Toward Identifying Academic Barriers of TANF/CalWORKs

Students in Community Colleges

by

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Toward Identifying Academic Barriers of TANF/CalWORKS

Students in Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

The number of women enrolling in Post-Secondary Education (PSE) is on the rise, except for women of color and for women on public assistance. Restrictive Welfare-to-Work policies, a lack of resources, and the effects of race and gender may be impacting their educational goals. There is a gap in the literature regarding TANF/CalWORKs students and their academic barriers. To address this gap, focus groups and individual interviews of 20 CalWORKs students from a community college were conducted. The research questions were:

1. What barriers to academic success did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students experience in community college?
2. What strategies did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students use to contend with the barriers?

Using a continuous comparison method, five themes emerged: (a) Mental Health Erosion, (b) Perceptions of Support, (c) A Failing System: Welfare-to-Work, (d) Finding Support, and (e) Taking Back Control.

Findings indicated participants first developed protective strategies such as “don’t ask,” for any support, and “don’t tell” anyone about receiving public assistance. Later, participants demonstrated an adaptive model to surviving college. The students also worked to create a college identity.

Future studies might review: (a) assessments offered by the Department of Social Services and colleges regarding academic needs or readiness of these students, and (b) knowledge and use of resources by these students. Progressive Welfare-to-Work
policies could support TANF/CalWORKs students to reach their academic endeavors, thus improving their employability and indirectly reducing recidivism.
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Faithless is he who says farewell when the road darkens.

— J. R. R. Tolkien

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was former President Bill Clinton’s solution to welfare reform. The goal of PRWORA was to reduce the number of families on public assistance and to return family responsibility to the welfare recipient. The federal government also restructured the assistance it gave to the states. By changing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the federal government gave most of the control regarding public assistance funds back to the states. But control of the funds came with some big modifications. The federal government now issued block grants and required two things: the state could use the welfare funds as needed, but the welfare program had to limit time on cash aid to 60 months for the lifetime of a recipient, and recipients must participate in work activities. In addition, federal TANF funds would get progressively smaller over time, until its scheduled end in October of 2002.

Changes did not come as quickly as planned, and in 2005 former President George W. Bush extended PRWORA by enacting the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005. Although the DRA extended PRWORA, it further tightened social service programs including TANF. The DRA made changes to TANF by making it more difficult for individuals and states to meet work participation requirements. While the list of activities remained the same, the changes in the DRA included increased oversight of work participation by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which discouraged states from allowing recipients to participate in activities that do not count
toward the work participation rates (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, 2006; Vu, Anthony, & Austin, 2009).

Both PRWORA and the DRA created stringent requirements pressuring states to enforce work participation rates of welfare recipients (Jones-DeWeever, 2005; Shaw, 2004). But the DRA required the HHS to draw up regulations specifying when a work activity such as unsubsidized employment, vocational education training, and job search and job readiness assistance, counted as one of the federally listed activities. The DRA also mandated HHS to establish uniform reporting requirements and verification requirements for participation.

Although commonly understood that education equates to higher earnings, and higher earnings translate to sustained self-sufficiency, the PRWORA limited support of education and training programs for welfare recipients to 12-24 months, unless the recipient had already been participating in an education or training program. However, the new DRA further reduced educational opportunities by supporting only 12 months of education and training, except, again, for those recipients who were already enrolled in an education or training program. The new DRA also added new regulations regarding education that significantly hurt college-going TANF/CalWORKs recipients. As stated in an article submitted by the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law (2006), “The regulations imposed limitations on education and training, such as precluding postsecondary education that leads to baccalaureate or advanced degrees and stand-alone English as a Second Language programs. These limitations get in the way of career-path employment” (p. 2).
With these tough restrictions on education and training, it became critical then that TANF/CalWORKs students who want education and training make the best of the limited educational opportunities. It is also important that college TANF/CalWORKs programs discover how to effectively help TANF/CalWORKs students complete their educational goals. For these reasons, identifying the barriers to academic success of TANF/CalWORKs students was the very goal of this study.

**Background of the Problem**

In 2006, just above 14,486,202 of the national population (25 years and older) had attained an associate’s degree; 33,496,187 a bachelor’s degree; and 19,394,708 had earned a graduate or professional degree. However, the largest group (38,185,678) consisted of those who had experienced some college and had not attained a degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In the same year, 82.3% of all TANF recipients nationwide had received between 10 and 12 years of education, most likely in high school. Only 4.2% of TANF recipients had achieved more than 12 years of education.

At the same time in California, slightly more TANF/CalWORKs recipients had completed between 10 and 12 years of schooling (87.4%), but only 2.9% experienced education past 12 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). While the U.S. Census Bureau (2006) report does not stipulate what types of education are included in the category of past 12 years, it is likely that it includes recipients attending adult education programs, private training programs, community college, and university education. It is also likely that the new Welfare-to-Work (WTW) requirements created restrictions and had an impact on CalWORKs recipients enrolling in postsecondary education (Bok, 2004; Christopher, 2005; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Price, 2005).
Mandating welfare recipients to participate in a back to work program was not unique to TANF. A program called Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) was in effect in 1981 and was a conservative plan that offered job search and job preparation assistance along with basic skills and advanced educational opportunities. Greater Avenues for Independence was one of the first programs that would coin the term *welfare to work* (Jennings, 1999).

Even though participation was mandatory in GAIN, the program did a better job at evaluating what recipients needed to find work than actually getting them to go to work; TANF would change that. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families limited states to 12 areas that it would accept as a qualified WTW activity. Furthermore, TANF required that 90% of two parent families participate in those activities. Additionally, 50% of all family types (single or two parent families) must also participate (Minoff, 2006). Motivating the states to get on board with these changes were monetary penalties. States not meeting the numbers would have to pay back the federal government. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families’s message of being temporary assistance was further supported by the imposed 60-month time limit, also referred to as a recipient’s clock. The limit to time on aid would begin to run as soon as the welfare recipient attended WTW orientation in which the new rights and responsibilities associated with collecting cash aid were presented. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families’s mission was clear: get recipients working so they can get off aid.

**Work Requirements**

Now that TANF had stated who needed to work, it also had to outline what counted as a work activity and how many hours each recipient needed to complete.
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families imposed 30 hours of work participation per week. The aforementioned DRA increased the participation to 32 and divided the hours into two sections. The DRA requirements had an obligatory 20-hour minimum in one or more of nine listed activities. These hours would be called core hours. A recipient could do 12 more hours in three remaining activities termed noncore activities, and, as such, the hours would be called noncore hours. In total, there would be 32 hours of required participation for a single parent welfare recipient and 35 hours for a two-parent recipient household. The 12 named work activities are outlined in Table 1.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families provided few exceptions to participating in WTW programs. Exemptions for nonparticipation were limited to: (a) being medically or physically unable to work or participate in a work activity or (b) caring for a disabled person living in the household. States could apply this exemption to 20% of its caseloads.

**California’s Model—CalWORKs**

The start of TANF outlined the goals of welfare reform but left room for each state to design its own way to implement change. In 1998, California created a new model for meeting TANF criteria, and out of that the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program came into being. California put a waiver in place allowing its welfare-to- work model to make changes at a slower pace. As the model emerged, the state gradually incorporated the federal guidelines required but then went a step further in requiring 32 hours per week for a single parent family. By October 2006, California’s waiver expired, and it became a work first state. Hence, “get a job, then get a better job,” became the states dictum.
### Table 1

*Deficit Reduction Act’s Allowable TANF Core*

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<td>Subsidized private sector employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subsidized public sector employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-the-job training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job search and job readiness assistance for up to 6 weeks a year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community service programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocational educational training for up to 12 months</td>
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<td>Job skills training directly related to employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education directly related to employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory attendance at secondary school or in a course of study leading to a GED</td>
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Both GAIN from the former AFDC regulations and CalWORKs under TANF mandates did make allowances for education. Greater Avenues for Independence, however, focused more on human capital development and included advanced degrees, while TANF and the new DRA sought to focus recipients’ efforts on working and offered only training or education as it related to employment.

School as Work Activity

Under California’s former waiver, new CalWORKs recipients and newly oriented existing recipients would be referred to attend job club or job search activities for 6 months. If a recipient could not find employment, then education and training could be considered to help the recipient become more employable. Recipients could attend school as a WTW activity for 18 to 24 months. One of the conditions, however, was that student participants must remain in good standing at the education site. That meant CalWORKs students must maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) and make satisfactory academic progress.

There was a second category of CalWORKs student recipients. Those individuals who had already enrolled themselves in an educational program prior to attending a county WTW orientation were deemed a Self-Initiated Program participant, hence the acronym SIP. Since these CalWORKs recipients had already committed to an educational program, the state accepted the students school endeavors as a work activity. The educational goal, however, had to lead to employment. Self-Initiated Program students did not have the 18-24 months limitation. In fact, they could continue to attend school as a WTW activity for the 60 months; they could receive cash assistance again if
they maintained a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) and make satisfactory academic progress.

However, for most other CalWORKs recipients, the DRA brought strict limits to what counted as a work activity and reduced the 18-24 months of education and training to 1 year of vocational training. The DRA also stipulated that a SIP participant’s academic program had to be a goal that could be completed during a recipient’s time on aid, and be a certificate or an undergraduate degree (Department of Public Social Services [DPSS], 2005). It is necessary to understand though, that the DRA does not state that CalWORKs students cannot go to school or pick a major of their choosing, but rather that the hours may not be counted as meeting WTW activities. That would mean that a CalWORKs student could continue on an educational course of their choosing but that time would be separate from the 32-35 hours needed meet WTW hours. For these separate hours, there would be no CalWORKs program childcare, book, or transportation assistance available. In this way, the DRA made it very difficult for a CalWORKs student to attend school beyond the 12 months allowed. These new restrictions were a severe blow to CalWORKs students.

CalWORKs Participants as Students

There were positive changes that came with welfare reform. The reform provided dollars to states for supportive services to CalWORKs students that included payment or reimbursement of a participant’s required books and supplies. Ancillary funds were also made available for states to cover costs, such as monthly transportation assistance. Funds were to be distributed by local county welfare offices through Employment Case Managers (ECMs), a type of social worker that monitors the work requirements of a
CalWORKs family. Employment case managers would work with a CalWORKs recipient to guide them towards employment. But if the recipient could not become employed, was in need of employable skills, or was a SIP, then the ECM could refer the recipient to school. Once the recipient was enrolled in a school activity, the recipient could receive supportive services. To receive support from the county welfare department, a CalWORKs recipient would need to provide their assigned ECM with documentation proving enrollment in classes, and show a need for ancillary support like books, supplies, and transportation assistance. The ECM would also evaluate the need for child care, then make a referral to a child care worker.

Problem Statement

With education linked to better pay, better promotional opportunities and lowered chances of returning to public assistance, one could see why a TANF/CalWORKs participant would want to enroll in postsecondary education. But with the PRWORA’s new WTW mandates and the DRA’s tighter restrictions on education and training, it was increasingly difficult for TANF recipients to attempt it (Polakow, Butler, Deprez, & Kahn, 2004). The number of TANF students in postsecondary education started to decline (Bok, 2004; Christopher, 2005; Clery, 2010; Jacobs & Winslow, 2003; Price, 2005).

Skeptics would argue, rightfully, that welfare rolls in general had started to drop and with that so would the levels of postsecondary enrollment. However, research conducted by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy in 1995 looked at information in eight states (not including California) and reported that 136,000 welfare recipients had enrolled in higher education courses via the Job Opportunities and Basic
Skills Training Program created as part of the Family Support Act of 1988. Yet, the numbers for any kind of educational endeavors including postsecondary education were estimated to be at 54,000 just a few years after the end of the JOBS program and the start of the PRWORA (Jacobs & Winslow, 2003; Karier, 1996).

While no federal agency kept specific records of welfare recipients that enrolled in postsecondary educational institutions pre or post PRWORA or DRA, per se, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) did track educational levels somewhat. The state of California also kept some records of welfare recipients and postsecondary enrollment, however somewhat loosely, since postsecondary education was not necessarily prohibited prewelfare reform, and of course after the reform, educational opportunities were considered secondary to finding work. Further limiting available data is the fact that the community college CalWORKs programs in the state did not become established until 1998, after and due in part to the PRWORA.

However, there are sufficient educational statistics collected by the federal and state departments of social services (DSS) agencies to draw information from. National DSS data showed TANF participants in 1997, with an educational level of 12 years or more to be at 42.8%. Data for 1998 were unavailable. However, in 1999 the rate of TANF participants with 12 or more years of education was at 45.4%. At the same time in 1997, California reported their TANF/CalWORKs recipients in educational levels with 12 years or more, to be at 42.9% (HHS, 1997). In 1999, 42.2% of CalWORKs clients had achieved a 12th grade education or beyond.

In the year 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services changed the way it reported its data. It now measured TANF participant educational levels at 12 years
of education and at more than 12 years (HHS, 2001). The new reporting system indicated that in the year 2000, TANF recipients with education greater than 12 years was at 3.4%. By September 2001, the national level had begun to show change, down to 3.1%. The following year, 2002, the national rate remained about the same (HHS, 1997, 2002). Years afterwards showed a slow increase for national levels, with the national level being 4.6% in 2007.

California’s reporting practices also changed, in 2000. California TANF/CalWORKs recipients who completed postsecondary education (PSE) were reported at 2.0% for this year. In 2001, only 1.6% of TANF/CalWORKs students participated in PSE. The drop was sharper in 2002, registering only 1.2% in PSE (HHS, 2002). Going forward to 2006, California recipients demonstrated an increase in achieving PSE to 2.9% (HHS, 2006). However, the U.S. Census Bureau (2006) reported slightly lower numbers of California recipients in PSE.

The California Community Colleges Chancellors Office (CCCCO) also reported different numbers concerning TANF/CalWORKs recipient students. In the initial development of college CalWORKs programs, the DSS provided to the CCCCO a magnetized strip of taped information regarding CalWORKs students believed to be enrolled in a community college. The CCCCO cross-matched the social security numbers of TANF/CalWORKs recipients with that of state student enrollment data and produced a report of how many TANF/CalWORKs students were indeed enrolled. Tape matches between the CCCCO and the California DPSS revealed that in academic years 2000-01 (after the 1998 PRWORA), 97,533 CalWORKs student recipients were still enrolled in the community college system across the state. In academic year 2001-02, 101,534
recipients were enrolled, and in 2002-03, there were 97,945 students attending classes. In academic year 2003-04, the tape match showed a drop to 69,165, while in 2004-05 the drop was to 61,173. Tape matches for 2005-06 were slightly higher than the year before recording again to 64,639 (CCCCO, 2010). Table 2 offers a concise view.

Table 2

*Tape Match History of TANF/CalWORKs Recipients in Postsecondary Education by Year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Number of TANF students enrolled in postsecondary education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>97,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>101,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>97,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>69,165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>61,163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>64,639</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adapted from *Report to the Legislature and Governor, Legislative Analyst, Department of Finance and the State Department of Social Services*, by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO), 2010, Sacramento, CA, retrieved from http://california.communitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Reports/CalWORKs2010toPrint.pdf.

Practitioners at community colleges would affirm that campus CalWORKs programs experienced steep declines. As the state’s work-first policies were increasingly enforced, the enrollment of CalWORKs students dropped significantly. Take Harbor View Community College (the research site) as an example. In 1998, local county tape match records indicated that there were approximately 2,500 welfare recipients in attendance at the Harbor View campus. While the county no longer offered tape matched records, the campus CalWORKs program collected and reported the number of county
referred and self-identified CalWORKs students who participate in the college
CalWORKs program. The campus reported serving 272 students in 2007 and 394 in
2008 (CCCCO, 2010). While from 2007 to 2008 the numbers do show an increase, the
numbers are still significantly low compared to 1998 10 years after the PRWORA. In
academic year 2006-2007, the tape matches stopped due to DPSS’ concerns over
confidentiality. Additionally, conflicting numbers between the institutions cast some
doubt as to how accurate a reflection the matches were providing.

The mere act of enrolling in school, applying for financial aid, and registering for
classes would imply that TANF/CalWORKs students seemed to understand that a better
education would improve their standard of living and that of their children. But the
attrition rate of TANF/CalWORKs students at community colleges implied that there
were barriers to completing their educational goals. However, if enrollment data were
limited, even more limited was the information on attrition rates for TANF and
CalWORKs students. Nevertheless, there were some data available regarding the number
of degrees and certificates awarded to TANF/CalWORKs students, which gives a
perspective on attrition rates through the completion rates.

Of the students who participated in a campus CalWORKs Program, there were
3,051 degrees and certificates awarded to CalWORKs students in 2006-07 for the entire
state. For 2007-08 and 2008-09, it was 6,885 and 8,248, respectively. These rates are
stated as being a 225% increase over the last 3 years. But despite the fact that these
numbers showed an increasing trend, it is possible that the numbers were a little lower in
that some students may have received a certificate(s) and a degree and therefore counted
twice (CCCCO, 2010).
Harbor View College had no formal comparison of CalWORKs students to non-CalWORKs students with regard to attrition or completion rates. However, district data showed that for academic years 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 the total number of Certificate or Associate degree awards conferred were 1,072, 973, and 1,106, respectively (San Diego Community College District [SDCCD], 2009). These numbers included TANF/CalWORKs students.

The results of an empirical study on the college enrollment of women welfare recipients showed that in 1996, before welfare reform, women welfare recipients were 13% more likely to attend college than other types of poor women. But in 1998, just 2 years after the PRWORA, TANF/CalWORKs students were 7% less likely to attend college than other types of poor women. The researchers claimed the mathematical difference was a negative “swing of 20 percentage points” in the likelihood of female welfare recipient attending college (Covington & Spriggs, 2004).

With regard to postsecondary enrollment of minority women, the scenario is just as glum. When compared to other (non-TANF/CalWORKs) types of poor women, African American women welfare recipients were 5% more likely to enroll in college before the welfare reforms of the PRWORA. After the PRWORA, African American women on public assistance were 16% less likely to enroll in college. Similar in decline, and also prior to the PRWORA, Latino women had a 16.4% greater likelihood (than other types of poor women) of enrolling in postsecondary education. But post PRWORA, enrollment of Latino women in postsecondary education dropped to a mere 4.9% (Covington & Spriggs, 2004).
While studies like the above mentioned bring much discussion on why and how work first policies have affected TANF recipients with regard to their postsecondary endeavors, there were little data on how those policy changes had affected welfare student recipients in California specifically. Even less available was information collected from CalWORKs students themselves on what they see as affecting their enrollment and more importantly what they experience as interfering with their academic success.

In most college CalWORKs programs, students are provided with counseling services. Some students receive book assistance, transportation, and childcare services from the college or the county of residence. But still, there are barriers that negatively impact performance and accomplishments of TANF/CalWORKs students. Current literature and this researcher’s observations have identified some of these barriers to include restrictive social welfare policies and difficulty in maintaining basic needs such as stable childcare (Christopher, 2005; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Price, 2005; Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). These barriers may be impeding TANF/CalWORKs students from reaching their academic goals.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore barriers to academic success of TANF/CalWORKs students as perceived by the students. By conducting this study, this researcher hoped to unearth which challenges keep these students from attaining course, program, or degree completion. The study consisted of focus groups and follow-up interviews. The focus groups took place in a community college facility. Since the majority of TANF/CalWORKs recipients are female and parents, this study narrowed its field to single parent women participants. The participants were single parent female
TANF/CalWORKs students who were former students at Harbor View Community College, enrolled in academic years 2007-2008, 2008-2009, or the fall of 2009 and were previous participants of the Harbor View College CalWORKs program.

**Research Questions**

This researcher explored TANF/CalWORKs students’ perspectives on the following questions:

1. What barriers to academic success did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students experience in community college?

2. What strategies did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students use to contend with the barriers?

A qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009) was used to delve into the lives of these women and to draw out their experiences as TANF/CalWORKs recipient students.

**Significance of the Study**

Current literature points out the reduced enrollment of TANF recipients in postsecondary education (Bok, 2004; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; London, 2005) and that the PRWORA and the DRA made it increasingly difficult for TANF recipients to attempt postsecondary education (Bok, 2004; Christopher, 2005; Clery, 2010; Jacobs & Winslow, 2003; Polakow et al., 2004; Price, 2005). Further literature indicated that the number of TANF/CalWORKs students attaining certificates and/or degrees is low (CCCCO, 2010; SDCCD, 2007-2008) compared to non-TANF/CalWORKs students. The literature also indicated that TANF/CalWORKs students who were African American or Latino had additional struggles when it comes to enrollment, as well as with certificate and degree attainments.
With limited focus on TANF students in California Community Colleges (CCCs), it was believed by the researcher that this empirical study would contribute solid qualitative data with regard to the obstacles faced by single parent, female, nontraditional students in this particular environment. A further contributing factor was that the barriers were identified from the students’ own perspectives. By following Creswell’s model of analyzing data, and selected recommendations for conducting focus groups (Greenbaum, 1998), the findings obtained in this study may provide insights in reaching academic success, and, in this way, narrow the gap in current literature. The study might also provide insights to community colleges and other institutions on how to help this student population reach academic success.

From a political perspective, it was this researcher’s desire that the experiences recorded in this study contribute important data that translate into practical welfare reform. When undertaking TANF reauthorization, this study may provide realistic input on the self-identified needs of TANF/CalWORKs students and what barriers to higher education exist. Candid focus groups divulged what TANF/CalWORKs participants themselves have identified as obstacles to their academic success, which in turn stop them from reaching self-sufficiency.

There are positive relationships between increased education and training and economic advancement (Bok, 2004; Kates, 1996; Mazzeo, Rab, & Eachus, 2003; Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). As such, to policy makers, the outcomes of this study offer the opportunity to revisit WTW policies with regard to postsecondary education and what it can contribute towards recipients’ independence and as a long term benefit to the federal and state budgets. Policymakers may renew their interest in allowing higher
The information from the study may also inspire a review of the time allowed in school, study time, and flexibility in meeting WTW requirements. Practitioners, including those from colleges, state, and contracted agencies, might examine the way in which they serve and support TANF/CalWORKs students and redesign programs to better assist recipient students. Also to be taken from this study are the enlightening views TANF/CalWORKs students have on social welfare policy, college attendance, and the personal challenges that influence TANF/CalWORKs students’ lives and decision making.

**Research Setting**

The research site (Harbor View College) is part of the second largest community college district in the state of California. The district has three colleges and six adult Continuing Education centers accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

The district is located in southern California and serves over 134,000 students, with 50,000 students enrolled in credit courses (SDCCD, 2010). For this particular study, data from only one college will be included.

With regard to student demographics, the district serves mostly 18- to 24-year-old students (51%), with 25- to 29-year-old students at 18%. In total, 69% of the district’s students are between the ages of 18 and 29 years old. In terms of ethnicity, the district’s largest group is White (35%), with Latino students following at 25%, and Asian students
at 12%. Just as the rest of the nation is experiencing, female students are now the majority of the district’s student pool at 51%.

For academic year 2009-2010, 2,043 Associate degrees and 2,137 certificates were awarded by the district. The number of transfer students to the CSU was 1,264, while 577 transferred to the University of California campus. Another 483 students transferred to private in-state universities, and 591 transferred out of state. In total, 2,915 students transferred from this Southern California community college district (SDCCD, 2009).

Individually, Harbor View College enrolls approximately 18,000 students. In 2008, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Civil Rights Project recognized the campus for achieving above average transfer rates for underrepresented students from low-performing high schools (SDCCD, 2008).

The college is also a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) as defined by federal standards. That is to say that the campus is a nonprofit institution that has at least 25% Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment, and of the Hispanic student enrollment, at least 50% are low income.

Recently funded propositions allowed for the campus to build a new Career Technology Center that will permit the campus to make improvements to the college nursing program and also increase access to programs such as cosmetology, photography, and digital media. Aside from upgrades to the campus infrastructure, plans to begin construction of new Arts and Humanities, Business Technology, Math and Social Science buildings are scheduled for the 2010-2011 academic year.
In 2009, Harbor View College graduated 1,057 students; 624 of them received an Associate degree and another 429 received Certificates of Achievement. Enrollment at Harbor View College is 69% students between ages 18-29 years of age, with the 18- to 24-year-olds representing 50% of total enrolled students.

In reviewing the campus success rate, tutorial courses and noncredit courses are excluded. Still, the campus’s overall success rate was 64%. Whites and Asian/Pacific Islander students both had a success rate of 71%, while Filipino students followed at a rate of 68%. When considering retention rates, tutoring classes are included. The campus’s overall retention rate for the campus in 2009 was 85%. Both the Asian/Pacific Islander and Filipino groups had an 87% retention rate, while the White students held at 86%. The next three highest groups were the students who identified themselves as “Other,” Latino students at 85%, and Native American students at 83%.

Other notables with regard to the students at Harbor View were that 81% of the students attended part time, and the college had a female enrollment of 54%. Continuing students made up 67% of the population, and an additional 8% were returning students. Twenty-three percent were new students. Also of note was the preferred mode of instruction, with 88% of students enrolling in on-campus classes and 12% of students taking courses online. Forty-five percent of Harbor View college students received financial aid, and 33% were first generation college students. Fifty percent were working less than 40 hours, and 28% were not employed. This, however, may be due to the current economic crisis in California.

For non-CalWORKs students, the number enrolled for the fall of 2007 was 16,433, with the number of TANF/CalWORKs students at 169. The number of
non-CalWORKs students that persisted to spring was 10,113 or approximately 62%. The number of TANF/CalWORKs students that returned was 107 or 63%. In terms of persistence of TANF/CalWORKs at the research site, the numbers were thought provoking. Interestingly enough, TANF/CalWORKs students at the research site persisted in courses at about the same rate as non-TANF students. They also completed degree applicable courses at a slightly higher rate. In regards to course completion rates, non–CalWORKs students that successfully completed (attempted at least one class and successful in at least one class) degree applicable course was 65% for the fall and 69% for the spring of 2008, while TANF/CalWORKs students completed at 68% and 77%, respectively. It appears that TANF/CalWORKs students persist and complete courses as well as non-CalWORKs students.

There was a change when it came to remedial courses in basic skills. The researcher looked at the completion rates of basic skills courses in English and Math. For the same time period, non-CalWORKs students completed basic skills English courses at 23% in the fall and 30% in the spring; TANF/CalWORKs students completed at 12% for the fall and 27% in the spring. The same pattern was seen in basic skills Math courses. Non-CalWORKs student completed at 24% and 21% for fall and spring, respectively, while TANF/CalWORKs students completed at only 16% and 18% for the two semesters.

With regard to student outcomes (awards and/or degree’s conferred), TANF/CalWORKs students were at approximately 1% and on par with the research site for academic year 2007-08. In that year, Harbor View awarded 947 degrees and certificates combined (SDCCD, 2009); TANF/CalWORKs students received 9 of those awards.
With regard to TANF/CalWORKs students statewide, in years 2006-2009, 87% of the CalWORKs program participants were women. Thirty-four percent were Latino, 28% were White, and 28% were African American. The Asian, Filipino, and Pacific Islander TANF/CalWORKs students were low in number totaling just 5.0%, 1.2%, and .07%, respectively, for the same 3 years. Eighty-five percent of them received financial aid, compared to non-CalWORKs students for years 2006-2008 (CCCCO, 2010).

In summary, TANF/CalWORKs students statewide were largely single parent women. Over 60% of them were also persons of color. A large portion used financial aid to support their education. They specifically struggled with the completion of basic skills courses in English and Math, and a very small portion of them received a certificate or degree (London, 2005). But if more women are enrolling in college than men and are earning more degrees than men, why are TANF/CalWORKs students not progressing as well as other women? What is different about female TANF CalWORKs students than other college women? What is obviously different is that these women students are single parents of color with deep financial need. Additionally, receiving public benefits means they must participate in WTW programs which tend to have restrictive policies, especially with regard to education and training. Hence, a look at these student’s circumstances through a conceptual framework is in order.

**Conceptual Framework**

Determining the conceptual framework for this study was difficult in that there were so many possible lenses from which to view this research. However, since a large portion of TANF/CalWORKs students are women, a natural framework was to take into account the student’s lives as women, as low income women, and as single parenting
women. As such, a view through a feminist perspective seemed fitting. Feminist Theory examines social relations, gender inequality, and other issues that affect women’s rights and interests. Also, much of the literature pointed out challenges faced by TANF/CalWORKs minority groups. Critical Race Theory considers race and power structures and how racial domination can lead to social, political, and educational inequities. Hence, a view from a race perspective also seemed fitting.

Still another critical factor seemed to be resolving immediate needs. Several referrals to emergency assistance for food, utility services, and housing prompted the researcher to consider whether the student’s obstacles were due to economic gaps. The researcher observed that TANF/CalWORKs families continued to struggle to meet these types of basic needs. Because of this and the limited monthly income a TANF/CalWORKs student receives, the author found Abraham Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs theory to be an appropriate lens, as well.

If we take a step back to view from afar the circumstances that TANF/CalWORKs students face as they attempt college studies, we can see how Critical Race Theory would support the idea that this population has less opportunity for not only employment but also education and training. Feminist Theory would also support the view that fewer opportunities exist for these students as the more prestigious and better paid jobs still tend to be held by men and likely require postsecondary education. Not to mention, responsibilities for parenting and childcare are still primarily left to women. Single parent women, such as most TANF/CalWORKs students are, become the sole provider for their families. With limited opportunities and more responsibilities, the likelihood for lack of progress could be explained by Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. This would
bring the three theories full circle in that TANF/CalWORKs students may be caught in a never ending cycle of poverty. Figure 1 illustrates the way the three theories interrelate.

**Hierarchy of Needs**

**Feminist issues** ↔ **Critical Race Theory**

*Figure 1. Conceptual framework model.*

**Definition of Terms**

Following is a list of terms used in this dissertation.

*Academic disqualification:* A student who is already on progress probation and whose grade point average falls below 2.0 in a subsequent semester will be placed on academic disqualification. A hold is placed on the student’s record, and enrollment is restricted. A student who enrolled before the hold was placed is later administratively dropped from all classes.

