Late Nights in Lethbridge: Parenting and the Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education

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Introduction: Navigating the Student Parent World

This research journey began in 2016 with an Independent Study on student parenting in post-secondary education. As a mother of six children, the last of whom was born the previous year and while beginning my third year of undergraduate study, I was keenly interested in how other parents balanced parenting and attending post-secondary education. My own experiences include homeschooling several of my children while writing my own papers, studying for classes, and incorporating other parenting and household responsibilities. Student parents all have stories to share about what helps and hinders them as they endeavour to accomplish their own goals in education while raising dependent children. I struggle with guilt and financial strain, but have determination to continue while wondering if it is possible as each semester proceeds. Do other student parents experience the same concerns, or are their trials unique?

It has become clear that while my student parenting reality is unique in many ways, it also has much in common with that of other student parents. Discussions with other student parents revealed the need to further investigate this topic and discover what supports and resources are available at the University of Lethbridge, as well as what resources student parents need. To this end, I conducted interviews with eight student parents and four stakeholders over a period of three months in the fall of 2018.

The University of Lethbridge is a liberal education institution in southern Alberta. I would like to acknowledge that this is the territory of the Blackfoot people as well as being Treaty 7 land (Kainai, Siksika, Piikani, Tsuut'ina, and Stoney Nakoda peoples). Additionally, Metis people also reside on this territory. Western education has been prioritized over other systems of education, with Indigenous epistemologies discarded or minimized. Linda Tuhiwai

Smith (2014) maintains that ideas that include "epistemological, ontological, juridical, anthropological and ethical systems of classification . . . are coded in such ways as to 'recognize each other . . .and screen out competing and oppositional discourses . . . which "ensure that Western interests remain dominant" (61). I recognize that this research is conducted in the confines of the post-secondary education and that education systems have historically exploited Indigenous communities and so desire that this research will eventually assist in "the broader collective struggles for social justice" (Dean 2018, 36).

Founded in 1967, the University of Lethbridge has a student population of almost 9,000 students (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students). The average number of part-time undergraduate students is 492 (University of Lethbridge - Institutional Analysis 2019, n.p.). The university is one of three CARI (or research intensive) universities in the province, with seven Faculties and Schools (Arts and Science, Business, Education, Fine Arts, and Health Sciences, Graduate Studies and Liberal Education), offering degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels. As the university is located on Blackfoot land, the university strives to incorporate Blackfoot heritage and education into programs, research, and instruction (University of Lethbridge - Institutional Analysis 2019, n.p.). President Mahon has committed to "place greater focus on recruiting and retaining Blackfoot, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students . . . [and create] opportunity and an inclusive campus environment for all students" (Office of the President 2019, n.p.). No records are kept on the number of student parents, therefore, this honours thesis contributes to knowledge about student parents as they navigate between family and university life.

The outline of this Honours Thesis is as follows: Chapter One explores the literature that examines the institutional and familial supports available to student parents, student parent self-

motivation, stigmatization faced by student parents, and the role of the neoliberal university. Chapter Two introduces the theoretical framework and methodology used for analysis. Examining the narratives through the lenses of reproductive labour and patriarchal motherhood, in a framework of feminist standpoint theory allows me to better analyze the elements that explain the findings. In Chapter Three, I analyze my findings—the key themes that arose are inner drive, invisibility of student parents, immediate and extended family support, and that student parents have a future focus. Inner drive is connected with a future focus. Student parents interviewed suggest that their own future career plans, along with what they envision for their children in the future, informs the effort they put into their education. Student parents develop personal strategies to achieve their educational goals, and also to adequately parent their children. The pursuit of post-secondary education is linked with their parenting responsibilities. To this end, support is necessary, and all student parents interviewed suggest that their combined responsibilities as parents and student are achievable with family support: immediate family such as spouses or partners, and/or extended family which usually includes grandparents, and sometimes their own siblings. Such a finding corresponds to literature on student parents that finds "there is a strong link between family support . . . with study (Webber 2017, 414).

A common challenge faced by all student parents is the invisibility of their parental status. This means either professors or university staff are unaware of their parental responsibilities because the student parent has chosen not to share that information with them, or the institution does not include student parents in its understanding and definition of university students. As Moreau and Kerner (2015) maintain, "the dominant, default image of the student in the physical and policy spaces of [post-secondary institutions] remain those of the carefree. . . young, smiling, and (presumably) 'unencumbered' [student]" (291). One result of this is that

information, resources, events, and such are more often than not directed to students who have no children. An example of this is student social events held during late evening hours, which makes it difficult for student parents to participate in when they have children to care for and put to bed at a decent hour. Student parents often forego attending extracurricular activities as this interferes with family time and many events are not child-friendly.

Finally, the conclusions and suggestions for further research provide an understanding of how the neoliberal university affects student parents and also how the university and community should respond. It is my hope that this honours thesis will enrich our understandings about the experiences of student parenting. Specific gaps it fills are concepts that inform student parent motivation and societal constructs that attempt to limit student parent engagement and success in post-secondary education. In the analysis, reproductive labour and patriarchal motherhood are explored and further add to the knowledge about student parenting experience. This is significant as it provides a deeper understanding of why extensive research has promoted little change for student parents in post-secondary study and creates avenues for future research on the subject. As student parents are already aware of what they need for success as students and as parents, including them in conversations with policy makers is important. In addition, the University of Lethbridge, including academic and support staff, may find the data useful to assist in discovering how to increase retention and completion rates. My hope is that this research will benefit all members of the community at the University of Lethbridge.

