soon as parents graduated. They were not aware that new jobs maybe months in coming or that financial situation may not improve rapidly because of student loans and other financial obligations incurred during their education.

It was interesting to further note that children knew only generalities about their parent's education, but not specifics, such as what their parent was majoring in. As an

individual once said, "I'm not sure what my kids are doing – but I'm proud of them." I think this is the important message for parents to hear.

Summary of Findings

The children of adult learners tell us that there is an impact in their lives when their parents return to higher education. Several themes emerged from the interviews with the children.

The distance the family resides from the university provides a variation on the children's perception of the university culture as well as the accessibility of the parent to their children during the semester. Children whose parents commute have only vague concepts as the university culture and have little or no personal knowledge of the people, faculty and peers involved in that segment of their parents lives. On the other hand, those children whose parents reside either on campus, or in close proximity of the campus, feel comfortable with the university culture or know many of the individuals their parents come in contact with in the context of their role as a student.

A second theme that emerged was the indications of how incongruent the children feel their lives are when the university is in session and when it is not. Interestingly, the children blame negative factors that occur in the home to the university. In their way of thinking, if the parent were not in school – then there would be no conflict. Three sub-themes came forth, that of daily routine of the home, food or meals in the home, and the level of stress in the home. When the university is in session, daily routines are described as "organized chaos" with attempts to employ various strategies to organize and keep the home running smoothly. Meals are often harried or "catch as catch can" with a major complaint of children that "big meals" are seldom prepared and fast food or pizza relied

upon as an alternative to busy meals. When school is in session, the stress level of parents may be high due to demands on their time from not only academics and family, but also work. The children felt that irritable behavior and intolerance manifest this stress. Children complained that parents were "gripey" and "yelled" at them. There is also some concern that parents are modeling behaviors worrisome to children, such as smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages. Possibly the most distressing manifestation of stress is the parent's lack of attention toward their children. There is a sense that they are present physically, but not emotionally. On the other hand, an almost utopian and holiday spirit enters the home when the university is on break. This is a make-up or grace period during which parents assuage their guilt and children enjoy attention and activities with their parents. The stress is reduced, if for no other reason, than it is one less role for the parents, parents are more tolerant and tend to hug rather than yell. All in all, it is apparent that children look forward to and relish semester breaks.

One of the most surprising themes is the knowledge that children have regarding family finances. That knowledge ranges from a level those most beginning freshmen does not have, to the knowledge that resources are limited and ways of saving money. Children obtained part-time employment when it was available, teaching them not only money management, but creating a sense of empowerment for the children.

Two additional themes were the difference in perspectives of time that parent's had been participating in higher education, and the feelings children had about graduate school, particularly evening classes. Overall, children feel as if their parents have been involved in post-secondary education a longer length of time than they actually have been. Time moves differently for children and adults. For adults, time moves swiftly and

seems to be so little time available. For children, however, time moves more slowly, thus the idea that parents have been involved in school for what seems to them to be "forever." Finally, children have a definite opinion on parent's attending graduate school. The university that was used for this study has their graduate classes offered primarily in the evening and weekends. Participants interviewed had difficulty with their parents being absent in the evening and on weekends, which is typically the time for interaction between parent and child. It further complicates matters when most extra-curricular activities take place either on weekends or nights, therefore, making it difficult for parents to attend these events.

A surprise was the number of activities that children are involved in. Various sports, fine arts, civic and religious organizations were represented, with a number of children involved in two or more activities. Although developmentally children are typically beginning to explore interests through activities, a question arose. Are children of student-parents involved in many activities to give parents time toward academic endeavors, or because it is a developmental issue? Participation in activities did alleviate some of the guilt that parents have when they are unable to give full attention to their children.

Finally, it is apparent that children both support and are proud of their parents. Since they are in school themselves, they understand the pressures of going to class, only on a much smaller scale. Conversely, children are divided on whether they "like" or "dislike" their parent's participation. Children realize that parents are obtaining degrees to not only benefit them-but the family as well. Children are under the impression that

once a parent graduates a better job and increased income will be forthcoming, therefore any sacrifice for today will reap rewards in the future.

This study suggests many implications not only for the parent and university, but also for those involved in adult learners. These implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Participation in higher education requires dedication and tenacity. For an adult learner with multiple life roles, this endeavor may be even more challenging. Adult learners engage in multiple roles that, in addition to that of a student, may include also that of spouse, employee, and parent. The role of the student, among many things, requires time and energy, the same attributes required of a parent. Parents are, by nature, concerned with the impact that their decisions have on their children. When this decision requires a life-altering commitment, such as participation in higher education, parents invariably are concerned about how this participation will impact on their child. Will this activity be beneficial to the child because of the potential for better jobs and wages? Or, will it be detrimental to the child because of the time and energy required of the parent during this time of the child's development?

In order to understand more about the nature of the impact on children of parents participating in adult education, a child's viewpoint is imperative. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of children between the ages of 10 and 13 whose parents are participating in higher education.