*Academic probation:* Students who fall below a 2.0 grade point average after completing 12 units in the Harbor View College District are placed on academic
probation and remain there until the students’ grade point average reaches a 2.0 or above, or the student becomes disqualified.

**Academic year:** An academic calendar year varies from a standard calendar year in that the academic year is from July 01 to June 30.

**Attrition rate:** The percentage of students who withdraw from a course at Harbor View College out of total census enrollments.

**California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO):** The mission of the California Community College Chancellor’s Office is to empower the community colleges through leadership, advocacy, and support. The vision of the board and chancellor is to build a better future for California, to foster access, success and lifelong learning for all students, while simultaneously advancing the state’s interests in a skilled workforce and an educated citizenry (CCCCO, 2013).

**California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs):** California’s public assistance program that is responsible for implementing the new federal mandates designed for TANF/CalWORKs recipients. It is also the agency that coordinates efforts between the local county, contracted agencies and colleges on WTW participation for TANF/CalWORKs recipients.

**Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE):** An educational support program for single parent students at California Community Colleges, geared toward the TANF/CalWORKs recipient who desire job-relevant education to break the dependency cycle.

**Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005:** Enacted by George W. Bush, the DRA offered a continuance of the PRWORA, which was scheduled to end and stop welfare
assistance by October 2002. The DRA further tightened restrictions to educational opportunities.

*Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS):* The DSPS program provides support services, specialized instruction, and educational accommodations to students with disabilities so that they can participate fully and benefit as equitably from the college experience as their nondisabled peers.

*Employment Case Manager (ECM):* Assesses and provides TANF/CalWORKs recipients with leads to training or employment opportunities.

*Extended Opportunity and Program and Services (EOPS):* A program for low-income, first-generation college students. The program’s primary mission is to encourage the enrollment, retention, and transfer of students handicapped by language, social, economic, and educational disadvantages, as well as to facilitate the successful completion of their goals and objectives in college.

*Feminist perspective:* View of the literature and the study through a lens of political, economic, and social rights of women.

*Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA):* The federal application form for receiving financial aid assistance for educational purposes.

*Grade Point Average:* The grade point average (GPA) is determined by dividing the total grade points earned by the total grade point units completed.

*Low income:* The income level at not more than 150% of the federal poverty guidelines. Federal poverty guidelines in 2007 for one adult with one child were $13,860.00 (HHS, 2007).
Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement (MESA): The MESA program works with educationally disadvantaged students to excel in the areas of math and science. One of the goals is to assist students to graduate with math-based degrees.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996: The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act is a United States federal law enacted by former president Bill Clinton in an effort to end entitlement to federal public assistance, commonly known as welfare.

Progress disqualification: A student who has been placed on progress probation shall be disqualified after a subsequent semester of progress probation in which the student again did not complete above 60% of all units attempted.

Progress probation: A student who has attempted 12 units or more in the Harbor View College District and has entries of Withdraw (W), Incomplete (I), No Pass (NP) on their academic record that reaches or exceeds 40% of all units attempted is placed on progress probation.

Retention rate: The percentage of students who complete a course with a grade of A, B, C, D, F, P, NP, I or RD out of total census enrollments.

Success: For the purposes of this study, success will be defined as having enrolled and completed a course to the end of the term with a “C” grade or “pass” for credit units.

Success rate: The percentage of students who complete a course with a grade of A, B, C, or P out of total census enrollments. In the campus success rate, tutorial courses and noncredit courses are excluded.

TANF/CalWORKs students: TANF/CalWORKs recipients enrolled in pos-secondary education and in the College CalWORKs program.
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): After PRWORA, TANF was created to replace the former Aid to Families with Dependent Children, (AFDC) program. The new program provides limited financial assistance to needy families while requiring participants to seek employment first, receive training, or complete volunteer service hours. The program does allow for medical or physical exemptions to the requirements.

Units attempted: Units attempted refers to the total number of units the student enrolled in at the college of attendance.

Units completed: Units completed refers to the total number of units the student enrolled for and persisted in for a grade in the course.

Welfare to Work (WTW): The component that assesses welfare participants ability to find work, need for training, language skills amongst other things, and also monitors weekly participation of WTW activities, such as hours worked, at school, or volunteered. Welfare to Work also assesses childcare needs.

Worker: Casual reference to a person’s social worker, employment case manager, or child care provider. It is in reference to a social worker.

Delimitations

The study looked at TANF students who resided in California and were under the TANF/CalWORKs program at Harbor View College. It also focused on TANF/CalWORKs students for academic years 2007, 2008, and the fall of 2009. Additionally, it included single parent female students. Not included in the study are students after the fall of 2009 when the outcome of their circumstances could have been affected by the California budget crisis. Also not included are students in the Continuing Education program (noncredit adult education.)
Limitations of the Study

As mentioned beforehand, this study employed a qualitative research model (Creswell, 2009), with inductive grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). It was not that long ago that the mere mention of a qualitative study raised eyebrows that cast doubt on the reliability, and therefore the credibility, of the researcher’s work. That likely stemmed from the fact that, in qualitative studies, there was no absolute guarantee that the researcher remained neutral or removed their own views from the study. Additionally, the qualitative research was largely nonnumerical. Data could not be funneled and then “crunched” to produce results. Rather, qualitative analysis was a process that required critical thinking of its researcher. Furthermore, grounded theory raised data from the inductive questioning of its participants and a series of sorting, and resorting of the information gathered. For this study, a series of focus groups served as the setting for collecting data, and the process continued until no new themes emerged.

In qualitative research, theories evolve. Unlike quantitative studies, there is no hypothesis to prove or disprove. The differing ways of data collection and analysis are what raised much concern about this type of methodology. But thanks to the processes created by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967), and built upon by John Creswell, this form of data collection is now well recognized and accepted in research circles. Still, the researcher used qualitative research procedures to support the reliability and validity of the study. Reliability in this study was supported by making sure that there was not a change in the definition or the meaning of the codes. Losing the meanings of the codes was avoided by constantly comparing data with the codes used. Also, writing memos about the codes and their definitions helped to keep the meaning of
the codes from being altered. Additionally, the reliability of the study was reinforced as transcripts were reviewed for errors that might have occurred during transcription (Creswell, 2009).

With regard to validity, tools such as member checking were also utilized. In member checking, the final report was reviewed by the participants of the study to see if the report accurately portrayed the participants’ experiences. The researcher also made use of a peer de-briefer in which a qualified person reviewed and presented questions regarding the study. The focus groups lent an arena in which various students could state their views (Creswell, 2009). Observations and notes taken by the researcher during the focus groups were used to further document the student experience. If converging themes arose from the various sources of data, this helped the validity of the study. This process is known as methodological triangulation (Creswell, 2009).

While all of these research tools have much to offer, it is also true that they come with some constraints. For this study, a limitation existed in that the participants were from only one college in California. As such, these particular experiences cannot be generalized to TANF/CalWORKs students in other colleges. Furthermore, it is necessary to say that the participants for these focus groups were all from southern California and were from one county. Since the campus belongs to a multi-campus district, the participants may have been enrolled at other colleges in the district but were CalWORKs students at the Harbor View campus at some point in academic years 2007, 2008, or the fall of 2009. Also, it is important to note that the county in which Harbor View Community College resides is comprised of a large Hispanic or Latino population, (30%), as is the city at 25% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Additionally, the county had
very small numbers of Black or African Americans, with the population being only 5.5% for the county and 7.8% for the city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

An additional drawback was a smaller than expected sample size. Since the TANF/CalWORKs students approached were students who attended several years ago, some may have moved out of the area. The participant’s fiscal matters were also of concern, since oftentimes TANF students disconnected home or cell phones and internet or email capabilities as a cost saving measure. As such, contacting previous students was difficult and thus limited the number of participants that were reached to participate.

**Researcher’s Role and Limitation**

As a final mention, it is important to note that the researcher had personal experience as a recipient of public assistance. Furthermore, the researcher is currently employed at a community college CalWORKs program and at one time was a CalWORKs program coordinator. However, the researcher recognized her own biases. As such, the researcher took extra precaution to keep potential personal interest from interfering with the results of the study.

Assisting the researcher with this charge was the fact that she had an advanced degree in education. A master’s degree with an emphasis in multicultural counseling and 17 years of work experience allowed the researcher to establish rapport with the group but to maintain a professional relationship. Additionally, a journal that recorded transactions and reflected the researcher’s thoughts during interviews was kept at hand and served as a note-taking system for meeting with students. Established counseling skills facilitated the role of the researcher in active listening and empathic skills, as well as in recording observations of nonverbal communication.
Organization of the Study

The study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 included the introduction and a brief history of welfare reform. This was followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose behind the study, and the research questions. The chapter also offered the significance of the study. Delimitations, limitations, and organization of the study end this chapter.

Chapter 2 offers the reader a review of literature related to TANF/CalWORKs recipients as students. Here, an assessment of what is known regarding TANF/CalWORKs student enrollment, persistence, and retention transpires. Also, a view of the conceptual framework and its necessary lenses are included. Additionally, this chapter includes an examination of institutional and individual factors that may be linked to the academic success of these students.

Particular attention is paid to female single parent community college students and what was known about their attempts at academic success. Additionally, theories including Abraham Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, as well as feminist literature including race, class, and gender issues, are included. These lenses help to review the possible impact of these issues on TANF/CalWORKs students. As such, the literature review provides the foundation for the proposed study.

Chapter 3 identifies the methodology utilized in this study. It outlines the requisite research design, participant descriptions, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. The chapter continues with data collection procedures, data analysis, and methods to ensure trustworthiness. Lastly, the credibility of the study is discussed.
Chapter 4 compiles the data obtained from the participants of the study and presented the results. Moreover, it reviews the findings as they applied to each research question.

In Chapter 5, the reader will learn of the implications of the study and how the study might assist TANF/CalWORKs students in reaching their academic goals. The study will conclude with recommendations for improving the delivery of services of Federal, State, DSS organizations, and community colleges, as well as ideas for future research.
CHAPTER 2—REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review included articles, studies, governmental and other public documents to gain an understanding of what academic barriers might be impeding the educational attainment of California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program students in community college. California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids is the state of California’s work-first public assistance program. The review looked at national data regarding college enrollment, achievement, and attainment. The review also looked at the same areas within the context of TANF and CalWORKs recipient students. Drawing from concepts found in the literature, the review also looked at three conceptual frameworks that may be influencing the outcomes of TANF/CalWORKs students. A set of literature explored the precepts of Critical Race Theory and systemic power structures. Under this lens, the researcher reviewed literature around TANF policies and social worker support as it pertains to TANF/CalWORKs student experiences in postsecondary education. Additionally, this review included literature on topics regarding poverty, employment, earnings, and gender inequality that also may be affecting TANF/CalWORKs recipient students. It examined other areas such as the influence of parenting and childcare needs. All of these subjects invited a lens from a feminist perspective. Still, there appear to be other possible factors that upset the academic success of TANF/CalWORKs students. One such variable that has not been well addressed in regards to TANF/CalWORKs students and their experience in postsecondary education is meeting basic home needs. Financial stressors, housing instability, indeed struggling to provide for regular meals beckoned Abraham Maslow’s (1943) theory on the Hierarchy of Needs into the conceptual framework of this review.
However, to begin to understand CalWORKs students, we must first understand the state of CalWORKs program and its source; the national program entitled Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Both the TANF and CalWORKs programs provide income assistance to insolvent families with children. Federal welfare reform in 1996 revamped public assistance, and the emergent TANF program limited time on aid and made benefits conditional. Recipients would have to participate in a work activity up to 20-32 hours per week and be off public assistance after 5 years. Educational opportunities were limited (Bok, 2004; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Jones-DeWeever, 2005; Price, 2005; Shaw, 2004; Shaw & Goldrick-Rab, 2006) to 1 year of vocational training for most recipients and then only if the recipient could not first find work (Christopher, 2003; Shaw, 2004). In 1998, California created its own model for meeting TANF criteria and, out of that, the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program came into being. Up until 1998, CalWORKs was called Aid to Families for Dependent Children (AFDC). However, the system is more commonly known as welfare.

**National Community College Enrollment**

In year 2006, national 20-year colleges experienced a growth in serving Hispanic students to 58%. In the same year, 2-year colleges also enrolled 50% of Asian, Pacific Islander, and Black Students (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2007). Women had also shown gains nationally, with regard to college enrollment (American Council on Education [ACE], 2009; Buchmann, 2009; U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2006). By the year 2000, 56% of college undergraduate enrollees were women, compared to 46% for men (ED, 2006). From years 1988 to 2007, enrollment for young
women increased from 30% to 45%, “an increase twice as large as for young men” (ACE, 2009, p. 2). Yet, for years 1999-2001, there was a decline in single parent women attending college (Peter & Horn, 2005).

The GAO (2007) states that community college enrollment is 61% female, with 59% of all students attending part-time. Women tend to enroll part-time more than men (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2009; Clery, 2010; ED, 2006; Jacobs & King, 2002). Also, after leaving high school, women seem to lose their academic and student identity advantages over men the more they delay enrolling in college (Carbonaro, Ellison, & Covey, 2008) and as familial obligations start to set in.

National Enrollment of TANF Students

United States TANF recipients have low education levels, as suggested by the statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The majority of recipients (53.8%) have a 12th grade education, and 28.5% completed to grades 10 or 11. Roughly 10% completed to 9th grade. Those with more than a 12th grade education were a mere 4.8% (HHS, 2006). A report from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth reported that up to 11% of welfare participants had some college attendance while receiving public assistance (London, 2005).

After 1996, the new TANF legislation (better known as welfare reform) shifted welfare recipients away from postsecondary education (Alfred, 2007; Bok, 2004; Christopher, 2003; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Jones-DeWeever, 2005; Zhan & Schreiner, 2005); the number of TANF recipients allowed to participate in postsecondary education changed. Hence, the number of TANF recipients enrolling in PSE dropped significantly. National data from the Department of Education found that in academic
year 1995-1996, “650,000 welfare recipients were enrolled in post-secondary education” (Price, 2005, p. 82). After welfare reform, the number of TANF students attending PSE was cut in half, to only 358,000 just 3 years later in 1999 (Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Price, 2005). By 2001, only 5% of all TANF recipients participated in education and training opportunities (Christopher, 2003; Martinson & Strawn, 2003). With regard to female TANF recipients, college enrollment went down, while enrollment for women was generally on the rise (Covington & Spriggs, 2004).

Another change affecting college enrollment came in yet another reform, the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005. The DRA listed only two options for TANF participants with regard to postsecondary education. The options were 1 year full time, vocational educational training, or 12 hours per week after 20 hours of work activity (Christopher, 2003; Minoff, 2006). Nationally, 4.9% of TANF participants were enrolled in the 1-year vocational educational training, with only seven states showing upwards of 10% enrollment (Minoff, 2006). Additionally, only 0.7% were using the second option (12 hours per week after 20 hours of work activity). Only one state, Wisconsin, had more TANF recipients participating in the second activity at 20% (Minoff, 2006). In other words, states were underutilizing the educational options included in TANF policy (Covington & Spriggs, 2004), and school enrollments were lower than the allowable slots “under the law” (Minoff, 2006, p. 3).

When the DRA was enacted in 2006 and again changed Welfare-to-Work (WTW) mandates, it further tightened the opportunities for welfare recipients to receive postsecondary education (Shaw, 2004). What these changes created was much confusion, great misunderstanding and, even worse, misinformation (Alfred, 2007). Misinformation
seemed to be the case in Wisconsin for a participant in Mary Alfred’s (2007) study on “Welfare Reform and Black Women’s Economic Development.” The one college-going TANF participant was enrolled in a nursing program but had to quit school to qualify for childcare services. Alfred’s belief is that when the new WTW policies were first put into place, many women who were in school full time and were on public assistance were “forced to give up school” to find employment and meet the new WTW requirements. The PRWORA and the DRA appeared to “disproportionately deny poor women of color access to education and training” (Bok, 2004, p. 3).

**National Enrollment by Ethnicity**

College enrollment varies by ethnicity (Perna, 2005). Nationally, the last 20 years have shown gains with regard to college enrollment for men and women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds. But still low, however, are enrollment rates for African American students (Lewis & Middleton, 2003), with a gain of only 11%. Latino students gained just 10%, which had lower gains than Whites at 14% (ACE, 2009).

Minority enrollment was on the rise for the year 2000-2001 (GAO, 2007; Szelenyi, 2003-2004) but was still lower than the enrollment for White, non-Hispanic students. In 1997, minority students received 22.8% of all associates degrees awarded, marking a 7% increase from 10 years earlier (Szelenyi, 2003-2004).

Despite the increases, from 1989 to 1996 ethnically diverse women were reported to have only slightly higher growth in enrollment to postsecondary education, with Latino women having a 7% gain from 51% to 58% (Peter & Horn, 2005). In the year 1999-2000, 56% of all college undergraduate enrollees were women (ED, 2006). Twelve percent of the same cohort were Black students. Among Black student enrollees, 66%
were Black women (Peter & Horn, 2005). Temporary Assistance to Needy Families policies may have affected minority TANF recipient’s enrollment in college (Bok, 2004; Covington & Spriggs, 2004). After controlling for age, marital, and parental status, welfare recipients of color are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education than White recipients (Jacobs & King, 2002).

California Community College (CCC) Students

The faces of CCC students are changing. Fifty-six percent of CCC students are female (California Tomorrow, 2010). In 2004, only one-third of CCC students were the more traditional young (18-24), unmarried, and transfer oriented type.

Also in California, the 2-year community college system reports that 55% of its students were students of color (California Tomorrow, 2010). Latino students comprised 27% of that population, while Asian, Pacific Islanders, and Filipino students were at 16.4%. African American students were 7.2% of attendees, while there were smaller numbers for Native American and other non-White students. In addition, over half of all community college students were working adults who carried family responsibilities. Of those, 21% were ages 25-34, and another 30% were 35 and older (California Tomorrow, 2010). Statewide, 62% of all students attend part time. In the year 2000, only 18% had received a Board of Governor’s Fee Waiver, and 7% had received a Pell grant (California Tomorrow, 2010).

All told, what this information implies is that CCCs have an abundance of working women who have familial obligations and are likely to attend part time. Additionally, the low use of financial aid may indicate a low awareness or limited access to college support systems. Furthermore, part-time attendance may likely lead to limited
eligibility for financial assistance and to longer time to completion of stated goals. It may be that these factors combined contribute to the high attrition rates, both in degree programs and individual courses of community college students (Cox, 2009).

Profile of CalWORKs Recipients and Education

Federal TANF regulations are what guide the California CalWORKs program. As such, it is not surprising to see similar data among its two populations. Close to the national numbers was the percentage of single recipients. Nearly 68% (67.7%) reported being single, 14.4% were separated, 9.1% divorced, and 1% widowed. All total, an astounding 92.2% of all CalWORKs adult recipients are not married (HHS, 2006). Female CalWORKs recipients also mirror the nation somewhat when it comes to age groups. Forty-six percent (46.8%) of all CalWORKs females were between ages 20-29. The 30- to 39-year-olds were 25.9% and the 40- to 49-year-olds were 16.3%, respectively. Only 6.7% were 20 or younger (HHS, 2006). Approximately 52% of CalWORKs recipients completed 12th grade, while 35% completed 10th to 11th grade. Different than the national statistics was the composition of ethnic groups. With regard to ethnicity, 50.9% of CalWORKs recipients were Hispanic. Whites accounted for 22.4% and African Americans for 20.7%.

Community College Enrollment of CalWORKs Students

At one time, the California Department of Social Services provided the California Community Colleges Chancellors Office (CCCCO), with a list of TANF/CalWORKs recipients via tape match. The highest number of TANF/CalWORKs students enrolled at CCCs was 101,534, in academic year 2001-2002. By 2005-06, the number had dropped to 64,639 students (CCCCO, 2010).
Not all TANF/CalWORKs students chose to participate in or were eligible for the College CalWORKs support programs. Still for those who did, data obtained from the CCCCO reflected that the highest number of TANF/CalWORKs students served was in academic year, 2000-2001 at 47,118 students. For the next 5 years, the CCCCO’s data mart reported a continuous decline. By 2006, the number of TANF/CalWORKs participating in the program at the CCCs had dropped to 29,154. Of those who did enroll, for years 2006 to 2008, 35% of CalWORKs students enrolled at more than 12 units for the 3 consecutive years. About the same number enrolled at less than full time, with 34% enrolling part time in 2006, 29% in 2007, and 31% in 2008. It is fair to say then, that there was interest in attending postsecondary education at the community college level since 69%, 64%, and 66% of TANF/CalWORKs students enrolled in credit courses from 2006-2008 respectively (CCCCO, 2010). But let us look more specifically at who these TANF/CalWORKs students are.

**Community College Enrollment of CalWORKs Students by Gender and Ethnicity**

Data compiled between years 2006-2009 showed that over 80% of the CCC CalWORKs Education and Training program participants in the community college students were female (CCCCO, 2010). The CCCCO also reported that the colleges’ CalWORKs programs are ethnically diverse. However, three groups dominated the ethnic categories. Latino’s enrolled in the program for years 2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-09 were at 8,593, 9,112, and 11,641, respectively. White (non-Latino) CalWORKs students enrolled at 8,265, 8,062, and 9,879 for the same 3 years. The third highest represented group was African American students at 6,575, 6,193, and 7,561—again, for the same 3 years. The program also served Asian, Native American, Filipino, and
Pacific Island students in that order, each with less than 1,600 students in any of the 3 years (CCCCO, 2010). Overall, the TANF/CalWORKs students enrolling in the CCCs are female and ethnically diverse with a larger part being Latino women.

**College Attainment**

In the previous sections, the researcher describes college enrollment patterns from a national and a California state perspective. She has also reviewed the enrollment patterns of CalWORKs students. Now that the reader knows who is enrolling in college, and keeping in mind that the majority are ethnically diverse women, the researcher will discuss the college attainment of these same groups in the subsequent sections.

**National Attainment of College Students**

In 2006, just above 14,486,202 of the national population (25 years and older) had attained an associate’s degree, 33,496,187 a bachelor’s degree, and 19,394,708 had earned a graduate or professional degree. But the larger number, 38,185,678, went to those who had experienced some college and had not attained a degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

The American Council on Education stated that in the United States for year 2007, 35.5% of all young adults ages 25-29 had achieved an associate’s degree. Within that number, 27.4% had also achieved a bachelor’s degree (ACE, 2009). But students were less likely to transfer if they have external demands like work and family as they enter college (Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Lewis & Middleton, 2003).

**National Attainment by Gender and Ethnicity**

From years 1980 to 2001, degree attainment increased for both men and women, but women had larger acquisition (Peter & Horn, 2005). Nationwide in 1997, minority
students received 22.8% of all associates degrees awarded, marking a 7% increase from 10 years earlier (Szelenyi, 2003-2004). A few years later in academic year 1999-2000, African American students earned 11% of all associates degrees and only 9% of all bachelor’s degrees. Along the same lines, Latino students earned only 10% of associate degrees and a mere 6% of bachelor’s degrees (Perna, 2005). By the year 2007, a little over a fourth (27.4%) of U.S. young adults aged 25-29 held a bachelor’s degree. But of those degrees, Asian Americans held a whopping 58% of all bachelor’s degrees awarded. African Americans receiving a bachelor’s degree rose to 17%, and Latino students grew to 11% (ACE, 2009).

A June 2009 fact sheet from the Urban Institute, entitled *Low-Income Working Families: Updated Facts and Figures*, provided current information on educational levels of the working poor. The article says that 73% of low income heads of households have a high school diploma. However, only 35% had more than a high school education (Urban Institute, 2009). These last two pieces of information could be describing the experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students.

**National Attainment of TANF Students**

Chapter 1 briefly addressed the attainment status of TANF students and the lack of specific data. But let us review the information. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and the DRA made it increasingly difficult for TANF recipients to attempt postsecondary education (Polakow et al., 2004). As the numbers started to decline (Bok, 2004; Christopher, 2005; Clery, 2010; Jacobs & Winslow, 2003; Price, 2005), it would be natural to see the rate of attainment decline as well. Information collected by federal and state agencies showed that in 1997, TANF
participants with 12 years of educational level or more was at 42.8%. In 1999, the rate was 45.4%. In the year 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services changed the way it defined educational categories and now measured educational levels at 12 years and at more than 12 years (HHS, 2001). Under this new reporting system, the data from the DSS indicated that the group with more than 12 years was at 3.4%. By September 2001, this group dropped to 3.1% (HHS, 1997, 2002). The years afterwards showed a slow increase for national levels with the highest national level being 4.8% in 2006. Reports for 2007 listed education levels past 12 years at 4.6% nationwide.

Rebecca London (2005) stated the biggest concern with regard to welfare students was the low graduation rate. London’s study showed that 62.9% of those who had enrolled in postsecondary education had not graduated. The same study also demonstrated that 85.4% of welfare recipients with a child 5 years old or younger who had attended college, never graduated.

**California Community College Student Attainment**

California allocates half of its state budget to education (M. Taylor, 2013). Yet, the state has been under fire lately for the poor completion rates of its students. In a report from the California Community Colleges Chancellors Office, about 90% of its students enter underprepared for transfer level English and math courses (Hill, 2008). A different report by the California Postsecondary Education Commission completed in 2007, stated that the number of CCC students that earned a degree over a 5-year period was only 17%. Approximately 50% of the students tracked in the same report left the community college without earning a degree or transferring. Additionally, fewer Latino
and African Americans earned a degree or transferred to a university, especially male students.

Women attained more degrees and transfers then men (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2007). In 2010, California awarded a total of 132,258 degrees and certificates. Of those awarded, 78,245 were awarded to women versus 54,013 awarded to men (College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, 2013). Still, while California women mirrored the nation and have become the majority of enrollees at CCCs, large numbers of them do not stay at the campus and do not transfer to 4-year institutions (Jain, 2010). This could be relevant to understanding the college attainment of TANF/CalWORKs students.

**CalWORKs Student Attainment**

The California Community Colleges Chancellors Office compiles data of students who participated in a campus CalWORKs Program. For academic year 2006-07, there were 3,051 degrees and certificates awarded to CalWORKs students statewide. The year 2007-08 improved to 6,885 degrees or certificates awarded and even more so for 2008-09 at 8,248 students. As mentioned beforehand, these rates are stated as being a 225% increase over the last 3 years. However, it is possible that the numbers are a little lower in that some students may have received multiple certificates and/or degrees (CCCCO, 2010). The top three disciplines in which TANF/CalWORKs students earned awards from 2006 to 2008 were in Liberal Arts and Sciences, a clear leader, with Office Technical and Child Development alternating between second and third place (CCCCO, 2010).
Gender, Ethnicity, and Age of TANF Students

It is apparent that more women receive public welfare benefits than men (Perna, 2005). When reviewing marital status, 69.6% of all TANF recipients are single parents. But when adding those that are separated, widowed, or divorced, the number grows to 89.5%. The number of married adult recipients is 10.5%. Many TANF recipients are ethnic minority women. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families nationwide by ethnicity are as follows: 35.7% are African American, 33.4% are White, and Hispanics receive assistance at the rate of 26.1%. Native American, Asians, Hawaiian, and multiracial recipients were under 2%. The age groups of these single parent female TANF recipients are interesting to note. Fifty-one percent of all U.S. TANF recipient women are college age 20-29, with 26.3% aged 30-39. Only 12.6% are 40-49 and, contrary to popular belief, only 7.6% are under 20 years old (HHS, 2006).

Gender, Ethnicity, and Age of CalWORKs Students

In California, the gender of CalWORKs aided adults is nine women for every one male. Of the aided recipients, only 16% were married and living with their spouse. There were an additional 11% married persons who reported living separated from their spouses. Another 6% were divorced, and 1% had widowed. Sixty-six percent of the CalWORKs recipients were single parents that had never been married. In total, 84% of aided California recipients were single parenting women (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).

From the same report, ethnicity data showed that 51% of all cases were of Hispanic descent, while 22% of welfare recipients were Whites. Another 19% were African American, and 6% were Asian. Additionally, Native American, Pacific Islander, and mixed race recipients together only totaled 2.6% (Reed & Karpilow, 2010).
The average age among all CalWORKs recipients was age 34. But the average age of single parent, head of households was 30 year of age. However, broken down more specifically, 36.1% were between 20-29 years of age. Another 31.1% were between the ages of 30-39, making the total of 20- to 39-year-olds a noteworthy 67.2%. Forty- to 49-year-old recipients were 22% of all CalWORKs caseloads, while 6% were over 50. Only a mere 4.8% were under 20 year of age (DPSS, 2005).

A national study on TANF families conducted in five large urban cities showed that Black and Hispanic recipients received less supportive services (like transportation and childcare) but more penalties (such as sanctions for being noncompliant with WTW rules) compared to White recipients (Gooden, 2006). These data suggest that it is possible that there is more to the success of TANF/CalWORKs students (or lack of it) than just academic barriers.

Similarly, CalWORKs recipients struggle for services. Due in part to budget woes, the state has enacted welfare-to-work exemptions for families with young children. The exemption allows for families with two children under age 6 or one child under age 2 to postpone participation in WTW activities. While that may sound generous, the reality is that exempted recipients are also exempted from receiving child care and other supportive services, like transportation and ancillary supplies like books. Unbeknownst to most CalWORKs recipients was the fact that they could become an exempt volunteer and gain back the supportive services.

Also, California regulations make it hard for family members of CalWORKs recipient’s to act as childcare providers often disallowing payment to anyone in the household. As most CalWORKs recipients are Latino females, that may pose a problem
since from a cultural perspective; Latino and other persons of color often select a family member to provide childcare. That translates to the recipients not receiving these subsidies or to have to consistently and persistently self-advocate for the limited alternative payment childcare spaces available in their communities (Acevedo, 2005).

A study involving California CalWORKs program recipients demonstrated that recipients felt that they did not get information on the various services and options provided by the state welfare department. A recipient told of feeling cheated of the opportunity to get domestic violence help. She stated that only when she was nearing the end of CalWORKs assistance was she made aware of those services. Participants also commented that at times they felt that workers withheld information. Several women from different counties shared the same sentiment in that if they did not ask about a service, the social worker did not cover the information about it (Christopher, 2005; Equal Rights Advocates, 2000; Ridzi, 2004). Some students did believe that their social worker was genuinely unaware of what the CalWORKs program offered (Equal Rights Advocates, 2000; Ridzi, 2004). Word of mouth was how most of the studies’ recipients said they learned about CalWORKs supportive services, especially Latino recipients (Equal Rights Advocates, 2000).