Chapter One — Literature Review: Experiences in Student Parenting

Duprez and Butler (2001) suggest that "in the new economy, human capital—intellectual capital—is and will continue to be a major force" (212). More jobs and careers require ongoing and extensive education, with projections pointing to an increased importance on higher education (212). Since student parents are part of this growing need for higher education and more skill, they are a crucial piece in the political economy. Fisher, Rubenson, Jones, and Shanahan (2009) maintain that "investing in 'human resources' would contribute to economic development at both the individual and societal levels" (563); in other words, investing in higher education for students benefits everyone. This includes student parents, who are increasing enrollment at all levels of higher education in Canada. In 2000, 17% of undergraduate students had dependent children, with that percentage rising to 19% in 2005 and to 23% in 2010. Similarly, 23% of graduate students had dependent children in 2000, with that number increasing to 28% in 2005 and to 35% in 2010. At the doctorate level, 41% of the students had dependent children in 2000, increasing to 47% in 2005, with that number staying stable in 2010 (Stats Canada *National Graduates Survey* 2010). Since student parents are important for economic progression, investing in student parent success is important for societal welfare. Nelson, Froehner, and Gault (2013) suggest that "despite the centrality of parenthood to the college experiences of 1/3 low-income adults, too few post-secondary institutions directly address their needs or experiences as student-parents, or even know how many parents they have on campus" (1).

The literature suggests that student parents come from various backgrounds: some are single parents; some have supportive and present partners, while others have unsupportive partners; some access support in the community and some have extended family support; others

may work, while some may have independent financial means to support parenting and education pursuits. The following literature review highlights key themes in the literature on student parenting including how they access support, navigate challenges, and persevere in pursuing higher education while parenting one or more children. It also examines marginalization and how this contributes to barriers for student parents.

Most of the literature is from American or British perspectives with some analyzing Canadian data on student parents. Student parenting is largely researched within philosophy, sociology, and education disciplines. Researchers primarily use feminist and sociological theoretical lenses to examine student parenting, influenced significantly by concepts of determination, invisibility, and perseverance.

1.1 Support and Challenges: Institutional and Familial

Fehr (2013) asserts that awareness of the complicated needs of student parents, along with institutional support, is important for student retention. She suggests that "campus leaders [need] to reassess the services and academic culture influencing the student parent post-secondary experience" (254). Voisin (2016) concurs, alleging that "the role of higher education in the lives of adults is growing and becoming an integral part of the global economy and [universities have] considerable room to improve and realize [their] potential in this area" (84). Conversely, Muser (2017) found that institutional support is not as important as partner support for student parent success. Quosai (2010) affirms that institutional support is crucial, noting that "a key factor in supporting students in post-secondary programs is recognizing the complex interplay among demands, resources, positive and negative effects of roles, and the strategies that student parents enact to manage these roles" (258). Flores (2013) suggests that "small [structural]

changes [can] provide a direct connection to validate the student parents' presence on campus, nurture their development, and [can] increase retention" (114).

Family support is important to student parent success. Webber (2017) asserts that "the family is a valuable source of *capital* (italicized in the original) and can provide individuals with support and opportunities to achieve success in terms of education" (413). Capital refers to cultural (proofreading or essay planning help), economic (help with childcare and household tasks, financial resources), social (sharing ambitions and goals with their social network), and emotional (support, patience, and commitment from family members) (415–417) assistance from external sources such as family. Webber further maintains that "receiving limited emotional or practical support puts additional stress on female students with families as they try to negotiate study time around the needs of family" (Webber 2017, 415). Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid (2009) add the importance of post-secondary community support for student parents and their families; they assert that although university family-friendly culture is important, the norms and culture of individual departments may be at least as consequential for the success or failure of . . . students" (450).

Research indicates that student parents do not engage in the same campus involvement as traditional students, that is, students generally defined as young adults entering post-secondary education directly from high school (Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke 2016, 14–15). Home and work environments significantly contribute or hinder student parent success. Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke (2016) suggest that "student parents' motivation to attend university appears to be multifaceted in nature . . . influenced by social contexts such as work opportunities, financial ambitions, the need for personal development, being a model to their family, and in particular their children, and the experience of critical life events" (23).

Challenges that face student parents range from scheduling to finances. Brooks (2012) asserts that student parents face "temporal demands of being both a student and a parent of a young child; the paucity of on-site childcare facilities; restrictive 'no child on campus' policies; late availability of timetables; inconvenient timing of lectures and acute financial pressures" (424). These challenges can vary from place to place and from student to student; however, being a student parent always brings unique worries not faced by students without children. While student parents "represent a unique subset of non-traditional students" (Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke, 2016, 15), their higher education studying is compounded with many responsibilities, which include a higher likelihood to be partnered, working long hours, childcare, and part-time studying (15).

1.2 Self-Motivation

Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke (2016) maintain that student parents' "chance for success is decreased when there is a lack of support or hostility in the home towards their return to school" (15). Other challenges that impact student parent success include financial stress, transportation, health, work and child schedules, and childcare issues. Despite these ongoing challenges, student parents are generally motivated to persevere and are more likely to excel academically when compared to traditional students (15).

Student parents in higher education come from varying backgrounds that inform their motivations to pursue further education. Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke (2016) suggest that motivation to attend post-secondary schools "has a strong future orientation" (14). This includes seeking better employment or a different career, self-development, and contributing to society in general.

Research also suggests that personal motivation and perseverance is a key factor in student parent success and retention. Peterson (2016) asserts that “student parents . . . [have] an internal resolve to be proactive, to plan for success, to face challenges and turn them into opportunities, and to daily renew their commitment to the goal of completion” (379). This coincides with others, such as Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke (2016), who maintain that “there is no doubt that student parents are motivated to attend and successfully complete university; also the inclusion of student parents enriches the learning experience for all students and faculty” (24).