The research revealed that children, albeit each unique individuals, shared certain perceptions concerning their parents' participation in higher education. The overriding sense of these children was that, while on the one hand they were overwhelmingly supportive of their parents' effort to further their education, on the other hand, they did not "like" their parents' attending higher education. Several themes, shared by these children, emerged from the data: the significance of proximity of the university,

variations in home life between times when school was in session and when it was out of session, financial concerns, the large number of extra curricular and school activities occupying the children, and finally the anticipation of a changed life after parents degree is completed. This chapter will review the methodology and discuss these major findings and themes in relationship to the research questions. Implications for counselors, universities and parents will be outlined and suggestions for further research will be addressed.

Methodology

The interpretative inquiry approach was engaged to gain insight into the shared experiences, activities, social life and feelings of children between the ages of 10 and 13 whose parents are engaged in continuing higher education at a university. An interpretative inquiry inquire was crucial in determining the issues of and the hearing the voices of the 19 children interviewed. In an effort to maintain a non-directive interview, data gathering through an exercise called clustering (Rico, 1983) was employed; this tool was expected to generate free-association responses from the children concerning their parents' participation in higher education. Parents of the participants were interviewed to clarify information obtained from children and to obtain necessary background information. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the researcher.

The clustering exercise proved to be especially beneficial in not only establishing rapport with the participants, but also in generating a meaningful conversation. By having the children clarifying the key words and phases they had introduced to the clustering exercise, a child's perspective was heard that otherwise may have been omitted. Similarly, rich and detailed responses were obtained from the participants when

interviews occurred on the children's own turf or in an environment where they felt comfortable. Children also were more verbal when engaged in an activity of their own initiative while the interview took place. For example, a game of basketball, grooming horses, and petting animals appeared to put the children at ease —thus promoting an open, honest dialogue that yielded valuable information. Overall, the children were delightful and anxious to share their point of view.

Discussion of Findings

The children expressed both positive and negative views about their life situations when their parents were attending post-secondary education. They were overall supportive of their parents' efforts and acknowledged that the sacrifices made by the family would also be beneficial to the family. Long-term expectations included the implied promise of better jobs that would lead to greater pay, and would, in turn, provide the children with luxuries and a more substantial way of life. Five themes emerged from the study. The first theme suggested that connection with the university is an important element in children understanding the parents as students. The second theme concerned the noticeable difference in home life when school was in session and when it was not. The third theme highlighted the large number of extra-curricular activities in which the children were engaged. A fourth theme addressed the financial aspect of a parent's participation in higher education. A final theme reflected the children's expectations a drastic change in life style when their parent graduated. These five themes will be summarized in the next section.

Closeness and Connection with the University

Proximity to the university was a theme not only dominant in the interviews, but also one underlining other themes in the research. On the other hand, children whose families lived near the university, cited stories of involvement and knowledge of not only the campus, but also the individuals connected with that aspect of their parent's life. A connection with the university appeared to be accomplished with greater ease if the family resided in close proximity to the university. The opportunity to participate in campus activities, and easy access to their parents were cited as advantages to residing near the institution where their parents attended. Children's lives appeared to be enriched when they participated in programs and activities the university offered. Continuing education programs in the arts, sciences, and recreation and/or sports provided opportunities for children to develop areas of interest and ability. In addition, children who attended the various athletic events exhibited a passion for, and became fans of the university. I was asked several times if I personally knew a specific basketball, football, or soccer player. Banners in bedrooms and t-shirts that displayed the logo and mascot of the university showed this support. Although the children enjoyed this comfort level with the university, easy accessibility to the parent was voiced as the greatest advantage when the family resided near the university.

Children, between the ages of 10 and 13, have the need to make sense of their surrounding culture to understand it (Vygotsky, 1927). It is, therefore, important for children this age to obtain a sense of understanding of the various cultures their family is involved in. Elementary school, community and church are culture that, because of their personal involvement, is understood. Parents are involved in an unknown culture; in this

case that of the university. Children have a need to be familiar with this culture in order to make sense of it.

Ease of access to their parents was voiced as an important concern from the children. Although children typically begin spending unsupervised time at age 10, children have a need to have quick access to their parents (Belle, 1999). Children indicated that parents had greater flexibility in the amount of time they were present at home when they resided nearby. Parents could leave later and return home earlier, increasing the amount of interaction between parents and children. Children especially enjoyed brief interludes with their parents. Lunch with their parents, or a surprise visit at their elementary school was a special treat. Children and parents alike voiced that there was a feeling of security and comfort when parents could quickly go to their children if an emergency arose. The study suggests that although residing in close proximity to the university may be beneficial due to easy access to the parents and a sense of familiarity with the institution, there may be an underlying message.

Children, whose parents commuted to the university, often felt unfamiliar with the campus and the faculty, staff, and peers in their parent's lives. Distance was significant with respect to the child's sense of the issue of connection or disconnection with the university; but more significant of distance was the idea of the parent's involvement in higher education. In order for children to truly understand what parents are involved in, it is important that children understand the environment their parents exist in on a daily basis. It stands to reason that if the child is familiar with the university, there exists a sense of comfort in knowing the place where parents spend time and energy. The implication is that children who are familiar with the university feel as if they are active

participants in the parent's goal of obtaining a college degree. In other words, parent's participation in higher education became a family endeavor. It was interesting to note that children, who felt a connection with the university, used "we" language rather than "they" language. For example, "When we finish school," rather than "When mom/dad finishes school." Cross (1981) indicated that adult learners need family support to be successful in their educational endeavors. Verbal support is especially important (Aisenbergy & Harrington, 1988). When children use"we" in a collaborative voice, it is a demonstration that the children are supportive of their parent.