It is conceivable, then, that TANF/CalWORKs students may be facing not only impoverished circumstances but also systemic racial discrimination. This is why it is important to include Critical Race Theory in this study.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) arose in the1970s out of critical legal studies and the presence of discrimination, hence racism, in the American legal system. Its major tenants
include (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (b) the challenge to
dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the centrality of experiential
knowledge; and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Critical Race Theory’s focus is to examine race and power structures (Delgado &
Stephanic, 2001). Community colleges enroll a diverse group of students, and have larger
percentages of nontraditional, low income, and minority students than 4-year colleges and
universities (Provasnik & Planty, 2008).

Viewing the experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students via a CRT lens may help
to identify issues impeding TANF/CalWORKs students’ success. As such, CRT will be
an important factor in this study, since community colleges serve the highest number of
students of color across the nation (Jain, 2010). The same is true for the state of
California. Also, American community colleges serve more women than other
institutions of higher education (Jain, 2010).

**Critical Race Theory and TANF/CalWORKs Students**

As previously learned, CRT developed out of critical legal studies in the 1970s. It
addressed racism and discrimination in the American legal system. Soon after, CRT was
borrowed by educational circles to examine race and power structures in the American
educational system. For the purposes of this study, CRT will be used to examine the
experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students and the race and power structures possibly
obstructing their academic success.

In social/school inequity theory, authors Ladson-Billings and Tate (1975) added to
the tenets of CRT and outlined three precepts. The first is that “race continues to be a
significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.” The second is that “U.S.
society is based on property rights.” Third is “the intersection of race and property create an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and consequently school) inequity” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48). The author would add that it is important to acknowledge the precepts of CRT, because dismissing them would be like dismissing the existence of air. Although one cannot see air, one can feel wind. Such is CRT. That established, consider why CRT is an important theory to apply to TANF/CalWORKs students.

As stated, community colleges serve the highest number of nontraditional, low income, students of color across the nation (Jain, 2010; Provasnik & Planty, 2008). In California, the 112 community colleges are the primary education provider to ethnic groups across the state (Jain, 2010). There are larger percentages of Latino, African American, and Native American among TANF/CalWORKs students than in the non-TANF/CalWORKs student population (CCCCO, 2010). This can infer that the majority of students in CCCs are lower income female students of color. Still, despite the large numbers of diverse students that enroll in community colleges, few transfer to a university (Clark, 1960; Jain, 2010).

Also, few TANF/CalWORKs students attain certificates and degrees (CCCCO, 2010; London, 2005) in relation to non-CalWORKs students. Table 3 illustrates the number of students attending CCCs and the amount of certificates or degrees awarded for the 2006, 2007, and 2008 academic years.

Similarly, Table 4 illustrates the number of CalWORKs students enrolled in those same community colleges and the numbers of certificates and or degrees awarded to CalWORKs students. Once enrolled in CCCs, CalWORKs students do well, completing
Table 3

**California Community College Student Certificate or Degrees Awarded**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Number of CCC students statewide</th>
<th>Number of CCC students awarded certificate or degree</th>
<th>Percentage of students awarded certificate or degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>2,593,822</td>
<td>105,561</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>2,748,862</td>
<td>104,969</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>2,861,167</td>
<td>111,740</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Report to the Legislature and Governor, Legislative Analyst, Department of Finance and the State Department of Social Services, by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO), 2010, Sacramento, CA, retrieved from http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Reports/CalWORKs2010toPrint.pdf*

Table 4

**CalWORKs Student Degrees or Certificates Awarded**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Number of CalWORKs students statewide</th>
<th>Number of CalWORKs students awarded certificate or degree</th>
<th>Percentage of CalWORKs students awarded certificate or degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>27,663</td>
<td>3,051</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>27,522</td>
<td>6,885</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>34,690</td>
<td>8,248</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Report to the Legislature and Governor, Legislative Analyst, Department of Finance and the State Department of Social Services, by the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO), 2010, Sacramento, CA, retrieved from http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/Reports/CalWORKs2010toPrint.pdf*
11%, 25%, and 24% of degrees awarded to TANF/CalWORKs students for academic years 2006, 2007, and 2008, respectively. However, it is important to understand that, while the numbers look impressive, CalWORKs students are approximately 1% of the total number of CCCs enrolled (CCCCO, 2010).

Numbers at the research site are also a good example for demonstrating the minor numbers of TANF/CalWORKs attaining certificates and degrees. In May of 2011, Harbor View College awarded over 1,300 certificates and Associates degrees. There were 525 unduplicated TANF/CalWORKs students enrolled in the campus program that same year, of which 27 received any type of award or degree.

Previous criticisms have placed blame on the community colleges for becoming a mere holding tank for less prepared, hence, less desirable students and doing little to assist them. Known as the “cooling out” function, the theory contends that these institutions of higher education softly approach its students to recognize their academic deficiencies, re-evaluate their career options, and then re-route these students to applied or vocational programs. This in turn leads these students to 1-2 year certificate or degree programs and seriously impacts the possibility for transfer to a university. This systemization is not necessarily a part of an institutional plan but rather a set of unnoticed practices (Clark, 1960) that become normal policies and procedures in the cooling out process.

While these processes may not seem racist, Critical Race Theorist, Edward Taylor, pointed out that White superiority is so much a fabric of legal and political life, that it is hard to make out and that “individual racist acts are not instances of bigoted

Critical Race Theory is not only applied to race, as it also has what is referred to as intersections with sex and class. Coined by Kimberley Crenshaw in 1989, Intersectionality is a methodology in which the crossing of various social and/or cultural categories overlap and are studied. This overlapping of multiple identity factors converge to create social inequality and develop systems of oppression. Restrictive WTW policies (Christopher, 2005; Clery, 2010; Jacobs & Winslow, 2003), disproportionate opportunities for education (Bok, 2004; Christopher, 2003; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Price, 2005), and struggles with childcare (Alfred, 2007; Hasenfeld, 2010; Ridzi, 2004) can be viewed as being part of those systems of oppression. Another researcher agreed. Mary Alfred (2007) found that there were three obstacles interfering with TANF recipient success, one of which was welfare reform policies. She found that the most identified barrier as told by her research participants, were “the work first approach to self-sufficiency policies” (p. 298).

**Restrictive Policies**

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 and the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 goals seemed to be clear—get people off welfare. One way to accomplish that was to restrict educational opportunities (Jones-DeWeever, 2005; Shaw, 2004). A 2005 study reviewed the correlation between college attendance and the increase in time a welfare recipient is dependent on cash aid (London, 2005). The study noted that 31% of welfare recipients who did not attend college received welfare benefits for less than a year. The longitudinal
study showed this trend to be true over the last 20 years (London, 2005). Although studies also showed that educational opportunities kept families from returning to welfare, restricting educational opportunities got participants off aid quicker.

A separate study investigated factors that affected the “success” of federally set WTW measures. Findings around education and job types were that 50.5% of study participants had no high school diploma, 30.9% did have a high school diploma, and 18.6% had some college. The data also showed that of the participants, 83.2% had service jobs and 9.6% held clerical or sales jobs. The study also mentioned that 77.2% of its participants were single mothers. The study noted that mothers were more likely to leave welfare employed and living above the poverty line if they completed high school or had a college education (Cheng, 2007). Yet, social worker attitudes may have played a part in the gross misinterpretation of policy, mistakenly telling recipients that they could not attend college at all if they wanted to continue receiving public assistance (Price, 2005).

**Social Worker Attitudes**

Social worker attitudes may make a difference in the supportive services received by a WTW participant (Ridzi, 2004). As part of his study, Ridzi (2004) described how the state of New York introduced the new PRWORA guidelines and used three basic goals to measure success. New York State asked its counties to implement processes that (a) increased the Work Participation Rate (WPR); (b) reduced the state’s caseload of families receiving cash assistance (welfare benefits); and (c) moved families that were not off cash aid yet, into another program before the end of 5 years. These goals would help the state avoid federal penalties, keep any reserve savings, and help welfare recipients
regain responsibility for their success. To meet its goals, the state allowed counties to create new entities for enforcing the three measures, hire specific staff that shared its mission, and to reward county social workers if they met or exceed program goals. Moreover, employees in the new program could have better pay, more vacation, and sick leave days than others in the same field.

This scenario led to social workers wanting to move toward the state’s new philosophy and mission with regard to welfare reform. It also made counties compete with each other to make benchmarks, gain bonuses for employees, and press welfare recipients to stop their dependence. Although Ridzi’s (2004) article sought to investigate one New York area pattern of success in welfare reform, it also coincidently outlined what dehumanization was taking place and how a social worker’s attitude could interfere with a participant’s plan for self-sufficiency.

Comments from the social workers themselves demonstrated the attitude sometimes received by a WTW participant when asking for supportive services. Ridzi (2004) quoted several social workers imposing not only WTW policy but also using policy to impart their own personal feelings and to justify denial of supportive services. Social workers, he believed, “frame” and “rationalize” their behavior, and feel that they are ultimately helping the client to face reality, take responsibility, and become self-sufficient. The study stated that social worker behavior or what Ridzi called “personal concerns” did help to achieve the state’s objectives for WTW. Nonetheless, the study is a testament to the fact that social worker attitudes can and do, at times, create a lack of supportive service towards TANF participants and can sometimes be demeaning (McPhee & Bronstein, 2003).
Yet, there are studies that report the contrary. In a 2009 study that interviewed social service program directors and their influence on the organization, it was found that 75% of the 295 participants interviewed believed that lack of education and the economy were bases for welfare dependency and longer term poverty. Only 23% of them believed that poverty was due to the client’s lack of motivation. Another 8% believed that welfare itself was the cause of poverty (Reingold & Liu, 2009). However, the same study reported that the longer the social worker stayed at the job, the higher the belief that individual attitude and cultural conduct was the cause of the individual’s poverty and showed an increase from 23% to 50% after 3 to 8 years of employment. The study also showed a tendency of those employees without a degree or who were White to state that culture was a cause of poverty, more than those employees with degrees or who were Black. Additionally, senior administrators viewed the reasons for poverty were due to culture, attitudes, and behaviors of the poor (Reingold & Liu, 2009).

All told, it is possible that participation of TANF/CalWORKs students in postsecondary education worsened due to social workers being unaware of the new rules and not providing enough information (Alfred, 2004; Christopher, 2003) or personal views (Reingold & Liu, 2009). However, there may be other reasons for the challenges faced by TANF/CalWORKs student recipients. It is possible that there are other systematic barriers. As you recall, the majority of TANF/CalWORKs students are single parent women of color and may be facing feminist issues and gender inequality.

**Feminist Theory**

Feminist Theory is said to have early beginnings as early as the 1700s. In the United States, early feminist origins were primarily concerned with the women’s suffrage
movement (the struggle to gain women the right to vote, Bechtold, 2008). However, noted resurgences have marked their time in history. Between 1910 and 1930 is said to be the time that modern feminism was born. This phase is credited for bringing new concerns to feminism, such as gender identity issues and those of social construct. This amendment created for some feminists a change in ideology and a political swing towards the left (Cott, 1987). Later, more theories developed, and the birth of existentialist Feminist Theory and the notion of patriarchy sprung out in the late 1940s.

Yet, another wave of feminist theories began to emerge with the many radical changes occurring in the 1960s, where issues involving spirituality and environmental concerns arose. Since then many feminist theories have emerged, such as feminist literary and film theory, French feminism, and many others. While the theories may vary in perspective, they do share a primary focus (Brabeck & Santiani, 2001): the study of the difference between people due to gender. Loosely defined, feminism is understood as the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes and its organized activity on behalf of women’s rights and interests (Merriam-Webster, 2010). Feminist Theory is the expansion of the practice of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse. Feminist Theory aims to research, via discussion, the experiences of women, in social, political, and various other contexts so as to understand the nature of gender inequality.

However vast, feminist practice and theories have not been without criticism. From early on, there were concerns that issues taken up by feminists were more or sometimes only concerned about the hardships endured by White women. The feminist movement was also criticized for having limited lenses, for ignoring women’s issues
outside of the United States, and for not taking into account the effects of race, class, and
gender (Bechtold, 2008).

Feminist issues and gender inequality manifested in several ways. In the
education arena, a common assumption was that the reason women enrolled in higher
education was to search for a husband, educate themselves so they could better educate
their families, or to gain a skill to support themselves should their husbands pass away.
The skills training offered was often tied to “women’s work, such as teaching”
(Slaughter, 1997, p. 6). As such, women seeking education were often tracked in to areas
of study that reflected women’s role in society (Hofstede, 1984; Slaughter, 1997). This
action, in which women’s choices for educational fields of study were geared toward less
prestigious, less well-paid positions, is known as gendered socialization (Bechtold, 2008).
Even today, women enroll in greater numbers in the humanities, social, and life sciences,
while men have greater representation in computer science and in the engineering fields
(ED, 2006).

Overall, women have made progress in college attendance and completion. They
are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education right out of high school or to return
to college after age 30. Women are completing 58% of bachelor’s degrees in the United
States (Buchmann, 2009). But they tend to enroll at less expensive schools, that in turn
have less resources and less prestige. This, in turn, can translate into fewer earnings and
less career growth (Buchmann, 2009).

American community colleges serve more women than other institutions of higher
education. The TANF/CalWORKs programs also serve a majority of women. For
academic years 2006, 2007, and 2008, women represented 23,998 of 27,663, 23,803 of
27,552, and 29,174 of 34,690 of total CalWORKs students served, respectively. Still, men hold a majority of doctoral (55%) and professional degrees (54%, Perna, 2005). Not surprisingly, women are still earning less than their male counterparts at each level of degree attainment (Perna, 2005).

Men enrolled in college more than women did until 1993. Also, men were more likely to attend college full time (ED, 2005). Oftentimes, women’s other gendered roles, such as being a spouse, homemaker, parent, and/or caretaker, interfered with educational opportunities afforded to women. Hence, women were viewed differently by educational institutions.

A Feminist View of Welfare-to-Work

There is considerable discussion regarding the effects of welfare reform and other social and economic policies on women. Feminists have argued that social, political, and economic policies have often been derived from a value system created and maintained by White and educated men (Shaw, 2004). Underlying these policies and processes are moral assumptions such as tagging TANF/CalWORKs recipients as responsible for their poor choices and viewing them as deviants that have problematic behaviors like lacking motivation (Hasenfeld, 2010).

Welfare reform and work first policies were not constructed to be postsecondary education policy necessarily, but rather that of social and economic policies that were thought to lead recipients to self-sufficiency in the quickest way possible. However, the effects of welfare reform policies, especially when viewed from a feminist perspective, show that the legislation targets poor women and children (M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004) and is in fact “decidedly antagonistic” (Shaw, 2004, p. 62) toward women. Shaw (2004)
suggests that welfare reform policies interfere with a woman’s aspirations to want to use education and training opportunities to improve her economic future. Time barriers in welfare reform policies with regard to education force “women to either not pursue a college education in the first place or to drop out before completion” (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001, p. 48).

Men still hold the majority of the highest paid jobs (Bechtold, 2008) and occupy powerful positions (Shaw, 2004). As such, policy research and implementation reflect this group’s set of values (Shaw, 2004). As stated by recognized feminist author Carol Gilligan (1982), “Implicitly adopting male life as the norm, they have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth” (p. 6). Both Shaw (2004) and Gilligan (1982) agree that this awareness can be missed as research institutions and researchers themselves have become accustomed to “seeing life through men’s eyes” (Gilligan, p. 6, 1982).

**Feminization of Poverty**

In even the wealthiest countries in the world, there are people living at or below poverty levels. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), in the United States the percentage of all people living at or under the poverty level was 14.3% for year 2009.

The University of Michigan’s Gerald R. Fords’ School of Public Policy reported that the data presented by the U.S. Census Bureau obscures the disproportionate way poverty affects people of color and women (National Poverty Center of the University of Michigan, 2009). When the information is sectioned out by gender and ethnicity, the poverty rates tell a compelling story. In 2009, 25.8% of Blacks were living in poverty, as were 25.3% of Hispanics. Poverty rates were much lower for non-Hispanic Whites (9.4%) and Asians (12.5%). However, the numbers are larger for single parent women...
(29.9%), especially if they were women of color. This growing phenomenon in recent U.S. history is referred to as the feminization of poverty (National Poverty Center of the University of Michigan, 2009; Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001).

**Pink Collar Jobs**

One cause for this phenomenon is the fact that many single parent women are employed in what is referred to as “pink collar jobs.” This term refers to the low wage or part-time jobs predominately held by women (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). Commonly, these jobs do not offer wages that lead to self-sufficiency. As said before, the highest paid jobs are still occupied mostly by males, and the earnings gap between men and women is still large (Bechtold, 2008). Temporary Assistance to Needy Families recipients have low economic progress due to a high degree of employment instability (Wood, Moore, & Rangarajan, 2008). Yet, the notion that these lower wage and underemployed women are wholly responsible for their impoverished condition still prevails (Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). Loose, lazy, and lacking ability are just some descriptors given to impoverished women, especially if they receive public assistance and have had seemingly unsuccessful attempts at self-sufficiency.

As we have seen above, Feminist Theory can be applied to various disciplines like psychology, in which practitioners ascribe to a set of tenets or a system of beliefs (Brabecck & Brown, 1997). In literature, others advocate that there are phases including the Feminist Critique, Gynocritics and Gender Theory as fashioned by Elaine Showalter (1985) in the eighties. Gynocritics, says Showalter, “begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women
between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture” (p. 131).

In Gender Theory, Showalter (1985) highlights the concept that sex is how one is born, as to be born a female. Gender, she argues, is cultural and learned. That is to say, one may be born a female (sex) but what being a female means in society is implicit to gender issues. That part is created (Showalter, 1985). For example, the fact that women earn less than men (Bechtold, 2008; McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001) and have more parental and caretaking responsibilities (Alfred, 2007) because they were born females, is referred to as gender inequity. Showalter’s expertise was focused on literature, but this type of inequality happens in many ways and areas, including the world of education.

**Gender Inequality**

Higher education institutions appear to be gender neutral but can have an effect on the women who work or attend them. Social policies such as welfare reform can function as a barrier to higher education for women, especially those on public assistance (Shaw, 2004). This is critical since most of the persons on public assistance are single parent women (Shaw, 2004). Females also receive less attention from instructors and are often diverted into nonmath, nonscience courses (Jain, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). And while women have made significant progress in accessing college, the outcomes with regard to pay still vary greatly, as women still earn less than men even when at the same education level (ED, 2005; Jacobs, 1996). Women were also more likely to be employed part-time and have higher rates of unemployment (ED, 2005).
Gender roles and sexism may be contributing to gender inequality. Gender role is defined as behaviors, expectations, and role sets defined by society as being masculine or feminine. They become embodied in the behavior of the individual (man or woman) and are culturally regarded as being suitable or fitting behavior of a male or of a female person (O’Neil, 1981). For example, being competitive is an accepted behavior of a male, while being a caretaker is part of the female role. Sexism is defined as an attitude, action, or institutional structure that devalues, discriminates against, or restricts an individual or a group due to their biological sex, sexual preference, or gender role (O’Neil, 1981). It is the devaluation of women (thus the majority of TANF/CalWORKs students) and the type of work they do, that sociologists and feminists alike might agree is gender segregation, in which the higher paid jobs that also hold higher prestige are reserved for men, while women are considered for lower paid, lower status positions (Bechtold, 2008).

On a national scale, women over the age of 16 and who were employed full time, earned a slightly higher salary than men. That is up until earning above $50,000. Fifteen percent of men earned in the range of $50,000 to $64,999 compared to only 12.4% of women. Also, 6.6% of men earned from $65,000 to $74,999, to only 4.7% of women in the same earnings range. Additionally, 10.1% of men earned $75,000 to $99,000, while only 6.1% of women did. Lastly, 12.9% of men earned $100,000 or more, whereas only 5.0% of women reached that mark (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

As an added note, for TANF/CalWORKs students who were awarded work study assignments, the majority (53%) of them were employed in clerical positions, followed by 12% in the child development field and 7.64% in instructional support positions. A
sample of other areas of employment were retail, culinary, and health but all showing less than 5% in each category. The student recipients also worked 20 hours or more per week. For years between 2006 and 2008, the majority of CalWORKs program participants (49%, 58%, and 61% respectively) worked 20-29.9 hours per week, showing an increasing pattern in the number of hours worked (CCCO, 2010). Gender segregation can start early in work experience and in career development, which may also impede career advancement.

**Parenting**

Family involvement is also a factor that may impede the advancement of African American students (Lewis & Middleton, 2003). The extent to which parents are involved in their children’s educational lives and reinforce their educational goals, increases the child’s college attendance and persistence. This is particularly true among minority students (Christopher, 2003). Although TANF/CalWORKs students often want postsecondary education to better their children’s lives, their parenting complicates a college student’s role, often taking time away from studies (Christopher, 2003) and interfering with integration into campus life. Integration into the campus helps mothers to increase self-esteem and persist in school (Sharp, 2004). Unmarried, parenting students complete 4-year degrees at much lower rates than other types of students. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicated that for students who started college in 1995-1996, 29% completed a bachelor’s degree, compared to only 5% of single parenting students (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2011).
Childcare Concerns

Having young children may contribute to problems in attaining postsecondary education (Carbonaro et al., 2008; Cheng, 2007; Christopher, 2003; Gemelli, 2008; Jacobs & King, 2002; McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004; Wood et al., 2008). A study which looked at unemployed mothers showed that young mothers who received child support and had family to help share the childcare responsibilities were more likely to get jobs. It is not surprising then that by the same token women who have young children experienced a decrease in likelihood of employment (Cheng, 2007; M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004; Wood et al., 2008) and an increase in punitive sanctions by county workers (Hasenfeld, 2010). Additionally, students who have more family obligations, lose out on educational advantages in academic skills and in developing their student identity (Carbonaro et al., 2008).

Obtaining childcare needs may be a challenge in itself. A study that explored how childcare was used by TANF recipients found that TANF families needing childcare often used a combination of types of care, choosing informal care a majority of the time. Informal care was provided by “relatives and friends,” and formal care was provided by “daycare” type facilities (Zippay & Rangarajan, 2007). Informal childcare was used most often because of flexible hours, its on demand capabilities, and its flexibility to be bartered or paid by other means such as food. From participant interviews, the study also found that the majority of participants had children age 5 and younger (Zippay & Rangarajan, 2007).

A study published by the Urban Institute reviewed the process parents experienced in trying to obtain childcare subsidies. The study captured the difficulty families (TANF
and others) experienced when dealing with caseworkers (Adams, Snyder, & Sanfort, 2002). Lost papers, lack of training for caseworkers, and heavy caseloads often led to long waiting periods and interrupted childcare service. Families experienced frustration and became discouraged from participating in childcare subsidy programs such as formal daycare services. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families families have many variables such as irregular work hours (and varied schedules for their children) when trying to use the formal childcare benefits (Zippay & Rangarajan, 2007). Participants in the study (n = 45) concluded formal care was hard to find, hard to apply for, had wait lists, and was inflexible. In short, most single parent mothers did not receive the childcare hours for which they were eligible (Christopher, 2003).

The unavailability of childcare created missed days at work or the loss of jobs (McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; Zippay & Rangarajan, 2007). Childcare was also difficult to obtain at schools where the TANF recipients attended. Lack of space in campus child development centers was a problem, as was finding a spot for the different age groups of TANF/CalWORKs students’ children. Also impacting the students’ childcare concerns was finding childcare at nontraditional hours where daycare centers, especially campus based, offered more traditional hours. Additionally, some campus CalWORKs programs moved already limited childcare dollars into other program components such as work-study (CCCCO, 2010). Lack of adequate childcare also seemed to hinder university transfer of African American students (Lewis & Middleton, 2003).

Financial Circumstances

Financial obligations also may be hindering TANF/CalWORKs students from completing a degree (ED, 2005; Jones-DeWeever, 2005). Between 17% and 18% of
women stated that they had to leave postsecondary education due to work or other financial reasons (ED, 2005). Data obtained from the CCCCO indicated that 25% of all non-TANF/CalWORKs students statewide received financial aid for years 2007 and 2008. However, for the same years, TANF/CalWORKs students received financial aid at a much higher proportion (85%, CCCCO, 2010), indicating a great financial need for this group.

Even with financial aid, in the researcher’s experience TANF/CalWORKs students still struggle on a very basic level. This observation is important because families with a female head of household, that have children under the age of 18, are 21.9% more likely to live in poverty than those same types of households headed by men (Gatta & Deprez, 2008). As such, it becomes necessary to view the student’s situation under the lens of Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943).

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

One of psychology’s best known theories is Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). Developed in 1943 for a paper on human motivation, Maslow’s initial theory described the stages of development or psychological growth of humans. His highly recognized pyramid of needs started with a base of what he called the physiological needs. It consists of the needs for basic human survival; the need for food, water, sleep, warmth, and so forth. These needs, he says, exist in a physical realm. The second tier is composed from a human person’s need for safety. It outlines the need to be free from threats, live in physical safety, and to have economic freedom. To this component Maslow assigned the mental realm. The third tier components house the social needs and belonging. In this tier, the need for acceptance, being part of a group,
and identification with a successful team start to emerge. This is in the emotional realm. Tier four, Ego/Esteem, has the elements of wanting important projects, recognition from others, and prestige and status. Maslow believed Tier four to be the spiritual self. Maslow’s fifth and last tier is the one he described as being the self-actualized tier in which the person is meeting the need for challenging projects, opportunities, innovation, creativity, and learning. It is when one achieves the best of oneself, and there is an integration of all the other four components (Maslow, 1943).

In his work, Maslow (1943) stated that to someone who is greatly lacking in the physiological needs (the need for food, safety, love, and esteem), it is likely that individual will desire food more than any other need. Maslow further commented that, if all the physiological needs are missing, all other needs are pushed back. This theory may apply to TANF/CalWORKs students, as they have extremely limited resources.

Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs as applied to TANF/CalWORKs students works in two ways. Since TANF/CalWORKs students lack so many of the basic needs, such as adequate food and shelter and are also dependent on Federal, State, and County aid awarded and determined by a social worker, it is relatively safe to say that TANF/CalWORKs students are in Tier one and two. Additionally, because of the stigma placed on welfare recipients, single parents and lower income people of color, attaining self-esteem, confidence, and the respect of others will also present a challenge to TANF/CalWORKs student recipients. Maslow’s pyramid (Figure 2) illustrates just how significant the distance is from the physiological tier to that of the self-actualized.

Maslow’s (1943) pyramid displays his theory for the Hierarchy of Needs in four areas he claims are organized into areas of greater influence, force, or power. He lists the physiological needs at the base of the pyramid with safety needs, belonging needs, and love needs. Then he listed esteem, the need to know and understand, aesthetic needs, self-actualization, and transcendence needs in that ascending order. Maslow defined the physiological needs as satisfying hunger, thirst, and bodily comforts such as sleep, sex, and warmth. The second step is derived from a sense of danger and a need to be free from threats, to live in physical safety, and to have economic freedom (Maslow, 1943). It is these first two steps that are of relevance to TANF/CalWORKs students, as their
benefits depend on the interpretation and implementation of policies, procedures, and philosophies of federal bureaus, state agencies, county departments (Alfred, 2007; Christopher, 2005; Price, 2005; Ridzi, 2004), and sometimes on the will of a social worker (Ridzi, 2004). As an example, TANF/CalWORKs students must meet qualifications each month to acquire food stamps and cash aid. Without it, students may be unable to keep hunger and shelter needs at bay.

Maslow (1943) also grouped the needs into two separate areas: deficiency needs and growth needs. In the deficiency needs, each previous or lower need must be met before moving to the next and higher level. Maslow hypothesized that an individual is not ready to act upon the growth needs if the deficiency needs are not yet met. He stated:

In the human being who is missing everything in life, in an extreme fashion, it is most likely that the major motivation would be the physiological needs rather than any others . . . the urge to write poetry, . . . the interest in American History . . . become of secondary importance. (p. 373)

Maslow (1943) also posited that prioritizing basic needs affects the individual’s motivation to fulfill higher needs. This concept can be applied to the postsecondary experience of TANF/CalWORKs students in that if the students are struggling to meet basic needs, the success of their academic endeavors can be compromised. Maslow stated that individuals who have unmet basic needs are focused primarily on obtaining those essentials. For “without the ability to acquire sufficient food, clothing, and shelter, individuals, all other needs become . . . non-existent or . . . pushed into the background” (Maslow, 1943, p. 373). Yet, some of Maslow’s critics argue that his theory was highly individualistic.
Geert Hofstede, while examining the quality of work life in several countries, maintained in his 1984 article, “The Cultural Relativity of the Quality of Life Concept,” that Maslow’s model was formed under the influence of an individualistic society. Individualistic societies, such as is the United States, says Hofstede, look after their own interests and that of their closest family members. Hofstede also claimed that the United States was a masculine society in which biological differences were used to create differing social roles and hold different expectations for each gender. Men, he argued, are supposed to be assertive and competitive, among other things. They are also to make every effort to achieve material wealth. Females are to take care of and serve the weaker populace and children or what he called the “non-material” issues. Hofstede noted that in female cultures, members can enjoy “overlapping” roles in which neither gender is pressured to be competitive or ambitious. Hofstede, then, pointed out that cultural values, such as those in North America, are not the same across cultures and that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs cannot be broadly applied to all of humanity. In fact, he claimed that the Hierarchy of Needs created by Maslow mostly applied to the United States. The author also stated that the determinants of the diagram were really a matter of Maslow’s own value system and experiences. Hofstede’s beliefs are best expressed in the following quote: “The present author [Hofstede], concluded; the ordering of needs in Maslow’s hierarchy, represents a value choice—Maslow’s value choice” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 396).