1.3 Stigmatization

Moreau (2016) argues that student parents “represent a significant proportion of the higher education population in England and other Western countries . . . [however] extant research concentrates mostly on the experiential level” (906). She further suggests that college and university policies are directed towards students without children and therefore higher education institutions contribute to marginalization of student parents (906). Historically, certain groups have been excluded in academia, student parents among them; however, much has changed, and more diversity among the student body is seen at most Western higher education institutions (907–909): this includes student parents. Statistically, mothers assume the bulk of the care work, and, as Moreau maintains, care work is seen as private and time intensive, while academic work is regarded as productive and also time intensive (911–912). Combining study and parenting is thus considered counterproductive and incompatible. Faced with this dilemma, student parents, particularly mothers, strive to create a balance that allows them to fulfill both student and parenting responsibilities as, in the academic sphere, children are considered disruptive and problematic (913). As Moreau asserts, “by bringing private lives into academia, parenting and pregnant bodies become subversive of the public/private binary” (913).

Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid (2009) maintain that "student mothers . . . must . . . contend with conflicting and powerful ideologies that surround academia and motherhood" (438).

1.4 The Neoliberal University

Neoliberalism is a defining feature of late capitalism, one that involves cultivating individuals as "capital-enhancing agents" (Rottenberg 2018, 7). It is centred on liberalizing free markets and free trade, privatization, privileging private property ownership, and promoting self-responsibility. Neoliberalism works as a form of political economic governing that shapes and impacts all areas of social life (McKenzie, Bieler and McNeil 2014; Rottenberg 2018; Ball 2012; Davies and Bansel 2007).

The effects of neoliberalism on the university are extensive and deep. Practices of performance measurement rest upon neoliberal notions of individualization and competitiveness, and as such are concerned with defining the parameters of an optimally productive, performing students and faculty. What underscores this neoliberal practice of individualization is the idea that universities determine what skills are necessary in a competitive market. In a global economic market, players, including universities, are compelled to remain competitive and current. Globalization of education is considered a necessary part of post-secondary education to increase knowledge production and encourage exchange of ideas and money (Morrissey 2013; Davies and Bansel 2007; McKenzie, Bieler, and McNeil 2015; DesRoches 2011).

Davies and Bansel (2007) suggest that "schools and universities have arguably been reconfigured to (re)produce highly individualized, responsibilized subjects who have become 'entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives'" (249). They further maintain that "neoliberalism is . . . widely taken up as natural and inevitable" (258). However, they also warn

that “becoming an appropriate(d) neoliberal subject who floats free of the social and takes up responsibility for its own survival in a competitive world, where only the fittest survive, is no easy task” (258). Indeed, the reconfiguring of students as individually responsible subjects eliminates any other identities or value as human participants in society or higher education. Further, with neoliberal individual participants prepared to function as competitors in a global market, social behaviour is reconfigured as an economic imperative but perceived as personal choice (Davies and Bansel 2007; McKenzie, Bieler, and McNeil 2016; Rottenberg 2018; Morrissey 2013).

There is a vast body of literature that highlights the ways in which neoliberalism underscores much of the contemporary university institutional life, which appears increasingly typified by burgeoning interactions with the private sector (eg. industry and technology sectors). This literature expresses concern that higher education is being overly influenced by economic delineations of productivity, which miss out on broader civic, political and social educational ‘values’ (Gordon 2009; Morrissey 2013; for Canadian context see Brownlee 2015). Brownlee (2015), for example, maintains that “academic units that are ‘closer to the market’ are more and more likely to be prioritized within the institutional hierarchy” (28). Entrepreneurism is encouraged through more access to funding than other disciplines, and it is “often viewed as both an individual and an institutional necessity” (31). Changing university policies are influenced by growing corporate involvement, increasingly positioned as vital to sustainability (Brownlee 2015; McKenzie, Bieler, and McNeil 2015).

Universities also depend on “external sources of power in society” (Brownlee 2015, 13) for financial support. Although governments provide fiscal support, corporations and wealthy donors are also required to sustain programs and services at post-secondary institutions

(Brownlee 2015; Harvey 2005; Davies and Bansel 2007; DesRoches 2011). For the past several decades, market and corporate structures have increasingly wielded this influential governing power in post-secondary institutions through broadening financial investment.

Although the public sees neoliberal practices of corporatization and market influence as necessary and beneficial, undergraduate instructors and programmes in the social sciences and humanities struggle to function adequately (Raddon and Harrison 2015; Johnson and Luhmann 2015; Davies and Bansel 2007). In fact, neoliberalism works to frustrate instructors' authority and autonomy by imposing "state curriculum and surveillance authorities" (Davies and Bansel 2007, 256). As well, student internalization of neoliberal ideals that suggest certain streams of education to ensure a better paying future job can distort "their sense of identity in their own educational experience" (DesRoches 2011, 81).

The student consumer is part of the neoliberal university. Debates around liberal versus vocational education have "helped transform students into educational consumers—or as customers purchasing a service or a private good—who are encouraged to extract maximum 'value' for their tuition dollars" (Brownlee 2015, 75). Brownlee (2015) affirms that "redefining students as educational consumers—with similar roles, rights and obligations to customers in the private marketplace—has changed the way universities relate to their 'students,' as well as the ways in which students view learning, knowledge production and their relationship to the university" (79). Neoliberal tenets at post-secondary institutions are introduced and reinforced by specific policies that govern practices and inform individuals in their place in the working of the university. Therefore, students are active participants in circulating practices and discourses to maintain the neoliberal university (Davies and Bansel 2007; McKenzie, Bieler, and McNeil 2015; Ball 2012; Raddon and Harrison 2015; Johnson and Luhmann 2015; Morrissey 2013).

Performance management conflicts with the "foundational urges of public universities to 'promote independence of intellectual thought'" (Morrissey 2015, 630). Neoliberal governmentality at modern universities strives to regulate student performance. However, the neoliberal student takes personal responsibility, working harder and better, contributing to self-worth and individual value (Ball 2012; Morrissey 2015; Rottenberg 2018; Davies and Bansel 2007).

The student parent is absorbed into the neoliberal university with additional responsibilities, which involves navigating an education, financial burdens, and parenting duties. The increasing burden to be self-sustaining, proactive, and self-motivated challenges parenting responsibilities, which usually involves highly dependent children who require physical, emotional, and mental sustenance.