With this said, however, parents are often faced with difficult choices when beginning their higher education with respect to relocating or commuting to the university. In addition to seeing a university that offers their choice of study, the location of a university is a factor. If the university is a considerable, yet commutable distance, there are options to be deliberated. Considerations such as selling houses, raising cost of gasoline, support systems, and existing commitments, as well as the stress of relocation must be weighed against having easy access to and perhaps additional time with their children. Parents struggle with the lesser of the two evils. This study suggest that children need to consider themselves as active participants in their parent's education; therefore engagement into the parents endeavors is an important aspect of gaining the child's support.

Regardless of the above concerns, there are often no easy options for a family. Perhaps the most obvious response would be to look at distance education programs, specifically computer based instruction, as a viable option for higher education degrees. It was interesting to note, however, that only one child mentioned web-based courses.

Although the university offered such classes, many of the parents did not consider such courses as a viable alternative. Problems such as dial-up networks and poor computer skills were given as detriments to web-based courses.

The issue of connection is such a prominent factor in children's reactions that parents need to be aware of the tensions related to this feature of their pursuit of higher education. Families may find it possible to reside near the university. That option, however, may not be a possibility for all families. Parents then need to be supported in finding ways to develop a sense of connection between the child and the university. A sense of connection could possibly be made by actively involving the child with the university by attending classes with parents, or by taking the child to campus periodically for arts, science, or athletic activities. The opportunity for the child to put a name with the face of a peer or faculty member would allow for greater dialogue and understanding between child and parent. Whether the parent commuted or resided near the institution, day-to-day home routines changed when school was in session.

What a Difference a Break Makes

The second theme that emerged concerned the differences children noted in their home life between the times school was in session and the times that school is on break. There were stark contrasts between the atmosphere of the home when school was in session and when it was not. While home life when school was in session was described as stressful, organized chaos, and busy, home life when school was on break was described as stress-free, fun and relaxing.

Parents attempted to have some semblance of organization when school was in session. Routines for bedtime, meals, and homework were set in place so that parents

could conduct the day-to-day operations of the home, and yet have an opportunity to complete their homework, as well as attention to the homework of the child. Innovative strategies were employed by the family in an attempt to keep the home running smoothly. In spite of these attempts, however, there appeared to be limited time for daily chores, family meals, and family time with the busy schedules of both parents and children. One of the children in the clustering exercise had only two words on the paper, "pizza and pizza." When questioned, he said, "My favorite thing about my parents going to school is pizza – 'cause I like it. But it's also the worst thing, 'cause I get tired of it."

These issues may be compounded when parents have either early morning or evening classes. Children reported mixed feelings when their parents had early morning or evening classes. Parents involved in early morning classes required children to rise and get ready for school by themselves. Evening classes appeared to be even a greater issue with the children. Although convenient for parents, children did not like the time that parents were absent from the home in the evening, especially if they were involved in extra-curricular or school activities that took place in the evening. Parents were either unable to attend the activity, or children were unable to participate in the event; either option leaving the children disappointed.

On one hand, the children enjoyed the independence of being home alone, but on the other hand, grew weary when this was a frequent occurrence. Likewise, children who did spend time alone were competent in or developing life skills such as cooking, cleaning, etc. Erikson (1950) suggests that this is an age for children to achieve a sense of accomplishment and competency. Therefore, children with such responsibilities felt not only positive about their skills, but had a high level of perceived self-efficacy.

Households were much calmer when there was an established routine; however, these routines were often forgotten toward the end of the week. Although most of the children had assigned chores, parents tended to continue to perform many of the household activities because it was faster for them to accomplish the tasks rather than rely on the children, and because of the guilt parents feel. Children were quick to admit that they manipulated their parents by using guilt, and did so at regular intervals. This manipulation simply added to the level of stress already being experienced at home.

Stress, as described above, in the home was evident when school was in session. Hence, often the university and the requirements imposed by the university on their parents were held responsible for the stress in the home. Stress was evidenced by parents' irritability and distractibility when school was in session. Parent's experiencing role contagion adds to the feelings of stress (Home, 1996). Children reported parents to be "gripey" and although present physically, perhaps present in an emotional or cognitive level. Children and parents alike often reported being stretched to the limit due to each being involved in studying, homework, and work and/or extra-curricular activities. As a consequence, children blamed the stress in their lives on the university and the fact that their parent was attending school.

An interesting phenomenon occurred, however, when school was not in session. Parents, recognizing their irritability toward their children when school was in session, became more indulgent during breaks. In other words, because parents felt guilty in the amount of time and energy school was taking out of their lives; they used school breaks to "make it up" to their children. Children viewed breaks as holidays where they had their parents' undivided attention. Routines were forgiven and favorite meals were prepared.

All in all, it was a welcome relief from the hustle and bustle of life when school was in session. Because of the additional amount of time parents spent with children, children felt as if parents were no longer under the stress which they assumed had been caused by the university. Interestingly, according to the parents, involvement in higher education may not necessarily be the key stressor in their lives. Jobs, financial matters or extended family issues may in fact be the primary stressor in their lives.

