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The Constant Jugglers- Single Mothers Amidst Patriarchy and University

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The Constant Jugglers – Single Mothers Amidst Patriarchy and University

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Abstract

This case study juxtaposes feminist literature with an examination of single mothers pursuing an undergraduate degree in teacher education. The Patriarchy and the English language emerged as definers of cultural norms that are oppressive to outsiders. Three single mothers living on the U.S.-Mexico border were interviewed. Their stories were compared to the literature of the Patriarchy. The status quo was examined in its roles as lawmaker and as rights taker. Patriarchy and the English language emerged as definers of cultural norms that are impacting and controlling the choices of these women. Themes that emerged from the data are dependence vs. independence, the community of peers, and how the women negotiated their own identities and higher education

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v-vi
Introduction.....	1-3
Demographic Context.....	3
Purpose of Study.....	3-4
Research Methodology.....	4-5
The Critical Qualitative Case Study Methodology.....	5-7
Review of the Literature.....	8-10
Rights Defined as Equal.....	10-14
The Womb as Public Private Property.....	15-17
Morals.....	18-19
“Mom”.....	20
Media.....	21
Identity Part I.....	21-23
Research Participants.....	23-26
Data Recording.....	26-27
Results.....	27-29
Dependence vs. Independence.....	29-31
The Cult of Single Motherhood.....	31-32
Identity Part II.....	32-34
School Days.....	34-35

Recommendations to the Field.....	35-37
Conclusion.....	37-41
References.....	42-45
Curriculum Vita.....	46

Introduction

The human condition is one of control. Our lives are subject to the forces of nature. Our ability to negotiate between nature and our personal natures defines us as the people we are. As we emerged from the primordial forest physically and spiritually, our desire to control our world began. Though limited in our abilities to control nature, we certainly could attempt to control each other. Rules, laws, proprieties, and morals emerged as the defining labels of these emerging Western cultural controls. Many of these rules were pragmatic, and thus defined themselves as standards chosen less for control than for safety or general well-being. Examples of this were dietary rules, personal or domestic cleanliness, or the limiting of inter-family reproduction.

Other rules or standards emerged that had less to do with the well-being of all, and had more to do with the well-being of those in charge. A ruling class emerged, and in most cases, its gender was male. This patriarchy is an expression of the times and a manifestation of the emerging male philosophy of control. Sanday (1981) illustrates this as a few males in control of the many. She also connects this process of dominance to the day-to-day lives of nomadic persons, people who were constantly moving to find safety, water, and food, which allowed the few to control the many. Sanday equates the emergence of male power as being the by-product of the nomadic lifestyle. She suggests that change amidst constant movement was more likely to be pragmatic rather than being rules created to address the needs or lives of the individual. Chisholm, Millard, and Jackson (1992) affirm that as migration ebbed and a more stable fixed civilization began to emerge, male hegemony held the high ground, and their patriarchal conventions flowed down hill from this point to the citizens below.

A ruling class emerged as a consequence of this gender specific dominance in the very constructions of laws, religious dogma, the division of labor, and the extension of the labels of

social class. These, the definers of early cultural norms, can be grouped by the term *patriarchy*. This denotes a society from which the power is disseminated by the males of the species. These founders of religion, law, and culture will be referred here as simply the patriarchy, less as an accusation, than as a definition of as a dominant philosophy (Hawkesworth, 1990; Mill, 1970; and Rogers, 1966.) The existence and grasp of this patriarchy reaches into the public and private lives of those who live within this realm. This was the classic human trade-off of fealty in exchange for the safety which allowed one to live.

This thesis examines patriarchy maldefining women, and through this practice has limits the options and the lives of single mothers in particular. This devaluation is reflected within the literature as well as within the experiences of the research participants. These limitations appear as the real life barriers, constraints, and standards thrust upon women who reproduce outside of societal “norms” (Parker & Coles, 2000). This subjugation reflects what women have faced and continue to face. These constants of control and marginalization have taken female private lives and made them public, while the lives of men have remained private. By placing the lives and choices of women into the intellectual thoroughfare, the patriarchy defines women’s issues as being inherently public. Thus, women, their lives, their bodies, their offspring, and their very processes are thrust onto a public stage.

By connecting the literature to the lives of the three single mothers matriculating within a teacher education program, ideas are offered that might begin dialog and ease their process. Single mothers are here, and the patriarchy is no longer powerful enough to rule by force alone. Engagement of these university students has become a necessity for the society at large and the institution itself within its role as reflector, disseminator, and amplifier of culture. Single mothers attending university are negotiating daily the similar landscapes that women have had to traverse

from our earliest beginnings as a civilization. How best can single mothers serve self, serve their children, and survive the civil and intellectual minefield that is this patriarchy?

Demographic Context

In 2007, live births reached a record high of 4.3 million (Center for Disease Control, 1997) and forty percent of these births were to single mothers. The National Center for Health Statistics (a division of the CDC) broke these numbers down further. Seventy-two percent of unwed mothers were of African American heritage, fifty-one percent were of Hispanic heritage, and twenty-one percent were of Caucasian heritage. Though these numbers are designated as records within the baby-boom, statistically, this reflects more upon the population gains within the United States than upon the birth rate of the baby-boom of the 1950's. Instead, these numbers reflect the changing identity of those giving birth and are the reflection of an American society that have deemed this a problem (Lawson & Rhode, 1993). Beyond this label lies the more complex dilemma of how a nation is changing socially, and how its infrastructure might best serve this emerging reality of women choosing to give birth outside of marriage.

Purpose of the Study

Single mothers who have chosen to live outside of the patriarchy's traditional roles are creating subaltern lives. The morals and rules of the past revisit them daily. How they traverse and negotiate this landscape is forcing society to reevaluate its concept of what is normal. Nations emerge that are of color, with ethnic and gender roles changing daily. This exchange begets non-traditional gender roles amidst a norm that is multi-cultural and pan-sexual, and redefines the concept of normal daily interactions. In essence, a national discussion of the institutions of the nuclear family, marriage, and religious doctrine is being held without the de-facto permission from half of the board of directors.

This research and its connection to the literature offer voice to these dialogues. Not only are single mothers creating new paths for themselves and for their children, but as teachers, they offer the incorporation of these emerging values into their curriculum. Pinar (2003) suggests that how we teach, and what we teach defines a society's true nature and identity. Chomsky (2009) suggests that how we speak, and what we say define who we are. Valenzuela (1999) heard the culture emerging from first and second generation American students. My research listened to the stories of single mothers who were first and second generation Americans, and were the first in their families to attend university. This emerging demographic of newer immigrants, single mothers, and students using education as a way up and out, are the front lines of this cultural discussion into how the ruling classes might better serve lives that are not only present, but forcefully emergent.

Research Methodology

An understanding of the following question was fundamentally required to begin my research: "What are the realities of single mothers pursuing higher education?" Sidel (2006), Hancock & Algozzine (2006), and Grills (1998) suggest that one's path can be viewed as defining one's process. They illustrate how disparate lives can choose similar coping strategies. Lives in process and lives emerging, no matter how non-traditional, can be compared to lives deemed traditional through examination (the coding of words and of themes). Valenzuela (1999) and Hitchcock (1993) address identity as defined by choices made (as a process) and by the language chosen to express identity. "Who are you?" or "How did you get here?" lead those questioned towards defining their journey. Valenzuela's respondents answer the question, "Who are you?" by combining the identity of immigrant parents with a first or second generation American's language of reinvention. Her students borrow or trade from one language or one

culture to another. This causes an emergence of an identity and a road-map to how one becomes something new. This is where Valenzuela's connectivity between language and cultural choices connects to Chomsky's (1999) ideas of language as being hard-wired within heritage. He connects oppression and its allowance. To Chomsky, the negotiation of one's way through oppression manifested through the language choices of the speaker. Within a Chomsky construct, choice is behavior, behavior is character, and language is chosen as a definition of who we are.