1.5 Summary

The literature focuses on larger post-secondary institutions, with some smaller institutions examined. There is a consistent theme in the literature that relates to childcare needs, household responsibilities, studying, and school planning. Such responsibilities suggest avenues of inquiry through theories of reproductive labour and patriarchal motherhood, which helps me understand how student parents navigate their responsibilities. Student parent experiences and institutional perceptions of student parents are disconnected in the literature, which may be explained by a lack of research on stakeholders in student parent research. Also, underlying reasons why institutional support is lacking is not thoroughly examined in the literature, and I will attempt to address this in my project by analysing the information through a social feminist framework.

Chapter Two -— Theoretical Frameworks and Methodology: A Feminist Perspective of Student Parent Imperatives

In this chapter, I first outline the theoretical frameworks and perspectives that underpin my analysis of the interviews in subsequent chapters. Here, I lay out the tenets of social feminist theorizing on reproductive labour, and then draw upon the work of feminist scholars who theorize notions of patriarchal motherhood. The second part of the chapter discusses my methodology, which includes a discussion of feminist standpoint epistemology as well as an outline of the research process itself.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Reproductive Labour and Patriarchal Motherhood

Reproductive labour was originally defined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as a "differentiation between the production of goods in the economy and the reproduction of the labor power necessary to the maintenance of that productive economy" (Duffy 2007, 315). Although Marxism developed the concept of reproductive labour within the category of capitalism and its social relations, it failed to consider the impact of gender in its understanding (Nicholson 1997, 143). Socialist feminism extends Marxist theories of reproductive labour to include how "gender, race, and class [participate] in constructing inequality and exploitation" (Gordon 2013, 22). Particularly, socialist feminism understands how the labour of some benefits others and contributes to marginalization and oppression of women. Socialist feminism addresses how racialization and class intertwine with patriarchal power relationships. Other feminist theories are potential lenses for this study and include liberal feminism, that has a goal of equal opportunity for women within a patriarchal system and thus considers unpaid reproductive labour within patriarchy as antithetical to equality. Conversely, radical feminism advocates for abolishing women's oppression—as it is based in patriarchy—and seeks a woman-led society

(Toupin 2018). Neither radical nor liberal feminism provide reasonable discussion for the reality and intersectional contexts of reproductive labour, so theorizing through socialist feminism is more pertinent to my thesis. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the concept of reproductive labour helps explain the experiences of the student parent participants in this research.

Patriarchal motherhood can be defined as an institution that has historically oppressed women through regulation of women's behaviour and specific directives for raising children. It is a societal construct created under patriarchy to govern women's behaviour. It encompasses aspects of childcare and housework that centre on the home being the traditional and accepted place for carrying out activities of child-raising and domestic work, with the mother being the primary and essential person to undertake the work. Motherhood has long been subsumed under patriarchy, and women have been strictly defined and subject to prescribed behaviour under their capacity to bear and raise children (Green 2015; O'Reilly 2016; O'Brien-Hallstein 2014; Holmes 1997). With the advent of Rich's work *Of Woman Born*, patriarchal motherhood became a site for inquiry. Rothman (1989) analyzed patriarchal motherhood through capitalism, postulating that mothers are "workers", through their mother work and bodies; however, "under capitalism, workers do not own or control the products of their own labour" (65): children are valuable, but the "mothers . . . are the cheap, expendable, not-too-trustworthy labour necessary to produce the precious product" (65–66).

Rich (1986) theorizes that "at the core of patriarchy is the individual family unit which originated with the idea of property and the desire to see one's property transmitted to one's biological descendants" (60). Extending this, mothers then carry the "property" of the fathers, so motherhood is imagined under a lens of patriarchy and exhibits specific characteristics to cement patriarchal order. Rich further argues that "in the creation of the patriarchal family . . . [the

mother's] full meaning and capacity is domesticated and confined within strictly defined limits" (127). Ross concurs, suggesting that motherhood is a "universal construct, . . . a patriarchal institution male-defined, male-controlled, and oppressive to women" (Ross 2016, 1–5).

Maternal feminism is a theory drawing domestic labour and childcare into the women's movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Devereux 1999, 178). As an imperialist notion, it situates white women as "the 'mother of the race'. . . producing and raising healthy children as she also [works] valiantly to make the nation and the empire socially and morally hygienic as her own home" (178). As a colonial imagining, maternal feminism erases racialized mothers and their experiences and fails to properly counteract patriarchal motherhood.

O'Reilly (2016) describes "ten ideological assumptions that cause patriarchal motherhood to be oppressive to women [namely,] essentialization, privatization, individualization, naturalization, normalization, idealization, biologicalization, expertization, intensification, and depoliticalization of motherhood" (65). Particularly, the terms privatization, expertization, intensification, and individualization fit into this research. Privatization "locates mother work solely in the reproductive realm of the home" (65), which reinforces neoliberalism. Individualization "causes such mothering to be the work and responsibility of one person" (65). Intensification and expertization are intertwined, otherwise known as "intensive mothering", which "causes childrearing to be all consuming and expert driven" (65). Green (2015) suggests that

> components of trans feminisms . . . may enable us to move away from the impossibility of patriarchal institutionalized motherhood . . . [stepping] toward a rearticulated mothering practice that collectively conceives of parents, parenting, and parenthood beyond assumptions and expectations of what constitutes femininity and 'good mothering' (197).

O'Reilly (2016) suggests that the concept of mothering "has the potential to be empowering for women", counteracting patriarchal motherhood and maternal feminism (O'Reilly 2016, 5).

Patriarchal motherhood works to govern mothers' behaviour. For example: emotional, physical, and intellectual child raising is placed under the responsibility of mothers, with any delays or perceived failures considered maternal responsibility. Further, mothers have the responsibility of ensuring fathers understand and implement parenting skills to enhance their children's characters and abilities (Song and Lee 2014). As a social construct, patriarchal motherhood maintains that "good mothering" and good fathering" are idealized under neoliberal concepts (Doucet 2013; Palladino 2014; Johnston and Swanson 2006; Verduzco-Baker 2010; Bayraktar 2014).