In today's busy society, it is difficult for most families to maintain a stress-free and organized life. This is even more difficult when the parent is a student attempting to juggle many roles (Scott, 1996). As previously stated, children felt that the primary stressor in their family was the university. This would suggest, then, that parents may need to work at minimizing the amount of stress in the home when school is in session. It stands to reason then that if parents can reduce the amount of stress in the family, especially when school is in session. It was observed that those households who tended to have the least amount of stress employed strategies of compartmentalizing and communication to alleviate these feelings of frustration in the home.

Compartmentalizing time may be a strategy that would be beneficial to the children and parent. A humorous note was pasted to the door of a student-parent's home office. It read, "No admittance between 6:00 and 7:00 unless you are bleeding or one of you is dead. If so – ask your father first, if you can't find him – then you may interrupt – but positively, absolutely only at your own risk. Love Mom, p.s. – from 8:00 on is yours." Children in this home had specific boundaries and a time that they realized was their own. It was admitted by the mother, however, that there were many times she forced herself to stop at 7:00 so time could be spent with the children, only to resume studies

after the children were asleep. By the same token, stress did appear to be less in those homes where parents set aside a specific time for one-on-one time with their child. Families who had a designated time to talk or a mechanism for communicating and staying in touch, seemed to fare much better in the long run when one or both of the parents returned to school.

An observation was made that all of the above-mentioned issues were compounded for those single-parent families. A feeling of constant overwhelm exist that limits a single-parents (Home, 1996). Needless-to-say, a single parent has total responsibility for the care and welfare of their children in addition to their role as a student and perhaps that of an employee. As one single mother indicated, "Sometimes my day just goes to hell in a hand basket." There is little or no relief for parents who are both mother and father unless custody is shared with the ex-spouse. The single parents interviewed vacillated between the pros and cons of visitation with their ex-spouses and their children. On one hand, it was reported that it would be helpful if visitation could be during the time the parent was in school, thereby eliminating one of their responsibilities. On the other hand, if children were gone during their breaks, there was alone time for rejuvenation and respite for the custodial parent.

Extra-curricular Activities – For the Sake of Whom?

A factor that not only contributed to the high level of stress, but also to the limitations of time, was the large amount of extra-curricular and school activities in which the children were involved. Children between the ages of 10 and 13 have opportunities through school, recreational activities, and church to participate in a variety of activities. Each child was involved in at least one activity, with 15 of the children

being involved in activities almost year around. These activities provided not only a social contact for the children, but an opportunity to develop life interests and skills. Children enjoyed the opportunity to associate with peers; however, they expressed dismay when parents were unable to attend the ball games or, dance recital because of class. Parents, in their interview, indicated that although the children enjoyed the activities, these activities were a blessing or a curse. On one hand, activities for children may be a blessing if the time involved in the activity provides parents an opportunity to study or complete other tasks. On the other hand, the same activities may add additional stress because of transportation needs of the child. Parents felt secure knowing that their children were involved in adult-supervised programs, and were particularly pleased when the practice or meeting was immediately after school. There was little concern about children being left to their own devices. Parents were also pleased that practice or meeting times provided them an opportunity to study, do homework, or catch up on errands.

As I listened to the children, a question arose as to whether the activities the children were involved in were more for the sake of the child or the parent. The activities were almost regarded as a babysitter for the children. Children between the ages of 10 and 13 are at the age in which socialization is important to their development (Dworelsky, 1987). Although they are too old for day care, they are too young to be left totally on their own recognizance. After school activities offer the opportunity for children to socialize and develop life long skills in an adult-lead activity. Care should be taken, however, to scrutinize the activities. There was expressed a sense from a few of the children that they may not have been involved in a particular activity if it was totally their

choice, rather than a convenience for their parent. As one young man professed, "I really didn't want to play baseball. I wanted to do soccer, but I get a ride from my cousin if I play baseball." Regardless, participation in those activities appeared to be mutually beneficial, especially when parents could arrange to be there for important functions.

The Many Dimensions of Family Finances

The financial situation of most college students is somewhat precarious to say the least and is a mitigating issue for adult learners dropping out of college (Cross, 1981). However, it is more compounded for student-parents who must support their family as well as themselves. As with every college student, the finances will vary depending upon their individual circumstance. It is not surprising that money was an issue the children were aware of; moreover had such knowledge of financial aid. Offspring of adult learners knew when financial aid disbursements were made, and also knew of programs such as state rehabilitation assistance, Stafford Loans, and university scholarship programs. Families who had limited financial resources were familiar with cost cutting and an economical lifestyle. In other words, it was not considered to be "a big deal." However, there was a different reaction for those whose families who had previously had been in a higher socio-economic status. Children had difficulty adjusting to the more limited resources and, in fact, were somewhat bitter about the lifestyle change.

An interesting note was the almost over-reactive behavior noted by the parents when it came to finances. Parents did not seem to communicate realistically to their children the actual financial status of the family. Children tended to receive mixed messages; they were often under the impression that the family had no extra funds. Allison related an interesting story. She had an opportunity to take part in a field trip with

her class at a cost of $5.00. Allison assumed there was no possible way for her mother to give her $5.00; therefore, she stayed home. Her mother was appalled that Allison would have the idea that she would not give her $5.00 for a field trip. However, that was the message received based on the "we have no extra money" lecture given to her by her mother. There existed a priority of household money of which the children were unaware.