Hitchcock (1993) asks in his research, "How is America different?" The answers again speak of individual stories that in their telling connect history and heritage. Chomsky (1999) and Zinn (2003) connect collective voices saying similar themes as the emergence of "Americanism," a hybrid of language, personal history, identity and freedom of choice. This can be heard within Valenzuela's and Hitchcock's participants as they find their way toward expressing identity amidst a dominant culture. Though the participants in our research told their individual stories, Valenzuela, Hitchcock, and Chomsky would suggest that in the telling, we are all rewriting ourselves. These authors conceive that our heritage and our traditions can be heard within how we choose to tell our story.

The Critical Qualitative Case Study Methodology

The methods used in my research were based upon the standards established by I.E. Seidman (1991) in his book titled *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, and *Doing Case Study Research* by Dawson R. Hancock and Bob Algozzine (2006). The critical qualitative case study research methodology used in-depth interviews of three participants. These three participants were chosen from a pool of 108 teacher education students attending the university near the U.S. border with Mexico. All three volunteers were selected via the following criteria: They were

single mothers, they were studying to become teachers, and they had a self-reported lack of support from family and friends in their academic, social, and private lives.

Seidman's (1991) phenomenological method of qualitative research case study interviews was chosen to highlight these single mothers' interpretation of their process. These participants were suggested for this research by what Seidman calls "informal gatekeepers" (p. 36) by their professors. These professors were briefed only in the broadest and most general terms about this research, and then invited students to volunteer. The only requirements expressed by the researchers were that single mothers were being sought for case study interviews. No benefits to those offered the opportunity to be involved were stated beyond the chance to tell their story.

As suggested by Seidman, these approaches were formal and were preceded by the researchers filing Internal Review Board (IRB) documents, as well as proposing this research (thesis) through the Graduate School Offices and the offices of the Teacher Education Department. An informed consent document was created using the university's Office of Research and Sponsored Projects' template. The final document (IRB # 99708-1) reflects their requirements and the researcher's desire for consent that created both transparency and privacy for those who chose to participate. Seidman (1991) suggests that researchers offer all information to their participants in order to create an atmosphere of openness and trust within the case study interviews.

Siedman (1991) suggests three 90-minute interviews, but due to the time constraints of the participants, two women participated in two interviews and the third woman participated in one interview. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the interviewer (researcher). These transcriptions totaled 97 typed pages. The data were coded by two separate and independent researchers to assist in establishing the validity of context. This created clarity

through the alignment of consistent themes. The paradigm of validity was suggested by the works of Mishler (1986) as well as by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They suggest that “intersubjectivity” (Seidman, 1991, p. 17) between researchers allows for two separate interpretations of data coding. The independent checking and double-checking during coding increases the possibility of validity, as well as moving toward what Seidman calls “trustworthy” results (p. 17). The dual coding of themes then allowed for the second interview (or follow-up emails) to improve upon what Seidman calls “the qualitative tentative connections” (p. 28). The follow-up questions could then focus upon not only the women’s journey into teacher education, but could also reflect revisited patterns of their own cognition. Hancock & Algozzine (2006) describe the clarifiers as “events, programs, situations, and activities” (p. 15) that indicates choice or process. They suggest that this type of research can incorporate the natural context of the data within a case study rich in content. This inherent content connects the participant to its own style and patterns of the telling of one’s distinct life stories. This then allows the researcher to ask less and to listen to the participants more, thus giving the researcher patterns and ideas to follow without the need to constantly redirect or interrupt the participants’ stream of consciousness.

Later, this coding allowed for thematic analysis (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) that better connected the elements of biography, process, and consciousness (Chomsky, 1999; Vigotsky, 1987). These case study interviews were purposefully kept separate from the analysis (Seidman, 1991), but through coding allowed the qualitative connections to the deeper meaning of these women’s experience. These themes connected woman-to-woman, and later linked literature to the lives observed within the critical qualitative cases studied.

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature in the field of the status of women is told historically first and theoretically second. Though Hancock and Algozzine (2006) suggest that literature reviews begin in present day and work back through time, I have done the opposite to demonstrate that the patriarchy and the philosophy of their oppression is self-referential and little changed over time. From the beginning of recorded history, the patriarchy has defined the matriarchy as secondary in status (Kerber, 1988). Philosophically, this secondary status is clearly defined from the early expressions of the old and new testaments,

And the LORD God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help mate for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man (Genesis 2.19 – 2.22).

The New Testament examples a similar misogyny when it states, “for the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (I Corinthians, 11.8-9).

This inherent patriarchal philosophy continues within the writings of Aristotle with women as “defective” and as “misbegotten males” (Hawkesworth, 2003, p. 22). Saint Augustine later continues this devaluation when he states, “flesh must be subject to spirit within the right order

of nature” (Hawkesworth, 2003, p. 23). Inherent in this subordination by Augustine lays the critical component of the patriarchal belief that women are not only weaker physically, but that they are also more prone to sin. St. John Chrysostom in his *Exhortation to Theodore after His Fall* (A.D 379) extends the Augustinian construct (begun in the Garden of Eden), that the “the full comprehension of the nature of women can protect men against the loss of virtue” (Rogers, 1966, p. 16). To protect men and to create purity, women must be controlled (Pateman, 1989).

The first step in restriction of women (and other groups of secondary status) that the patriarchy wishes to oppress is to first philosophically devalue them. This culling or separation prior to branding with a label is expressed as a form of division prior to subtraction (Chomsky, 1999; Stanley, 1994; Zinn, 1980; & Coontz, 1992). A name and a clarifying set of behaviors gives the status quo the ability to turn a domesticated familiar “us” into a rabid “them.” These labels are repeated enough throughout history to be useful as a cross-generational connector. Chomsky (et al.) would define these actions as representative of patriarchal identity and of patriarchal process. The words chosen that we hear continuously from men in western culture label those who will not conform as “wild women” (Linton, 1891; Maxwell, 1892; Spelman, 1982; and Greenslate 1997). These four writers over one hundred years connect the patriarchy’s fear of the wild woman to their need for control. Here the philosophy of the nature of women as defined by men met the physics of female suppression. The patriarchy again defines itself by choosing to control women they deemed wild as a prerequisite to the further controls they deemed necessary. It then becomes an even smaller intellectual journey from men needing to control women, to then marginalizing their lives and deeming their labor or desires, or needs as inherently less than those of men.

Harriet Taylor Mill (1851) suggests that there is a duality of purpose within this oppression, “that not only do men demand women be their sexual slaves, but literally in the fields to be their workers too. They [men] ‘use women as slave labor, and that more advanced men enslave women for their sexuality’” (p. 108). Here, control is further illustrated conceptually as one gender controlling the sex of the other as, “the non-bearers of children want to control the breeders of children [to thus] define a breeding territory from which other men were excluded, to best identify their having offspring, and being able to identify these offspring as their own” (Richards, 1982).

By turning gender difference into the reasons for marginalization and subjugation, tradition, law, morals and normalcy become the fruits of this patriarchal poisoned tree. The antidotes to this pathology began in the 19th Century with women’s suffrage. As women traded fealty for protection, the trade became behavior for rights. Purity and reproductive rights are linked to suffrage as the patriarchy seems to be offering choice.