Another critic of Maslow’s work on basic human needs was Manfred Max-Neef. In his work on *Human Scale Development* (Max-Neef, 1991), the author stipulates that all needs are part of a system that is interactive and interrelated. No need, he says, supersedes the other; the exception being subsistence, or the need to stay alive.
Max-Neef (1991) offers an alternative scale in which needs are traded off or can exist simultaneously. His two categories are the existential (the interacting of being, having, doing, interacting,) and the axiological, (subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, and freedom). Since there are only two categories and the needs do not take precedence over each other, there is no need for a hierarchy. Max-Neef also states that his model can be used across cultural value systems.

Maslow’s critics identified flaws in his theory. Geert Hofstede (1984) suggested that Maslow’s work was not broadly applicable in that it was most suited to individualistic societies. He believed that the U.S. values system stemmed from individualistic and masculine ideals. Max-Neef (1991) argued that Maslow’s pyramid approach was flawed because no one need superseded the other. However, Max-Neef claimed one exception: the need to stay alive.

While Maslow’s theory received both praise and criticism, it is hard to argue that basic human needs are not food, drink, and bodily comforts, followed by a need for safety. It is also hard to argue that these two basic tenets are not affecting TANF/CalWORKs students on almost a daily basis since TANF/CalWORKs students experience much economic uncertainty (i.e., varying work hours and varying childcare costs) even when employed (Wood et al., 2008). The stress of the uncertainty may have a significant impact on the student’s well-being and, as a consequence, on their academic achievement.

**Psychological Consequences**

Perceived social support and Perceived health are strong contributors to subjective well being (Hampton, 2004). As such, literature indicated that there may be
consequences suffered by TANF/CalWORKs students as a result of the aforementioned experiences. Studies found mental health challenges and struggles with identity development as possibly affecting the success of this student population.

**Mental Health**

Improved mental health benefits would greatly assist TANF recipient’s well-being (Fletcher, Winter, & Shih, 2008), as there is an association between entering welfare and depression (Dooley & Praus, 2002). Depression, family, and other barriers may create obstacles in the educational attainment of TANF/CalWORKs students. In their article, authors Mary Jane Taylor and Amanda Barusch (2004) presented nine barriers that surfaced during their research of 284 long term TANF participants (3 or more years on cash assistance). They researched barriers that interfered with leaving public assistance and successful employment. The list of barriers included “personal characteristics” (M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004), such as depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Gerdes, 1997; M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004). Additional personal characteristics encompassed overall health, substance abuse, learning disabilities, and gaps in education and work history. Other identified barriers were listed under family issues. M. J. Taylor and Barusch stated that over the case of their study they found that the most frequent number of barriers reported by participants were three (26.1%). In addition, 5% of the participants reported having six or more barriers. Overall, family health, domestic violence, and child behavior problems also affect the TANF recipient’s ability to leave the welfare rolls or to gain employment (DeLapp, 2001; M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004). Violence in particular, may even impede their ability to learn (Wagner & Magnusson, 2005).
Rachel Kimerling and Nikki Baumrind (2004) studied women who experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IVP) within the last year. Women exposed to IVP were more likely to be African American or Hispanic, were younger, and tended to be separated or divorced than nonexposed women. These single women of color also tended to have young children and not to have completed high school and college (Kimerling & Baumrind, 2004).

Recall that earlier we learned that the more women delay enrolling in college after leaving high school, the more they seem to loose their academic and student identity advantages over men (Carbonaro et al., 2008). Also, insufficient opportunity to build a college identity can have ramifications on academic performance (Lounsberry, Huffstetler, Leong, & Gibson, 2005) as social interactions are vital to college integration, persistence and academic performance (Nora, 2004).

**College Identity**

Alexander W. Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993), in their publication *Education and Identity*, wrote about the identity development of students in higher education. In their book, the authors theorized that an individual identity is built upon seven vectors or stages of development. Chickering and Reisser articulated that the seven stages were Developing Competence, Managing Emotions, Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, Establishing Identity, Developing Purpose, and Developing Integrity.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) described the first vector as a three part process in which three tines are developed. The tines are intellectual competence, physical competence, and interpersonal competence. The individual’s sense of competence comes
from the knowing he/she is able to cope with adverse circumstances, and as such can achieve goals. The TANF/CalWORKs students face many adverse circumstances, and as such these times may be important to consider.

In Managing Emotions or vector 2 of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory, the individual must learn to understand, accept, and appropriately act on feelings including anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, and anger along with developing positive emotions, such as inspiration and optimism. This vector is particularly interesting, as it may be relevant to TANF/CalWORKs students in that these students experience depression, guilt, and shame in their day-to-day lives (M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004). The third vector, Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, meant the successful achievement of learning how to be emotionally independent. This includes becoming free of consistent need for comfort, affirmation, and approval from others. The individual also grows in problem solving abilities, initiative, and also self-direction. Chickering and Reisser proposed that the individual begins to understand that they are part of a whole.

Vector 4 of Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) model is Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, where the individual learns to appreciate and understand cross cultural tolerance and the differences of or in others. An individual also becomes competent in developing and maintaining long term intimate relationships.

Vector 5, Establishing Identity, builds on each of the ones that come before it. It involves becoming comfortable with oneself with regard to physical appearance, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, and social roles. The individual also becomes stable and gains self-esteem. A person who has a well-developed identity can handle feedback and criticism from others.
When an individual is Developing Purpose, or is in vector 6, an individual develops commitment to the future and becomes more competent at making and following through on decisions, even when they may be contested. It involves developing a sense of life vocation. It may also involve the creation of goals and can be influenced by the lifestyle of the individual or that of the family.

Developing Integrity or vector 7 consists of three stages which flow in chronological order, but can overlap each other. These stages are the humanizing and personalizing values, and developing congruence. In humanizing values, there is a shift from a cold, stiff system to a more balanced one. The self-interest of the individual becomes more in accord with the interests of others. After this is established, the individual can bring together a core group of personal values, but those of others are considered and respected. Actions are in line with beliefs, bringing a sense of congruence to the life of the individual.

Developing a college identity may be relevant to the success of TANF/CalWORKs students who are, in large part, single parent women. Therefore, it is important to consider if feminist issues play a role in identity development. It is conceivable that their other gendered roles, such as being primary caretakers for home and family, may be in conflict with their college identity development. For example, the student may want to attend class but is unsure if going to class is realistic, considering other immediate family needs. Immediate family needs also brings us to consider Abraham Maslow and his work on the Hierarchy of Needs as a possible interference.

Moreover, it would be wise to look at identity development (or lack of it) from a Critical Race perspective too, as TANF/CalWORKs students are also largely students of
color. Certainly social, but more particularly political power structures such as the federal and state WTW requirements and the DPSS, may be impeding TANF/CalWORKs student’s ability to develop a college identity. An example might be a TANF/CalWORKs student who attends college but struggles because of WTW limitations to education or unfunded child care for study time.

It is important that TANF/CalWORKs students develop interpersonal relationships at the college since, as stated earlier, a student’s level of social integration has a positive relationship to a student’s persistence (Harper, 2009; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Tinto & Engle, 2008), while insufficient social integration leads to lack of persistence and degree attainment (Bean, 2005).

Also important to the success of these students is the development of a sense of purpose and congruence, which may help them navigate through large bureaucratic systems like college environments and social services departments. This is particularly important in understanding the academic barriers of TANF/CalWORKs students. For in the absence of interpersonal relationships, along with immediate family needs, a missing sense of purpose may lead to a college identity crisis. All of these factors, singularly or in combination, may be affecting the academic success of these college students.

**Student Success, Persistence, and Attainment**

For some researchers, the lack of student success has less to do with policies, stretched financial resources or ethnic disparities but more with the lack of very hard work (Adelman, 2007). An absence of student motivation, of seizing learning opportunities, lacking the willingness to do the coursework or to maintain efforts and not take responsibility for it, are some of the reasons why students do not succeed (Adelman,
2007). Other researchers say that a student’s level of social integration has a positive relationship to a student’s persistence (Harper, 2009; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Tinto & Engle, 2008) and that an insufficient social integration leads to lack of persistence and degree attainment (Bean, 2005). Academic advising and programs such as first year services can also have an influence with regard to student persistence and graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Still other studies list students’ educational expectations as a factor to student attainment (Astin, 1977; Museus, Harper, & Nichols, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), as well as student perceptions of what faculty expect of them (Harper, 2009; Museus et al., 2010). Yet, other researchers claim that merely starting one’s educational endeavors at a 2-year college may affect student success (Astin, 1977; Karabel, 1972), and attending a community college can create negative outcomes for women in particular (Astin, 1977; Park & Pascarella, 2010).

Also, delaying college attendance can have a negative effect on attaining a bachelor’s degree (Kempner & Kinnick, 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Not entering college right after high school or postponing entry regardless of what type of institution, may have an affect on degree attainment, as might the time when a student decides to attend college (Kinnick & Kempner, 1988). Educational attainment has also been linked to student self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001; Museus & Hendel, 2005). Yet, college success can also be linked to a student’s psychosocial development, as discussed in College Identity Theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

**Summary**

We have learned through this discussion that in the United States, values stem from individualistic and masculine ideals. Hofstede (1984) recognized how masculine
traits imposed on the values of a particular culture; Max-Neef (1991) and Maslow (1943) did not. And for all the great contributions Maslow, Max-Neef, and Hofstede gave to the understanding of basic human needs, none appear to have addressed it from a female point of view. None seemed to directly address or even recognize how these imposed male values affected women.

Even so, women are now enrolling in college at a slightly higher pace than men (ACE, 2009; Buchmann, 2009; ED, 2006). Yet, the number of single parent women attending college is declining (Peter & Horn, 2005). This is concerning, since once leaving high school, women seem to lose their academic and student identity advantages (Carbonaro et al., 2008). Worse yet, ethnically diverse women have even lower enrollments (Peter & Horn, 2005), and after controlling for age, marital, and parental status, welfare recipients of color are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education than White recipients (Jacobs & King, 2002). And of the women who do enroll, they tend to enroll part time more than men (AACC, 2009; Clery, 2010; ED, 2006; Jacobs & King, 2002).

A large majority of TANF/CalWORKs students are single parent women of color. It can be argued then that TANF policies have affected female minority TANF recipients’ enrollment in college (Bok, 2004; Covington & Spriggs, 2004). The 1996 TANF legislation (better known as welfare reform) shifted welfare recipients away from postsecondary education (Alfred, 2007; Bok, 2004; Christopher, 2003; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Jones-DeWeever, 2005; Zhan & Schreiner, 2005), and while enrollment for women was generally on the rise (Covington & Spriggs, 2004), enrollment of female TANF recipients went down.
As demonstrated above, literature that states that restrictive welfare reform policies, such as the PRWORA and the DRA, disproportionately denied poor women of color access to education and training. Also, the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of polices led to misinformation and some states underutilized education as a Welfare-to-Work option. Additionally stated in the literature is that TANF/CalWORKs students were made to find employment, which led to abandoning school.

However restrictive, policies are only a part of what may be interfering with TANF/CalWORKs student success. Current literature also suggests that single parenthood and having young children have an adverse effect on education, as well as employment. Articles regarding mental health issues and social worker attitudes were also tied to affecting TANF/CalWORKs student success. In addition, poverty and low wage jobs may also have a negative influence on the academic performance of this group. Gender issues, such as limited educational opportunities and the tracking of female college students to the less prestigious, less profitable careers, may be forcing TANF/CalWORKs students to leave school for parental and other familial financial responsibilities. In short, the inability to meet basic needs, while experiencing disproportionate opportunities and earnings potential due to gender, race, and ethnicity, give the three theoretical frameworks of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Feminist Theory, and Critical Race Theory a leg to stand on.
CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the author discusses the research design and why this particular design fit this study. Additionally, information on the research questions and their formulation is included. Factual information on TANF/CalWORKs students and a description of the participant pool is also found in this chapter. Furthermore, an account of the data collection strategies and the consideration of human subjects are addressed. Finally, the data analysis portion of the study and the methods employed are covered.

As discussed in previous chapters, fewer TANF/CalWORKs students are enrolling in postsecondary education. Of those who do enroll, approximately 25% do not return the following semester. To understand why this is occurring, this study explored barriers to the academic success of TANF/CalWORKs students, as experienced and perceived by the students themselves.

Research Design

The study attempted to capture the experiences of single parent, female TANF/CalWORKs students in a community college. Because the researcher wanted to learn about TANF/CalWORKs students’ personal experience as told by the students, a qualitative study method was employed (Patton, 2002). Facilitating this process was a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Compared to other research designs, “grounded theory focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content” (Patton, 2002, p. 125). The emergence of themes was what excited this researcher in utilizing a grounded theory approach, since there would be no greater truth than what would emerge from the student participants themselves. In this way, the study offered a real world view of what TANF/CalWORKs
students said could make a difference in the academic success of future TANF/CalWORKs students.

As a grounded theory study, the research consisted of focus group sessions. The focus group method was selected as the best option to provide a safe environment for open discussion and candid conversation on the student’s academic progress, what they perceived as barriers to their academic success, and what tool were needed to support their academic goals. Participating in a focus group presented the students with an opportunity to discuss their experience as students, as parenting students, and as student welfare recipients. But more specifically, it granted TANF/CalWORKs students the chance to talk about these topics and how it related, or did not relate, to their academic success or shortcomings. The benefit in this type of design was that it created an atmosphere of “meaningful interaction” (Owen, 2001, p. 4). It allowed for “human sensitivity, a willingness to listen and a respect for opposing views” (Owen, 2001, p. 4). It also allowed the group’s interaction to replace the interaction they might have had with the researcher (Owen, 2001). In this way, the conversation in the focus group centered on the students’ experience, and the information gathered was a more introspective look at the barriers to academic attainment as perceived by the TANF/CalWORKs students themselves.

Eight focus groups were held at a campus of a three-college district within a 5-week time span. While the focus groups were planned with four to eight participants, the size of the focus groups ranged from two to four persons. As topics arose in the focus group sessions, it allowed the researcher to find common threads in the discussion and form families of related topics. These families were then sorted to find recurring themes.
The recurring themes then led the researcher toward developing a theory as to what was interfering with the groups’ academic achievement. At times where the focus group discussions led to information that required further investigating, an individual interview was utilized. Such information offered insight on how to best serve TANF/CalWORKs students and perhaps, even more importantly, how to help them reach academic goals. At the time where there were no longer substantive themes evolving from the focus groups, the researcher understood that the study had reached its saturation point.

**Research Questions**

What inspired the researcher to undertake this study was a combination of personal observations and topics found in the literature. The researcher observed TANF/CalWORKs students struggling with the social welfare system. While there were limited studies on TANF/CalWORKs recipients as students, the literature was supported by related studies of TANF student-recipient experiences in other states. These articles suggested that issues related to social worker attitudes (Ridzi, 2004), restrictive policies, and institutional practices were affecting TANF recipients as students (London, 2005; Price, 2005).

The researcher also observed TANF/CalWORKs students experiencing college challenges. Understanding college policies like drop deadlines, institutional practices such as applying to financial aid, and issues around campus climate also seemed to obstruct the student’s academic goals.

Additionally noted were some characteristics of the of the TANF/CalWORKs students. They were mostly female (CCCCO, 2010). Also, they were largely a single parent population. The researcher observed, and literature supported, that
TANF/CalWORKs students not only struggled with their roles as women and as mothers but also with their roles as single parents (Cheng, 2007; Christopher, 2005). Additional TANF/CalWORKs student pressures were witnessed in areas of self-perception, academic performance, motivation, and with regard to family obligations (Adams et al., 2002). Both the literature and the observations by the researcher gave some insights as to what might be impeding on the academic success of these students. With so many possible factors influencing the outcomes of these students, it was important to ask the students themselves what they attributed to being their academic barriers. As grounded theory is inductive, the model was a sound fit for the study, and the researcher explored with TANF/CalWORKs students the following questions to gain their perspective on these matters:

1. What barriers to academic success did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students experience in community college?

2. What strategies did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students use to contend with the barriers?

The questions were designed to draw out information which, in turn, helped to develop themes from the student’s experience.

**Participant Description and Recruitment**

The study took place at a community college in the southwestern region of California. The city had a busy harbor that complimented the tourist industry. It also had a military presence and was approximately 15 minutes from the international border with Mexico. Demographics for the city were female at 49.7% in 2008, with ethnic breakdowns of White persons at 50.9%, Hispanics/Latinos at 30.9% and Asian at 10.3%. 
African Americans were 7.86% of the city’s population. In the year 2008, the median household income was $62,820, with 12.6% of the city’s population living below the poverty level. In the business realm, approximately 75% of all businesses were owned by White persons, while Hispanic, Asian, and Black constituents owned 13.4%, 8.0%, and 2.7%, respectively. Women owned 30.1% of business firms (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

Situated in the heart of this busy downtown area is the college. The campus was accessible by public transportation, including a trolley station across the street. The college also had two distinct freeways within a two-block radius of the campus, each providing nearby entrances and exits. As such, the campus had an intercity atmosphere. The college was part of a three-college district. For the purpose of the study, the college was referred to as Harbor View Community College (HVCC).

Approximately 9.04% of the city’s residents were college aged (20-24 years of age). In academic year 2009, HVCC served approximately 19,000 students. Fifty percent of the campus student population was between 18-24 years of age. Additional statistics on the age of the campus student population demonstrated that 18% of the students were age 25 to 29, while another 10% were age 30-34 years of age. This translated to 28% of the students being between 25 and 34 years of age. Over half of the student population was female (54%). The campus was also a Hispanic serving institution with 34% of its students identifying themselves as Latino. Table 5 gives a brief overview of HVCC students.

Notice in Table 5 that the units attempted by 43% of the student population were between 3-5.9 units, indicating that nearly half of the students attended half time.
### Table 5

*Profile of Harbor View Students (Fall 2009)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreported</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependents</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Units attempted</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1-2.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0-5.9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8.9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11.9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12+</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Note.* One percent of students were less than 18 years old, while students aged 40-49 comprised 8% of the population, and 5% were aged 50 years or more.

*Note.* Students self-identified their ethnicity as American Indian 1%, Pacific Islander 1%, other 3%, Filipino 4%, Asian 6%, and unreported at 8%.

*Note.* Students with four dependents were at 2%, and those with five or more were at 2%.
Table 5 included TANF/CalWORKs students in the data. Since participating in the College TANF/CalWORKs program was limited to students who met specific criteria, not all students who received public assistance were part of the college TANF/CalWORKs program. Still, the college had a viable TANF/CalWORKs program of approximately 470 students.

The TANF/CalWORKs students who participated in the study also created a similar profile. Of the 20 student participants, 9 were between the ages of 25 and 30. Four students were between 31 and 35, and one student was age 36. Another four were between the ages of 41 and 45. The oldest participant was 44 year of age, while the two youngest participants were both 24 years of age. In terms of ethnicity, there were two groups which had an equal number of participants: six students identified themselves as African American and another six as Latino. The next largest ethnic group (White) had three students represented. Two students declined to state their ethnicity, and there was one student each who identified herself as American Indian, Asian, and Filipino, respectively. Participant data also revealed that most students had one child. Another five students had two children. Four student participants had three children, and one student participant had four children.

In regards to the number of units completed, four students had completed between 0 and 24 units. Six, the largest number of the 20 focus group participants, had completed between 25 and 48 units, while only one student was between 49 and 60 units. Four students had completed between 61 and 99 units, and three students had completed between 100 and 125 units. Two students had completed more than 125 units. One of these two completed 155 units.
It is wonderful to report that TANF/CalWORKs students were academically progressing. Seventeen of the 20 participants earned a 2.0 or above grade point average. One student earned between a 3.5 to 4.0 grade point average, while 7 of them earned between a 3.01 to a 3.5 GPA. Nine of the 20 earned between a 2.0 and a 3.0, with 4 of them above a 2.6. Overall, the highest GPA earned was 3.93, while the lowest was 0.87. The student participants had attended HVCC during various academic years. The largest number (10) came from academic year 2007. Another eight students attended HVCC in academic year 2008, and two attended in the fall of 2009. Table 6 consolidates the data for the focus group student participants.

Harbor View Community College is part of a three-college district. The district also has six Continuing Education Centers. The six centers combined served a large number of TANF/CalWORKs students. However, since the Continuing Education Centers offer noncredit courses, these students were not included in this study.

The 2009, 2010, and 2011 California budget crisis undoubtedly had a direct effect on all TANF/CalWORKs student participants. California counties had to cut back on supportive services like dental care and cash assistance to TANF/CalWORKs families. Harbor View TANF/CalWORKs students soon began to experience other changes in their county supportive services. In Southwest County, all student recipients also experienced reductions in childcare and transportation assistance.

As of July, 2009, all TANF/CalWORKs families across the state of California received $598.00 for a family size of two (one adult and one child under age 18, State of California Health and Human Services Agency, 2009). However, the self-sufficiency standard for living in the county where HVCC exists was $2,920.00 per month for
Table 6

*Profile of Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other(^a)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependents</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One child</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two children</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three children</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Units attempted(^b)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-48</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49-60</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61-99</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^a\)There was one student identified as American Indian or Asian or Filipino, respectively.

\(^b\)Units completed in this table refer to the total number of units the student enrolled in and persisted to the end for a grade in the course. Additionally, the total number of units includes all units completed by the student in the Southern California Community College District (a pseudonym), and only represents the 20 focus group participants.
one adult and one teenager. The amount of $3,326.00 per month was necessary for a single parent with one school age child (Insight—Center for Community Economic Development, 2013).

In the fall of 2009, the budget crisis affected college support personnel and counselor staffing in five major programs serving TANF/CalWORKs students. The five categorical programs affected were the campus California Work Opportunity and Responsibility for Kids (CalWORKs) program, Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE), Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS), Disability Support Program (DSP) and Matriculation (Matric). Two of the categorically funded programs (CalWORKs and CARE) served TANF/CalWORKs students directly, while the other two provided services to lower income first generation students and/or disabled students. Matriculation served all campus students. By the spring of 2010, both the county and the college began to reduce services, and TANF/CalWORKs students experienced the full impact of the California budget crisis.

Because of the many changes to TANF/CalWORKs at the state and college levels, the study did not include participants after the fall of 2009 when the budget cuts might have had an impact on the study. The study, then, included students that were out of school prior to the cuts taking place and in this way providing a more accurate picture of what had been the students’ experience prior to the California budget cuts.

Recall that this study included single parent women only. This was central to the study since college CalWORKs programs are largely comprised of females. For the year 2008, the CCCCO’s statewide data showed that the community colleges served over
29,000 female CalWORKs program students (CCCCO, 2010), the majority of them being single parents, compared to just over 5,000 males in the same college programs.

Also, recall that the budget cuts of 2009 had great impact on both state CalWORKs services and on college CalWORKs programs. These cuts had direct impact on TANF/CalWORKs students, as their cash assistance was reduced while community colleges simultaneously reduced campus services offered to CalWORKs students. So that the state budget anomalies of 2009 did not skew the outcomes of the study, only students who attended community colleges before the budget crisis were invited to participate in this study.

The study was concerned with perceived barriers to academic success by single parent female TANF/CalWORKs students. Hence, the participant recruitment criteria included female TANF/CalWORKs students who (a) were single parents, (b) were former students at HVCC, (c) enrolled prior to the fall of 2009, and (d) were participants in the college CalWORKs program. Before the study took place, the researcher obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from San Diego State University (see Appendix A). Once the IRB protocol was approved, the researcher submitted to HVCC’s district Institutional Research office, a request for email distribution. The request forms stipulated the student selection criteria listed above and asked for an electronic mail (email) distribution of a recruitment flyer.

At the district site, the district’s student basic record system was cross-referenced with the HVCC TANF/CalWORKs data base. A computer program matched students who were enrolled at the campus and participated in the college CalWORKs/Believe program for 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years. The data also included the fall of
2009 as part of the study. After the district compiled the data, it created the e-mail list and sent out the flyer from a district address. The district reported that it sent out 1,039 emails, of which 914 were delivered on the first attempt. Of this same amount, 84 emails were reported as undeliverable. Another 41 were undeliverable, but the district would reattempt to deliver to these addresses again over a 5-day period. The district’s first email delivery yielded 13 responses. A second email was sent out with 947 delivered to the addressees. This time, 92 email addresses were undeliverable, but the responses were more fruitful (26 responses). In all, 39 former students responded to the invitation to participate.

Considerations for the low response rate were that, while the majority of the email addresses seemed valid, TANF/CalWORKs students could not easily access their email on a regular basis, thus missing the message. The main campus was closed for summer 2011 due to the budget crisis, and the campus closure eliminated using campus computers and internet services. Additionally, the month in which the study took place (July) was the month in which TANF/CalWORKs recipients received a reduction in cash aid. It is reasonable to speculate that students who might own a home computer might have had to cut internet connectivity as a cost saving measure. It is also possible that, since the students were not enrolled for summer classes at HVCC, they may not have been monitoring emails sent by its district site. Later, some respondents shared that they almost did not open the email because they were unfamiliar with the district sender. Still, there is the possibility that the students did not want to participate.

The email addresses were the primary recruitment tool. Included in the email was the recruitment flyer (Appendix B). The flyer notified the student of the study, listed the
criteria for participation, and invited the students to participate in it. The flyer also included the researcher’s contact information and notified them how to become involved. The flyer asked interested students to contact the researcher by email. The informational letter and consent forms were included as email attachments (Appendices C and D). The informational letter gave information about the researcher, the study, and the faculty supervisor. The waiver and consent form explained to the student that they had a right to stop participation at any time and for any reason. Sending out all the documents gave the former students the opportunity to review all the documents before making a decision to participate.

Additionally, the waiver and consent form stipulated that the student’s name and information would be kept confidential and that information on the students would not be shared with any other person but the researcher and the research assistant. As another precautionary measure, the research assistant was restricted from sharing any information about the student or the study by signing a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E).

**Data Collection Strategies**

Once the students for the study were identified, the next step in the process was participation in the focus groups. Students were contacted via email for possible dates of participation. Students were emailed two to three focus group meeting dates to choose from, and the student notified the researcher of their preferred date. Five participants requested additional communication by phone. Each student that scheduled a focus group date was sent an email reminder the day before the focus group meeting. If the student was absent, the researcher continued to recruit the student and sent a new set of dates.
Nonetheless, issues with child care, student work schedules, and transportation, limited those that could participate. In all, 20 students participated in the study.

The focus groups were conducted at HVCC. The college had several conference rooms that were available for reservation. A comfortable and quiet conference room that could accommodate a confidential focus group was reserved for a 3-hour window. This assisted in keeping the sessions from being interrupted. The blocks of time allowed for set up, focus group meeting, and then take down. Additionally, signage on the exterior of the conference room door notified passing persons that the conference room was reserved, and a meeting was in session. Focus groups were scheduled with four to eight participants each. Yet, each focus group varied in size and consisted of two to four students per session. As aforementioned, student participants struggled to secure childcare and transportation. Students shared that the CalWORKs agencies were unable to provide childcare or transportation, unless the needs were employment related. This left the student participant to have to pay for child care and transportation to the focus group site or to search for who could provide the services for free. This created an extra burden for some of the scheduled participants. Also, three students shared that their work-time lunch hour did not allow sufficient time to participate in the study after all. As such, the focus groups continued with the students who were able to make their scheduled time.

The time allocated to the focus group discussion did not exceed 2 hours. Beverages and small snacks were provided for student participants. Compensation for participation in the focus group was offered to all former TANF/CalWORKs student participants in the form of $25.00 U.S. dollars. Students also had the option to participate
in a workshop that would inform the participant about how to repair their academic or financial aid records. Two workshops were made available at a later date.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for San Diego State University took great precaution and provided significant training to the researcher in the treatment of human subjects. After receiving a certificate of completion for the training, the researcher recognized that concerns needed to be addressed to ensure the physical and mental health of all participants were protected.

In addition, this researcher obtained approval for conducting this study from the IRB office at San Diego State University. Once the approval was granted, the following procedures took place to insure confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

First, confidentiality was maintained and any information gathered by district data was limited to the scope of this study. All records, files, or other data including electronic transmissions (i.e., faxes, copies, email) that may have included confidential student information was kept in a secure location at the researcher’s place of employment. The researcher is tenured nonclassroom faculty, and as such had a designated office in which the confidential records were kept under lock and key. To further maintain a participant’s privacy, each participant selected their own pseudonym. This way, the researcher had signed consent forms but transcripts without any actual participant names. To enhance confidentiality, the list of participant names to corresponding pseudonyms was stored in a separate data file. Records that may link information or an assigned name to a participant were kept in a locked office and locked file cabinet. Only the researcher and research assistant had key access to the file cabinet. Electronic files were handled in the same way. Electronic records that may have linked student information to assigned names
were stored in different data files and were password protected. While hard copies of confidential research material were stored in locked file drawers, electronic information such as email was kept on the researcher’s networked shared drive maintained by the college district and secured by password protection. Additional security against intrusion to the shared drive was provided at the district level. Also, any electronic equipment used in the study (i.e., laptops, external hard drives, and flash drives) were password protected. After the study was completed, all records were destroyed.

With respect to the students themselves, great care was taken to not create undue hardship. Still, while the researcher tried to uncover the unknown about the student’s academic life, pointed questions were necessary. Institutional Review Board guidelines were followed when developing the interview questions (Appendix F). Additionally, a three-member team consisting of the researcher’s dissertation committee reviewed the appropriateness of the interview questions. These team members were professors for the doctoral program in educational leadership at San Diego State University and were expert researchers.

Once the questions for the focus groups were developed, they were reviewed by two current TANF/CalWORKs students who were not part of the study. Feedback obtained from the students was used to address any foreseeable problems, such as clarity of questions or level of communication. The two student reviewers found no concerns with the interview questions.

Once the interview questions were reviewed, the questions were pilot tested. Four former TANF/CalWORKs students participated in the pilot testing. These pilot tests were done on an individual basis. The students were able to understand the questions and
contribute to the discussion. Here new topics surfaced from the students. Discussions of fear and feelings of guilt were shared by the students. As is done in grounded theory, these new topics were added to the focus group meetings.