Children appeared to be learning life-long money skills as well as initiative and resourcefulness. Between the ages of 10 or 13, children were knowledgeable about cost-cutting measures that could stretch finances. Many of the children already had part-time jobs and were gaining a solid work ethic. This is not to say, however, that all of the children wished for more luxuries and a more extravagant way of life.

Images of the Future Post-University

In so far as parents felt that post-secondary education would change their lives (Kennedy, 2002), children felt their lives would also change. It was apparent that the majority of the children felt their lives would be improved once their parents completed their degree since most parents were participating in higher education to improve their job prospects, pay possibilities, etc. However, it was obvious the children expected immediate results. Children did not seem to realize that the projected change would take time. Also, they were unaware that their parents would perhaps be assuming more responsibility with a new job or higher pay scale and this, in turn, could mean more time removed from them. Children were promised various rewards upon graduation. Rewards included everything from moving to a better or larger house, a vacation, or other luxuries. The "what are you going to do now" – "We're going to Disneyland" syndrome was prevalent. A feeling existed among the parents that the promise of rewards to come

would satisfy the children and perhaps make them "buy into" the sacrifices and stress level of the parents. As a result, there were unrealistic expectations on part of the children and, in fact, may well indeed prove to be more frustrating to the children in the future. Realistic discussions of the future and open communications with the children regarding their expectations would create a greater understanding between parent and child. Parents may well want to either avoid promises of a glorious future, or consider more realistic changes.

Need for Further Study

This exploratory study affirmed that children are not only directly impacted by parent's participation in education, but they have very definite perceptions of this experience. Each themes emerging from the study merit further study. For example, a closer look at the issue of distance is worthy of future study. In addition, it would be interesting to look at various developmental ages of children to ascertain whether one age group would have a less impact than another age group when their parents return to school. For example, consider infancy or toddler years versus high school ages.

Follow-up research on the same participants would be useful to gain an insight into the long-term effect on the children of student-parents. Questions concerning whether or not their experience of college via their parents will encourage their own attendance at a university, or have such a negative impact that the child will not pursue post secondary educations should be pursued.

Implications of the Study

The perspective or view points of the children that this study revealed suggest that parents' participation in higher education is not only an investment in the future for the

student-parent, but also for the entire family. This study, although limited, indicated that universities and counselors might be overlooking the impact of higher education on children of student-learners. The fact that children's lives were directly affected by the decision of the parents to pursue post secondary education suggests that strategies are needed to make the experience a positive one.

Implications for Universities

This study suggests that universities' stance in relation to its population is an important element not only to the education of the adult learner, but also important to the children of the students as well. How well the university responds to the needs of the student-parents and their children may have an impact on not only the satisfaction of the adult learner, the quality of family life, but on retention rates, as well.

The changing demographics of student population suggest that staff and faculty members need to be more aware of the issues facing student-parents. For example, paper deadlines may need to occur prior to breaks, rather than after, would allow greater opportunity for the students to enjoy their children during the break. Faculty members, by encouraging children to attend classes with their parents, especially on days when public school is not in session have an opportunity to not only recruit first choice careers, but develop a greater sense of who the student is. Children would have an opportunity to understand where their parents go on a daily basis, and not only see the buildings, but get to know the people involved in their parents' lives and the atmosphere of academia.

The study indicated that university programs geared toward children of adult learners might also alleviate some of the difficulties. For example, universities may consider introducing after-school or evening programs for children to attend while

parents are in late-afternoon or evening classes. Student services have historically focused on traditional student population with little attention to adult learners. The typical functions and services for the younger student population tend to discourage participation by student-parents. It is difficult to attend a welcoming dance with children in tow. This study suggests that family-orientated activities may increase student participation in campus activities. A welcoming attitude and philosophy by university staff and faculty toward children of adult learners would increase student satisfaction. Providing low-cost or free entrance into university programs, such as plays, athletic events, etc. would bring a rich new perspective to the university.

Implications for Parents

Communication with children emerged as a key element in the success of adult learners and their education. Parents must weigh the pros and cons of higher education and consider the impact that this will have on their children. Open dialogue with children regarding realistic expectations about the future is vital to children's understanding that decision. The study suggests that parents should include their children in the decision-making process by discussing their plans to return to school and what this change in lifestyle will eventually mean for the family. A discussion of the positives and the not-so-positives is very important in preparing the children for what is ahead.

Possibly the most important finding from the study suggests that exposing children to the university culture can create a connection between the educational goals of the parents and the investment by their children. With increased understanding comes greater support for the adult learner. Parents need to consider methods of integrating their

child into the university setting by involving them in university programs, taking them to class, and including them in the events at the university culture.

The study suggests that along with open communication, involving the children in decision-making process and participation in the home structure is vital to their feeling of involvement. It is important parents continue to acknowledge some of the frustrations and inconveniences which may be placed on their children. Families may need to consider strategies that would work within the confines of the family structure and activities of its members. The study further suggests that the family as a unit needs to look closely at the activities the children are involved in and the reason for those activities. Children have a need for their parents to be involved in and support their activities. It may be more beneficial for parents to stay in school longer, taking less hours, and becoming more involved in their children's activities.