Rights Defined as “Equal”

Post Civil War, the concept of equality had been engaged. White males had begun to give rights and values to those they had previously judged to be lesser. This created the platform for women’s suffrage and eugenics (racial purity) to emerge simultaneously. This connection was based again within the needs of men. Once they engaged women for their labor and their ability to reproduce, men connected women’s values to those of newly freed male slaves. If an African American was worth “X”, then what was a woman worth? The enduring lesser status of women (and others) can be seen throughout American Civil Law statutes. The words “free / white, Christian, and male” defined the ruling class (Novak, 1996). These words are repeated in court as women sought to gain rights to constitutionally exist and to affect this status through the vote.

Minor v. Happersett (1874) addresses how existence, suffrage, and the vote are thought of by the male judiciary. As women slowly gain rights as citizens, they are allowed equal rights under the law, and thus allowed to vote. Yet, once men state that women have equal rights, their suffrage is dismissed with the logic that if you were always equal and could always vote, then where is your suffrage? In effect, this interpretation of suffrage divided women across political lines. They could vote, and for some the right was victory alone. For others, these were still the scraps of male privilege being used for the benefit of the status quo first, and for those with lesser power second. Men were saying by their actions that free, White and Christian women were preferable to the other races that the status quo feared. As Lori Ginzberg writes, men may have been addressing status, but in deed, they were far more concerned with sexual controls (Parker & Cole, 2000). These actions to control demand that the patriarchy find a way to depict women as both citizens, voters, and “the embodiment of middle-class Christian sexual virtue” (p. 140). The patriarchy was willing to trade women’s limited rights in exchange for them voting and living “correctly.” It was assumed that these limited citizens would balance out the emergence of immigrants, non-Christians, and emancipated slaves. To some, especially in the South, men and woman as husbands and wives united in the hope of preserving a pure America (Varon, 1998).

By establishing women as voters and citizens, they joined the civil service and earned their own monies. They could own property, and their children’s rights were extensions of the rights of the mother. These emerging women with (limited) power further threatened the patriarchy as women stepped beyond male control. Reactions (Parker & Coles 2000) to these societal shifts reflect much of what we see today. Women with power (and who exercise their franchise) are labeled as “others,” a threat to the values of those with conservative religious values. This is

again the use of the concept of the uncontrollable wild woman as a threat, not only to men, but to their institutions.

As Parker & Coles, (2000) example demonstrates, the status quo engages other women as their allies. They are momentarily engaged as the proxy of the patriarchy. Invited into the government and the political process, women are momentarily empowered. The vote of women is viewed as cancelling out the vote of other men. Women aligned with the patriarchy can be gifted power enough to offset the vote of a freed slave, or to counter the voices of other “wilder” women. This begins an important break between women themselves at a time when the gains of suffrage were also used as controlling deficits. Women, who extended these rights and were bold enough to write under their own name (Coryell, 1990), were the prime targets for attacks from both genders.

Contrasting examples of these bold women, who established the suffrage line, are Anne Carroll, who courageously ventured from the family home into politics in the late 19th Century, and Ada Clare, who began to write publicly under her own name regarding the possible realm of women’s rights. They are contrasting examples of those who stood in the front lines of the suffrage movement. Both women were products of the antebellum South. Carroll extended this tradition of subservience and gentility to move slowly through the uncharted waters of women as writers and shapers of public opinion. Though she came from an outside political party, known as “The Know Nothings,” her methods were familiar to men. In public, she was deferential and picked her fights carefully. She wrote mostly of religious diffusion in America from outside influences (the Jesuits). She spoke of Catholics, both foreign and domestic, as moral corrupters. Her writing gently attacked these religions as the forces of moral decay. Regarding her Christianity, she writes, “the fate of America is the work of our daughters ... on their strewn

virtues, their cultivated intelligence, their faithfulness to duty, to God, and their country depends on American salvation now” (p.91). Carroll’s clarity can be seen in her use of the term for political women as “moral agents to develop her children for God and his country” (p.91). This clarifies the message of both god and of country, extending America as being inherently god-given.

Contrary to this familiar style was the public persona of South Carolinian, Ada Clare, who not only wrote under her own name, but also began to use satire and humor to directly challenge men. She wrote unswerving of gender roles by first calling women “people.” She demanded the right to education, the right to dress freely, and the right to live independently. She directly challenged the subservience of women to the morals, the separate spheres of the sexes, and to what she called “the cult of domesticity” (p. 101). Writing in a New York Literary magazine “Saturday Press” (November 26, 1859), she soon reversed the patriarchy back upon men, by publishing,

Men should be educated but not too highly, we want him sweet, gentle, and thick-skulled ... why puzzle this brain built for the cultivation of the moral sense with such abstruse sciences as geography, history, grammar etc. We do not want intelligent men, our only choice is the angelic dunce (Parker & Coles, p.101).

Clare continued to attack the status quo in this ironic style, and was among the first to suggest equality, based not upon gender differences, but upon the sameness of the genders as human. The public was outraged, and attacked Clare, not for her message, but on false accusations regarding her relationship with her married boss and other men at her work place (Coryell, 1990).

Not only do we see the wild women used to stifle women outside of patriarchal norms, but we also see a style emerging that defines the phrase “a stalking horse.” This phrase refers to a consumer getting a better deal by sending another in their place. In other words, a third party will act as the public face of a buyer to get a deal which the actual buyer could not. This use of women to write of other women’s behavior (and speak for the patriarchy) will emerge as the key to protracting the progress of women’s rights. By using women to report other women and to make this engagement public, the patriarchy discourages discourse. Women demean and diminish other women, which can illustrate a path of less resistance for subaltern women.

The early 20th Century extended women’s rights as being useful to men. The World Wars required women to do the work of missing men (Parker & Coles 2000). The family was being held together primarily by the matriarchs. Here was social change by necessity. Although women made physical gains in public spaces through employment and education, their gains were costly. Women paid for independence once again in the public eye. The public unsympathetically judged women on their choice to work in the home or in the workplace. Once the war (or crisis) was over, the status quo attempted to return to the “normal.” Post World War II, women who tried to continue less tethered to a home or a husband, were again demonized by the stalking-horse of other women (Pateman, 1988 & 1989; Coulter, 2009). They were again publicly labeled as antithetical to behavioral norms. They were made wild, less by behavior than by word (Stephens, 1992; Chomsky, 1999). Thus began the 1950s, as culturally a return to the safety of tradition, or as Bissell (2005) calls this process required for sublimation, “colonial nostalgia.” Both Chomsky (1999) and Zinn (2003) call the return of women to traditional roles a de-facto prerequisite for a citizen’s repatriation. Yet again, protection is proffered in exchange for behavior.

The Womb as Public and Private Property

Women's rights had been gifted from the patriarchy. One could work outside of the home, yet, with more public lives came more public exposure. Behavior was still closely monitored, and for being allowed to be considered "people," women were again expected to barter their independence for dependence. Normalcy was defined for women, not by women (Hawkesworth, 1990). Women in the 20th Century were allowed publicly to be "people," but men continue to attempt to control women's bodies just as they have done throughout much of recorded history. The patriarchy continued to closely monitor how women were using their freedom. Their bodies were in public, and the trade-off was their gender becoming the subject of public discourse. Manners, dress, language, and choices were discussed in ways that men were not (Hawkesworth, 1990). Women are defined by others as marriage-able, or as "old-maids." A woman's reproductive cycle became incorporated into language because her physical status as a breeder was spoken of publicly. Women who could have children had more value than one who could not. On the same notion, women who live through childbirth had an increased worth, while a woman unable to have a second child was deemed damaged goods. The patriarchy judges a woman and her ability to reproduce with the same respect as a domesticated animal trying to breed (Hawkesworth). All women were valued by male criteria, and their biology was publicly discussed. The connection between women's reproductive abilities or status and their subjugation by gender are juxtaposed when she writes, "Why should human beings choose to model reproductive practices on those few species in which male dominance is prevalent?" (p. 81).

