Intersecting Identities & Resiliency: Sharing Stories of Student Mothers in Community College

Kamisha Sullivan, Ed.D.

June 19, 2018
Portland State University
National Student Parent Success Symposium
Positionality

Raised by a single mother, First generation to college, Mother of three children, Married to alumni of CC, & Recently a student mother

Insider

Outsider

Faculty at CC, Level of education, Ethnicity, Social class, Researcher
Background

Majority of students raising children in community college (45%) (Gault, Noll, Reichlin, 2017)

2.1 million students in CA community colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2018)

80% students with children are female (Gaut, Reichlin, & Roman, 2014)

40% student mothers work (Nelson, Froehner, & Gault, 2013)

50% student mothers leave community college without degree (Gaut, Reichlin, & Roman, 2014)
Purpose

To better understand the student mother experience

Intersecting Identities

Institutional Resources

Individual Assets
Research Questions

How do student mothers in community college describe their intersecting identities?

What assets do student mothers use to navigate their community college experience?

How do student mothers utilize institutional resources in community college?
Conceptual Framework

Institutional Resources: Programs and people that support the student

Resiliency Theory (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000)

Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (I-MMDI) (Jones, Abes, & Quaye, 2013)

Other dimensions of identity: ethnicity, age, marital status

Individual core: assets
Qualitative
Participants

Student Mothers

- 25 and Older
- One Child
- Married
- Hispanic
- Employed
- Enrolled Part-Time
- Returning Status
- First Generation to College
RQ 1: How do student mothers in community college describe their intersecting identities?
Invisible: Outsider Within

It’s definitely different to be a parent and be in school... Especially because I’ve always been the stay at home mom with him. I am a breast feeding mother... I had never been to college... It’s very weird to be focusing on myself. I’m not use to that as a mom because I’m always focused on him.

Fin
I feel like there’s all these statistics against me, because I had him so young. I was only 19, and then you read about these teen moms and they don’t go to school and I’m like, I don’t want to be like that.

Michelle
Recently I was struggling with Algebra and she’s in 8th grade, so she’s doing similar work… I was sitting at the dining room table and I was struggling with a problem. And I think she could feel me getting frustrated. And she came over and said “Oh I have a trick for that” and she got out her math book and she showed me how she would do it. And that moment was so satisfying for me. Because she could teach me something.

Agnes
Empowered: Shared Student Identity

We need to become partners now. You’re about to go to college. I’m already here. Let me learn what I need to do so I can be successful. That way you can get here. I can help you out.

Jamie
Empowered: Renewed Focus

I did leave when I had my son in 2009. I enrolled right out of high school in 2007…Then I came back…It seems like I would come a semester, take two classes, not come….The main reason was because of work, work was a priority. This all shifted when my son got older because I had the ability to come to classes that I needed at specific days and times when we would be in class.

Katniss
RQ 2: What assets do student mothers use to navigate their community college experience?

Assets

- Organizational Strategies
- Self-Care
- Self-Talk
Organizational Strategy: 

Prioritizing

You have to make choices. Do you study for the test? Are you going to sacrifice sleep because your son also needs help with homework.

Vanessa
Self Care: Exercise

I was 245 (lbs.). That’s why I've dropped to 175 exercising. I feel less angry now because I used to just get mad for nothing. I started exercising three years ago, but this past year, it's more of the routine now. I don't drop the routine anymore. Jackie
Hey, I did this. I **gave birth.** I took care of this little person that I had no idea what to do. I had no idea what to expect, but I somehow managed. I didn’t sleep and at times I couldn’t eat and at times I couldn’t even shower if I didn’t have help, but I **somehow made it through**....I can definitely get through and study for this test tomorrow.

Lisette
RQ 3: How do student mothers utilize institutional resources in community college?
Child Care

Never went. Not on campus. I wasn’t ever able to. I wanted him to. I really wanted him to…but the waitlist was ridiculous.

I feel the building I’m in is child-friendly. Even when you think about it, our center is not within the campus. Nothing ever is. It’s outside. It’s a whole separate building...by the parking lot, like in the back.

Michelle
Student Engagement

I had so much fun. It made me feel like a kid. Well, it makes me feel like a student. Like a regular student. That’s the awesome part... Those are the hours I feel like a regular student, having so much fun.

Gwen
Faculty Support

I did research and I know that a lot of students that come to community college don’t graduate, they don’t finish. I don’t want to be part of the statistics. Since I know the odds are against me, I always make sure to do whatever I need to do. I visit my professors at the office hours.

Amanda
Faculty Support

I didn’t think there were going to be times when I would want to take advantage of meeting up with my professors…[until one time] she ran late and didn’t give us enough time to do it. So she told anyone they could finish it during her office hours. That something that for me to get to your office hours I either need to get to a babysitter…

Rey
Conclusions

Student mothers are Resilient.

&

The community college can do more for student mothers by increasing & improving access & availability of Institutional Resources.
Implications

Ethic of Care*

Institutions MUST care:

Modeling
Dialogue
Practice
Confirmation

*(Noddings, 2013)
Recommendations

Practice

Policy ↔ Research
Recommendations

Gather Data → Change Practice → Further Research
Recommendation: Collaboration

High Schools → Community College → University

Community Services & Resources
Recommendations

Policy: Title IX

Practice: Faculty Support & Student Awareness
Recommendations

Family Friendly Campus

◉ Space for students to study on campus with children
◉ Policy allowing children on campus (in counseling appointments, libraries)
◉ Space for breast feeding mothers & changing tables in restrooms
Thank you

Questions?