It should be further noted that children anticipate with great excitement the day their parents will complete their education. Children have been promised, or bribed by their parents, that good things will happen when they graduate from college. Promises of a better and more lavish life style, better home, vacations, etc. have been made to the children. On the other hand, parents, in their enthusiasm to show how their participation in higher education will benefit the entire family, may have set unrealistic expectations. There is concern, however, that the promise of immediate gratification for years of sacrifice may prove to be disappointing to the children. It may take a period of time for employment to be secured, and money substantial enough to take the long awaited vacation, better house, etc. This would suggest that communicating to the children

regarding a more reasonable change and the length of time for that change would better prepare the children for life after their parents' graduation.

It would seem from the study, that the two most important factors for parents is to communicate in a realistic, positive manner, and to involve the child as much as possible in their activities at the university.

Implications for Counselors

Duty to warn and informed choice is a vital and ethical responsibility for counselors. This would seem to be even more important when working with adults who are considering pursuing a degree in higher education. Career and university counselors have in the past had limited knowledge of the impact of higher education on children. This study would seem to suggest there is an impact. Student-parents face issues unique from the more traditional students. Along with study skills and time management, parenting classes and available community resources may be needed to provide the adult learner with necessary coping skills to have a successful home life as well as academic career. Counselors need to facilitate and assist the parents in learning how to communicate with their children. Often, however, the family unit has the need to learn how to communicate in an effective manner. Children between the ages of 10 and 13 are beginning to develop their own sense of the world; parents need to understand how to open the dialogue between them.

To summarize, the study suggests that universities need to become more orientated to the increased population of student-parents by revisiting existing programs and policies. Children have a vested interest in their parents' education; they have the need to be connected with and have an understanding into that particular facet of their

parents' lives. Parents can develop strategies to lessen the impact of their education by including their children in not only the life of the university, but also by realizing the impact their education has on their children. Finally, career and university counselors may be instrumental in promoting skills and strategies to facilitate the understanding between child, parent, and university.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the perspective of the researcher. As a mother, adult learner, faculty member, and counselor who work on a daily basis with student-parents, I am in a unique position to suggest recommendations based on this study. It is believed that there are strategies for universities, parents, and counselors which can be beneficial.

Recommendations for Universities

- Universities may wish to consider designating an office the responsibility for looking at the various programs and policies for student-parents. This office could consider special events to disseminate this population into the college culture. Programs such as shared baby-sitting and clothing closets would be beneficial to families of student-parents.
- In-service training for faculty members may be beneficial in addressing the unique concerns of student-parents. Changes in syllabi and in assignments may mean major changes in time management for the student. Field trips and out-of-the-classroom requirements may interfere with the little time parents have with children.

- Universities should consider expanding or developing after-school, evening, and weekend programs for children of adults. Although the age researched, 10 to 13, are too old for day care, they are also too young to be left unattended for lengthy periods of time. Enrichment programs, provided at little or no cost, could be made stronger by using the unique resources of personnel a university has to offer. For example, students involved in Health and Physical Education could run a wellness program for children. This would fulfill the need of the children, as well as provide excellent experience on a resume.
- A family-friendly environment can be promoted by the university through actively welcoming children on campus. An example would be to develop a reading room for children in the library enabling parents to research while spending time with their children.
- Universities should develop a separate orientation session for adult learners that would be less intimidating for the student, as well as provide pertinent information of interest to that population and to inform student-parents of resources available to them.

Recommendations for Parents

- Student-parents should consider involving their children in the life of the university. Exposure to the campus and the individuals involved in that facet of their lives is crucial. Parents should take their children to campus, enrolling them in activities through continuing education, attending plays and attending athletic events on campus.

- A strategy for the smooth operation of the home should be implemented, and regardless of how bizarre it may seem, stick to it. One of the constant comments from the children was that home life was chaotic, and that each week began with good intentions of organization, only to fall by the wayside during the week. It may be that parents need to take a realistic view of the home life and develop a strategy that works.
- Parents should engage in a realistic dialogue with their child on a regular basis. Long-term as well as short-term goals and expectations need to be articulated in a way children can understand. It is also important that parents communicate to their children the issues they are facing as students. Children can relate to the same issues their parents are facing. For example, children can understand concern about studying for an exam and with understanding comes tolerance.
- It is important for parents to understand that it is important for them to be present for their children's events and activities. The children seemed to feel that their parents being there for half of the game or the play was better than their parents not being present at all.

Recommendations for Counselors

- Counselors should provide informed choices from which parents can make decisions.
- Counselors should guide adult learners toward realistic expectations regarding education. It may be more useful for parents to take an extended time to graduate and be available to their children rather than go though a program quickly and spend little time with their children.

- Information regarding alternatives to traditional classes should be provided by counselors. Web based or computer instruction may be viable options for parents.
- Skills-based programs in time management, parenting, and communication skills with pre-adolescents should be developed for student-parents to assist them in obtaining the necessary tools to be successful.