Choices about the definitions of independence, dependence, sexuality, and femininity were all a slippery slope for the emerging woman. Sexuality and allure were allowed to a point, but

the patriarchy looms to punish those who exceed their momentary limits of decorum. From the movies to the public lives of privileged women, we see women emerging as fulfilled people. The concept of them as citizens was becoming the norm. However, once they move in status from person to impregnated person, the dynamic changes severely. Hawkesworth (1990) calls it “the virtue paradigm” (p. 166). So ingrained are our philosophies of the “mother” as an archetype of goodness that modern persons of both genders find it difficult to combine the mother with someone who is sexual. Once pregnant, there seems to be a paradigm shift involving pre-determined behaviors for the new mother. The woman was expected to treat her pregnancy as the end to one type of life, and the beginning of another. Institutions were thrust upon her (and the father) to indoctrinate them into the masses of the married. It is as if pre-pregnant, a woman belongs to herself and to her choices, but once impregnated her behaviors belong to another exemplar. Her choice can be forgiven by society should she join the mainstream through marriage and domesticity, or she can forge a different path and risk being labeled as “the other.”

Normalcy as Defined by Those Not “Others”

As female norms moved from theory to actual behaviors, there continued to be a split between female policy makers and females for whom the status quo required no changes. As radical feminism pushed further from the patriarchal center, so too did conservative women push their agendas back toward behaviors the patriarchy had previously approved (Parker & Coles, 2000). Writers like Carole Pateman (1989) and Anne Coulter (2009) began to repeatedly report other women within their writing. Coulter specializes in this public shaming of those she deems subaltern or subversive to traditional female dogma. Unwed women were exemplified as the root cause of future dysfunction by their children. Women, who birth children by different fathers, are somehow less of a person than women who reproduced with one man. Women who chose to

divorce men were seen differently than men who divorced women. In essence, the law is being made by public opinion and by perceived cultural norms instead of by due process.

The law is wholly masculine, created and executed by man. The framers are all restricted to the masculine standpoint to the thoughts and biases of men. The law gives us no representation as women, and therefore no impartial justice even if present lawmakers were honestly intent upon this: for we can be represented only by our peers (Antoinette Blackwell – Stanton, 1881, p. 524).

The rights of one gender are decided or being given by the dominant gender. The patriarchy is gifting that which is not its to give. Women are being re-gifted the freedoms that inherently should have been theirs based solely by the law.

Government Influence and Policy

Women's rights are not easily retrieved once granted. With their emerging freedoms, such as the right to vote, women earned their own money separate from men. With a new engaged force, women had a voice in the choice of life partner and planned reproduction. Women not only had created voice by their sheer existence, but the nation on a Federal level was tasked to better serve them. Government services expanded post-Depression, but again in a patriarchal way. The government would care for its children, but only within self-referential parameters. The New Deal served women only in a secondary status (Dimand & Nyland, 2004) by offering them the jobs and the lives men had left behind. As the century progressed, one could hear the same diminishment being applied to female choice (and identities) that echoed amidst the empty lots of broken promises.

Morals

The patriarchy again misdirected or mislabeled by using the culturally loaded term “welfare” to suggest a policy whose intent was to care for children whose mothers were judged less able to care for their own. Instead, the government offered to again trade benefits in exchange for behavior. Cash payments, food stamps, and daycare were given, but only after a woman publicly required to name each child’s father (Sidel, 2006). With whom the woman chooses to live become public record, just as do her benefits. The government plugs her need as well as her services into a mathematical formula. If a single mother exceeds these limits on what they receive, benefits are deducted.

Sidel (2005) illustrates how the government offers those in need the trade of benefits for acceptance of their label as “needy.” President Reagan coined the phrase “Welfare Queens” to reflect that the welfare system was enriching those in poverty or need. This continues the practice of subjugating women and their children based more upon morals than upon need. This idea was engaged by political right as defining poverty as a lifestyle choice. Again, single women with children were being placed in the intellectual street for all to judge. Their status is defined by this preexisting notion of motherhood and the lives of women and children as somehow less.

Here is the lottery ticket that single mothers are handing their innocent children by choosing to raise them without fathers. Controlling for socioeconomic status, race, and place of residence, the strongest predictor of whether a person will end up in prison is that he was raised by a single parent (Coulter, 2009, p. 38).

Coulter’s *Today Show* quote filled the news cycle, which appeared to be her intent. Her fighting words were intended to call out single mothers. Common accusations included the

following attacks: “the liberal media exalts the single mom...most teenage mothers, runaways, murderers, and rapists, can be traced back to being the children of single mothers” (Bell, 2009). Taken in the context of a conservative author on a book tour, these comments are less volatile than many of the book’s quotations.

According to the U.S. Justice Department crime statistics, domestic abuse is virtually nonexistent for married women living with their husbands. From 1993 to 2005, the number of married women victimized by their husbands ranged from 0.9 to 3.2 per 1000. Domestic violence was about 40 times more likely among divorced or separated women, ranging from 37.7 to 118.5 per 1000. Even never married women were more than twice as likely to be victims of domestic violence as married women (Coulter, 2009, p. 58).

Here again is the language of the stalking horse in use to reign in subaltern women.

Single motherhood is the apotheosis of the feminist vision: women without men!

Except they're not without men. They're without one specific man with an interest in their particular children. But men -- and women -- across the country have been forcibly enlisted in the job of feeding, housing, and clothing single mothers and their children. The rest of us have to be constantly attuned to the needs of single mothers.

Government policies are designed to support single mothers, rather than stop them.

Churches, corporations, and nonprofit organizations are required to chip in to make up for single mothers' lack of husbands. I am woman, hear me roar! Hey, what's the holdup on my government check? It never occurs to anyone to simply return to the original rule. Unless a man is married to a woman when she gives birth to his child, he has no rights to that child, and unless a woman is married to a man when she gives birth to his child, she has no right to his paycheck or his time (Coulter, 2009, p.67).

Again, motherhood is defined by fathers, or by the morals of the patriarchy. It is quantified by the monies the mother requires, and qualified by the status quo of men.

“Mom”

The devaluing of a mother’s path is not new, nor is it free from language choices. This mimics the enslaving words that differentiated terms like “ladies” or “harlots” in the Middle Ages (Hanawalt, 1998). It appears again in the terms “Homes for Unwed Mothers,” or “Foundling Hospitals” in the last century (Lawson, 1993). The message remains constant. Single mother required government to save her and her children, while a married woman was entitled to a private bedroom.

Status and values were publicly transmitted by words (Chomsky, 1999). The patriarchy was defining a woman’s womb as being within the public domain. Behavior and the children resulting from behavior were made ward’s of this state. The line between the public and the private is blurred by this misuse of language and power as stated in Coulter (2009);

Getting pregnant isn't like catching the flu. There are volitional acts involved -- someone else explain it to Dennis Kucinich. By this purposeful act, single mothers cause irreparable harm to other human beings -- their own children -- as countless studies on the subject make clear. Not only do single mothers hurt their children, they also foist a raft of social pathologies on society. Look at almost any societal problem and you will find it is really a problem of single mothers (p.36).