Intensive mothering is an ideology that works within patriarchal motherhood and positions the mother as the ideal caregiver, particularly with her physical presence and deep commitment to parenting her children. A mother is seen as a "good mother" if she devotes all her time and attention to raising her children, thereby designating outside activities—such as work, volunteering, or higher education—as inaccessible. Although many women work outside the home, they still carry the majority of the load of domestic and childcare responsibilities in the home. The culture of "mother-blame" is rooted in patriarchal motherhood and is "so dominant that it is taken for granted; it goes unchallenged and has seeped into the pores of our culture's narrative" (Ames 2015, 122). Women are expected to conform to gendered stereotypes of behaviour in the private and public spheres to fit societal expectations for success at home and work. The failures of their children to conform to social expectations is blamed on perceived mothering defects. Another concept that adds to the patriarchal motherhood imperative is the discourse of "new fatherhood", which works within patriarchal motherhood and alongside

intensive mothering, encouraging fathers to increase their involvement and time with their children, along with working full-time hours. Examining the experiences of student parents through theoretical lenses of reproductive labour and patriarchal notions of motherhood helps me understand how the student parents inform their individual narratives (Vissing 2014; Paltineau 2014; Anderson and Moore 2014; Borda 2015; Takseva 2014; Estes 2011; Ross 2016; Johnson 2008; Breton 2014).

The continuing issue in the literature on the unpaid reproductive labour of women centres around its devaluation and perception as "unproductive" work. What lies behind the implication of reproductive labour—childcare and housework—as meaningless and unworthy of monetary compensation is the enduring existence of patriarchal motherhood as an institution. A challenge lies in the disagreement among feminists, with some seeing mothering and domestic labour as oppressive and others suggesting that it needs to be recognized as part of women's experiences (Nathanson 2008, 249). However, more feminist scholars are challenging essentialization of mothering/motherhood and the misogyny that underlines the denial of motherhood as a site for analysis. At the root of this argument, reproductive labour remains a key component of the establishment of patriarchal motherhood, and it is that system that oppresses everyone generally and mothers specifically.

2.2 Methodology

Feminist standpoint questions the power relations present in knowledge production (Naples and Gurr 2014, 19). It also "amplifies the liberatory possibilities . . . [in] women's experience and activity as a dominated group" (Hartsock 2004, 355). Hartsock further argues for a re-evaluation of women's experiences and use of that knowledge to examine patriarchal institutions and ideology and potentially "raise . . . a community structured by a variety of

connections rather than separation and opposition" (366). Hartsock also argues that "a standpoint is not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged" (36), reinforcing "a duality of levels of reality" (37) and "recognition of the power realities operative in a community" (39). Further, feminist standpoint is "achieved rather than obvious, a mediated rather than immediate understanding" (39), allowing for deeper inquiry and understanding. However, "there is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for that metaphor to ground our visions . . . the feminist standpoint theorists' goal of an epistemological and politics of engaged, accountable positioning remains eminently potent" (Hekman 2004, quoting Donna Haraway, 235). Pels (2004) quotes Harding, suggesting that

> the epistemic asymmetry between the standpoints of the dominant and the subaltern, in its feminist version, implies that 'starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts, not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order (275).

Feminist standpoint allows me to more accurately understand the information gathered from the narratives.

Crucial to feminist standpoint theorizing is situating oneself in the research. Hesse-Biber suggests that "reflexivity means taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one's own lived reality and experiences, [which is] extremely helpful in the research process" (200). Positioning myself as a student parent, but also as an observer of other student parents and interpreting their experiences, situates me as an insider and an outsider. I speak only for myself, and carefully consider the voices of the participants when analyzing the data.

In keeping with feminist research, I employed a qualitative approach to my data collection so as to "understand the 'lived experiences' of the individual" (Hesse-Biber 2014,

189). Hesse-Biber (2014) suggests that "much of qualitative search. . . deals with observation and interviewing, methods that require constant interaction between the researcher and the researched" (398). Using a qualitative method such as interviewing allowed the participants to engage and respond to questions with deeper context, thereby providing a greater depth of understanding. As well, unlike other data collection methods, opinions and experiences are shared that could have been missed otherwise.

Certain questions initiated the interview process, and from the data, the same and further questions drove the analysis. These questions are: What do student parents experience in their parenting and studying responsibilities? What motivates or guides the strategization for student parents to succeed in their post-secondary education pursuit and parenting? How does the University of Lethbridge function to support and engage student parents? How can the University improve in its support provision for student parents?

I applied for ethical review through the University of Lethbridge's Human Subject Research Committee and was approved to begin my research on August 29, 2018. Interviews and data analysis were undertaken in accordance with the expectations of my ethics protocol.

I sought to recruit seven to ten student parent participants who were currently enrolled full or part-time at the University of Lethbridge (undergraduate or graduate) and parenting at least one child who was seventeen years or under. I also sought to interview a minimum of three institutional stakeholders, defined as University of Lethbridge employees who work in a service or department that provides support for university students.

I used my own network, placed recruitment posters around the university from September 2018 to December 2018, and had participant recommendations to find more participants. I also spoke to several university classes about my proposed study. To recruit stakeholders, I contacted

departments at the university through email: specifically, the Student Success Centre, Counselling Services, the Office of the Dean of Arts and Science, and Campus Women's Centre. This is described as convenience sampling. Convenience sampling "[provides] insights into the sampled population" (Miner and Jayaratne 2014, 316). Convenience sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling that is useful for finding participants that are more readily available. This sampling also consisted of snowball sampling—where participants invite others in their own network to participate in the research—as some participants could recommend other student parents who were willing to share their experiences (Miner and Jayaratne 2014, 316).