Conclusion

The participants interviewed provided a delightful, eye-opening insight, and often touching perspective on what it is like to be the children of parents who are also students. These shared experiences and thoughts have provided me with a rich insight that will be beneficial to me as not only a Mother, but a faculty member, and counselor as well. It was a great delight that while writing the results of the study, several of the children I interviewed approached me with new and unique insight, some very humorous. For example, one young lady approached me in Wal-Mart and indicated I should tell parents "not to have more than one kid – it just makes the situation worse – at least I used to have Mom all to myself." Another young lady wanted to know if I could "find my Dad a woman – someone nice and understanding and could cook."

Perhaps the most poignant illustration was the young man who came up to me at a wrestling match. After sitting next to me, he hugged me. As I hugged him back, I thanked him and asked him what the hug was for. He responded that after I left his home after interviewing him, his parents asked him what we talked about. According to him, as he related the purpose of the study, his parents in turn, asked him what he said. "…. so I just told them what I like and don't like. We talked a long time – and now I understand some things, and they understand some things. It's cool now." The study affirmed that through

communication and understanding each other both the parents and the child can be "cool" about the return to higher education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARENT/GUARDIAN PERMISSION FORM

For research being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus

A Study to Determine a Child's Perspective on Parent's attending a University is a study by Regina Robertson, LPC, CRC, for fulfillment of the requirements for a dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Irene Karpiak.

The purpose of the study is to determine how children between the ages of ten and thirteen, experience their parents attending a university, specifically East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. My child will be interviewed and will be audio taped with permission. Approximately seven primary questions will be asked. There may be follow-up questions asked if further clarification is needed. Any follow-up questions will be audio taped. The list of questions is available for my review. My child will also be asked to put down some of their thoughts on paper. The interviews should take no longer than one hour. The child will be interviewed in his/her own home, or another suitable location, to be determined by the parents. Parents will also be interviewed to obtain background information and to obtain and confirm information.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to the children. The child will be told that he/she may refuse to answer any questions, and that they may turn off the audio tape recorder at any time.

The benefits from this research may result in new knowledge that leads to greater understanding for parents when deciding to attend a university, for universities concerning possible improvements to student services and for educators and counselors concerning improving communication between parents and the children.

I understand that participation may be stopped at any time. I further understand that all information is confidential. Information obtained from my child will be considered confidential and will not be released to other or myself. . The only exception to this protection is that the researcher is required by Oklahoma law to report child abuse and neglect to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services if she obtains information from you or your child that causes her to have reason to believe that abuse has occurred. All information, audiotapes, etc. will be kept in a locked, secure place. All tapes will be erased after they have been transcribed.

It is understood that I may contact either Regina Robertson at 580-310-5647 or Dr. Irene Karpiak at 405-325-4072 with any questions about the research or about legal rights. I further understand that any inquiries about rights as a research participant may be made to the Office of Research Administration at 405-325-4757.

□ By checking this box, I am agreeing to allow my child's interview to be audio taped for the purpose of this research

I hereby agree to allow my child to participate in the above-described research. I understand my child's participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my child from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Parents/Guardians _____

Date _____

Child's Name _____

PERMISSION FORM
CHILD ASSENT FORM

For research being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus

My name is Regina Robertson and I would like your permission to talk with you about a study that I am doing at the University of Oklahoma. The purpose is to find out what people your age feel or think about their parents going to College.

I will ask you about seven questions and will ask you to fill in a picture with some of your thoughts. I will be glad to let you look at the questions before I ask them. This won't take more than one hour. We will talk in your home or at another place you feel comfortable. Please read the permission form below and remember to ask me any questions that you have before you sign it.

I agree to be interviewed on audiotape to help find out what kid's think about their parents going to college. I know that I don't have to do this, and that I may stop at any time. I also understand that everything on the tape and everything that I say is private, and will not be repeated to my parents or anyone else. . The person I talk with will not tell anyone else unless there is a law that says she must. I also understand that no harm will come to me because I talk with Mrs. Robertson.

I further understand that any inquiries about rights as a research participant may be made to the Office of Research Administration at 405-325-4757.

If I have any questions, I may call Mrs. Robertson at her home – 580-436-2211 her office – 5880-310-5647, or e-mail at regina@cableone.net. I may also call Dr. Irene Karpiak, faculty sponsor at 405-325-4072 or at ikarpiak@ou.edu.

I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. I have read and understand the above.

□ I actively consent to my interview being audio taped.

Name _____

Date _____

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

For research being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus

A Study to Determine a Child's Perspective on Parent's attending a University is a study by Regina Robertson, LPC, CRC, for fulfillment of the requirements for a dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Irene Karpiak.

In addition to interviewing children, I would also like to interview the parent of the child to obtain background information. I will ask you approximately nine questions. Copies of the questions are available for your review. It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately one hour. We will visit at a location of your choice and your convenience. Please read the permission form below. I will be happy to clarify or answer any question you may have.

I agree to be interviewed on audiotape to provide background information that may be helpful in obtaining a child's perspective on parents returning to school. I understand that the interview may be stopped immediately upon my request. All information obtain is considered confidential, with all transcriptions and other documents to be kept in a secure place. The only exception to this protection is that the researcher is required by Oklahoma law to report child abuse and neglect to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services if she obtains information from you or your child that causes her to have reason to believe that abuse has occurred.

I further understand that any inquiries about rights as a research participant may be made to the Office of Research Administration at 405-325-4757.