Media

Chomsky (2009) often refers to literature and language as an actual landscape. How we speak or write or label can become a barrier for the listener and the author. Once public, it is hard to pull back our words. This is further exacerbated by the nature of public and private as exemplified by the fuzzy line that is the internet. So much of language can be heard in the currency, the immediacy of what is referred to as “The 24-Hour News Cycle.” Private behaviors are placed into the public’s view immediately via the media and the World Wide Web’s reach. Where once culture could more slowly be defined over time, the current technology makes value judgments about definitions such as “subaltern” or “normal” in mere seconds. Real lives are presented in real-time on our computers and on television. How and what the media reports reflects the values or culture of those in power. Labels or rhetoric are presented as fact and last until the next patriarchal news flash comes along. The bodies of women are in the public domain as intended. Chomsky says a society defines itself by the manner in which it speaks. The words chosen in societies’ news, opinions, and values are specifically chosen to empower or to disempower. An example of this power substitution might be the switch of the word “politician” for “Senator,” or “housewife” for “mother.” To those outside of power, how the patriarchy speaks, and what they mean might be misunderstood. Trying on identity within such a loud landscape seems one more accommodation for those beyond the pale.

Identity Part I

The media heat (without light) can be juxtaposed with the enlightenment from within landmark literature seen in Angela Valenzuela’s work *Subtractive Schooling* (2009). Though it focuses on education, her book also examines about how we hear and speak culture. She addresses both cultural identity and cultural cognition. Valenzuela illustrates identity as inter-

dependent upon language by delineating culture as the messages sent by those in charge and the language and culture heard by those outside of power. The language and identity choices her students try on for size connect to the same idea that Chomsky (1999) and Stanley (1994) suggest about speaking and hearing as transformative. Process is progress as the young gain the tools for accommodation and assimilation from what they hear. As Hitchcock (1993) illustrated participants hearing American culture, Valenzuela's students are listening too. Culture's cacophony and its softer sounds are linked to how those outside of power can attempt to move up and in.

By connecting the values of first and second generation American students to behaviors, Valenzuela portrays identity as a malleable process. As exemplified by Valenzuela, this hearing is sometimes so subtle. Culture different from one's home nation or parents literally creeps into their identities. This social capitol is received by her students, processed, placed into the self, and then influences behavior.

The participants in our research seemed to share this process of hearing values just as Valenzuela's did. Their shared stories illuminate the process of language and behavior merging to become one's voice.

Phrases used by Valenzuela's participants in her case studies, like "Indian-ness" (p. 89), were used by a daughter to reflect a parent who needs colonization. Terms chosen signify old and new fashioned behaviors emerging. These qualifiers appear repeatedly as Valenzuela links identity creep to values and important choices her participants are making. She uses a term "Mexicanidad" (p. 168) to compare cultural identity as connecting peoples across borders, even amidst a pervasive culture of "Americanidad." This comparison is the cultural commerce of Chomsky, where one hears something new and tries to repeat in one's individual voice. This

language choice mirror Valenzuela's students sampling of identity. Her participants are reflecting and refracting their parent's culture in order to become American instead of "Mexicanized" (p. 23).

The participants in our research will reflect a similar "trying on" of values and culture. They too seem to be negotiating the landscape of newer Americans. Their pasts and their mother's choices are heard within their values new to motherhood and new to university, and one hears this expression of identity emerge.

Research Participants

The three single mothers were chosen from an invited pool of approximately 108 students. The three participants were each interviewed in a 90-minute format. The researcher or researchers sat opposite the participants, and all the initial interviews took ninety minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted in person and by email.

Research Participants' Biography

All three participants are University of Texas at El Paso's School of Teacher Education students. They range in ages from twenty-six to thirty-five years of age. All three were advised about consenting and signed informed consent forms, and will receive copies of this research. They will also receive all documents created from these interviews, and will know that all data will be destroyed upon completion of this project. All participants know that this includes tape recordings (both digital and analog), all transcripts, emails, notes, and paperwork.

The first participant, "Anna" (pseudonym) was born and raised in the more rural Southwest by a single mother. A first generation American, she and her two siblings were the families first to learn English. She is the youngest of three children. All three attended college. Her brother is a public school sports coach, and her sister is a public school teacher and counselor. Their

mother worked for thirty-three years in a hospital kitchen, but became ill. The mother's illness required her to move across the country and into an urban hospital for medical treatment.

Consequently, Anna missed many days of high school (she mentioned forty to sixty) prior to dropping out in 1998. She worked at a hardware store prior to the birth of her children. She completed her General Education Development Tests (GED) prior to her children's birth. The former job was near her rural home, and she completed her GED after following her family to the city. Here she worked in a law office with her brother's wife. Currently, she lives with her sister and began college locally at community college in 2001. Her first child was born in 2003 (female), and the second child was born in 2006 (male).

Anna worked and attempted school, but her schedule in the law office was not flexible enough to allow her to move or cut enough hours to accommodate both, work and school. She quit her job and applied for financial aid. She returned to school in 2005, while her mother continues to receive ongoing medical treatment. The older sister supports both, though Anna pays her sister \$1000.00 each time she receives financial aid. Her classroom hours range from "a small load" to her current fourteen hours in spring 2009. She lives on the opposite side of town as the university, and must commute forty-five minutes in each day. She drives a Chevy Cavalier with 230,000 miles on it, and it is not reliable transportation. Her children's caregiver when class is her mother, who though ill with both diabetes and heart disease. Anna admits, she "does the best she can." Anna's mother was laid off from the hospital where she prepared meals at age sixty-two, so now she has neither retirement nor health care from the hospital.

"Betty" (pseudonym) is second-generation American; she is also the first member of her family to learn the English language. She moved from Mexico to the United States at the age of three. She too was the child of a single mother born when her mother was sixteen. Betty was

raised primarily by her grandparents while her Mom worked. Her mother was briefly married to her father and is now divorced. Betty has no contact with her father. Betty's mother worked locally in the garment industry for a major American blue-jean manufacturer. Those jobs were eliminated in the 1990s, and her mother was retrained by a government program. Betty's mom currently works as a school custodian in a large local school district. Her mother married a second time, and is again divorced. Betty describes her family as strong though small, with few outside friends or influences, though a pervasive inner culture based upon her grandparent's heritage exists. She reported "becoming American" only through her efforts. Betty was the first in her family to graduate from high school. At the age of 19, she moved out of the family home, and began living with a man she would eventually marry and divorce. Her first child (male) was born when she was twenty-one, and her second child (male) was born when she was twenty-six. At age twenty-eight, she enrolled at a community college and divorced her husband.

"Carol" (pseudonym) is also a first generation American on her mother's side. Her mother was born in Korea and married her father, an American military man, during his deployment in her mother's country. Her parents moved to the border when her father was redeployed, and here Carol was born. Her father left the family when she was five, eventually divorcing her mother soon after. The father returned to his boyhood home, remarried, and now has more children. Carol's father has no contact with either his ex-wife or their daughter. Carol and her mother separated in adolescence due to constant disagreements between Korean and American cultural behaviors. The daughter moved in with a female schoolmate, and completed high school. Carol does not have a recall of names and dates of history ("a haze"), though she began at Community College, met, and married a man who was in the military while beginning her degree program. She dropped out of school to travel with him, and she lived and worked mostly in California. In

her mid-twenties, she separated from her husband and began dating another man. She became pregnant. Carol had her baby at age twenty-six, divorced her husband, and tried living with the father of her male child. Issues with alcohol abuse have suspended this relationship, but she and the father's child have attempted living together "off-and-on." At the time of her participation in this research, Anna has moved twice - first out of the father's house, and returned once the father returned to his parent's home. She is now back in the house. The child's father has family here, and Carol now has contact with her mother (no longer estranged) and her child's paternal grandparents. Carol still attempts to reconcile with the child's father, but believes that he "is done," and both seem "stuck" in their attempts to reconcile. The father teaches music at a public high school, while Carol has transferred into the Teacher Education Department where she is currently taking nineteen hours of classes. These are divided between four classes at the university, and two classes (plus a lab) at the community college.