As the focus groups took place, students were welcomed with refreshments. Before the focus groups got started, students were oriented. The IRB approved consent form was reviewed with the group and any questions were addressed at that time. The consent form indicated that a participant could withdraw from the study at any time and for whatever reason, without question or penalty. The participants were also reminded that stopping their participation would not negatively impact their academic status at HVCC or with the TANF/CalWORKs program. The researcher checked the consent forms for signatures and collected the forms prior to commencing any type of interviews.

The researcher had the help of a research assistant named Cynthia (pseudonym). The assistant signed an employee confidentiality agreement before starting her assignment. The assistant was neither a recipient of public assistance nor a student of HVCC. She did have a bachelor’s degree in public administration from a local university. The assistant supported the researcher with tasks such as setting up the refreshments, collecting the consent forms once they were reviewed, and issuing compensation to the student participants. The research assistant also took notes during the focus group sessions, so that the researcher was free to hear and observe the student participants.

At the orientation, and before starting any discussion, students were reminded that the interview was to be audiotape recorded. At this point, those who did not wish to be
audio recorded or were uncomfortable with the note taking could still opt out of participation. No students decided to opt out.

Students were also reminded that the interviewer or the research assistant would be taking notes. The researcher explained to the group that the notes were to become part of the researcher’s journaling. Journaling assisted the researcher to recall the interviews with accuracy. It also helped the researcher to remain focused on the study and to minimize biases.

To protect the identity of the participants in the study, recording devices were not turned on until after a formal greeting had taken place. Each participant self-selected a pseudonym that was used throughout the study. A table tent with their selected pseudonym was provided to each student. A master sheet was developed that included the participant’s contact information and selected pseudonym. The same pseudonym used at the focus group meeting was used for audiotapes, transcripts, observation notes, file folders, or e-folders that contained information on each participant. Where quotes were used in the published dissertation, the fictitious names were utilized. The same pattern followed for subsequent participants.

The researcher deduced that those who agreed to participate in the study were comfortable answering the questions in a group setting. Still, to increase the comfort level of participants, at the onset of the focus group, the researcher shared an established set of ground rules with participants. The ground rules were written on a whiteboard and, as they were reviewed, the researcher invited the participants to add additional rules. The student participants were comfortable with this process.
The researcher worked to establish rapport with the participants. As the focus groups progressed, students discussed their emotional well-being. The researcher noticed this and reminded students that if during the focus group session a participant became uncomfortable, the participant could choose to skip a question and wait as the group moved to the next question. The student could also decide to stop participation. The researcher anticipated that these steps would reduce or limit the severity, duration, and likelihood of any harm. In two occasions, a student participant became somewhat emotional. The researcher offered the students to skip the question or to stop the discussion. In both cases, the students elected to continue participation after a quick break. In addition, three students peaked the researcher’s attention. Follow-up interviews were scheduled with these students to discuss topics they had raised with more detail (Appendix G).

At the end of the focus group meetings, student participants received compensation in the amount of $25.00, regardless of the level of participation. After the conclusion of each focus group meeting, the tape recordings were given to a transcriptionist. Transcription was necessary to help the researcher review the efficacy of the interview questions and make any necessary adjustments. It also facilitated the coding process described later. The researcher reviewed the transcription along with the recording to ensure accuracy. In total, eight focus groups and three one-on-one interviews were scheduled and continued until the groups yielded no new information and data collection reached its saturation point (Charmaz, 2006).
Data Analysis Strategies

For this study, the model for Data Analysis in Qualitative Research created by John W. Creswell (2009), was used. Creswell’s model included a six-step approach to processing the raw data into themes that ultimately painted a picture of the former TANF/CalWORKs students’ situation. These six steps included: organizing and preparing data, reading through all data, coding the data, generating a description and creating themes, interrelating themes/descriptions, and lastly, interpreting the meaning of the themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher began with first organizing and preparing the data. In this step, the recorded data collected at the focus group meetings was transcribed, then visually scanned. Handwritten field notes were word processed, reviewed, and a sorting and arranging of the data followed.

The second step included reading all of the data to acquire an overall sense of the material and attempts to encompass its meaning. This included writing notes in the margins of the transcripts and on notes taken during the focus group sessions. It also included the start of composing general thoughts or ideas about the data (Creswell, 2009).

The third step involved the beginning of the coding process. Coding was the way in which segments of text were identified and sectioned out prior to any interpretation or meaning was derived from it. Creswell (2009) identified steps for creating a solid data analysis.

However, Charmaz (2006) outlined a description for solid coding procedures. She discusses a two-part process. First, she suggests two guidelines for a review of one’s own “stance” in the coding process. She recommends staying “open to exploring
whatever theoretical possibilities” one can discern from the data by remaining logical and “sticking to the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 47). She also recommends “working quickly” and with “spontaneity” (p. 47), acknowledging that one can return to the data to revise codes for improved fit.

Charmaz (2006) then provides guidelines for how to proceed with the coding. In her description, she discusses initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. In initial coding, she reiterates that one should stick closely to the data presented. She also suggests that each segment of data be viewed from an “action” perspective and noted with action words rather than from a preexisting category. This practice could help the researcher from assigning “extant theories” before having completed the necessary analytical work (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). In initial coding, the assigned terms remain “provisional, comparative and grounded in the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). In that way, they can be reworded to improve fit.

In focused coding, one can begin to sift out the most frequent or significant codes to explain larger segments of data. This will help to figure out the adequate use of the codes and which codes make the most analytic sense.

Figuring out what makes most sense is also a characteristic of axial coding where “selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model” (Creswell, 2009, p. 184) is the goal. It also “provides a frame for researchers to apply” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61). Thus, axial coding attempts to “link categories with subcategories and asks how they are related” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61). In short, axial coding can help “reassemble” the pieces of data “fractured” out in initial coding.
Charmaz (2006) also makes a point of stating that, no matter how one begins to code data, in grounded theory one uses constant comparative methods. In constant comparison methodology, one is viewing and reviewing the data, establishing analytic distinctions and making comparisons at each level of analytic work (Charmaz, 2006). As an example, comparing interview statements within the participants of a focus group and later comparing them to the comments of another focus group in the same study.

Charmaz (2006) suggests that using constant comparative methods will help one to avoid assumptions and preconceived ideas thus “only using those terms that fit” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 54) the data. In using the constant comparative method, and the many recommendations for analyzing data, the study yielded 158 codes.

Returning to Creswell’s (2009) model, step four was taking the categories created to produce a detailed description of “people, places or events” and then utilizing these categories to create themes (Creswell, 2009, p. 189). This produced five themes for the study.

How the themes or descriptions were presented is addressed in step five. In this section, the five themes were melded with a theoretical model. As this study was a grounded theory study, the researcher took these themes and viewed them from Maslow’s assessment of basic needs along with a feminist and CRT and perspective. This means that the researcher took the themes and then processed them though an additional lens of gender roles and basic human requisites. These emerged themes are what became the significant findings of the study and were described in a narration, with the use of charts or graphs as additional support. A model that outlines the method for processing the data
and the development of the interpretation is presented later in the chapter as the intent of this researcher (see Figure 3, p. 105).

Creswell’s (2009) sixth and final step was in extracting a meaningful interpretation of the data. Here questions regarding the outcomes of the study were reviewed and questions for future studies were posed. Where did the findings lead? What was an unexpected theme? How did these finding compare to the literature? What action agenda could be presented? There were many ways to interpret the data found. Creswell states that qualitative research is flexible in that it can convey “personal, research based or action meanings” (p. 190).

Employing a grounded theory framework for the study means that there was an additional set of rules to go by. In its core concept, grounded theory is creating a theory from the coding, clusters, and concepts that arise from the study participants. It is both inductive and deductive in that it seeks out the experiences of the participants and then tries to deduce theories from them. Grounded theorists constantly compare existing data with new data, until there is no more new data emerging from the participants. Strauss and Corbin (2008) propose that these six characteristics are present in a researcher conducting a grounded theory study. They are as follows:

1. The ability to step back and critically analyze situations.
2. The ability to recognize the tendency toward bias.
3. The ability to think abstractly.
4. The ability to be flexible and open to helpful criticism.
5. Sensitivity to the words and actions of respondents.
6. A sense of absorption and devotion to the work process.
The characteristics set by Strauss and Corbin (2008) fit well with Creswell’s (2009) model. Creswell’s first and second steps for conducting a qualitative study recommended organizing, preparing, and then reading through all the data to get a “general sense” of the information. This was a natural lead into Strauss and Corbin’s (as cited in Patton, 2002) recommendation “to take a step back and analyze the data collected” (p. 489). The ability to recognize biases was assisted by keeping a journal. Abstract thinking would evolve from Creswell’s third step, the coding process. Flexibility and openness to helpful criticism was evident in the peer reviews done before the study. Additional opportunity for commentary and criticism was had during the student member checking.

The sensitivity to words and devotion to the work process was demonstrated by the researcher during the student interview process. It was also evident in the care taken to review interview transcripts and in the creating of themes. Figure 3 outlines Creswell’s (2009) steps for the processing of data and theme development.

**Trustworthiness and Data Triangulation**

The accuracy of a study is what lends trustworthiness. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, several steps were taken. First, the interview questions were pilot tested by two current TANF/CalWORKs students who were not part of the study. Then, four former TANF/CalWORKs students participated in the pilot testing the interview process. These students all had similar characteristics as the students needed for the study. The input from these students led to the addition of two new questions regarding fear and guilt.
Figure 3. Modified model of Creswell’s (2009) data analysis in qualitative research.
Next, as the focus groups were completed, the recorded sessions were transcribed verbatim by a reputable transcriptionist. Once a transcript was received, the researcher reviewed the transcript and checked the accuracy by simultaneously listening to the corresponding taped session. This helped to ensure that no errors occurred during the transcription of the recordings and to ascertain the accuracy of the transcripts. The transcription was also checked against the notes taken by the research assistant during the focus group meetings. These observations and notes were used to further document the student’s experience. The data were reviewed for similarities and differences. Information obtained from the various focus groups assured the students’ perspectives. The validity of the study was supported by the review of the various methods of data and from which converging themes arose. This process is known as methodological triangulation.

Additionally, procedures were put in place to ensure the study’s credibility and confirmability. One such additional process was member checking. Member checking is taking a section of the findings to a follow-up interview with the participants of the study and “providing an opportunity for them to comment on the findings” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). In this way, student participants can help the researcher check for accuracy of the results. The researcher contacted three students from the focus groups who were deeply interested in the study and who were articulate in their responses. The participants were sent a copy of Chapter 4 to review. The students were then asked to review the chapter both for accurate representation of their responses and of the themes that arose. In this way, the students could validate or negate the findings. One student replied to the request
for feedback and, after only minor adjustments, the student believed the study accurately portrayed her sentiments.

To augment the credibility of the study, a peer debriefing by a qualified researcher was also conducted. The peer debriefer with a doctorate in educational leadership, had experience in qualitative studies. She was also familiar with research inquiry, data analysis, and with low income and special population students such as TANF and CalWORKs recipients. Her work experience also included knowledge of academic policies and current state budget issues. The debriefer examined the methodology employed, reviewed data collection, and the analysis. She acknowledged that the study appropriately applied the methodology necessary for solid findings. The debriefer also suggested minor grammatical improvements, which were incorporated into the dissertation. The objective peer review lent validity to the study (Creswell, 2009).

Role of the Researcher

“Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15). As such, it merits saying that the researcher received public assistance for a number of years. It also merits saying that the researcher has completed a higher level of education and has earned a master’s degree in education, with an emphasis in counseling. She has also previously coordinated a TANF/CalWORKs program. All of these facts may present bias in the study. However, the researcher was aware of the possible biases and has taken precaution to keep personal experiences and biases from the interview questions and the focus group sessions. A journal was used during the data collection and analysis process to note nonverbal behaviors of the participants. It also served to post ideas, note similarities, or differences in the focus group sessions and to
begin sorting out commonalities. This was one way in which the researcher could
triangulate data. But the journal served a dual purpose. The journal also provided an area
of free writing in which the researcher’s thoughts and feelings could be expressed and
then later reviewed to help sort out biases.

It can be argued that the researcher’s work experience may have indirectly
benefitted the student participant, as the researcher is a community college counselor.
Her work includes training and experience in conducting individual, group, and workshop
meetings. That is to say that the researcher has practice conducting groups, the ability to
form rapport, and the skill of dealing with sensitive issues. (See Appendix F for
interview questions.)
CHAPTER 4—RESULTS

Introduction

The findings in this chapter are the results of a qualitative study conducted with 20 former TANF/CalWORKs recipients in a focus group setting. The recipients were also former students at Harbor View Community College (HVCC) in southern California for academic years 2007, 2008, and the fall of 2009. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students falling into these years were invited to participate in the study. The study specifically recruited former TANF/CalWORKs students who were single parent females. All students who responded to the invitation and were deemed eligible were invited to attend a focus group meeting. The interested participants were given dates of various scheduled focus group meetings to select from. Participants of the focus group meetings included students who had persevered and had transferred, graduated, and/or had left school for employment. It also included students who were on academic probation, were disqualified, or who simply could not continue to attend college. Since the intent of the researcher was to allow theories to evolve from the participants, the study was conducted using grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

The focus groups meetings were conducted over a 6-week period from July to mid-August 2011 at HVCC. The meetings were held in IRB compliance and lasted 2 hours. A series of interview questions was designed to help identify the academic barriers of TANF/CalWORKs students. The groups were asked to discuss academic barriers they had encountered. The students were also asked how they defined support and to describe support they had received or might have needed from the college and their
families. They were also asked to define and describe the same regarding state and local agencies providing Welfare-to-Work (WTW) services. All the student participants selected their own pseudonym. All focus groups were recorded. Following each session, the digitally recorded focus group meetings were transcribed. Next, after listening to each recording, the researcher began to see common threads in the discussions and found related topics. Then the researcher conducted an open coding procedure. Open coding (Creswell, 2009), in which the transcribed documents are reviewed for coding or naming of choice words or paragraphs, was the first level of review for the documents. After the eighth focus group session, there were no longer any new substantive themes evolving from the focus groups, as the study had reached its saturation point.

All the documents were converted to a rich text format and then entered into a computer software program named ATLAS.ti (version 6.2). The software is a tool for processing qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, audio, graphical, and video data (Friese & Ringmayr, 2011). Once the documents were uploaded into the software, a second review of the documents occurred. In this second review, codes were confirmed, changed, or added. In total, there were 158 codes established. A review of the research notes helped the researcher to recall the discussions that occurred and the meanings that students tried to relate. Axial coding was incorporated (Charmaz, 2006). In axial coding, the matching of the codes to other related codes or relationships is developed. It serves to link categories with subcategories, asks how they are related, and helps “reassemble” the pieces of data “fractured” out in initial coding (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60).

From here the researcher started to develop concepts. The concepts then led to categories. As these categories were organized, common themes emerged. The recurring
themes guided the researcher toward identifying barriers associated with the students’ academic achievement.

The following themes emerged from the study:

Theme 1: Mental Health Erosion

Theme 2: Perceptions of Support

Theme 3: A Failing System: Welfare-to-Work

Theme 4: Finding Support

Theme 5: Taking Back Control

Figure 4 outlines the themes and subthemes for the study and how they relate to the research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>Research Question 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What barriers to academic success did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students experience in community college?</td>
<td>What strategies did female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students use to contend with the barriers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1:</strong> Mental Health Erosion</td>
<td><strong>Theme 2:</strong> Perceptions of Support Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subtheme: Luck of the Draw—Caring Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subtheme: Family Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3:</strong> A Failing System: Welfare-to-Work</td>
<td><strong>Theme 4:</strong> Finding Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subtheme: Feelings of Solitude and Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Subtheme: Perceptions of Her on Welfare—An Ugly Secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 5:</strong> Taking Back Control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Research questions: Themes and subthemes.

Research question 1 is related to what happens to TANF/CalWORKs students and specifically asks, “What barriers to academic success did female, single parent
The first research question was designed to discover the academic barriers of female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students in community college. With respect to this question, there were three strong themes that emerged from the data. They were Mental Health Erosion, Perceptions of Support Systems, and A Failing System: Welfare-to-Work. These finding were supported by coding occurrences using the ATLAS.ti (6.2) software. The strongest theme was that of Mental Health Erosion. Of the 20 focus group participants, there were 63 references made to the condition of their emotional sense of well-being. Descriptors from the students included terms like depression, stress, worry, and sadness. Also included in this category were explanations of situations, feelings, and events shared by the TANF/CalWORKs students that alluded
to mental stressors. Accounts that told of difficult “family issues,” “having breakdowns,” “getting very upset” and being “mentally tired,” were included in this category.

**Theme 1: Mental Health Erosion**

Mental health was the largest area of concern regarding TANF/CalWORKs student recipients. While anyone can understand that being poor is stressful, the level to which surviving poverty weighs on the minds of TANF/CalWORKs students was significant. Also significant was how the students’ mental state affected their day-to-day experiences at school.

The relevance of mental health erosion became apparent to the researcher after the many instances of students reporting a constant stream of challenges. Stress and anxiety were being conveyed in the language they used and the stories they shared. While some students did not realize the deterioration they were experiencing, some students were cognizant of the toll of their mental state. They clearly described how these experiences were beginning to wear them down and erode their mental stamina. In a focus group session, M&M (a pseudonym), explained that she had been in the real estate market before and had been a victim of the economic recession. Before that, she had not planned on returning to school. Now, she was on cash assistance. She felt pressure to gain new job skills and to provide for her daughter. She stated: “I need a stable job; a comfortable, you know, like a salary so we can live; you can live normally, and we don’t have to beg to other people or governments here.”

In this one sentence, M&M outlined her need for stability, comfort, and for living like a “normal” person, without having to humble herself by pleading for her family’s survival. The pressure of her situation was revealed in the next statement: “Yes, and if
I’m just going to sit down doing nothing at the house and be stressed. You know, like I don’t want to become cuckoo.”

Welfare-to-Work policies limit educational opportunities. Yet, many TANF/CalWORKs students believe that education can improve their living situation. In the following statement, the student, whose pseudonym is Lovey, shared how advocating for her right to education was very difficult. She shared with the group that her constant struggle with state and local WTW agencies in regard to her education was a mental stressor.

Now I’m mentally tired because I fought and got my education at the same time, you know. I should have been given a job for going through that hell, pure hell, but you know it was just bitter sweet. I just did it because I wanted my education.

In the next example, a student, Lydia, discussed how her situation was “depressing.” This student’s commentary demonstrated how she viewed escaping her circumstances. The student made the connection that poverty was tied to low education. Low education was tied to low wages. Low wages were tied to depression. Hence, for her, getting an education is related not only to better wages but to improved personal satisfaction. Also for this student, education is related to moving on to better conditions and is related to having a better future. She believed that achieving her educational goals would even make her a better and more knowledgeable role model. In discussing why she decided to attend college, Lydia said the following:

I, also for the same reason [as the rest of the group], decided to come back to school . . . for personal satisfaction that I had completed something . . . and for my daughter . . . I want to be a role model for her. . . . And, also to have a better
future, to hopefully get a job that pays more than minimum wage at some point and just get out of the whole, you know, they call it poverty. And it is what it is, because it’s the wages, and the income is so low, and it’s just depressing. It’s pretty much for myself to move on.

While the same student admitted that math had also been a barrier to her academic success, she openly discussed the fact that, at times, there were other factors that drained her, and it took all her strength just to get out of bed. Lydia called it a major barrier.

As far as other barriers, personal problems that kind of just didn’t encourage me or motivate me to wake up in the morning and go to my 9 a.m. class. That was and is . . . [becomes emotional and stops]. It has been one of the major barriers. I just don’t have motivation to wake up in the morning. Like, I just wish I could just stay in bed, because I start thinking about everything that I have to do . . . there’s something inside of me saying, oh don’t do it because it’s very tough, and I mean it might not be worth it kind of thing.

At the base of Lydia’s commentary lies another hurdle for TANF/CalWORKs students. There permeated among several students a question about whether attending college was worth all the struggles with welfare agencies, child care issues, and college demands. This seemed to affect their willingness to continue in school. Another student, named Dina, said the following:

And I’m thinking, oh my God, I’m going to get all these loans! I’m not going to get my career! I’m going to be jobless! I mean it’s scary . . . I guess it’s my mentality—mentality and lack of motivation. And, maybe the lack of feeling that I’m completing something.
In a separate focus group, Amy shared the same feeling as the two previous students. She was growing weary of the obstacles she had to face.

I’m not going to give up but it has gotten to the point where my child is not getting younger, and in 4 years he is going to be graduating, and it has taken me how long to, you know, try and get where I’m going? I just, you know, I keep hitting obstacles and it’s like . . . oh my god!

For some students, even getting monetary assistance from TANF/CalWORKs can sometimes feel like it is not worth the trouble, as the assistance also creates a source of stress. Jasmine said: “Yeah the county, some people think you’re getting this ‘we’re helping you.’ To me, it’s sometimes more of a stress than a help. You know what I’m saying?”

There were several other factors contributing to mental health erosion. Concerns stemming from family issues, illness, violence, addictions, court proceedings, and childcare were just some of the concerns brought forth by TANF/CalWORKs students. The student, Elizabeth, stated how family concerns affected her schooling.

For me it was just pretty much what I said before about just family issues were really the things that were keeping me from [stops]. I didn’t do bad in classes but it’s a distraction when you have family issues going on. . . . It kind of keeps you from focusing.

Lisa commented on how a mental health situation at home with her son was interfering with her education. Lisa stated:
I have an older son that was having breakdowns like a few years ago, but praise God he grew out of that. That was interfering; just complications in family. Just a little mental health disturbance, behavior disturbance stuff was interfering.

Martha explains how her physical illness led to mental health illness. Both of her situations interfered with her attending school until as she says, she “got everything going” again:

I got pregnant and then I started suffering with uterus cancer and cervix cancer, and then I started getting really sick. I started feeling depression. My body started going down on me. I was in bed, started gaining weight, didn’t want to get up; I was seeing how my family was stressing on my money, and I went to a doctor and got some depression pills and got everything going.

Other types of physical disorders interfered with TANF/CalWORKs students’ success and corroded their mental health stamina. Elizabeth tells of her struggles with learning, while Carmen talks about her Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and how it interfered with her academics.

Elizabeth: I asked my mom if I had ever been tested. And she was like yeah, you have a learning disability, but your grandma, who had custody . . . was like “she’s fine.” So I went through school struggling my whole life.

Carmen: Interfered with me as far as academics? I guess I could say the same thing, but I mean I guess ultimately it comes down to me. I wasn’t focused. Now, I kind of know why. I have a [pause] I take medicine now for ADHD.
Carmen’s ADHD and other issues wore on her mental health. She talked openly about how the Employment Case Manager (ECM) recognized she needed help and referred her to participate in a county program. She describes the program below.

Carmen: The first ECM, he was pretty good; he noticed that I wanted to do stuff, but there was something else going on in me that he noticed enough that he sent me to Move Onward [a pseudonym], which was the best thing that could happen actually. You go there instead of doing any kind of work or any kind of work search and basically . . . people that have been abused, abused in every which way . . . or been homeless or issues, emotional whatever, . . . they help you out with that.

Carmen shared a positive experience with the WTW agencies. But Amy experienced hardships that deeply frustrated her. She shared with the focus group that she must report her childcare needs on an attendance form. Although she does not complain about having to report the attendance, she seems overwhelmed at the steps she must take to get that accomplished. Her frustration at various other challenges with the welfare agencies also became apparent.

Amy: They don’t send you the child attendance form with your QR 7 [an income reporting form]. So you have to go wait in line . . . you have to wait in this horrific line. . . . And every month, I would have to go down there twice on the bus, go take my hours back to her . . . they haven’t been very helpful . . .

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students also mentioned other stressors, such as worry for their own personal safety. But only one student made direct mention of domestic violence. However, three students did openly discuss the
anxiety around disclosing former unlawful behavior with county and college staff. They feared that prior convictions might hinder their career choice, hence their academic path.

Barbara: I’ve gone into a counseling appointment where they have shot down all my dreams. I wanted to be a nurse. I had felonies at the time. Oh she [the counselor] says, “Well, I don’t think it can happen. I’m pretty sure. I think you need to rethink what you really would like to do.”

Barbara shared how she felt judged and unsupported by the counselor regarding this matter.

**Theme 2: Perceptions of Support Systems**

The students were asked if they felt supported by the college, their families, employers, and the WTW agencies. To understand what frame of reference TANF/CalWORKs student recipients used to define the term “support,” the question was asked directly of them: “What does support mean to you?” Another student, Dana, outlined her understanding of the various types of support. It is interesting to note that Dana stated that support can be guidance from a person. Lisa states that support is crucial in helping a student meet completion goals. While she did not stipulate that support was generated or delivered by a person, her inference to being here “by herself” indicates that support is something that is given to her. It also appears that she feels that she does not have adequate support. As such, she must rely on herself as her own source of motivation: “Support, financial support, as well as support from a person, to say, you know, kind of guide you in the right direction or say, here are some options for you. . . . That’s how I feel support is.”
Lisa: Support is crucial; it is a crucial element to any of when you set a goal, because that’s what helps motivate you to want to go out and achieve things. So I don’t have a whole lot of support, because I’m out here by myself. But support is everything, because that’s what helps you to complete your course and your goals.

Overall, 16 of the 20 focus group participants offered a description of what support means. In the following section, students described specifically what they viewed as campus support. They also discussed what services they may have received or missed.

**Campus support and programs.** As part of the study, students were asked about the support they had received from the college. It was more than evident that the TANF/CalWORKs students felt that they had received lots of support from the campus programs. A great majority of students felt that the campus had sufficient support programs in place to help them along their educational experience. There were 35 mentions of positive experiences with the campus specific to student support issues. In particular, students named several special population programs as sources of support. Many students also made reference to specific programs such as CARE, CalWORKs, EOPS, DSPS, and the MESA Programs. Also, many students made reference to campus tutorial services.

Among the most commonly visited offices were the campus CalWORKs office, which supports students who are on public assistance with counseling, job placement, and advocacy. They also mentioned the CARE program which assists single parent students who are currently or have previously been recipients of public assistance. Also, several students made mention of the Disabled Students Program and Services (DSPS) office, which helps students with physical, mental, and learning challenges to access and
participate in mainstream academic programs. Students also had high praise for the campus Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS) program, which supports first generation, low income students, and the college Math Engineering Science Achievement (MESA) program that focuses on students interested in math, engineering, and science careers. The campus tutorial center received lots of recognition from the participants of the study, as well. Lisa explained how she maximized her opportunities for support:

Well, I got a lot of support from Harbor View College, and I can’t even complain because with the CARE program, the EOPS program, the Transfer Center and then CalWORKs, that program, so they helped me out in every way and I really exhausted every resource that Harbor View College had to offer.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students felt exceptionally supported when they participated in categorical programs. They also felt they benefitted by participating in several of them at the same time. Included in the following citations are a few specific examples of programs where students felt multiply supported or felt the support was stellar.

Campus CalWORKs. Maricel shared, “I feel like I got all the support I needed here from Harbor View College. I had support from CalWORKs [the campus program], which was like huge, you know. Huge support from CalWORKs and especially my counselor, you know.”

Dana refers to a foster youth program, the campus computer labs, and the English Writing Center as areas where she was able to access multiple sources of support, as well as participating in multiple categorical programs:
I got support from EOPS as checking my grades and keeping up with my academic progress. Being able to go to my CalWORKs [campus] office and say “hey, I’m having a problem” . . . also, there was a lady here that helped adopted people . . . and the writing center, as well.

**EOPS.** Lydia stated, “EOPS was a great, is a great help. I don’t think, I don’t think I could have, you know, been continuing in college without EOPS; it’s a huge help for me.”

**DSPS.** Dina: Well, as for me, the DSPS program support helped me with a tape recorder, that way I could tape record the lectures, such as biology, which is a big class, and you cannot always sit at the front. The tutorial services, I guess that’s a great service, a free service for any student! I believe that’s the only way I got through my math and my other classes because of the tutors there.

**MESA.** Elizabeth said, “I was in the MESA program, like math and science. They would give tutoring and things like that. Especially, when I would have like trigonometry. So it was helpful.”

**Tutorial services.** Terry stated, “They helped me through the whole math services, through writing essays because English 48 I was in the tutorial center almost 24-7, and I received all A’s. And that pushed me along to 101.”

When asked what campus support was not offered but needed, students described supportive services that were absent or hard to find on campus. Although not prevalent, there were still instances where some of the TANF/CalWORKs student recipients noted bureaucratic experiences that large institutions like colleges can develop. Carmen shared,
“I don’t feel like I really got much support from the school. I needed child care; I didn’t have that. So that was a pretty big challenge.”

Dina: At times they [the students] are not asking for much, you’re asking for information from them and they [the college staff] just block you . . . you’re running around like a headless chicken from office to office asking the same question, and then, they send you to other programs . . . but they never answer whatever they need to.

There were times when TANF/CalWORKs students felt shunned or ignored, like the example mentioned above. Students also stated that faculty sometimes had the same responses as other college staffers. Faculty, it seems, play a role in making TANF/CalWORKs students feel supported.

**Subtheme: Luck of the Draw—Caring Faculty.** In several instances, students commented that faculty support can also affect their academic success or failure. To a TANF/CalWORKs student, having faculty support meant that the faculty member was caring, approachable, and, in some way, accommodating.

In discussing what kind of accommodations were helpful, several students mentioned child care related modifications. Child care issues often affect TANF/CalWORKs student attendance, and students reported that they needed faculty members to give an opportunity for discussion about childcare issues and to be more accepting of their situations. One type of support was described as stretching attendance and tardiness policies. Another student mentioned that classroom faculty lent support by allowing the students to bring their children to the class.
M&M: And he [the instructor] said that he understands my situation, because when I spoke to him before I ask him, I said I have a daughter and it’s just me and her, and I don’t have anybody that can take her to school or pick her up; it’s just us. You know, just me alone.

Maricel: You know what, one of my teachers did let one of the students bring her daughter into class, and she would just sit there and draw, you know, she was so good.