Ultimately, I interviewed eight student parents (see Table 1) and four stakeholders (see Appendices A and B for Letters of Invitation and Consent Form, respectively).

Table 1: Student parent demographics

Name	Major/Year	No. of Children	Marital Status
P1	2nd yr/Sociology/Ed	4	Married
Mark L.	3rd yr Science/Ed	3	Married
Erinn R.	Returning student (has PhD in Music) in the Ed programme	3	Widowed
N.S.	3rd year Public Health	3	Married
Graham	2nd yr Graduate student/Psychology	2	Married
P2	4th yr Public Health	3	Married
Deirdre E.	2/3 year Fine Arts	1	Single
Crystal B.	1st yr Graduate student/French	5	Married

Source: This information was taken from the consent forms filled out during the interviews.

I conducted the interviews between September 14 and November 1, 2018. Participants were given choices for time and location. Most stakeholders were interviewed in their offices, and I interviewed student parents in booked group rooms in the university library, which allowed for more privacy to record the interviews. Semi-structured in nature, the interviews provided opportunity for participants to respond to questions with as much detail as they desired. Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to ask specific questions to inform my research but also allowed the participant to tell their story and for me to add other questions that came up through the process. Hesse-Biber (2014) maintains, "an agenda . . . is not tightly determined, and there is room left for spontaneity on the part of the researcher and interviewee" (187).

Each interview began with a discussion about informed consent, which allowed participants to ask questions before the interview began. Before the recording began, I built rapport by chatting with the participant about general topics, sometimes related to the interview and sometimes about classes or university life. The student parent questions centred on schooling and parenting experiences and supports, along with a query about what participants would like to see in the future to support them in their student parenting. The stakeholder questions were about stakeholder awareness and experiences with student parents, as well as what they perceived was available at the university to support student parents.

Ethics

Feminist research is aware of power relations informing the researcher and the researched relationship, and it emphasizes "responsibility and caring relationships rather than more abstract ideas about rights, justice, virtues, or outcomes" (Bell 2014, 80). As important as the research is, the participant's well-being is more important than obtaining personal information that may cause them harm. Alcoff (2014) asserts that "a kind of representation occurs in all cases of

speaking for [others] . . . [and] this representation is never a simple act of discovery, and . . . it will most likely have an impact on the individual so represented" (486). She further maintains that "speaking for others is often, though not always, erasure and a reinscription of sexual, national, and other kinds of hierarchies" (Alcoff 2014, 494). To address these concerns, I attempt to keep my position as a researcher, and my position as a student parent, clear and present throughout the analysis and discussion.

Limitations

This study focuses on the experiences of eight student parents at the University of Lethbridge. This research is intended to provide grounding work for eventual master's research. The scope and sample of this research are appropriate for a feminist standpoint theoretical lens that "is achieved as a consequence of self-reflective analysis from a specific social actor, social group, or social location rather than available simply because one happens to be a member of an oppressed group or share a social location" (Naples and Gurr 28). Results are not representative of all student parents, but they are a small sample to "look at the 'process' or the 'meanings' individuals attribute to their given social situation, nor necessarily to make generalizations" (Hesse-Biber 192).

My research participants do not include anyone who self-identified as Indigenous, racialized, or LGBTQ. Although I placed a poster by the Indigenous Studies department, only two participants responded to posters and neither suggested they are Indigenous. I understand this is a limit to my findings and recommend that future research with student parents at the University of Lethbridge should specifically seek out these populations.

Chapter Three — "With knowledge, you have everything": Student Parenting Challenges and Strategies

This chapter presents my analysis of the interviews and central findings. In the first section, I introduce the student parents interviewed for this study providing brief biographical information about each. Next, I consider how sexist and essentialist constructions of parenting impact student parent experiences. Finally, I present how student parents challenge these assumptions to forge their own educational and parental paths in individual yet common ways and suggest how institutions can address the needs of student parents. Researchers postulate that post-secondary education is a "site of struggle [and] a site of resistance in which student parents actively engage with negotiating the dominant discourses of deficit typically applied to non-traditional students and redefine their own status in their own terms" (Moreau and Kerner 2015, 230). This project may help institutions respond to and recognize student parents.

In the following research, neoliberal concepts of self-investment, individual effort, and personal directives provide a framework for understanding themes that have arisen around reproductive labour, invisibility, and being a "good parent." The research participants are consistently drawing on aspects of neoliberal rhetoric when they emphasize the personal effort they exert into accomplishing their student and parental goals. Understanding how notions of patriarchal motherhood and reproductive labour work to inform societal constructs of student parent behavioural expectations provide groundwork for analysis of the data.

3.1 Student Parent Biographies

Participant 1 (P1) is a second-year sociology student, planning to enter the Faculty of Education program. She is married and has four children, between the ages of 5 and 16. P1 returned to post-secondary study when her youngest was school age. Her inspiration to return to

school came from a friend who suggested pursuing her education would "push her family forward" (interview, 14 Sept., 2018). Her spouse is supportive of her studies, but works as a teacher, so P1's classes must be balanced with his work and their children's needs. She and her spouse cooperate to ensure their children's needs are taken care of (homeschooling, school, extra-curricular classes, etc.) She tries to take later afternoon or evening classes, as the family does not access outside childcare. P1 has found that her university classes enhance her parenting, and her experiences as a parent enhance her student experience. Her children are constantly on her mind, even while in school. As P1 iterates, "You don't ever stop being a parent."

P1's spouse is encouraging, and she describes him as her greatest support. She does not disclose her parental status to her professors or classmates, as she found that sharing that information changed the dynamics between herself and fellow students.

Mark L. is a third year Science/Education student. He is married with three children, the oldest having started school at the beginning of this school year. His spouse works part-time as an ultrasound technician, so they need childcare only a couple of days a week. Mark's inspiration to go back to school was while he was a construction worker: he felt that his job made him a "worse parent." He was tired when he came home and could not spend the time he wanted with his children. Going back to school to become a teacher became his goal, as he believes he could help other youth learn in a supportive atmosphere and be an effective and present parent for his children.