Data Recording

As reported in the methodology section, interviews were recorded on dual recorders (one digital with one back-up analog cassette.) These 90-minute interviews were transcribed into approximately 90 pages of transcript (including follow-up interviews and e-mails). The interviews were then reviewed independently by two separate researchers for autonomous coding purposes. The coding used the methods of Seidman (1991) and Hancock & Algozzine (2006), for thematic and content analysis. This coding reduced each interview to ten or fifteen pages. The contents were then grouped into themes. Through this analysis, four very strong and consistent themes emerged. Every participant addressed these themes as significant parts of their stories. The themes were: independence versus co-dependence; the financial component of work vs. school vs. parenting; how these single mothers connected to other single mothers (which I have

termed “The Cult of Single Motherhood”), and finally; those interconnections to the experiences shared by first and second generation American students in establishing identity through voice.

As Bassey (1999), Chomsky (1999), and Eisenhardt (1989) suggest, quotes from the research interviews are used verbatim whenever possible to offer the reader a glimpse into the context and the process of the speakers. Eisenhardt and Bassey both propose that, to build theory from research, it matters how the participant speaks, frames, illuminates, misinforms, and ultimately finds both their voice and their story. Multiple quotes are condensed only to show how they said or arrived at thematic junctions.

Results

Though the initial research question was, “What are the realities of single mothers pursuing higher education?” Seidman (1991) and Hancock & Algozzine (2006) recommend that researchers doing case study keep their early questions concise, and let the interview steer itself whenever possible. The first question, “How did you get here?” was asked of all three participants.

To be honest, I really don’t even know I got here I just uh ... and I was 17 and I was living and holding down the fort. And you know that it was just kind of like a shocker you know/for me. And I moved over here, and I left behind the bad things/ and I told myself you know what, I’ve never had it in my mind ... I’ve just assumed you know I had no friends, I had nothing ... after like 3 years of working I decided to go back to school (Anna, p. 1).

Carol expressed process in a comparable yet uniquely personal way.

I graduated high school in 1998. I was married in 2000, divorced in 2006, I met somebody who I’ve been with, who I just recently split from, we’ve been together for 4 years, and have a little boy together. He’s 2 years old. And when I got pregnant this time, I was given the

opportunity work full time, or go to school, but I wasn't gonna do both. So, because we're not married, I'm considered a single mom, I was able to qualify for financial aid and that's what got me to come back to school (Carol, p.1).

Anna and Carol were similar in that both seemed to be telling their story, and hearing it in their own voices as they spoke. Their transcripts (pre-coded) were uniquely disconnected, and then later (post-coding) they connected in several distinct ways. First within their style, Anna and Carol told their stories in a less linear and "choppier" manner. Bassey (1999) calls this style "fuzzy generalizations," and suggests that these recollections are fuzzy in name only. He advises that within the telling, this self-discovery and hearing of ones' own story (as in effect an observer) can be heard as no less telling than is a more linear style.

Their process can be heard as different from Betty who was older, and immediately spoke of a life and process in a more connected manner that reflected pre-thought regarding her past.

I grew up with that mentality where if you want something done, go after it and get it. I learned the American way by myself on my own. I think that has a lot to do with why I am who I am now ... my children came along, I have two sons. And then it became all about my children..." It's a struggle. But more than anything, it's really rewarding to me. Going home every day knowing that the whole day was spent on something for the rest of my life. I think that's the best part of living right now...that I can go home and enjoy my kids. And see them, their little eyes, that enthusiasm of them wanting to go through what I'm going through right now and in the future (Betty, p.1).

Both in raw transcript and in coded transcripts, Betty told more of a classic progression of event-to-event. She seemed to have previously told her story to herself. As the interview progressed, all three participants settled into their style that was distinctly their own.

Mom's Story

All three participants had single mothers who attempted marriage, though ultimately lived without a patriarch. All three mothers were native speakers of a language other than English. Two were Spanish-language speakers, and one was a Korean-language speaker. All were first generation Americans. Because the mothers of these women were monolingual, all worked jobs with less stability and benefits. One mother worked in the garment manufacturing field with several national brands before being downsized and outsourced. Though retrained by the government, she currently is a custodian in a local school system. The other two mothers worked in health care, though previously stated one is now too ill to work. The other mother continues to work in the health care field.

None of the participants spoke of their mothers' referring directly to their status as previous single mothers, though in all three cases, the participants attributed this to a culture which did not discuss reproductive matters. Across other cultures, this is not anomalous (Turner & Ehlers 2002; Hayes, 1986; Paskowitz, 1982; and Ludtke, 1997).

All three participants reflected their mothers' struggles, but each was also careful to separate themselves from their mothers' stories. This reality can be seen within the Valenzuelan and Chomskian concept of "Identity Creep" where an emerging generation chooses words carefully to express their difference from those who have come before them.

Independence vs. Dependence

The participants spoke most often about being inspired toward independence by their self-motivation to achieve and by the inspiration of their children.

My motivation is my son, so that he has the life...he sees mommy going to school and maybe that will motivate him to go to school right after high school and don't wait so long, because time just flies. That's where I'm at now, so right now, I'm just hoping that I'll graduate next year and be done (Carol p. 3).

The slippery slope between a mother caring for both her child and herself appears again here, as Anna negotiates her terms.

You need to work and you know, you need to be your own person and you know, I wish I could. But I'm just, where am I gonna leave my kids? You know, you have I feel selfish sometimes 'cause I feel like I'm bettering myself to be selfish (Anna p.7).

Betty also is expressing her own contradictions of dependence and independence as she establishes her voice,

You have two options; finding the perfect person to marry with a lot of money, that will promise you and come through for you, maybe I'll find it; maybe I won't but just in case, let me have something saved. Make it on my own. Do my thing. My life. My own way. So then you start working. You have two incomes. All this money's coming in, but you can't qualify for food stamps, you can't qualify for WIC, you can't qualify for nothing (Betty, p.8).

All three women have independently been drawn to higher education as their way to improve their live, but as each moved to the university, the cost of tuition remained a burden. Their language reflected this duality of becoming financial dependent in order to become financially independent. Each knew that their single mother status helped them qualify for some benefits, while earning too much money or having a husband (who worked or did not) changed their status to both the government, and those willing to loan them financial aid. Though

eventually, other mothers were pathfinders towards resources inherent within the system for single mothers. All three participants expressed similar unawareness to how dependent they would have to become in order to pay for their choices.

Each expressed similar frustration with appearing helpless in order to qualify for more assistance. This assistance appeared in the forms of student loans, food stamps, Medicare, child support, and daycare. All were inter-connected as accumulated income, and as agencies, one had to repeatedly update as to one's personal life. All reported learning that often qualifying for one benefit disqualified one for others. This same status change occurred to all three participants regarding working versus being a student, regardless of marriage status. These women were labeled in need.

The Cult of Single Motherhood

Though descended from single mothers, all three participants reported they never really knew the reality of single motherhood until they become one. All three spoke of friends who preceded them into single motherhood, and how their friends' lives changed. Each friend also reported understanding these differences much more profoundly after experiencing it themselves, "I didn't really understand. I couldn't understand why we could make plans and then they would cancel because their child got sick, or they were just tired" (Anna, p. 16).