Carmen: Yeah, you might be having a hard day today; you didn’t get to sleep all night last night, your kid’s driving you crazy, but you know you better go because they’re going to kick you out of class again. . . . I think teacher support is important, to have a teacher that is not such a stickler when it comes to, you’re literally one second late,”sorry you got to go.” A little more understanding support type of thing. So I would say that’s the kind of support that I would need. The students posited that flexibility with time in arriving late or having to leave a class early was important to them due to child care issues. They also noted policies regarding absences could be more flexible for the same reasons.

**Faculty: Positive feedback and fairness.** While TANF/CalWORKs students were looking for support, that does not mean they were expecting special treatment with their academics. Some faculty not only received accolades for their flexibility with punctuality but also for providing supplemental instruction and a sense of fairness. Carmen states that her instructor was strict, yet she felt him to be a fair instructor and was happy to be treated like everyone else. Both she and Maricel exemplify the opinions of
several TANF/CalWORKs students. They were happy to get additional academic support from their instructors.

Carmen: The reason I didn’t finish the class was one of the things I loved about him. He was the kind of person that you’re one second late, that’s it! . . . There was no favoritism or differences. But it was a big support that he answered all your questions. He definitely supported you if you needed any kind of extra help or anything.

Maricel: The teacher support, yeah. I did find pretty much that throughout my college that I didn’t really have teachers that were okay with being late or anything like that, but feedback on how you’re doing academically, it just gives you the confidence to keep trying and going forward with that, so that kind of support, . . . like feedback.

Interesting here is that the students did not receive any special treatment when it came to flexibility with attendance or tardiness policies. Yet, they praised the instructor for being approachable for supplemental information or instruction. But not all students had praise for their instructors. Some felt strongly about feeling distrusted by faculty.

**Faculty distrust.** On 18 occasions, the study participants reported negative experiences with classroom faculty. Most of the reports were regarding the issue of distrust. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students often felt that the instructor doubted their sincerity about the reasons for absenteeism or falling behind on course work.

M&M: One time . . . I was sitting with my friends. . . . They’re really trying to help me out because I was losing my home, you know. So like I can’t really
concentrate, so they were helping me out. . . . So she actually asked her [my friend] to move from my desk to a different desk.

Jasmine: Let’s say I’m really absent and you have a doctor’s note, you have some professors who will still, “Oh well!” Which . . . hinders somebody’s education and their learning.  I have my doctor’s note and some professors are like, “yeah, whatever, that doesn’t do anything for me.” Then it’s putting stress on you, putting stress on the work.

Jessica: I don’t have insurance, and maybe I don’t have the money to go to the doctor’s, so I don’t have a doctor’s note, but I was really, really, really sick.

No matter the case, weather a positive or negative experience, it is detectable that TANF/CalWORKs student feel that faculty hold a key role in their academic success.

**Subtheme: Family Support.** Students from the study were also asked about family support. Family support was very important to the students. It was the most emotionally charged interview question. For students who experienced positive family support, there were multiple means of support often received in combination of each other. Several students discussed receiving financial and transportation assistance, along with child care and time for studying. One student made a direct mental health connection, stating that her family support is what helped her to stay sane.

Lydia: I think the greatest support I have ever gotten is from my family. They kind of help me stay sane, . . . to keep on going. I know that they can take my daughter to child care. I know she’s fine. I know that I could study.

Barbara: If I needed transportation, money, it was there. When I needed the books it was there, when I needed a backup, it was there.
Support by mother. There were a noteworthy number of mentions of support being offered by the mothers of TANF/CalWORKs students. The common thread in the support received from the mother came in the form of child care. The impression the students gave when discussing their mothers and the childcare they offered was that of a sense of relief. This in turn provided for a sense of well-being.

Martha: My mom stopped working for me to take care of my kids. When I told her I wanted to go to college, and I was really going to do something with my life, she stopped working.

Amie: For me my mom, when I first started college, my mom, she gave me the most support where she wanted me to go to school, and she was willing to watch my son for me free of charge, and that was a really good thing.

However, family support was not available to all TANF/CalWORKs students. Some reported feeling like they had no family support at all. In fact, there were more mentions of the lack of support.

No family support. The discussion around family support was no easy task for the participants in the study. The underlying emotion created sadness for some students during this part of the interview session. Students who experienced sadness were given the option to stop or to move on to another question. Still, TANF/CalWORKs students braved the discussion and talked about what support they would have liked to have received from their families. In particular, they discussed the moral support they needed from their parents.

Terry: My mom didn’t back me up like that, you know, “Do what you want to do.”
Dina: I guess the support that I would have really liked to have gotten from my parents would be emotional support. Although they encouraged me to go to school . . . they would only say it. Like when I was a senior in high school . . . [stops]. I’m getting emotional.

Carmen: I needed them to support me going to school . . . and I’m like, man, I didn’t really realize that this actually bothered me. . . . They never pushed school, it’s go to work, go to work, and why are you wasting your time going to school?

Like faculty, parental support was important to TANF/CalWORKs students. The students who claimed they did not receive familial support did not focus on the material needs like child care or transportation as much as they did on the lack of emotional support.

**Theme 3: A Failing System: Welfare-to-Work**

By far, the largest set of instances of lack of support came when the TANF/CalWORKs students discussed their issues with the WTW agencies. In this category, students made mention of 53 strained contacts with the various welfare agencies. Commentary on topics like unnecessary reapplications, “paperwork, paperwork, paperwork,” “poor communication,” and “waiting 3 hours” to see a worker are representative of this grouping. In this grouping are also concerns about the efficacy of WTW rules and policies such as becoming “timed-out” of welfare. Barbara tells of the frustrating experiences she has had with the WTW agencies and on getting information from them:

I have gone through four different people on a phone call one time for something as simple [as] I just needed to know what does this letter mean? . . . Support wise,
there wasn’t really support. If you’ve missed something, they couldn’t tell you what you missed, and if you couldn’t figure it out, time to reapply.

**Welfare bureaucracy.** Large institutions like the WTW agencies almost always have bureaucratic challenges. In California, the WTW agencies are a network of the Department of Social Services, along with outsourced employment contractors and child care providers. With the many components of welfare reform, it is only fair to say that some TANF/CalWORKs recipients will not go unscathed when it comes to lost forms and missed benefits. However, what is rarely heard is the devastation caused by getting caught in the bureaucratic undertow. For TANF/CalWORKs students, it not only affects their living situation, it also has an impact on the other aspects of their lives including coming to school. As the Dina describes, “everything shuts down”: “I mean you have to turn in paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, and by one little thing or mistake that you turn in, I mean everything shuts down.”

Jessica: They had messed up on my aid . . . at that time . . . that was my rent money. . . . I went through this whole eviction thing . . . I haven’t been back to school since what, almost a year now? Just because of that little bump in the road.

**Instability and the stress of uncertainty.** Bureaucratic bumps in the road often produce unstable day-to-day living situations for TANF/CalWORKs students. Some of the most telling comments were made in trying to express the inability to provide basic needs for their families. The stress of not knowing if basic necessities would be met created angst for the students, especially since the changes to family income can happen by human error, be it that of the student, a worker, or a far off politician. In the next
citation, Dana expresses concern over cuts to the family budget after the state made a
decision to reduce the amount of aid granted to families. Jasmine is discussing how after
an error her TANF/CalWORKs case is finally reopened. However, now the monthly
grant is reduced.

Dana: So July 1st was when the budget was cut, so was I. I was receiving 694
dollars or 698 dollars, but as of July first I now receive 638, so what gets cut? My
laundry soap! Thank goodness I still have a lot of toilet paper, but the essentials
for the single parent still gets cut because I still got to supply diapers.

Jasmine: When they decide to reopen it [her CalWORKs case], they do not give
me the same amount. They lowered my amount! My rent, they don’t lower the
amount on my rent, they don’t lower the amount on my bills, so it’s very difficult
for me.

**Unmet basic needs (food, shelter).** Student participants were very open about
the real concerns of making ends meet. There were 17 mentions of concern for food and
shelter. This sample representation of student commentary below demonstrates that
TANF/CalWORKs students have chronic issues related to basic life needs and, as such,
have a high propensity for worry. The worry contributes to the mental health erosion. In
the commentary below, students shared how they felt alone and how securing food was a
stressor. One student summarized the TANF/CalWORKs students’ plight. M&M stated
that they can opt out of attending a class but cannot opt out of having to provide food:
“They [the TANF/CalWORKs students] can . . . be like, oh okay, I’m not coming to
school. But, we’re not gonna eat tonight? You know, they can’t do that.” Barbara
commented, “What worries me is I don’t have any money to pay for the rent, for the
house, for the gas, food.” Lovey stated, “I have to find the cheapest meals, the oranges and apples or soup, that’s always on my mind, the cheapest food possible. . . . That within itself is stressful, just trying to stay fed.”

**Unmet childcare needs.** Lack of child care resources were also a source of worry for TANF/CalWORKs students. There were 19 mentions of insufficient childcare from the focus group sessions. While students needed child care for work and school, there was evidence that the students believed that the college or the WTW agencies could have provided more assistance. In fact, one student mentioned that she opted to stay on public assistance and receive less cash aid, because the child support she would receive would not suffice to pay for childcare costs.

Dana: But still, I’m still getting less. I get less county help than I would if I got my child support, but I need child care; I can’t afford to pay the child care.

Dina: I just want to ask, . . . why does the county make it so difficult? . . . I don’t know why they make it so hard that you cannot get the childcare if you’re not getting cash aid.

**Social workers: Support and distrust.** Student commentaries on social worker support were mixed. There were 24 positive experiences regarding Employment Case Managers, child care providers, and other WTW agencies. Most of the comments described the contacts with Employment Case Managers, which are subcontracted by the county in the study area. Below are some comments that highlight the impact social workers have on TANF/CalWORKs students.
Patty: My ECM is amazing. She, I was telling her that school’s a little hard for me, and you know, she was looking at my grades and she’s like, maybe you have a learning disability and . . . I looked into it.

Dana: With my experience, everyone in the CalWORKs [county] was excellent. My ECM was one of the greatest ones, because I always got my amount for my books before the semester started, so I had one of those prized possession ECM’s like everyone would have wanted.

However, the number of negative experiences outnumbered the positive ones. Students reported having difficulty reaching their Employment Case Managers, getting wrong forms, and delays in getting supportive services. This, in turn, affected their ability to stay on cash aid and adversely affected their academic stability in school.

Amy: It is important too to have good ECM’s and eligibility technicians . . . you give them the information and they don’t make a note of it, or they don’t give you the proper form to fill out, and you do end up getting knocked off [of welfare].

Jasmine said, “It is harder to get in contact with them . . . you had to wait for your worker. So that slowed you down and made . . . it made it more stressful.” Barbara related, “But, yeah, in terms of support, there wasn’t very much. It was about paperwork, it was about procedure, and it was about getting it done, whatever you got to do.”

**Distrust of social worker.** Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students felt that some social workers doubted the numbers of hours reported for work, school attendance, and child care needs. Students used various descriptors like “iffy,” “lying,” and “didn’t believe” to describe their experiences. Dana describes her experiences with her childcare worker. Jessica describes how her worker asked her to
resubmit documents, even though she had turned in her documents earlier. Lovey described how she felt her worker doubted that she participated in both work and school activities and still asked her to do additional WTW activities.

Dana: Now, my child care worker . . . because I worked on call, it didn’t always give me enough hours. Even though all of my hours from school should have covered full-time child care. But she still was kind of iffy about my hours for my work part.

Jessica: My second one, . . . like everything, was a struggle. It was like, you know, even if they do have the paperwork in, they act like you’re lying about something, and they need another paperwork.

Lovey: All those other people, . . . they made me do the most ridiculous things because they didn’t believe that it [work and school] was possible.

Restrictive policies. At times TANF/CalWORKs students believed that restrictive WTW policies are what made their life difficult. The WTW policies particularly interfered with the time or the opportunity to attend school. Lydia felt that she was pressured to leave the welfare rolls. Carmen felt that her Employment Case Manager dismissed her desire for education and pushed the WTW agenda, while Lovey felt that some social workers simply did not care what she was trying to accomplish and tried to reroute her to taking any job.

Lydia: There’s a lot of rules that are there trying to—trying to get you out of the system and make you self-sufficient, and that’s the whole purpose. I understand it, but sometimes I get caught up in the “we need to get the numbers out, the people out.” And so they’ve—they have restricted me, they have told me they are
gonna restrict me with just 12 hours of school, and then I would have to get a job for the remaining 20 hours, and that makes it difficult.

Carmen: My ECM kind of just wasn’t supportive. . . . It was more, I don’t want to pay you to go to school. . . . She pushed more, you go to work, you go to work, you go to work, kind of thing. So that would have been nice, that support. Any time I would bring stuff up to her she would kind of, she wouldn’t, she would just kind of shut it down.

Lovey: It was bitter and sweet. Some case workers didn’t give a crap about me going to school, didn’t think it was possible and pushed me to get a McDonald’s job.

All combined, the effect of having to negotiate meals, rent, childcare, while also attempting to complete course work, class projects, and WTW requirements, can create emotional tsunami’s for TANF/CalWORKs student recipients. They often reported feeling alone and unable to rely on anyone but themselves. Feeling unsupported created feelings of solitude and isolation, which further contributed to the student’s mental health erosion.

**Subtheme: Feelings of Solitude and Isolation.** One of the areas that emotionally moved the students was when they discussed feeling unsupported. The common thread in their sentiment was feeling alone and being the sole responsible party for their family’s success. Terms like “just me alone,” “no one else,” and “stand alone” speak to the feelings of solitude and isolation the following three students experienced.

M&M: I said I have a daughter and it’s just me and her, and I don’t have anybody that can take her to school or pick her up; it’s just us. You know, just me alone.
Maricel: I just have, like it’s me and my son and that’s it. . . . And there’s no one else that’s gonna help me to succeed.

Lovey: If you really want to have a better life, you have to sometimes stand against people that make more money than you and think they’re smarter than you, and it’s not so, but you have to stand alone.

Another student summed it up for these students who felt that, for the most part, no one acknowledged their struggles. When it came to providing a safe environment, providing basic needs like food and shelter and even in providing models for success, it was apparent that these students felt like Roxy: “Everything was on my own. So, it was not easy. I think it was a difficult, difficult part.”

Single parents, like most TANF/CalWORKs students, do have many challenges. But some studies and students have stated that single parenting is not just a set of challenges but is a barrier unto itself.

**Barrier—single parenting.** How did the students describe single parenting as a barrier? Odd as it may seem, the two students below detailed the description for us.

While one could read the commentary below and believe that it is the children that are the barrier. It is more likely a case of chronic burdens. The constant negotiating between the child’s needs and the student parent’s needs is what is draining for student recipients.

Jasmine: Actually . . . like I said before, being a single parent, you’ll never understand that, that in itself is a barrier. . . . On the weekends, you have to be entertaining your child. . . cooking, cleaning, doing this and doing that. . . It’s crazy!
Dana: I think my barriers were that I was a single parent and I had to have everything on my plate, . . . everything that she had to do, plus everything that I had to do, and here I am trying to work, trying to go to school and having to spend every like free moment either studying or going to the park, so that she can go to the park and play, and I have my book, so the barrier was the other [absent] parent for me.

While the above student indicated that the absent parent was a barrier, more to the point was that TANF/CalWORKs students felt that there were not many options for lightening the load of responsibilities. It was not so much that the absent parent was not available to help, it was that no one else was either. Having to always be readily available seemed to be a major interference. Below, the TANF/CalWORKs students describe how being the only party responsible for child rearing has interfered with their school activities.

*Interfered with school—single parenting.* Elizabeth: Honestly, for me, it’s just being a mom in a way because you not only have to worry about getting your homework done, you have to get your kid’s homework done, and you have to get them back and forth to school, and sometimes there’s transportation issues, that type of thing. That’s the hardest part about, you know, staying in school.

Carmen: So I would say most of the time it was, well I can’t take them to school because they’re sick and I can’t take them into class, so I guess we’re just gonna stay home today, and that’s just how—that’s pretty much how it went.
Jessica: Things get to be too much, and I don’t go to class. . . . I have to go to work, but class, I need to go but I don’t “have to,” so that’s the first thing that goes.

**Subtheme: Perceptions of Her on Welfare—An Ugly Secret.** It was not surprising to learn that TANF/CalWORKs students felt stigmatized by being on public assistance. Students mentioned terms like being stigmatized as being “lazy” and being a “statistic” or a “screw up.” They also felt that it was “embarrassing,” to be on cash aid and when discussing the way they felt people perceived them. Ironically, there were no questions that asked the student about how they were perceived. In actuality, the responses below came from discussions around why the recipient decided to come to college. There were 21 mentions of how people perceived them.

Amie: Being on CalWORKs, I was kind of embarrassed in a way, because every time I would go to the store, when I show the EBT card, I kind of try to hide it, because I don’t want people to give me those looks, oh another single mom on welfare. And I just didn’t like the looks.

Dina: I’m not going out there and saying I’m a CalWORKs . . . because of the whole, the stigma, the whole way that people view CalWORKs. . . . If they don’t ask, I don’t tell.

**Perception of her by her children.** Nine of the 20 participants stated concern for the way their children perceived them or how they would like for their children to see them. Here there seemed to be an element of shame associated with being on public assistance. Martha wants her children to be proud of her and to be seen by them as
“good” and “dependable.” Lydia wants her children to be able to say that their mother has a college education on application forms and such.

Martha: Their mom is something in this world, you know, that is why I wanted to come to school so I could have a good dependable job, and my kids could be proud of me.

Lydia: I want my son to see that, they can write down “what education did your parents have,” and I want them to be “my mother has a college degree,” you know.

The TANF/CalWORKs students clearly understood what perceptions society had of them. They understood that at times they were viewed as unworthy persons. It appears they wanted to remedy that for the sake of their children.

**Perception of her as an unworthy person.** Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students worried about being considered an unworthy person. Student participants used language like “self-worth,” and “of people looking at you as less.” Even more abundant were terms that referred to being a “normal” person, being like “other people,” and “being smart.” While these conversations occurred around the question of why the student decided to return to school, the students felt that going to school was a way to gain acceptance back in to society and in a way be absolved of their wayward past.

Jessica: To get a sense of building or self-worth. You know being in school and feeling like you’re a member of society and feel better about yourself. That’s what I’m trying to say.
Lydia: For me, right now as where I stand in life, I see it as school is my shot at proving to myself that I can do something and that I’m capable of completing something that is in a way admirable to others and to myself.

Lovey: I wanted to attend it [school] because I wanted to be smart. I just wanted to be a smart person and to have a better life, or I would say the whole hype, yeah I want a better life for me and . . . I just wanted to be like the other people, the smart people, do things the way society says you’re supposed to do things, get a job and go to school, you know, things like that, buy a house.

As put by one student, there was no reason why life complications should mean that they cannot “just be part of society, be part of what they call the American way of life.” The students wanted a shot at proving themselves and to refute the judgment cast on them for being poor and in need of public assistance.

*Feelings of fear.* Throughout the discussions, the topic of fear arose in various areas. Students commented on the initial fear of coming to college but then also revealed that they had other fears such as fitting in, communicating, and second language barriers. They also mentioned being fearful of having to fight against restrictive policies for the opportunity to attend, and of not being able to do college level work. They feared the fallout of past mistakes, of incurring debt, and of having made the right decision. Odd as it may seem, there was fear of success because then the expectation of them would be higher. There were also a few mentions of being afraid of leaving cash assistance or what would happen once they were no longer eligible.
Roxy: I was nervous, nervous, shaking. I didn’t know how to react and the barrier that I had at that time, which I still have a little bit, my English. I was really shy. I was always sitting in the back.

Dina: It’s just so difficult to see that I have been able to accomplish or to even get a good grade, . . . it’s like your expectations are so low that when you see a good grade you’re like, oh I could do it! But for me, it’s frightening. I’m scared of even finishing a class because I kind of think I can’t do it, it’s too hard for me.

Lydia: And now that I’m kind of more mature and that I have my objectives, . . . I really, really want to finish school, I just regret all of the mistakes that I’ve done and I feel like they haunt me.

The feelings of fear came with some feelings of guilt as well. Some of the students shared they felt guilty for having made some poor decisions in the past and for ending up on welfare. They also felt like they may have short-changed their children.

**Feelings of guilt.** Guilty feelings with regard to leaving their children for many long hours, being inattentive, and not being readily available to their children also arose in conversations. The students felt bad about having to sacrifice one-on-one time with their children, due to work or school demands.

Emily: Yeah, I feel badly [sic] all the time because I feel like I sort of rob my kids of their childhood. . . . I’m the guardian, the one 100% legal guardian, and I’m not there 75% of the time. . . . I go to work in the morning . . . I go to school at night so . . . Monday through Friday I’m never home. I go home and they’re sleeping and I just drop them off at the bus in the morning, and I see them the next morning. That’s the way it is. So I do feel guilty.
Carmen: You go to school because you want to better yourself. . . . but now you’re leaving your kids somewhere else while you’re bettering yourself, and you’re not spending that time with your child, and others outside might even tell you, hey you’re leaving your kid over here so you can go to school. But you know that you’re doing it for yourself and your kid because you want something better for them. And it’s like a catch 22.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students do seem caught as Carmen said, in “a catch 22” in that if they are stay at home mothers they are seen as lazy and dependent on the system. But if they work and go to school they are seen as neglectful parents. Either way, they are viewed as selfish women who are avoiding responsibility.

**Lack of support.** While a great number stated that the college campus provided a good support network, half of the 20 students still felt that they lacked support. In reviewing the data, more students said they needed moral or emotional support. And, while some student felt that their families provided support, just as many wished for more emotional support (as opposed to material support) from their parents. Also, while not directly stipulated, student commentary indicated that the shortage of support was from outside the campus community. Lovey stated, “I never got any support for—except for some from SIFE [a campus program] and my family, I can tell you my school and my family because they are the only things that have gotten me through this world.” Dina related, “I needed more morally [sic] support, emotional support, maybe knowing that they were there. . . . So I guess that’s what I would have really love to have from them, from my parents, that morally [sic] and emotionally support.”
Feeling overburdened and not feeling supported can certainly lead to mental health erosion. One can see why support would be so important to this student population. Yet, this researcher is left thinking that if support was an academic barrier, and the lack of support was felt mostly from the parents and the outer community, how did TANF/CalWORKs students fill the emotional gap? Moreover, how did they apply their academic barriers?

**Research Question 2**

The second research question sought to learn what strategies TANF/CalWORKs students used to cope with their academic barriers. In the findings, below the study participants gave insight into their survival skills. First, they shared that they needed support to survive. Second, they learned to minimize threats to their survival by managing the damage a barrier could create. But what did they mean by support? How did they manage the threats?

**Theme 4: Finding Support**

As part of the interview questions, students were asked to describe what support meant to them. Interestingly, when the students discussed feeling supported, they described interactions with groups or individuals. Terms like “someone,” “anyone,” “talk to,” and “teach me” indicated that being or feeling supported meant a human interaction. Also, lacking support was linked to a missed opportunity to make a direct connection with someone. Maricel openly sought out one-on-one interaction with a social service provider, while Lovey feels that what has hindered her academic success in math has been a lack of dedicated time with a tutor.
Maricel: Like I know now they have the access line where you can call them, and they also have email which I found is actually more efficient than calling, but the best thing to do with them is just to show, just to go stand in line at the office and talk to someone at the window.

Lovey: Yeah, it would be learning how to actually study . . . being able to have anyone to help me or tutor me, having anyone to give me that time, to teach me what it’s like, to sit down and type or study for hours. I don’t know what that’s like.

Even though the first statement above says that email works more efficiently, she claimed that the best thing to do was to show up and talk to someone. There were 51 occasions of students describing support as time spent with people. This interaction seemed to provide a sense of normalcy for TANF/CalWORKs students. Besides providing a sense of normalcy, human interaction allowed for personal encouragement, something not provided by email or telephone systems. For these students then, support meant people.

Elizabeth: But usually when you work one on one with someone, they look over your work and they see you’re just a normal person like them, you’re just going through a situation, and you’re struggling. . . . So just having interaction like that pushed me to do more.

Roxy: Angel was the one who was helping me all the time, like you can do it don’t worry about it, you’re gonna be fine, you can make it—all that positive support.
Efficiency was important and necessary for this population, but it appears not to be as important as meeting with a worker. It appears that technological advancements such as communicating by email or telephone systems do not necessarily provide a sense of security. Rather, personal human interaction does. It also seemed to add to a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging also seemed relevant to the students’ success.

Jasmine: My mom always tells me it’s like a village; you have got to have a village. Your village starts with people who surround you, who are positive, who can help you move on to the next level, so that’s what support is.

Dina: If you were able to get into the smaller groups, maybe EOPS or MESA or CalWORKs, it’s more on an individual basis, and it’s more personal for the counselor, as well as the individual. And they kind of walk you and kind of hold you by the hand and walk you through whatever classes you need to take.

**Theme 5: Taking Back Control**

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students have had to find strategies to survive both the mental health erosion and to overcome their barriers. Some of the study participants have learned to evaluate time needed for tasks, to anticipate what may go wrong with their public assistance, and other areas of their lives that may be threatened. Amazingly, some students have learned to plan for certain obstacles and/or to minimize the impact of them. In essence they have learned to manage the damage.

Carmen: I didn’t realize a lot of the things that I would fail. . . . I learned they could have been prevented . . . it really opened up my eyes to about being prepared for the earthquake that you didn’t know was gonna happen. So you
better have your books with you kind of thing, and ultimately it really does come down to you.

Maricel: Like you said, I just strive one 100% of the time to be 20 minutes early to class or half an hour early, you know, so I leave like extra room, you know, time to show up early. I try, you know, I study like as soon as I get out of class I study before I go home and then before class the next day like because they say that helps with your memory and—like I just I haven’t had barriers. . . . it has been so good up until now, so it’s like I have 6 more months until I graduate.

**Acceptance/tolerance.** Some of the study participants have learned to accept chaotic situations and have built a tolerance for it. Not only do they plan for what may go wrong with their public assistance, but they accept their part in preventing threats to their survival. Terry discussed the commitment necessary to succeed in school:

> It’s not like work. You’re not gonna come home and kick off your shoes and take a bath and do nothing. When you come home, you’re gonna have to study and do your homework. If you do that, you’ll succeed.

Maricel talks about trying to prepare for her worst case scenario and the steps she has taken to create support for herself. She is a nursing student with a history of prior drug use. This poses a threat to her career choice, since she will need to be around medications, and employers may have concerns regarding her access to them.

> I had several misdemeanors that have been dismissed and now expunged. . . . I can go and finish and get my bachelor’s degree in nursing and potentially not be allowed to become a nurse. So that’s something that I have been preparing for and you know, so I have been trying to do everything right the whole way through
including the externship, letters of recommendations from all my teachers, from all my family, friends, whoever I can get letters of support from, the church, and everything.

**Adaptive learning.** Some TANF/CalWORKs students have gained adaptive learning skills. They have learned to evaluate their situations, change the way they perform certain functions and evaluate their outcomes.

Dana: I would ask other students what did they think of that professor, because my daughter was a very emotional child, and she would wet herself in elementary school. . . . I would get the call during class like I need a change of clothes. . . . Do I sit in class or do I drive 15 miles home, 20 miles to her school, and then come back to class to finish my last class. . . . I just learned how to pick professors.

They have also worked to become self-reliant. The students below have decided that they must be change agents. They assume responsibility for their experiences, or at least those that they might have some control over.

Lydia: I have come to the conclusion . . . that I can’t rely on them [the Employment Case Managers] a hundred percent. That I can’t, even if I have my hours [WTW hours] way before, even if I, if I submit my book request ahead of time, then do everything that I have to do, I know at the beginning of the semester I have to save up for my books, just in case they don’t have my [book] money.

Carmen: I kind of tweak things here and there. When you notice that’s just not working, you have do something better.

Lydia touched on another strategy employed by some TANF/CalWORKs students. Lydia stated that she saw the “finish line so far away,” yet was able maintain
her focus. She stated that she learned to adjust to her current situation despite her instability. She did not let her instability discourage her from her intended goal. She employed delayed gratification. She stated, “So part of staying focused is that, that I see the finish line so far away. So it’s kind of adapting . . . adapting to the coursework, because with me it’s so unstable. Everything’s so unstable.”

**Delayed gratification.** Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students made 11 references to learning to wait for a forthcoming pay off. Interestingly, a distraction for the students seemed to be the needs of their children. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students learned to negotiate their concerns and stay on task by believing that their current sacrifice was actually an investment for their family’s future benefit. M&M explains to another student how she discusses the delayed gratification to her daughter and encourages another student to do the same. Dina and Jasmine hope that their children will understand that the sacrifices they make now will pay off later.

M&M: With me I’m kind of like pretty strong because I explain it to her. I say I’m doing this for you, for us. You have to explain to your son too, that . . . whatever you’re doing is for both of you, for a good future.

Dina: I don’t want it to become a grudge towards me on their part but it’s something in the long run they will understand, and it’s gonna pay off.

Jasmine: I think about all the time I see how my son has this little behavior thing, but I keep telling myself you know it’s gonna benefit us in the long run. It’s such a struggle being a single parent, going to school, that’s the hardest part, but I’m proud of myself.
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students were very encouraging when they were asked what kind of recommendation they would offer to future TANF/CalWORKs students. The students below were quick to offer up more learned strategies. The recommended strategies were to build a support system and to find resources.

**Finding resources and getting support.** The participants in the study discussed many types of support systems. While the students used various combinations of them, the message for other TANF/CalWORKs students was clear. To do well in school, they must find resources and create a support system for themselves.

Amy: Just have the support system.

Maricel: Yeah, find a support system.

Dana: I agree with the resources. It can be any resource, me sitting next to you, . . . just say it out loud and say, I need somewhere to help me get laundry soap. . . .

So you just got to ask the questions, like “does anyone know who gives out gas cards?” . . . it doesn’t matter how small you think your question is. . . . if you ask for the help someone there is gonna say go ask this person or “hold on. Let me call her and ask if she knows anyone who’s giving out shoe vouchers or any type of resource.” If you don’t ask you don’t get help.