Mark is in his education practicum and feels the work is not as difficult as construction but requires more time. As a child, he struggled to learn and did not actually graduate from high school. Although he had trades training from NAIT, it is not transferable to the education

programme at the University of Lethbridge. Mark entered university as a mature student but was on educational probation until he could prove he could manage the work involved.

Eventually, Mark would like to work with at-risk students who struggle with their education. His own experiences in elementary and high school inspired him to want to help other students who need that understanding and support.

Erinn R. already achieved her PhD in Music, several years ago, when her now ten-year-old son was a year and a half old. At that time, she thought she was finished with her schooling, as she had already completed three degrees (undergraduate, masters, and doctorate). Previously, she had a job at the University of Lethbridge, but she left that when the family needed to move for her spouse's residency. A couple of years ago, when Erinn's spouse passed away from cancer, she found herself a single mother of three young boys. Attempting to get a job once more at the university was unsuccessful, and Erinn decided she wanted to get her education degree to become a school teacher. Entering the Education programme directly at the University of Lethbridge means she has only 19 months to complete her Education degree and begins with the coursework and practicum immediately.

Finances are a concern, but Erinn teaches private music lessons, which helps supplement her income, and she tries to access scholarships. Her youngest is the only one in daycare, as her older two boys are in school, but fortunately she found a dayhome close to the elementary school. Balancing single motherhood and school is challenging. However, despite all her responsibilities, Erinn enjoys all she does. She "[loves] teaching music lessons, [loves] her kids, . . . [loves] going to school, and [her] courses" (interview, 24 Sept. 2018).

N.S. is a married, third-year public health student, who also works full-time and is the primary provider for her family. Her spouse was laid off of work five months prior to our

interview and started a job the day before we met. She has two teenage sons along with an adult son who attends college. N. is also an immigrant, moving to Canada from Eastern Europe with her husband and children to provide a better future for their children. In her country, N.S. was already a registered nurse and had a theology degree. However, that education did not transfer to Canada, and she went to the Lethbridge College shortly after arriving, to attain a Canadian high school diploma and then a licensed practical nurse (LPN) diploma. N.S. works as a LPN full time, and attends university two days a week. Her salary pays her own tuition, as well as that of her college-age son, and the household bills. Initially N.S. thought she had only one day of school, but has two days, so loses an extra day of work which makes finances challenging.

Graham, a second-year graduate student working on a Master of Science in Psychology at the University of Lethbridge, is married with two children under school age. His oldest child was born when he was finishing up his undergraduate degree, also at the University of Lethbridge. Currently, he finds his schedule allows for a great deal of flexibility, so he can be more involved as a parent and in household responsibilities. While an undergrad student, he found the work more demanding, with extensive exams and assignments.

Graham feels his education impacts his parenting and his parenting impacts his learning. His thesis is about how children learn to speak, and as he researches the topic, he is also observing how his own children develop. Graham was used to working with adults in his undergraduate studies, but now as a graduate student he works with children—his own, as well as his research participants—and that provides a new perspective that informs his roles as student and parent.

Participant 2 (P2) is a fourth-year public health student, married with three children, and lives out of Lethbridge, travelling approximately one and a half hours each day to get to and

from the university. Her two eldest are school age and her youngest preschool age. Her spouse works full-time, and they work together to make sure the children are cared for, that home and family needs are met, and that P2 can accomplish her school assignments.

As a student parent, P2 feels like a caregiver with her fellow students as well as being a caregiver at home. She is concerned for the well-being of her classmates. She also feels that as a student parent, she "takes school more seriously" (interview, 13 Oct. 2018) than she might otherwise do. In her cohort, she has made "fantastic friends . . . [who] take care of each other, bringing different experiences and skills to the table."

P2's children study along with her, bringing their own school work to be with her when she studies at home. Her own studies have influenced how her children learn. For example, her older son learned about microbiology when P2 was taking a class in the subject. She feels her own university education helps her teach her children "new things and answer their questions" (interview, 13 Oct. 2018).

Deirdre E. is a second and third-year fine arts student and is single with one school age child. She was living in a small community working in a pub, and when her daughter was beginning school, she decided she wanted to go back to school herself. Initially, she was making the four-hour commute to and from her hometown to Lethbridge to attend university, coming home after classes to make supper for the family (at that time she was with a partner and lived near his extended family) but was unsupported by her partner and his family, so maintaining this schedule was unsustainable. Moving to Lethbridge made it more manageable, as she had family options for support and help. Along with attending university, Deirdre works part-time cleaning house for a friend.

Crystal B. is a first-year graduate student, working part-time on a Master of Arts in French feminist literature. As a part-time student she cannot access scholarships or grants, so relies on her teaching assistant income to pay most of her tuition and books. She is married with five children, and her spouse works full-time as a chiropractor.

Crystal's journey to this educational pursuit has been long and involved. She completed her undergraduate and accompanying education degree prior to marriage and children, and she was a focused and hardworking student and student teacher. Although that work ethic has remained, she has found that having children has caused a paradigm shift, bringing a new perspective to her educational pursuits. Attempting at different times over the years to complete a master's degree, different life events caused a change of course. Finally, with encouragement from her spouse, and her own desire, she is determined to follow through with her graduate degree plans.

3.2 "When the kids go to bed, I crack open the books": Reproductive Labour and Student Parenting

Childcare is an essential aspect of reproductive labour, as is the accompanying work that attends children: cooking, cleaning, and chauffeuring to activities, school, and other events. All student parents engage in domestic and childcare responsibilities that require regular attention.