The deeper connection to resources came for all three from the women they met in their college classes. In work-groups, all three heard connections to their own lives. These were chance meetings, but all participants traded their independent status. Similar comments include, "I can get through this; there are thousands and thousands and thousands of people who have done what I'm going through now. And they've made it" (Carol, p. 23); "I started observing

other people's lives, and losing friends. I had to start new relationships with new people. Start surrounding myself with people who were like me" (Betty, p.33).

I do feel left out, you know, I mean, when I meet the mothers with the little ones you know, I want to reach out to them, You know, the other day, a girl in my group in this last class, we stayed on the phone for I think, an hour the first time and then another hour, cuz we were just talking about what kind of situation we have (Anna, p.19).

From these connections, our participants found official and casual resources. All three reported wanting more connections like this, but also found unofficial advice often outdated or simply incorrect, "I've had to find out through friends. It's not like some body's reaching out to me and telling me yeah, there's this program and this program, no, I have to hear it from a friend, and ask around" (Anna, p.14).

Identity Part II

So much of the literature, from Chomsky (1999) to Bissel (2005) to Valenzuela (1999), refers to identity as status or self-knowledge taken from the ether that surrounds us. They, of course, recognize the direct messages of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, but they all suggest that beneath the audible cues for identity, lay silent messages that are as powerful as those expressed through voice. It is within these more subtle suggestions of status, behavior, and identity, that identity cues may also be found. How one's parents are treated or how they treat others would an important example. The pervasive nature of popular culture seeps in, and those trying to establish identity continuously process these messages hidden beneath the truth of the situation.

Because of our participants' status as English Language Learners and students newer to the American culture, the work of Angela Valenzuela connected strongly to the research. In her

book, *Subtractive Schooling—U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (2009), the author connects newer citizens to culture via language and the negotiation of assimilation. She suggests that culture is there for the taking, as well as being there for rejection. The children of first generation Americans can either be drawn to their parents' traditional culture or attracted to their nation's "new" culture, or even to be suspended in varying degrees between both, the old and the new. Valenzuela's students try on culture, and during this previewing, can often identify with neither of one culture nor the other. Our participants directly reflected this in their own connection and language. What Valenzuela (2009) calls "Mexicanidad," Carol reflected upon her flight from her mothers' "Korean-ness." This mimics what Valenzuela reports when she refers to cultural identity as "assimilated or heard differently by each person" (p. 168 -172). The participants in our research heard their world and their personal culture differently than did their parents. Betty hears her grandparents Mexicanidad in her own identity as a proud Mexican-American. Even after their death, she refers constantly to their voices within her. Carol, once defiant of her mother's Korean standards, now makes peace between both cultures, and establishes herself as something new. Anna calls herself "something else" (p. 1), but connects her mother's struggles to her identity as a fighter for her children rights as well.

Anna also reports on events that mirror Valenzuela's term "subtractive schooling" and "politics of caring." Anna's rural school's culture chose some students to receive resources and the caring of teachers/staff, while other students were deemed less worthy or without status. This manifested itself once Anna's mother was ill and left Anna alone to seek medical care in the city. Anna missed "46 -60 days of school" (Anna, p.3). Her counselor and her principal took the time to tell her that her path now was to drop out of school, pursue a GED, and that, in her principal's words, "he was paying taxes on her" (Anna, p.14). This mirror Valenzuela's (2009) findings that

athletes and academic achievers received care while everyone else had diminished (subtractive) resources available (p. 63-65). This was determined often by the teachers, coaches, and administrators. Our respondents reported similar labeling that was done for them. Anna reports simply, “I was labeled as something else” (p. 3).

School Days

All three participants connected education beyond high school or GED. as the way to advance in life. Once they negotiated the financial constraints that preceded their needs, they were able to physically go to college. All three spoke of the cultural changes that college offered, and all three began first at a community college in a border town, and then later transferred into a larger border university.

Each has negotiated the requirements of their classes with their responsibilities as mothers. Each has tried on working and attending school, daycare and family caring for their kids while in school, as well as getting financial and government aid. All three have negotiated university culture and their classmates’ reaction to their being single mothers. Though the feedback they receive from other students is not identical, the tone can be compared to the thesis of culture as behavior and language heard.

I’m just so tired that I just go to sleep, cause I need to study. Or sometimes, yesterday, I stayed up till 11 and I went to bed. I was just so tired. I do try to have, to give them structure. I feel kind of selfish because I’m trying to get through school. I feel selfish. You know a lot of people make me feel selfish (Anna, p.22).

Identity is being negotiated as the participants define both the language and their selves. Here, Betty expresses her unique hearing of values in a different yet familiar form,

Socializing with people my own age (saying) you're not the only one, and look at me I got divorced in 2003, How do you do it? You're single; you must be looking for a man to take care of you. What a selfish explanation in general to say to a divorced woman. What did I do wrong to get a divorce, and they categorize people right away. I hate that. But, I get through it. You know, breathe in breath out. That's what keeps me going (Betty, p.2).

Carol balances her daily requirements in her own distinctive style,

I take 19 hours. I take 4 classes here at UTEP and I take 2 classes and a lab at Community College. I still have my son to take care of, who is 2 years old and he is a handful. I put him to bed at 9 and up from 9 until 2, 3, sometimes 4 o'clock in the morning doing my homework. I'll get a few hours of sleep, wake up, come to class, and go home, pick up the baby and take care of him all day, and it's just like that. That's my routine, I have to get myself into a set schedule so I can balance everything. Otherwise, it's just like hectic chaos for me (Carol, p .1).

Their school lives are united by their constant renegotiation of what their many roles these women take as single mothers. Their identity as mother, student, and woman are re-formatted and re-balanced daily. Their identity and their behaviors were referred to by the participants in this research as juggling, balancing, and adapting. As they told their stories, their struggle was palpable, and their identity seemed ever-adaptive.

Recommendations

Between the participants and the literature are suggestions to the field that are pragmatic and grandiose. Inherent within the research participant's lives as full-time college students and full-time mothers, there are the stories that by themselves offer one type of recommendation to the field. They will survive single motherhood, the university, and becoming a teacher. They were

doing it before we found them, and though they recognize that any assistance would ease their load, these are in one sense pragmatically successful women.

As they took us through their day, they realized the time-savers and soul-savers that get them to the next event. Tasks like feeding the family, bathing the family, driving the family, playing with family, and putting one's family to bed prior to homework, were all illustrated as multi-tasking planned occasions. These participants combined as many tasks as they were able, and as they reported them, paused in the hopes that they would not be judged harshly for their ideas of bathing with their kids, or eating a family meal as they drove, or read a textbook as their children played. These methods worked for them and were repeatable. These women were time-shifting and saving moments whenever they were able.

As an institution, however, they and I can offer some simple suggestions. Our participants and education writers like Meier (2003) and Valenzuela (1999), among many others, connect the institution and its culture to how safe and cared for the student's feel. Teachers who clearly state verbally and non-verbally "engage me," and buildings or offices that invite students in encourage the feeling of inclusion. In 2009, the culture of this university celebrates many diverse lives, but we would suggest that culture need open further still. Single mothers will use resources that pragmatically fit their lives. If as a university we reconsider the daily grind in their lives, they have said this acknowledgment would go a long way in their different status and needs. They know others have come before them and survived the status quo, but they also have expressed that flexibility within syllabi and university culture would ease their way considerably. As a university, we should always be suggesting ways to identify and engage the emerging "others." Inside actual classrooms and within the emerging computer world of distance learning lie opportunities for the university to cast an even wider net.