**Get college support.** Some college support systems received accolades from TANF/CalWORKs students for providing support. The participants in the study suggested that future TANF/CalWORKs students need to be well informed about the support the college has to offer. But they also recommended that they be proactive in searching out these resources.
Dina: I think to be well informed, because there is a lot to know, a lot to find out. There are lots of programs, but you have to go and find them. And there are lots of majors, but you have to figure out which they are, and you have to figure out which of those you like. So, using the resources I think is important.

Jasmine: Resources, for us poor people they have so many things, they have CARE, they have EOPS, they have CalWORKs . . . or they have the tutorial learning center. Some people just don’t use those resources. All those resources! All they have in the L building, in the academic success center, . . . those are your resources. And if you don’t know, you should ask. Some people, they don’t do that, they don’t ask.

A few students identified that there were untapped resources like campus clubs that TANF/CalWORKs students do not consider as a resource, or feel they cannot participate in because of work or family demands.

Lydia: Programs that really help a lot and that a lot of students don’t take advantage of are the student activities and . . . the clubs . . . sometimes we don’t consider them . . . we don’t think we have the time to be involved in a club or a student activity. But I think those are essential . . . because they help you kind of create kind of a little community within the huge college. They help you stay on track and kind of feel like you’re part of the school.

Dina stated, “There’s a lot of clubs, there’s a lot of organizations in the school that the Dina’s [meaning students like her] . . . need to be aware of.”
Summary

The findings of this study were complex, in that they were very interrelated. Much like a stack of standing dominoes, one unexpected move can have devastating effects and cause the TANF/CalWORKs student’s chances for academic success to come tumbling down. Mental health erosion was a constant challenge to TANF/CalWORKs students, as were the difficulties they experienced with WTW agencies. However, the findings have also led to the discovery of significant actions that can strengthen the possibilities for their academic success.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students found support and encouragement in relationships with people on their campus, as well as with family and WTW employees. It seems the difference in feeling supported is in developing interpersonal relationships with family, faculty, and social workers as individuals and more as people, rather than as a process. They learned to become active and visible on campus and with their workers. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students also developed strategies to surviving the many obstacles they faced, such as preventing crisis and anticipating some common pitfalls. Through this process, they became “college material” and created a college identity for themselves. In the following chapter, the researcher will discuss how the findings relate to known literature and what suggestions there are for future research.
CHAPTER 5—FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For this study, the researcher hoped to unearth the challenges that keep single parent female, TANF/CalWORKs students from attaining course, program or degree completion. Several governmental reports (ACE, 2009; Buchmann, 2009; California Tomorrow, 2010; CCCCO, 2010; ED, 2005, 2006) and journal articles (Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Jacobs & King, 2002; Peter & Horn, 2005) acknowledge that there are more women enrolled in postsecondary education, but the number of single parent women, especially women of color, are dropping in number (Christopher, 2003; Covington & Spriggs, 2004; Martinson & Strawn, 2003; Price, 2005).

The lack of educational attainment of female single parent TANF/CalWorks students becomes a grave area of concern when one considers that 84% of TANF/CalWORKs recipients are women and 78% are women of color. This is especially worrisome in that, with the exception of low income women, women now outnumber men in college enrollment.

As far back as the year 2000, the national college enrollment for women in undergraduate programs was 56%, compared to 46% for men (ED, 2005). Additionally, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2007 reported that community college enrollment is 61% female. Nonetheless, ethnically diverse women were reported to have only slightly higher growth in enrollment to postsecondary education (Peter & Horn, 2005). Additionally, in a study regarding completion of schooling by age, life events, and social background, welfare recipients of color were less likely to enroll in postsecondary education than White recipients after controlling for age, marital, and parental status (Jacobs & King, 2002).
As such, this research was born out of concern for the low and seemingly decreasing number of single parent, low income women in postsecondary education. The purpose of this study was to help practitioners, policymakers, and educators understand the plight of TANF/CalWORKs students as they try to reach self-sufficiency through education. Additionally, it is the researcher’s hope that the study will encourage us all to challenge our preconceptions of women and poverty, as well as the stigma associated with TANF recipients. Institutions, organizations, and systems must examine their roles in marginalizing this student population. If not addressed, the barriers that TANF/CalWORKs students face will persist, and the road to self-sufficiency will remain needlessly arduous.

With that in mind, this study examined the experiences of single parent female TANF/CalWORKs recipient students in community college. Because of the national and California economic crisis, students were recruited from years prior to the crisis to reduce the impact of the economy on the study. The participant pool included students from academic years 2007, 2008, and the fall of 2009. The study followed a grounded theory model so that theories would evolve from the data. There were two research questions that led the study.

1. What barriers to academic success do single parent, female TANF/CalWORKs students experience in community college?

2. What strategies do female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students use to contend with the barriers?

The study, conducted at Harbor View Community College (HVCC, a pseudonym), included eight focus group meetings and three one-on-one interviews as a
means of gathering data. The topics that emerged through the focus group and interview research described the experiences and perceptions of the TANF/CalWORKs students who participated in the campus CalWORKs program in the previously mentioned years. The experiences and perceptions the students shared were analyzed and presented as findings in Chapter 4.

The findings of this study were then examined in the context of the literature presented in Chapter 2. The literature review included four major sections: (a) college enrollment, (b) postsecondary attainment, (c) demographics of TANF/CalWORKs students, including a look at student success theories, and (d) theoretical frameworks. The last area (d) contained three theoretical frames that could apply to this study: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stephanie, 2001; Jain, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano et al., 2000), and Feminist Theory (Bechtold, 2008; Carbonaro et al., 2008; Gilligan, 1982; Peter & Horn, 2005) as lenses through which one might view the complex lives of TANF/CalWORKs students.

From the above mentioned analysis, five major themes emerged. As a reminder, the themes are: Mental Health Erosion, Perceptions of Support, A Failing System—Welfare-to-Work (WTW), Finding Support, and Taking Back Control. Themes from the analysis and the literature were then interpreted and presented as possible contributors to academic barriers. The results were also analyzed from the perspectives of the aforementioned conceptual frameworks. Readers will find the themes and the theoretical frameworks woven in to the subsequent discussion. This chapter will also include a brief
discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for practice (as suggested by the findings), and suggestions for future studies.

**Findings and Interpretation of Results**

When reviewing the first research question, “What barriers to academic success do female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students experience in community college,” the data collected in this study uncovered what these students believed was interfering with their educational endeavors. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students stated that they were in a constant state of apprehension and felt largely unsupported in their educational endeavors. Furthermore, student comments indicated that they felt that the system that was supposed to lead them to self-sufficiency often impeded their efforts and triggered feelings of solitude, isolation, and shame. The findings that emerged from the student interviews suggest that TANF/CalWORKs students suffered from a barrage of concerns that caused them to feel “stressed out,” “depressed,” and defeated. These findings are consistent with previous studies that showed that long-term welfare recipients (more than 3 years) suffered from depression and generalized anxiety disorder (M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004).

At the forefront of the students’ concerns was their children’s and their own survival, as basic as food and shelter. The students constantly worried that a missed phone call from a social worker or agency had the potential to stop their means of transportation and create hunger and homelessness. These single parent women understood the hardships they and their families might have to endure if they could not secure social worker support. Their very real vulnerability to such situations generated an
The angst that for some students created an emotional challenge to “just show up” to college every day.

The findings here are consistent with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs posed in the theoretical framework found in Chapter 2. Maslow (1943) stated that without the ability to acquire sufficient basic needs, the individual’s motivation to fulfill higher needs becomes secondary. Such is the experience of TANF/CalWORKs students as their energies are focused upon more immediate life-sustaining activities.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students mentioned other concerns that created anxiety for them. They shared that family issues such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol addictions, along with physical and learning disabilities, played a role in creating mental stressors for them. Family concerns, health, domestic violence, and learning disabilities were also findings in the study completed by M. J. Taylor and Barusch (2004) when they studied TANF recipients and employment barriers. The findings were also consistent with a study by Karen Gerdes (1997), in which she stated that “previous abuse and victimization” may mirror “innate physiological and psychological responses to trauma seen in victims of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)” (p. 361). Additionally, a study completed by Rachel Kimerling and Nikki Baumrind (2004) stated that women who had experienced intimate partner violence were less likely to have completed high school or college.

The participants also discussed their perceptions of support. They talked openly about their experiences with caring family and the perceptions of maternal, social worker, campus programs, and faculty support. They were descriptive when they felt unsupported by these same groups.
Six students specifically named their mother as a key support person in their lives. However, when describing faculty support they spoke in general terms such as “my instructors,” “my teachers,” or “my professors.” Students were slightly more specific when speaking of campus support. In this area, the students named a certain counselor (i.e., Ms. Martinez), a specific staff member, or a particular program like EOPS.

When the students spoke of the types of support, they discussed academic support from faculty and supplemental instruction like tutoring or proofreading from family. They spoke of tangible support (i.e., transportation, childcare, and financial assistance) from the WTW agencies and a type of reserve support from their families for unexpected situations, such as helping out when they were short on gas money or when they needed back up childcare. Few students spoke of receiving emotional support from WTW staff or from family, and three students became saddened when discussing the emotional support they would like to have received from their parents. Interestingly, students perceived the most emotional support coming from the campus student services programs and the faculty, often describing the encouragement they received as support that got them through a course or a program of study.

Student perceptions of support received were also studied by Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) and Olney and Brockelman (2005). When it came to the student’s perceptions of family support, the findings of this study were consistent with those of Miller et al. (2005) in that family, and mothers in particular (Olney & Brockelman, 2005), play a significant role in supporting the student. One significant difference from the previous studies was that TANF/CalWORKs students desired more emotional support.
Olney and Brockelman’s (2005) study also looked at the self-concept of students with visible and invisible disabilities. Being a TANF/CalWORKs student is in some way an experience that can be likened to that of a person with invisible disabilities. The experience of TANF/CalWORKs students was similar to the students with invisible disabilities in that in order to receive additional support the student would need to self-disclose. Also similar was the perception of shame associated with their personal circumstances. Like persons with disabilities, TANF/CalWORKs students can be viewed as noncontributing members of society and being a drain on resources. The experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students support the Olney and Brockelman study given that the students’ need for support would have to be weighed against the cost of any personal ramifications.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students appreciated that their needs as a parenting student were different from other students and named single parenting in itself as a barrier to their academic success. Their self-assessment was in line with the studies by Monica Bok (2004) and a plethora of other studies. Bok found that family demands of welfare recipient students often conflicted with school demands, particularly if they had young children (Carbonaro et al., 2008; Cheng, 2007; Christopher, 2003; Gemelli, 2008; Jacobs & King, 2002; McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; M. J. Taylor & Barusch, 2004; Wood et al., 2008). The students also recognized that their situations and student experiences were vastly different than non-TANF/CalWORKs students. At a time when most college students were finding their independence, learning about themselves and dreaming of their future, TANF/CalWORKs students were mortified by anyone learning of their dependence on programs. They were not dreaming of their...
future, as much as they were bound by harsh realities of the day. Their vulnerability led to shame for attempting college, while the media reported the “drain” that social service recipients placed on the national economy. As such, social pressure to find employment and fear of judgment prompted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” survival strategy for this student population. Yet, this protective strategy also led TANF/CalWORKs students to feelings of solitude and isolation. Here, the experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students support the Olney and Brockelman (2005) study in that, like the students with hidden disabilities, TANF/CalWORKs students did not feel a sense of “community to which they belonged” (p. 89) because of the risks associated with self-disclosure.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students also communicated that their needs could easily be ignored by institutions, faculty, and family. One student tied it all together succinctly by saying that it was easy for her instructor to “assume” that she did not need any support. The students also collectively identified frustrations with county systems as well, stating that the county was impervious to their needs. They chronicled many accounts of the difficulties in trying to reach a worker by phone or in person. The students particularly disliked the way the county office of social services required them to contact the office through an “access” phone center. They also had many complaints about how the local social services office used a folder “bank” system in which no one social worker was responsible for any particular case.

Many students described their experiences with the social work agencies more like a course of action or as a procedure. One survey participant stated it this way: “one little thing or mistake that you turn in, I mean everything shuts down.” It appeared to students that the way in which the social services agencies received and input reporting
forms and other documentation was very systematic. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students felt that their fates lie in what some workers considered a simple processed batch of paperwork. That made the students fear for their livelihood.

Students also perceived that what was absent from their interactions with social workers was the human caring for the individuals behind the case file. “Something that they needed, needed to be done like I said, yesterday.” “If you need something, it could wait” said one student. Another student described her experience with a systems error. “When they messed up on my aid, there goes my rent money. I went through this whole eviction thing, basically because of the [mistake in] aid.”

Situations like the two described above, led TANF/CalWORKs student recipients to feel stripped of their humanity and as if they were only a case number. The students perceived it as a disregard for their survival. Unfortunately, the study findings are consistent with prior studies which identify some social work agencies as engaging in demeaning behavior and restricting supportive service towards TANF participants (Christopher, 2005; McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; Ridzi, 2004).

Overall, the student descriptions of their experiences with the WTW agencies led the researcher to characterize such actions as insensitive. Bureaucratic insensitivity supports the ideal that institutions and programs do not want to know about the lives of TANF/CalWORKs recipients, much less how they are faring as students. In effect, bureaucratic insensitivity allows systems to adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell” strategy of their own. This creates an environmental block for TANF/CalWORKs students in receiving much needed support and, as a result, can restrict educational opportunities (Jones-DeWeever, 2005; Shaw, 2004). In review, TANF/CalWORKs students reported some
supportive interactions with social workers but more unsupportive experiences, particularly when discussing the services at WTW agencies.

Yet, at the same time, TANF/CalWORKs student were protecting themselves from social judgments and did not share with many that they may have needed support. Recall that they employed a “don’t ask, don’t tell” strategy. While the “don’t ask, don’t tell” strategy gave TANF/CalWORKs students relief from social pressures, it was very detrimental. The self-preserving strategy may have added to mental health erosion by keeping them from receiving necessary support in a system that is not structured for a successful exit. Dana stated it quite succinctly:

If you just say it out loud and say, I need . . . help . . . people are only here to help if you ask, they don’t know what you’re thinking. So you just got to ask the questions. . . . They teach you the only stupid question is the one not asked . . . just ask for the help. If you don’t ask, you don’t get help.

It is not difficult to see now how the three themes in research question one (Mental Health Erosion, Perceptions of Support Systems, and A Failing System—Welfare-to-Work) all tie into barriers that may be impeding the student’s road towards course, program, or degree completion.

In research question 1, student responses illustrated the mental state of TANF/CalWORKs students and how students perceived support. Students also told of sometimes foregoing supportive services due to the shame and stigma associated with welfare recipients. Yet, for the most part TANF/CalWORKs students spoke highly of their experiences and support at the college. What was making this experience so different? What was happening at the college?
The answer was found in exploring research question 2, “What coping mechanisms do female, single parent TANF/CalWORKs students use to contend with the barriers?” The participants shared with the researcher what they needed to survive and how they went about getting it. The students learned to work within the large educational system. Evidence emerged that successful student participants were proactively going out and searching for assistance from various campus programs and instructors. In essence, they had come to terms with having to divulge their personal situations and learned to go out and obtain additional support. This was not only to maximize their college benefits but also to sustain themselves emotionally.

Students told how they searched for an appropriate professor, the right course, or the right counselor. They spoke to other students about faculty teaching styles, level of coursework, and flexibility with attendance policies. Two students mentioned using a web tool to find out even more specific details about an instructor whose course they were considering.

Students also felt that, for the most part, classroom faculty were helpful and willing to provide support services, such as additional time explaining an assignment or adjusting a due date for papers or projects. However, six of the students were also sure to stipulate that a supportive faculty member did not mean being an easy faculty member. The students wanted to differentiate that getting help from an instructor was not the same as getting an effortless pass for the class. In fact, none of the students protested about the difficulty of a particular course nor named an instructor as particularly difficult. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students did not mind having an
instructor challenge them academically. Several students said they enjoyed getting feedback from classroom faculty, even if the feedback was less than pleasing.

Faculty feedback was very important to TANF/CalWORKs students, since the notion of capability was present and on their minds. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students faced their own thoughts and fears about being a competent college student. Regrettably, these findings were in line with the findings of other researchers who claimed that a student’s own educational expectations can be a factor in their attainment (Astin, 1977; Museus et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For some TANF/CalWORKs students, hearing “you could have done better than this” was actually interpreted as a complementary statement as the professor recognized that they had academic potential. Odd as it may seem, it appeared that TANF/CalWORKs students received a type of confirmation from the instructor’s feedback. Dina stated it very succinctly: “It’s scary to know that you’re not that dumb person that you were believed to be or I don’t know. It’s scary to see that you have the capacity of actually doing college work.”

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students also spoke of approaching financial aid personnel and took initiative in asking for help understanding their student financial aid awards and the campus work-study program. They used campus programs such as EOPS for counseling support, DSPS for classroom accommodations, and also learned about certificate, transfer, and graduation requirements by maximizing their use of multiple counseling and campus programs. They sought information and connected with key personnel on campus. For instance, several TANF/CalWORKs students made use of the campus CalWORKs office for information on their
rights and responsibilities as WTW participants. Overall, a good majority of students spoke with fondness about a relationship with an instructor, program, or staff member who helped weather the college environment.

However, the study also revealed another student undertaking outside of the college that helped them contend with barriers. They attempted to maximize the support they received from the social service agencies, as well. As Barbara shared her own experience, she also recommended her approach to future students:

I would ask for whatever resources they [social services] have available in all areas that they cover, child care, cash aid, food, clothing, transportation. . . . So as students come in, definitely take advantage of every program that they [social services] have because it is possible to do that. And find out what else they have going on.

Much like when they selected a particular instructor or course to anticipate personal situations, the students learned to anticipate what might go wrong, for example, with the social services agencies. The students learned to work within the large social services system. As such, they learned to minimize or avoid an impact upon their well-being. They told of collecting date and time stamped receipts for forms they had turned in to the welfare office. They also kept extra copies of the forms they had submitted. Most students learned how to use technology in their favor to reach counselors, social workers, and childcare providers by fax and email. When needed, they insisted on being seen in person and conducted an individual sit-in at the various offices. In effect, they had learned to be preemptive.
This last point led the researcher to understand a very key point in this study. These proactive and preemptive approaches indicated that the TANF/CalWORKs students had learned to become self-advocates. While the students might still be in dire circumstances, they felt like they had taken back some control of their situations. In an act of survival, the students’ strategy was to embark on a counter offensive charge.

This counter-offensive strategy served to offset the barriers that interfered with their academics. Equally important, the strategy also helped them to offset some of the social stigmas that were attached to them as WTW students. In doing so, the students became more empowered. When asked why she decided to come to college, Jessica stated: “To get a sense of building or self-worth. You know, being in school and feeling like you’re a member of society and feel better about yourself—that’s what I’m trying to say.”

The strategy had a third function. It helped TANF/CalWORKs students to cultivate a new part of them. The students worked on forming a new college identity. Remember that TANF/CalWORKs students worried about basic needs like food, shelter, and safety. College attendance, then, may have taken a back seat to daily survival. Also recall that they felt a lack of support for their academic endeavors by some social workers and family members. That, in turn, may have discouraged TANF/CalWORKs students from believing that they could attempt college. Furthermore, restrictive WTW policies that confined the types and duration of educational opportunities may have limited access to childcare, transportation assistance, and ancillary services, such as books. These policies may have made it so that a TANF/CalWORKs student might not have been able
to be physically present on campus. This combination of barriers had the potential of making single parenting a larger impediment to attending and completing college.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students also had fears of being seen as incompetent and felt snubbed by society. As such, the student participants may have distanced themselves from college faculty, staff, and programs so as not to reveal their “ugly” secret of receiving public assistance. This, in turn, may have led to feelings of solitude and isolation. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students may have become intimidated and had difficulties integrating into the campus environment and believing they were college material. As such, forming a college identity has been problematic for this student population.

Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory in Chapter 2 discussed forming a college identity though seven vectors of development. The findings of this study support Chickering and Reisser’s theory in that TANF/CalWORKs students have very similar experiences to those of their student participants. One of the points Chickering and Reisser proposed was that, in developing a college identity, an individual grows in problem solving abilities, initiative, and also self-direction. Like the students in the Chickering and Reisser study, TANF/CalWORKs students questioned their competence, yet learned to retain or regain optimism, while learning to resolve a multitude of problems.

Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) vector 7 includes a humanizing of values where there is a shift from a cold, stiff system to a more balanced one. The individual can bring together a core group of personal values, but those of others are considered and respected, as well. Hence, for this student population perhaps this creates a shift to a more balanced
approach to accepting WTW regulations and the demand of school. It is possible that at this point TANF/CalWORKs students can begin to align their values with that of the larger academic and social service systems, making it easier to navigate through them. Furthermore, as TANF/CalWORKs students developed their college persona they were able to fuse their college identity with their other social roles, such as being primary caretakers and parents. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students could now develop a sense of belonging to campus and social services structures. This is important to the success of TANF/CalWORKs students since, as stated in Chapter 2, a student’s level of social integration has a positive relationship with a student’s persistence (Harper, 2009; Roberts & Styron, 2010; Tinto & Engle, 2008). Integration into the campus also helps mothers to increase self-esteem and persist in school (Sharp, 2004), while insufficient social integration leads to lack of persistence and degree attainment (Bean, 2005). Additionally, students who have more family obligations lose out on educational advantages in academic skills and in developing their student identity (Carbonaro et al., 2008).

Having just discussed College Identity Theory, let us also consider Feminist Theory. Feminist Theory is described as an examination of the experiences of women, in social, political, and various other contexts so as to understand the nature of gender inequality (Brabeck & Brown, 1997).

Following the precepts of feminist critical theory discussed in Chapter 2, it can be argued that at least one reason TANF/CalWORKs students struggle to develop a college identity may be due in part to the social and gendered pressure associated with attending college. By society’s measure that would mean that the student must sacrifice being a
good wife or good mother (Hostetler, 2008; Mottarella, Fritzche, Whitten, & Bedsole, 2009) in order to be a good student. The National Center for Education Statistics (ED, 2006) noted that 14.2% of female students reported that they left postsecondary education without completion or did not return to school due to personal or family conflicts. Several studies show that often women are conflicted (Hostetler, 2008; Shaw, 2004) or even scorned for deviating from roles, such as being a wife or mother (Mottarella et al., 2009).

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students’ inability to provide basic needs for their families leaves them vulnerable to societal attacks on their roles as caretakers and mothers. Already viewed as lazy and loose women, taking on college attendance opens the door for attacking the wisdom of their choices, and they are blamed (Broughton, 2003) once again for creating such chaotic lives. This undoubtedly contributes to the struggles of creating a college identity. To create a college identity, TANF/CalWORKs students must first work hard to change the negative image and stereotypes assigned to them by society. Like a bad girl gone good, they must change their reputation from being seen as lazy to hardworking and from an immoral temptress to a respectable college student. As put by authors Covington and Spriggs (2004), in their article discussing the effects of welfare reform policy on college enrollment, “More so than any other group, poor mothers need to build their human capital” (p. 10). It is in this process in which they begin to create new characteristics and subsequently to be recognized (perhaps even unto themselves) as something other than the stigmatized lot they have been given.
It is interesting to note that in the case of this study, college identity theory, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory, and that of Feminist Theory reach a point of Intersectionality. Intersectionality, as described by Collins (2000), is a type of “analysis claiming that race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation and age, form mutually constructing features of social organization which shape Black women’s experience and in turn are shaped by Black women” (p. 299). While Collins focused her work on the experiences of Black women, the theory of intersectionality can be applied to the experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students.

In California, the majority of TANF/CalWORKs cases are women and women of color. Their social class is represented by their poverty. That they are single parent females speaks to their assumed irresponsible sexuality and their supposedly failed gender roles as caretaking mothers. They are judged and held responsible for creating their situations with no reflection given to absent fathers, limited resources for childcare, and limited opportunities to education. The fact that most TANF/CalWORKs are women of color brings a fourth element to the struggles of TANF/CalWORKs students that has not yet been approached but cannot be avoided, that being Critical Race Theory or CRT.

Critical Race Theory is also a significant piece in trying to uncover the academic barriers of TANF/CalWORKs students. As described in Chapter 2, CRT is an analysis which examines race and power structures (Delgado & Stephanic, 2001). The notion that TANF/CalWORKs students are mostly poor women of color is too much to leave to chance or coincidence. In California, it is a fact. These intersections of poverty, gender, and color support the research done by Diana Pearce (1978) in which she referred to this phenomenon as the “feminization of poverty” (p. 35). Critical Race Theory also
corroborates the research done by Karen Christopher (2005). She stated that most of her study participants were “disadvantaged by educational systems,” because they were “poor, single-mothers on welfare” (p. 166). Collins suggested that the intersections of race, class, and gender assert such power and control as to create a “matrix of domination” (p. 23). The findings of this study lend credence to the tenants of CRT and of the formerly mentioned studies and would suggest that there is also a feminization of lower education, at least for female single parent students on TANF/CalWORKs. To think that political, educational, or social service systems would have the influence and authority to generate such limitations may be difficult to understand. Harder still would be that it could be purposeful; however, it is much easier to understand after recalling Critical Race Theorist Edward Taylor (1998) from Chapter 2. He proposed that these types of actions were so much a part of the larger institutional structures that it was easily assumed to be the “fabric of legal and political life” (p. 122) to the extent that it was hard to discern White hegemony.

Community colleges enroll a diverse group of students and have larger percentages of nontraditional, low income, and minority students than do 4-year colleges and universities (Provasnik & Planty, 2008). The fact that community colleges have experienced this for several decades and have been slow to change infrastructure is apparent.

While community college administrators can state that they receive disproportionately lower funding, and have a much larger share of disadvantaged students to contend with, those factors are no excuse for slow progress. It is nonetheless disheartening. More disheartening is the fact that disproportionate enrollment and
funding even and is evidence enough to say that both federal and state legislators dismiss the needs and concerns of these students.

The researcher has discussed in this chapter that TANF/CalWORKs students felt distressed, felt they had little support and, for the most part, felt social services processes had reduced them to faceless beings. However, study participants turned that situation around. While they may not have realized it, they understood that their academic, as well as personal, survival depended on the actions of people. Perhaps they instinctively sought to make individual connections to people who cared about them as worthy human beings. For a TANF/CalWORKs student, then, support meant people. It meant connecting on a personal level, for in this way they could restore their humanity.

They owned the fact that they needed help, both materially and emotionally. They also came to understand that they were indeed college material and, as such, developed an alter identity. They had to develop an alter identity as college students, as being capable of doing and being in academia, and in the process they learned to “take back control” of their lives. The finding showed that TANF/CalWORKs students who had survived through the community college experience had developed this approach.

Without support for participation in out of class activities, TANF/CalWORKs students will miss out on some behaviors like focused study groups, learning communities, or even cramming. So too will the students miss out on the meaningful interaction necessary for integrating into campus life. Without time for meaningful interactions at the college (i.e., with faculty, staff, and other students), there can be little validating of their personal and quite different college experiences. Without integration (Tinto, 1997) and validation (Rendón, 1994), it is very likely that the students will lack a
sense of belonging. Maslow (1943), Olney and Brockelman (2005), and Hurtado and Carter (1997) have pointed out that a sense of belonging is an important human need.

**Summary**

In review of the chapter, we see that there were five distinct findings. Yet, in following ground theory methodology, there were two unforeseen theoretical models that emerged from this study. The first phenomenon was Mental Health Erosion. By and large, this phenomenon was the most described experience in the study. The participants described how experiences such as restrictive WTW policies, financial, and family issues made them feel “mentally tired,” depressed and affected their “motivation.” One student stated that they did not want to “go cuckoo.” Some students were not cognizant of how their issues were impacting their mental stamina. Yet, others understood that their constant stream of challenges was the source of their sadness and anxiety. The student’s mental erosion seemed to affect their willingness to want to continue in school.

Helping us to understand the experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students were three conceptual models used for this study: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Critical Race Theory, and Feminist Theory. All three models served to support and appreciate the experiences of TANF/CalWORKs students in community college. For instance, the second finding was Perceptions of Support, where the conceptual model of Critical Race Theory helped us to see the possible race and power structures may lead to social, political, and educational inequities. The result of these systematic inequities was that the students lacked a sense of “community to which they belonged” (Olney & Brockelman, 2005, p. 89) because of the risks associated with self-disclosure. Additionally societal
pressure to find employment and fear of judgment prompted a “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach to receiving supportive services from college and county personnel.

In the third finding, A failing System: Welfare-to-Work, the students described feeling what amounted to as general lack of human caring for the individual behind the case file. The students perceived it as a disregard or indifference toward their survival. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs supported the findings because of the struggles TANF/CalWORKs students have with limited resources. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students are overburdened, and it is likely that energies are focused to more immediate life sustaining activities. Maslow (1943) says that physiological needs are missing—all other needs are pushed back.

The fourth outcome was Finding Support. Recall that students instinctively sought to make individual connections and obligated personnel to care about them as worthy human beings. Recall, too, that to TANF/CalWORKs students support meant people. It meant connecting on a personal level. This action helped the TANF/CalWORKs students feel like they reclaimed their humanity. Feminist Theory helped to comprehend the many ways single parent females are blamed, judged, and held responsible for creating nontraditional family structures. For this, they are frowned upon, and begrudged, for example, from educational or employment opportunities.

In the fifth finding, Taking Back Control, the participants accepted that their lives had chaotic situations. But they built a tolerance for it. Not only did they learn to plan for what may go wrong with their public assistance, but they accepted their part in preventing threats to their survival. Essentially, they gained adaptive living skills, which may have helped their learning skills. They learned to evaluate their situations, change
the way they perform certain functions, and evaluate their outcomes for a forthcoming pay off. After a type of inner struggle, the students owned the fact that they needed help both tangibly and emotionally. To do well in school, they needed to find resources. They had to be well informed about the support the college had to offer. Also, they understood that they must be proactive in searching out these resources and create a support system for themselves. An important change in their behavior was that they allowed themselves to ask and receive support, for example, from social workers and college faculty.