If I have any questions, I may call Mrs. Robertson at her home - 580-436-2211 her office - 580-310-2755, or e-mail at regina@cableone.net. I may also call Dr. Irene Karpiak, faculty sponsor at 405-325-4072 or at ikarpiak@ou.edu.

I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. I have read and understand the above.

□ I actively consent to my interview being audio taped.

Name _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHILDREN

1. How come your parent is going to school?
2. What are they going to school for?
3. What was it like before your parent went to school?
4. What is the best thing about your parent going to school?
5. What is the hardest thing about your parent going to school?
6. How do you think life will be different after Mom/Dad graduates?
7. What kinds of chores do you do around the house?
8. What kinds of activities are you involved in?
9. How often have you been to the university and why?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

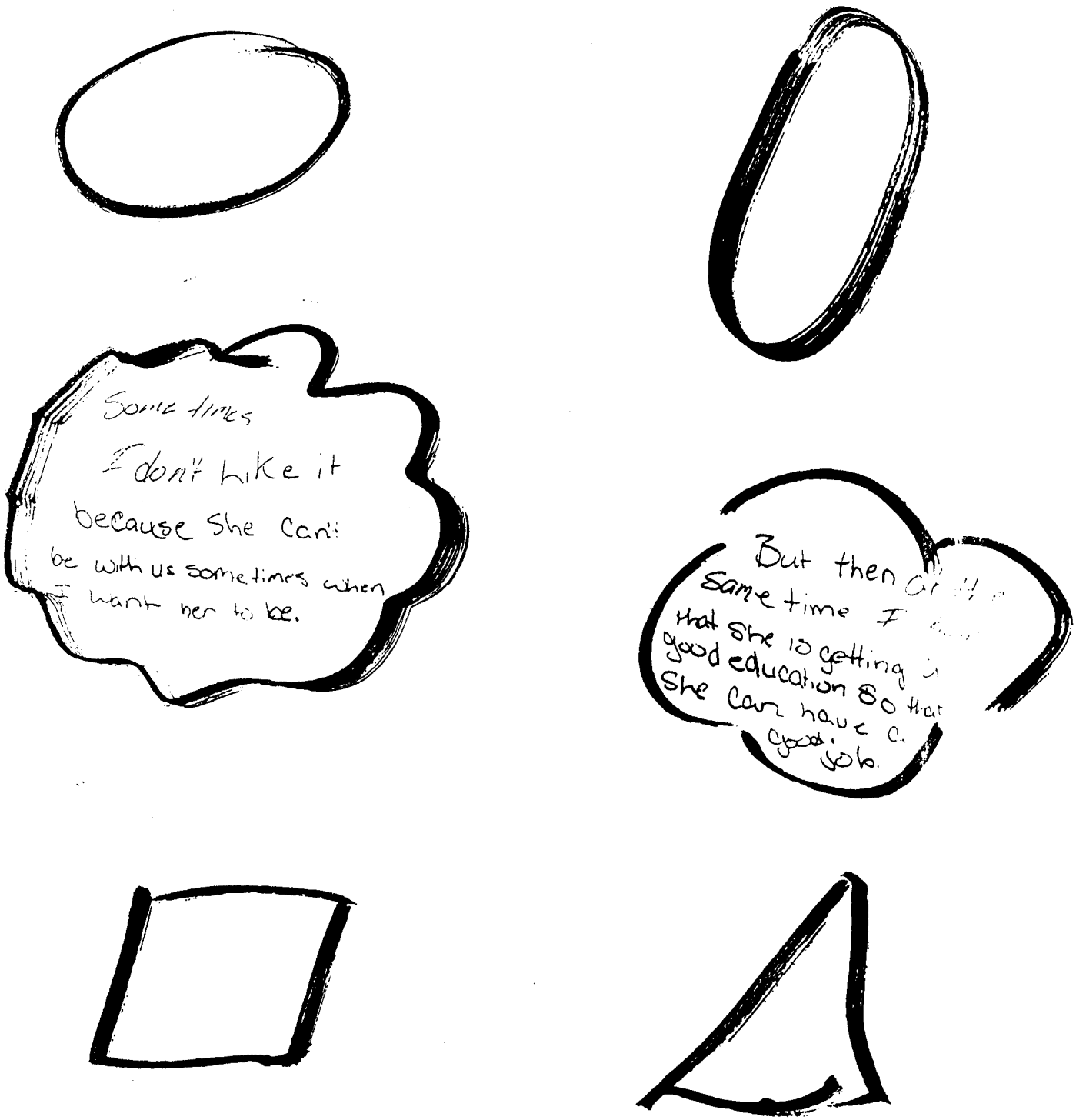
1. Could you tell me how many are in your family, and what their ages are?
2. What is your course of study?
3. What precipitated your return to school?
4. What sorts of concerns do you have about returning to the university in regards to your family?
5. What is your sense of how your children are responding to your being at the university?
6. What are your plans after graduation?
7. What kinds of chores are your children required to do around the house?
8. What kind of activities are your children involved in?
9. How often have your children been to the university, and for what purpose?

APPENDIX C

CLUSTERING EXERCISES

The Case of Becky


pizza
food
gone
allert
pizza


Some times
I don't like it
because She can't
be with us sometimes when
I want her to be.
But then
Same time
that She is getting
good education so that
She can have
good job.