Our final suggestion regards daycare at the university. The participants and this researcher attempted to contact the on-site staff and the directors of the on-campus daycare center, The Child Development Center. Though campus construction has moved their facilities, several emails and calls by the researcher were neither answered by the day care staff, their directors, or the Dean of Student Offices. This inability to neither call nor email successfully anyone in this arena mirrored the frustration our participants expressed in gaining information or services in on-campus daycare.

Our participants also reported that the financial and paperwork requirements (medical clearance requirements) for their children in on-campus daycare were so onerous as to inspire all three to search for alternatives in childcare. Though students looking in at university culture from the outside, all continue to hope that childcare and the teacher education system might someday be made more integrated.

Conclusion

We speak often of what could be. As a university and as teachers, we aspire to much more than what is the status quo. The university lives as an intellectual safe house that allows us to create new paths of thinking, and of praxis. This sanctuary creates the chance at rewriting who we are, and what we have learned from thousands of years of history. If as Pinar (2003) says that curriculum is the story, we tell our children about ourselves, then how must our language change in order to be more clearly heard? How do we reconcile who we hope we are with the history of what we have been? This research and literature combine to suggest how language and culture are rewritten and customized by those living it. Review provides evidence of rewriting.

Behavior is character, and we are what we do. If we accept this as true, how do we take on our deficits, and hold on to our truths? Is not our goal always the next generation?

Generationally, how do we take the Chomskian truth of hardwired language, and create a wider and more inclusive vocabulary? How do we turn the human condition into more of an advantage than instead of the disadvantage that it can become? In essence, how might we forgive ourselves, and within process, find ourselves.

Parker & Coles, (2006) work defines the patriarchy as working beautifully for some, and as diminishing the lives of others. The character of this system can be seen in the privileged paths of some, and within the rockier roads of others. The inherent problem is that the system changes slowly and incrementally. The patriarchy shifts power around (Hawkesworth, 1990), but never gives up true control. It exists to momentarily placate those served less, and exists to delay or deny more permanent change. Independence may be offered, but there seems always the trade off of dependence or subservience to the status quo. Those already with less are forced to either accept the trade, or to wrestle with others for what the patriarchy has discarded or left as the scraps of empowerment.

Secondary status is defined as one winner, and everyone else is left to fight over what the one winner has as excess. This replicates the living history of what one gender has offered the other. Males have needed females, but only in ways that men determined. The laws of our land serve first the rights of those who most resemble our founding fathers. Humankind must get in line behind the status quo (Zinn, 2003).

Suffrage and eugenics emerged concurrently. The literature strongly suggests that it was less by accident than by necessity. Parker & Coles (2006), Hawkesworth (1990), Chomsky (1999), and Zinn all state that the emergence of “others” inspired the patriarchy to action. They were forced to engage those they had once labeled as unskilled beyond the “jobs” of sex and reproduction. Powers were first extended to the wives of the patriarchy in the hopes of limiting

the emerging power of newly freed men of color. By pitting their perceived enemies against each other, the patriarchy protects and extends white male dominance (Hawkesworth, 1990; Sidel, 2003). By sub-contracting repression, the patriarchy delays change generationally. “Lessers” are invited to the center to build cities, railroads, or industries, but the moment the work cements the wealth or powers of the employer, the worker is returned to their land of less.

Women, persons of color, the subaltern to this patriarchy, remain waiting upon a philosophical as well as upon an actual line for goods and services behind white males. To illuminate the lives of single mothers is to examine this queue. The message within this hardwired newsflash is clear to those of secondary status to “fight it out amongst yourselves, and let us (the patriarchy) know who wins.” The normal has become merely white male normal. It is not out of the realm of rationality to question if perhaps the entire model has been corrupted by a history that is clearly dysfunctional as well as so clearly heterogeneous.

Do we scrap the model that serves only some us? Perhaps the answers lie in the micro-culture of a city and its university instead of attempting to resolve the entire planet. The simple pragmatic changes offered to our university’s single mothers are certainly a start. By continuing to extend the safety zone that is university life, we are extending the reach of single mothers. By allowing the trying on of lives and thought beyond the status quo, single mothers can pragmatically discover what works for them. Women creating culture that has no reference to the patriarchy that preceded it seems like a genuine way to begin this discussion. So much of culture or heritage is self referential. We have seen the patriarchy re-packaged as new and improved, when in truth it is simply more of the same bitter and bilious leftovers. The law might refer to this process as fruit of a poisoned tree.

Within the university and within their formal and informal networks could be created culture unbound (Juffer, 2006). Single mothers by extension could construct their own particular traditions irrespective of male dominance and control. The university contributes as the connector of women and their culture to each other.

University culture welcomes those outside of the classic definitions of power, but it must go further by recognizing that institutions can easily become self-referential, and thus obsolete. Culture like language, must adapt to newer models of behavior or risk becoming extinct.

What if single mothers were spoken of as casually as any other student that was different? What if professors combined the making of work groups as a way to connect single parents in an *ad hoc* grouping? Every teacher reads through their syllabus with the class during the first session. If part of every syllabus was a statement recognizing the unique challenges that a single parent goes through in a university setting, the point could be made publicly that the university wants to better serve those students who are single parents. Their privacy must matter, too, so a professor might suggest, “If you are a single parent, please email this to me before the next class, so that I am aware of it, and this will allow me to better understand your workload.” Then workgroups could be created to link single parents physically as well as spiritually. Single parents could create culture within the comfort of their peers. Culture is built by language, behavior, and a sense of shared values (Chomsky, 1999; Pinar, 2003; and Kramsch, 1998). Beginning different or difficult conversation is what universities were designed to do. They offer the combination of intellectual safety combined with the hegemony of teaching professionals. Here we offer the engagements that can create language and the safety to express new ideas. From these emerging discussions, the university can ultimately offer single mothers a safe

forum. Each of our participants expressed this duality of single parenthood. I can do this by myself, but a little help, a small connection, would give me the chance to just breathe.

It is within these small breaths that as a university we could offer intellectual resuscitation. Just as women need only a safe connective place in which to define their culture, so too might single mothers begin their culture from the inside of university outward. This is a human right, to become what you might. The patriarchy has failed all of its citizens by serving mostly itself. Our today is tethered to these bounds of futility. All we clearly know is that we do not know.

Insanity is defined by doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different outcome. Perhaps the lunacy of the human condition is at least partially rooted within our continued ignorance of the other half of who we truly are.

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Curriculum Vita

Christopher Bordon Goldsmith was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1957. He is the oldest child of Walter and Mary Goldsmith. He graduated from the Scarborough School in 1973 and then attended Emerson College. At Emerson he was one of the seven founding members of the Emerson Comedy Workshop. He left college to perform comedy, and worked in various jobs until 1982 when he began work as a bodyguard and driver for celebrities in New York City. After 17 years he took early retirement and moved to El Paso, Texas in 1999. He was a substitute teacher and an under-graduate student at the University of Texas at El Paso where he received his Bachelor of the Arts Degree in 2007. He immediately began his Masters Degree in Teacher Education in 2007, and completed this degree in 2009. In 2009 he also applied to the PhD. Program in Teaching, Language and Culture at The University of Texas at El Paso and is scheduled to be both a full-time graduate student, and a member of the adjunct faculty; teaching two classes to other master's students in Social Studies Methods. Christopher divides his free time between restoring his 100 year-old home, and his work with The El Paso High Neighborhood Association.

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