Here is where we begin to see the second phenomenon of this grounded theory study. While neither the students nor the researcher mentioned a lack of college identity development, it appeared in the data collected. Students commented on the initial fear of coming to college, but they had other fears such as fitting in, and of not being able to do college level work. They discussed not being familiar with the college policies, procedures, and the college going culture. Phrases that repeated such as “I didn't know” were followed by words like “how to direct myself,” “how it worked,” and “how to start my plan.” Perhaps the most telling was the comment made by Lovey where she was speaking about college support: “Teach me what it’s like to sit down and type or study for hours; I don’t know what that’s like.”

The lack of opportunity to participate at the college, and a lack of shared experiences with other students, resulted in a lack of college identity for this group. The students told of wanting to participate more on campus, but factors such as restrictive WTW policies, childcare limitations, and other family obligations seemed to prohibit it. Without support for participation in out-of-class activities, TANF/CalWORKs students missed out on some college-going behaviors like focused study groups, learning
communities, or even cramming. So, too, did the students miss out on the meaningful interaction necessary for integrating into campus life. Without time for meaningful interactions at the college (i.e., with faculty, staff, and other students), there can be little validating of their personal and quite different college experiences. Without integration (Tinto, 1997) and validation (Rendón, 1994), it is very likely that the students will lack a sense of belonging. Maslow (1943), Olney and Brockelman (2005), and Hurtado and Carter (1997) have pointed out that a sense of belonging is an important human need. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students need to see themselves belonging in college and as capable of doing and being in academia, and to do this they needed to develop an alter identity.

Much like a study triangulates processes for validity or legitimizing outcomes, for this study, CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Feminist Theory (Collins, 2000; Gilligan, 1982), and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) served to triangulate and lend soundness to the concept for a lack of college identity. In combination, the conceptual frameworks obstruct the development of TANF/CalWORKs students by withdrawing the opportunities for the student to feel integrated, validated, and feeling like they belong in college.

In short, the academic success of TANF/CalWORKs students can be tied to feelings—feeling stressed and overburdened; feeling empowered, trusted and in control; feeling welcomed, accepted, valued, and a true part of the college culture.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study may not be applicable to all TANF or TANF/CalWORKs programs in that different states choose to interpret and implement federal guidelines
differently. Additionally, the experiences shared by student recipients in this study are from one county in southern California. This, too, may create a varying experience, as counties may have different organizational models that have unique characteristics. Also, individual colleges and TANF/CalWORKs programs have campus and programmatic goals that dictate how they provide student services. One additional limitation is the small size of some focus groups. While every attempt to fill each group session was made, some focus group meetings had two or three student participants. This may have had an effect on the dynamics of the meeting. Therefore, the findings of this qualitative study, while solely based on what was expressed by students, remain subjective. The researcher, while careful to prevent biases, is nonetheless an instrument that interprets the findings of the study. In this way, it is possible for the findings to be understood and extracted differently by another researcher.

Implications of the Study and Recommendations for Practice and Research

The findings revealed two main problem areas. The first problem is the many systems that affect TANF/CalWORKs students. They must learn to navigate laws and policies that determine their eligibility for receiving education. They must also learn their way around community college faculty and administration that can be both unfamiliar and insensitive to their needs. Lastly, there is the perceived indifference of bureaucratic social service agencies and at times the social workers themselves.

The second problem area lies within the TANF/CalWORKs students. As individuals, TANF/CalWORKs student recipients struggle with mental health, support, and identity issues. They feel overwhelmed by the many challenges in their day-to-day
living. Additionally, for the most part, they feel unsupported by family and social worker staff. They also struggle to see themselves as college material. These findings have implications for laws/policies; community college faculty, counselors, and administration; social services; and future research. The researcher will discuss these implications in the following sections.

**Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Evidence arose from data collection that TANF/CalWORKs student recipients felt greatly overburdened. The feelings of being overburdened were mostly derived from the many WTW policies and practices around maintaining public benefits that affected the students’ daily survival. Demanding work-first policies were a constant and ominous threat, as not complying with them meant losing benefits that provide food and shelter. Furthermore, WTW policies limited the opportunity for education and the time allowable for class attendance, study, and childcare, despite the many studies linking better education to better work opportunities and pay (Mazzeo et al., 2003; Tiamiyu & Mitchell, 2001). While the Welfare Reforms of 1998 and 2004 had some allowances for education, WTW programs still seemed to ignore the benefits of college attendance for its participants, and the practices were stricter than the law required.

A more effective practice would be to establish WTW policies that are more progressive in implementation. Policies that align with these findings would not only support student parents in their academic endeavors, but it would in effect improve the employability of the TANF/CalWORKs recipient. Research has shown that even a small amount of education improves employment and earnings potential (Bok, 2004; Kates, 1996). Therefore, policies that allow for more educational experiences would indirectly
reduce the chances of recidivism of cases. Education also increases workplace skills, and a skilled workforce can be tied to maintaining corporations in the United States. Additionally, educating women seems to increase the academic outcomes of the entire family (Farkas, 1996). Education may play a role in breaking cycles of poverty for the family. Just as important is that these allowances would greatly reduce the mental health erosion of the student parents. Because of the many stigmas tied to being a recipient of public assistance (welfare), it is vital to inform the public of the benefits of TANF/CalWORKs recipients receiving education.

This can be done by having federal TANF and state CalWORKs agencies work with legislators and advocacy groups to inform them of the policies regarding education and of the numerous ways policy change could benefit the nation. Leadership at the federal and state levels can work to distribute such information at TANF reauthorization hearings. These types of details are often ignored by the media and by the Department of Social Services. Increased employability, increased pay, and the reduction of returners is only one set of benefits. As stated above, there are many more. In the current economic downturn, such information can be well received and can effect change. State and local Department of Social Services agencies can provide in-service trainings for administrative and social work staff to ensure dissemination of accurate information occurs.

Likewise, college administrations and programs can take measures to be more aware of their college TANF/CalWORKs students. Administrators, program directors/ and program coordinators can work with the financial aid offices on many levels to better serve TANF/CalWORKs students. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
information can help identify how many TANF/CalWORKs students are on a particular campus. A review of childcare and mental health services can inform the campus of available services (or the lack of them) for the student recipients. Coordinated efforts to inform the students of these and other programs that can provide supportive services would perhaps increase knowledge and use of existing programs or help to identify gaps. In-service trainings open to all campus personnel would help to inform college campus faculty and staff of the challenges these students face and of the importance of reaching out to them.

Evidence suggested that attitudes of social workers added mental distress to TANF/CalWORKs students. Often viewed as loose and lazy by the general public, students mentioned that they struggled in receiving stigmatized treatment by their social workers. Moreover, students perceived the system as a whole to be a cold environment that treated them as a case number rather than a person in need.

Students also commented too on the difficulty of contacting their social workers. Difficult because as one student said “they cut . . . , the one-on-one social work attention.” They commented on trying to reach them by phone and email. Yet, they preferred to sit for long hours to see a worker in person. Personal contact seemed to provide a sense of security for the students. Ways to alleviate the seemingly automated situation might include hiring additional social workers. Theoretically, it would allow for current social workers to lessen caseloads and allow social workers more time to spend with each client. Understanding current economic conditions being what they are, the author recognizes that this recommendation may take a bit of time to accomplish. However, also understanding the demographics of the state, the need for a trained
workforce and the effect that education can have on the recidivism of TANF/CalWORKs recipients (Covington & Spriggs, 2004), it would behoove federal and state agencies to act sooner rather than later.

Several students wondered if the social workers fully understood the benefits the county could offer them. They discussed not knowing if their experienced lack of resources or opportunities were due to a lack of training for workers, staff support, or program resources. They also wondered if perhaps the worker did not want to inform them of a benefit. In California, where 84% of TANF/CalWORKs recipients are single women and 78% are women of color, it would not be far-fetched that these students received less supportive services than their White counterparts (Gooden, 2006).

Structured workshops for social services workers could help with informed and fair service to recipients. The workshops could be provided as in-service workshops with a focus on service and with earned certificates for a series of workshops attended. Recommendations for workshops could be trainings on cultural and social capital, CRT, feminist issues, and the effects of poverty to name a few.

Stigmatization was only one area that affected the mental health of TANF/CalWORKs students. By and large, the greatest area of concern was the constant fear of human or processing errors that would discontinue, reduce, or interrupt benefits. The students clearly identified how the slightest of errors could cause great havoc in their lives and the domino effect it could have on the most basic of levels, access to food and shelter. This area of concern was taken very seriously. Perhaps a starting point in this area could be a review of Department of Social Services operating policy in conjunction with computer programming practices. For example, rather than closing a case for a
missing document, DSS computer programs could be set to send out a phone call, letter, or email requesting any missing forms or information. Also, instead of a 30-day notice to comply, perhaps a 45-day notice could be put in place giving the agency, worker, or recipient ample time to find, input, or resubmit the missing information or document(s).

Learning disabilities, substance abuse, domestic violence, and other family problems also contributed to mental health erosion for TANF/CalWORKs students. Acknowledging the current economic crisis and understanding that providing mental health services can be costly, it still seems more reasonable to suggest improved benefits in mental health care. This is especially true if one takes into account the aggregate cost of police services, substance abuse treatment centers, judicial services, foster care, medical treatments, and the slew of other public services that ignoring mental health needs can induce. Not only could increased mental health counseling help TANF/CalWORKs student to cope with stressors, but it could help them feel more supported.

Students commented on being appreciative of feedback from faculty and staff. They also commented with much sadness about how they desired much more family support. Providing more support for TANF/CalWORKs students can be accomplished by providing “bring your own lunch” club meetings or by providing career focused study groups like anatomy study sessions for nursing students. Systematic approaches in the community colleges can be addressed, as well. Reviewing opportunities to support learning communities, as well as learning labs, could be a starting point. Also, working closer with county personnel to expound on the benefits of education and training for TANF/CalWORKs students and county employees alike would be beneficial.
College programs can develop peer mentoring or offer workshops with successful TANF graduates and former TANF recipients who have become working professionals. Learning communities and personal development courses can be taught with a focus on finding resources or careers that lead to self-sufficiency. These types of opportunities for gathering and bonding can help to fill the gap for family support by helping the students to form fictive kinships, an extended family type of relationship.

Forming effective kinships by participating in campus activities or study groups will aid in helping TANF/CalWORKs students to see themselves in a positive light. But it is not enough to guide TANF/CalWORKs students to join a club. Simply creating a social environment can create a problem since hours spent in social activities are not counted as hours of WTW participation. Current WTW requirements do not allow childcare for nonacademic and nonverifiable activities. Students would risk not getting childcare covered. Because TANF/CalWorks students cannot participate in unsupervised out-of-class activities, college faculty, staff, and programs and even other students may falsely believe that the students are unwilling to help themselves. Thus the “lazy” image could be perpetuated. Another complication in creating social groups for TANF/CalWORKs students would be that it would place students in a conundrum. It would mean they may have to disclose being on public assistance. Recruiting outside participants could also be a challenge. How then can a TANF/CalWORKs student establish a college identity if traditional means are unavailable?

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students clearly have unique experiences and have their own set of needs. To best support TANF/CalWORKs in creating a college identity, campuses can offer a safe space where this student
population can openly discuss their issues; a place where they can receive support but also offer support to each other. Since most current computer labs are areas of quiet study, future master plans for colleges could include identified space where meetings labs could be developed for this group of students. This would help in many ways. Study labs can be an allowable WTW activity. There would be no shame in disclosure since all users would be aided recipients, and students would have the same types of experiences. Thus, having to speak on the phone to social workers, childcare providers, or the children themselves while trying to complete a class assignment, would not be frowned upon.

More immediately, a designated meeting space could be carved out in existing CalWORKs program offices if possible. Such spaces would allow for TANF/CalWORKs student recipients to share systematic, personal, or identity challenges with other TANF/CalWORKs students and perhaps, just as meaningful, could help them to see themselves as college material. They can, as individuals and as a collective, begin to see that they do belong in college.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) claimed that students who lacked a sense of belonging were less likely to succeed. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) also stated in a separate work that, at least for Latina/o students, participation in support structures diminishes the feelings of marginality when they discover that there is much to learn about being a successful college student. Thus, creating a college identity is in some ways contingent upon feeling welcomed to the point of having activities and support structures to which the student can relate.

Laura Rendón (1994) stated that colleges and university support structures such as student activities and organizations “tend to favor more traditional students” (p. 34).
Furthermore, colleges and universities were established “by and for the privileged” (Rendón, 1994, p. 34) and for the most part are still that way. She also stated that these institutions largely overlook the contributions made by women and persons of color. She described an element of her Validation Theory to be “an enabling and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and personal development” (p. 44). In her book *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy*, Rendón (2009) states that “many students feel that who they are and what they represent are not valued” (p. 35). To say that TANF/CalWORKs students are not valued is a gross understatement. This is especially true as TANF/CalWORKs student recipients are usually viewed as a drain on resources rather than as contributing to them.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students can bring many contributions to the campus and to the classroom in particular. Rare is the student who can speak to policy changes and their direct effect on them and the public as can a TANF/CalWORKs recipient student. Their personal and political views on topics such as the economy, cuts to public benefits, changes in childcare, federal funding for *Sesame Street*, and policies like the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) is just the starting point. Therefore, TANF/CalWORKs student involvement is critical not only to the recipient student but to the development of all students.

There are plenty of studies that support student involvement. Tinto and Engle (2008), in their work regarding the academic success of college students, recommend engagement of college students especially for lower income students. Tinto (1997) also suggests that “the greater the students, involvement or integration into the life of the college, the greater the likelihood that they will persist” (p. 600).
Still, with all the knowledge gained by the various studies and theories, none of these theories can be applied if there is no college identity to which to apply them. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students are indeed college material and their college identity formation will require the support of colleges and universities, faculty, staff, and governmental policy change.

Engagement in meaningful and relatable activities where their unique experiences are validated and where they can truly feel a sense of belonging is necessary if colleges and other institutions are truly interested in advancing this student population. In this way, TANF/CalWORKs recipient students can start to define for themselves and for others (like family members, teachers, and social workers), a new mental image or version of who they are. In fact, it behooves us all to examine our own view of who they are.

**Implications and Recommendations for Research**

There were many times during this study that this researcher was excited about the many areas yet to be explored regarding TANF/CalWORKs students. The importance that these students gave to choosing faculty and deciding if and how much to disclose to faculty led to an interest in faculty perceptions of TANF/CalWORKs students. A qualitative study with faculty interviews on their perceptions of single parents, female students, lower income students, and students on public benefits in particular, may yield important information.

Furthermore, a study of faculty perceptions of students of color and if and how they assess the students’ learning in their classrooms, work with classroom challenges,
and high risk students may also contribute to current knowledge of student success for TANF/CalWORKs students, students of color, and community college students overall. Additionally, concerns regarding the academic achievement of this student population merit a look at the types of assessments administered at both colleges and the Department of Social Services. Both quantitative studies and qualitative interview of TANF/CalWORKs student recipients on areas such as knowledge, access, and use of community resources including mental health services, along with academic readiness or needs may assist TANF/CalWORKs students to reach course, certificate, or degree completion. It may benefit TANF/CalWORKs students and nonstudent recipients to better understand and reach goals for self-sufficiency.

Colleges and TANF/CalWORKs students alike might benefit from an evaluation of the efficacy of current tests assessing academic preparation, appropriate placement in courses, and needs in such areas as childcare and financial aid. Qualitative and quantitative studies might suggest essential tools needed by this population.

Given their many challenges, this researcher recommends follow up on the commitments made by TANF/CalWORKs students to their educational endeavors and the motivation behind their drive to persist. Their incredible leap of faith into an unknown system like the college environment also warrants a study in resilience.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students often stated that they came to college to better themselves and to better the lives of their children. They also often credited their children as their major motivator. However, more detailed analysis could bring to light more specific information on why these TANF/CalWORKs students decided that education, and that the community college system in particular, was
the way to achieve it. Knowing what they expected to find and comparing their expectations to their lived experience may lead campus counselors, faculty, and staff and social workers, along with future TANF/CalWORKs students, to new strategies that work for them.

Research could also be done on students who did not persist. Finding out why students were unable to reach their intended goal for course, certificate, or degree completion, or transferring to a university for that matter, might suggest what could have been done to prevent dropping out.

The absence of college identity models for this group calls for research on the college identity of single parent female students on public assistance. A study on this student population’s college going intentions, and the level of college identity formation before parenthood and after parenthood, would lend some knowledge to whether becoming a single parent interfered with or motivated college attendance thus hindered or launched the development of a college identity. Furthermore, studies on the effects of TANF/CalWORKs participation as compared to other types of college going, low income, single women may yield information on the effects that stereotypes, stigmas, and social pressures may be having on these students college identity development. New studies too, on the intersectionality of, CRT, Feminist Theory, and Motivation Theory (Bandura, 2001) would yield new information on these students’ motivation and will to persist. The college identity of TANF/CalWORKs students and the intersection of Integration and Validation theories would be worthy studies, as well.
Conclusion

Perhaps due to political alignments, social stigmas, or lack of resources, community colleges have offered little to foster the personal development (or academic needs for that matter) of single parent women on public assistance. No less as found in this study, these students have taken responsibility for their needs. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families/CalWORKs students live day-to-day with extremely limited resources and often worry about basic needs like food and shelter. Here Maslow’s (1943) theory seems to apply, as other areas of the student’s life, such as education, take a back seat to the more immediate needs. Yet, the students try to persist in school. The students shared that most of their support for attempting higher education came from the college itself. While the students enjoyed the general support, they outlined the critical role counselors, faculty and staff, play in learning the college environment and in their academic survival. For the most part, these students perceived a lack support from the department of social services and from their families.

However, they learned to contend with this gap by becoming more resourceful and by implementing new behaviors such as being pre-emptive and proactive in their approaches, especially with their needs from the Department of Social Services. They learned to self-advocate. All these practices were implemented to help themselves survive the college experience. In this fashion, they created a new college identity for themselves as often they had to demonstrate to others like family, faculty, and social workers that they were indeed college material.

As this was a qualitative study, the students were invited to share their personal experiences in a group setting. The courage they demonstrated in sharing their responses
was out of concern for future TANF/CalWORKs students, and this researcher was
grateful and honored to have learned from their experiences.
REFERENCES


Hostetler, A. J. (2008). *Educational careers, returning to school and work-family concerns*. Retrieved from https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/wfrn-repo/object/uy1g5zs7l9uz5e8g


APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

May 6, 2011

Student Researcher: Bernice Lorenzo
Faculty Sponsor/Thesis Chair: Dr. Nan Hampton
Department: Educational Leadership

vIRB Number: 673071
Title: Toward Identifying Academic Barriers of TANF/CalWORKs students
Risk Level: Minimal
Exemption: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Dear Ms. Lorenzo:

The project referenced was reviewed and verified as exempt in accordance with SDSU’s Assurance and federal requirements pertaining to human subjects protections within the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46.101). This review applies to the conditions and procedures described in your protocol.

The determination of exemption is final and requests for continuing review (Progress Reports) are not required for this study. However, if any changes to your study are planned, you must submit a modification request and receive either IRB approval (per 45 CFR 46.110 or 46.111) or IRB verification that the modification is exempt (per 45 CFR 46.101). To submit a modification request, access the protocol via the WebPortal, on the protocol Main Page, you will need to click on "Modifications" under Protocol Maintenance and enter a report. Once you have filled in your responses on the report form, click “Submit”. Additionally, notify the IRB office if your status as an SDSU-affiliate changes while conducting this research study (you are no longer an SDSU faculty member, staff member or student).

Please note the following for all exempt studies:

a) If this research involves the use of existing or secondary data sources, information obtained must be recorded so that subjects cannot be identified, either directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

b) If information will be obtained from individual medical records, please check with the organization authorized to provide access to these records to determine whether regulations relating to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) pertain to your research. Likewise, if academic records are accessed, Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements must be respected. Notify the SDSU IRB office if protocol revisions are necessary to comply with HIPAA regulations.

c) If recruitment will take place through an outside agency or organization, confirm with that institution that you have permission to conduct the study prior to initiation of any research activities. If this research involves the use of existing or secondary data sources, confirm with the data owner that you have permission to access the data.
d) Approval is contingent upon the completion of the SDSU human subjects tutorial (found at:
http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/~wra/login.php) by all members of the research team. This
certification must be renewed every 2 years.

For questions related to this correspondence, please contact the IRB office ((619) 594-6622 or e-
mail irb@mail.sdsu.edu). To access IRB review application materials, SDSU’s Assurance, the 45
CFR 46, the Belmont Report, and/or any other relevant policies and guidelines related to the
involvement of human subjects in research, please visit the IRB website at

Graduate Students: This notification may be used as documentation to register in Thesis 799A.
Attach a hard copy of this notice to your Appointment of Thesis/Project Committee form prior
to submitting the completed form to Graduate and Research Affairs - Student Services Division.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Nichols
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Briane Larsen-Mongeon
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Amy McDaniel
Regulatory Compliance Analyst

Choya Washington
Regulatory Compliance Analyst
What Is the Purpose of the Study?

- To explore the barriers to academic success of female single parent TANF/CalWORKs students.
- To explore what TANF/CalWORKs students identify as the barriers to completing their educational goals.
- To explore what TANF/CalWORKs students say are the difficulties they face when attending community college.

Who Can Participate?

- Women (age 18 years old or older) whom were single parents at the time they attended Harbor View college.
- And for whatever reason dropped out of classes before the end of a semester, prior to January 2010.
- And who might have been placed on probation or disqualification before January 2010.

What Are Involved?

- Participants of the study will partake in a 1-2 hour focus group meeting.
- Participants will be asked to discuss their experiences with Harbor View College, the social welfare agencies and about their personal nature.
- Participants will receive $25.00 Walmart gift card for compensation.
- Participants will receive the option to participate in a workshop that will inform the participant on how to repair their academic or financial aid records.

If you are interested in the study, please contact the researcher:

Bernice Lorenzo
Phone: 619-388-3724
Email: blorenzo@sdccd.edu.
APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate in a Focus Group Session
Regarding the Experiences of TANF/CalWORKs Students

Dear former Harbor View College student,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study regarding your past experiences at Harbor View College as a TANF/CalWORKs student. Specifically, you have been selected to participate in a one to two hour focus group discussion on TANF/CalWORKs students who attended Harbor View College, participated in the college CalWORKs Program and may have been disqualified, experienced probation or simply could not continue to attend. The focus group questions will cover areas about your personal nature, as well as your perceptions, observations and experiences with the college and the county.

Initially, there will be 3 focus group sessions dates to chose from. Each focus group will consist of 5-8 students per session. The time allocated to the focus group discussion will not exceed two hours. The focus group discussion will be audio tape recorded. Also, I, the researcher, will be taking notes. The notes will be part of my journal for the study. After the focus group meetings, the tape recordings and the notes will be given to a research assistant for transcription.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are not required to provide your name during the actual interview; thereby assuring the information you provide will remain confidential. Once data are collected, your comments will form part of a larger database, from which only group data will be reported. Because it is important to document your experiences and that the research be of significant value, it is important that each question you address be answered as honestly as possible. If you become uncomfortable or begin to experience distress, you may withdraw from participating in the focus group any point.

I am conducting the research under the supervision of Professor Nan Z. Hampton at San Diego State University. Only myself, a research assistant and Professor Hampton, will have access to the data. However, if you have any concerns during or after the completion of the interview, you are encouraged to discuss these at any time with me. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at SDSU (619-594-6622) to report problems or concerns related to this study.

Compensation for participation in the focus group will be offered to participants in the form of a 25.00 dollar, Walmart gift card. Also, you will be invited to attend a workshop at a later date, on how to fix your academic and financial aid records. Please contact me at (619) 388-3724 if you are willing to voluntarily participate in this study. Also, I will make detailed summary of the results available towards the end of my dissertation. Do let me know if you would be interested in a copy.

Thank you for your time and consideration in participating in the present study.

Bernice A. Lorenzo
(619) 388-3724 (work)
Blorenzo@sdccd.edu
APPENDIX D

Waiver of Confidentiality and Consent

The purpose of conducting the TANF/CalWORKs focus groups is to learn about your observations and experiences as a single parent woman attending Harbor View College while being on TANF/CalWORKs.

Participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time during the process and without penalty. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Bernice Lorenzo at the information listed below. You may also contact the Institutional Review Board at SDSU (619-594-6622) to report problems or concerns related to this study.

I, ______________________________________________________________,

(Name: please print)

Understand that:

a. This waiver and consent forms allow the researcher to access data from my student records but only for the purposes of the study.

b. While my name may be listed as a focus group participant and my comments may be used in a report derived from the focus group discussion, my comments will remain confidential and will not be attributed directly to me.

c. My comments will be audio-taped for the sole purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the discussion. The researcher will take notes. The audio-tapes and notes may be a reference for any reports derived from the discussion.

d. The information gathered in this focus group being summarized and may be used by the college and/or the CalWORKs program to report on the outcome of the discussion.

e. The Information derived from this focus group discussion may be used in publications and presentations to further the educational goals of TANF/CalWORKs and other students.

f. I may stop participation at any time, for whatever reason and without penalty.
I agree to participate in this project according to the preceding terms.

___________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

___________________________________________
Date

(_____)_____________________________________
Telephone

___________________________________________
E-mail Address

For more information related to this study, please contact Bernice Lorenzo at (388-3724). Or you may reach her by email at: borenzo@sdccd.edu
APPENDIX E

Employee Confidentiality Agreement

This agreement is made between the Employee:

____________________________________________________________________ and

Print Name

Bernice A. Lorenzo, the Employer.

As part of the terms of the Employee being hired by the Employer, the Employee agrees to the terms of this agreement:

1. The Employee acknowledges that, in the course of employment by the employer, the employee has, and may in the future, come into the possession of certain confidential information belonging to the students, the college or the employer including but not limited to student lists with academic and financial aid records.

2. The employee hereby covenants and agrees that he or she will at no time, during or after the term of employment, use for his or her own benefit or the benefit of others, disclose or divulge to others, any such confidential information.

3. Upon the end of employment, the employee will return to the employer, retaining no copies, all documents relating to the employers research including, but not limited to, reports, manuals, drawings, diagrams, correspondence, customer lists, computer programs, and all other materials and all copies of such materials, obtained by the employee during employment.

4. Violation of this agreement by the employee will entitle the employer to an injunction to prevent such competition or disclosure, and will entitle the employer to other legal remedies, including attorney's fees and costs.

5. This agreement shall be governed by the laws of the state of California.

6. If any part of this agreement is adjudged invalid, illegal or unenforceable, the remaining parts shall not be affected and shall remain in full force and effect.

7. This agreement shall be binding upon the parties, and upon their heirs, executors, personal representatives, administrators and assigns. No person shall have a right to cause of action arising out of or resulting from this agreement except those who are parties to it and their successors in interest.
8. This instrument, including any attached exhibits and addenda, constitutes the entire agreement of the parties. No representation or promises have been made except those that are set out in this agreement. This agreement may not be modified except in writing signed by all the parties.

Employer:                                                   Employee:

________________________ _________  _______________________ ____________
(Signature)                 (Date)                            (Signature)                (Date)

(1040 Tools, 2010)
General Introduction:

Good afternoon everyone and welcome back to Harbor View College! Before we start the group discussion, I would like to say thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. As we discussed in previous contact, the purpose of this study is to ask you about your experiences as women single parent TANF/CalWORKs students in community college.

The group discussion will take about 2 hours. As a reminder, this group meeting will be audio-tape recorded, and you will from time to time see me taking notes. The recording is to be sure I get what you said, accurately. The notes will likely be about something that triggered a thought for me. I want to be sure you understand that this group meeting will be confidential. None of your answers will affect any services you receive from the TANF/CalWORKs offices or the college. Remember, your participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you may stop your participation at any time. If there are any questions you do not wish to discuss, please let me know. Does anyone have questions for me?

As I mentioned earlier, we will be discussing your roles as women, as single parents, and as TANF/CalWORKs students in the community colleges. But I want to get to know you first. So let’s talk about why you decided to go to college.
1. Tell me, what was the reason you decided to attend college and how did you see yourself while enrolled in college? For example, where did you learn about the opportunity to go to college? What goal did you choose to pursue? Why did you choose that goal? Can you tell me more about that?

2. How did you prepare to be in college? Can you give me an example?

3. What have you explored in regards to your major? Can you tell me more about that?

4. What did you expect in terms of attending college?

5. How did you handle the demands of home life, school life, and if you worked, work life?

6. What was your reason for no longer attending Harbor View College?

7. Looking back when you attended here, what was the most challenging aspect of attending Harbor View College? Can you give me a specific example?

8. What was your experience with support from the college? Can you give me an example? What services did you access? Can you tell me more about that? Were you involved with the campus? For example, did you participate in any activities that were outside of the classroom?

9. What do you think is meant by academic success?

10. What does academic success mean to you?

11. What was your experience with support within your family?

Great! Now let’s talk a little about the social welfare system.

12. What has been your greatest difficulty with the social welfare system with regard to your education? What is your understanding of policies regarding your education?
13. What was your experience with the various types of social workers? How did they all work or tie in together?

Closing:

After all that we have discussed, what interfered the most with your academic success? Do you have any recommendations for future TANF/CalWORKs students?

Possible probe questions:

At the time that you attended college, were you familiar with college policies? What was your familiarity with institutional practices? How did you manage study time? What kinds of CalWORKs supportive services are available for education and training? How did you get supportive services? How did the process work? What was the time frame for getting your supportive services needs met? What kind of supportive services did you receive? What was your experience in getting your school books, transportation assistance, child-care? How did childcare affect your education? Who was providing your childcare? Did you feel you had adequate supportive services? How relevant were supportive services to your academic success? How do you think the social workers supported your education?
APPENDIX G

Follow Up/One-on-One Interview Questions

In the focus group you attended you before, you talked about staying focused.

What do you mean by staying focused?

How did you stay focused?

You also mentioned that a student needed to stay motivated.

What do you mean by staying motivated?

Can you tell me how you stay motivated?

In some of the focus groups, there was mention of being scared of doing well, of earning good grades, of earning an A, of school not being worth it. What do you think about those statements?

Another thing I heard in some of the focus groups was discussion of being scared having done the right thing. Tell me about any fears that you might have had about making the right decision to be in school.

Tell me about other doubts or fears you had with regard to your academics.