The student parents interviewed demonstrate this division of labour by the language and intentions they signify when describing their family and household responsibilities. When it comes to housework and cooking, the student fathers describe their participation as "helping", whereas the student mothers outline their domestic work as integral to their daily scheduling. However, both student mothers and student fathers interpret their parenting responsibilities in egalitarian ways. The literature suggests that although men and women "do gender" in response

to household work, they "'use' domestic labor to accomplish personal, interpersonal and emotional goals related to gender" (Johnson 2008, 3).

N.S.'s experiences demonstrate the gendered aspects of reproductive labour. Despite her spouse being at home, she still does all the housework, the cooking, and works full-time, along with attending university. Although her spouse sometimes helps, N.S. iterates "he's a man, and men do what they want to do" (interview, 25 Sept. 2018), thereby reinforcing the gendered divisions of reproductive labour. She prioritizes care for her adolescent and adult children above her school work, sacrificing sleep to finish assignments. In this way, N.S. demonstrates clear intensive mothering practices with a deep commitment to her children.

As single parents, both Erinn and Deirdre have full financial and home responsibility for their families. Erinn asserts that her parenting shapes her student experience by forcing her to manage her time better. Deirdre has primary care of her daughter, which means she must arrange school and extracurricular activities for her daughter, along with meals, shopping, and all the housework. Erinn has the same scenario with her three sons, as a widow. Although she has extended family support available, the primary care for her children remains with her. All the responsibilities of care and family decision making fall on the shoulders of single parents. The literature reinforces the suggestion that single parents face added burdens of solitary parenting. Sheila Katz (2013) maintains that single mothers "motivate and energize themselves . . . despite the structural obstacles to their pursuit of higher education" (299).

In a society governed by and through a neoliberal ethos, the single parent, like any individual, is expected to be self-sufficient. This extends to caring for one's children. Here, a responsible neoliberal citizen will not only support and adequately care for their dependent children, they will raise them to be successful and well-rounded adults, without relying on

external resources. This extends to outsiders questioning the parents' ability to manage their situation effectively if they seek assistance or support. Deirdre's experiences with a professor who assumed her struggles in class were because of her single mothering responsibilities and the cash office employee who suggested that perhaps this "wasn't the right time for her to be in school" (interview 24 Oct., 2018) reinforce unrealistic ideals of parenting and abscond responsibility for supporting her student and parenting experience. These assumptions further suggest that Deirdre's primary focus should be on her daughter, and that if she cannot "handle" the work or the financial obligations, she should re-prioritize. Mothering imagined in this context is seen as focusing all time and attention on child raising; the implication is that Deirdre should leave higher education and centre all her attention on her daughter. The literature critiques such essentializing of mothering. Johnson (2014) asserts that "by focusing on mothering practices as the main contributing factor in a child's outcomes we shift the social policy and research conversations away from a necessary but difficult discussion about how to develop healthier communities" (274). Both Kristin Krein, in The Campus Women's Centre, and the stakeholder in Counselling Services emphasize that student parents should not have to wait to go to post-secondary school but that "the institution should adjust to support student parents" (interview, 12 October 2018).

Most of the student parents rely on extended family to support their student pursuits by helping with childcare. Deirdre and Crystal engage in a reciprocal relationship with extended family. When Deirdre shovels her mother's walkways and her daughter packs her own lunch, she is expanding the scope of reproductive labour and modeling what cooperative work looks like. Although Crystal has an active and supportive spouse, she and her sister help each other out picking up and dropping off each other's children. Here, too, Crystal's children experience an

expansion of reproductive labour, understanding that accessing outside help in family life benefits everyone. The literature supports the concept of extended family support, much of it recommending that such help is essential. Webber (2017), for example, maintains that "accessing family capital [economic, social, cultural, and emotional] can aid a woman's success on a programme" (424). It also benefits the entire family as an example of collaborative support, if available.

Housework is a constant part of the family experience. With the rising trend of men being more involved in domestic labour in the home, both Mark and Graham demonstrate a commitment to a more balanced and egalitarian domestic arrangement, participating extensively in childcare and housework. Although it is not clear how equal their household responsibilities are with their spouses, they both indicate that "chores" and parenting responsibilities are shared. Graham maintains that his relationship with his spouse is critical and that recognizing her "unpaid labour and [relieving] her from her work at home" is important (interview, 28 Sept. 2018), which still assumes reproductive labour is the primary responsibility of women.

When domestic work is shared in the home, despite the work or school responsibilities of both partners, children have an opportunity to see what an equal relationship looks like. Although Crystal's and P1's spouses work full-time in their own careers, they share in the household and parenting labour with their respective partners. Although my research suggests reproductive labour is still primarily carried out by the female partners, some participants do suggest there is an increase of equality in the division of domestic labour. Balanced and cooperative relationships in the home where housework and childcare is equally divided serves as a valuable example for children. The literature reinforces this. Demo and Acock (1993) maintain that "[with] the importance of early socialization experience, it is also important to

examine whether children . . . are witnessing or participating in a more egalitarian division of housework" (323). Seeing family members work together to care for the home normalizes the experience, and children will carry that into adulthood.

Fully participating in student life is challenging for student parents. As P2 lives out of town, all time spent at the university is directed to study and class activity. When she explains that she had to turn down a teaching assistant position because it interferes with family time, she confirms that her time is not truly her own: school and study are for her family, and to continue nurturing her family, she must spend the time that is not devoted to classes and studying to being with them. This is supported by the literature. Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke (2016) suggest that:

> financial difficulties, transportation challenges, conflicts with work schedules, child care, and health problems make it difficult for student parents to maintain a balance between their home lives, in addition to their work and school commitments. These challenges and resulting tensions can lead to questions regarding their self-efficacy in their student and family roles (15).

Therefore, ongoing, physical support from partners and children are a crucial factor contributing to student and family success.

Participating in events or clubs or activities becomes almost impossible, as Mark suggests when he decided to pass on joining the track team. Although he would enjoy the connection with other runners and the physical activity, the required daily practices conflict with his school schedule and parenting responsibilities. Sacrificing some self-care is inevitable when one has children, and prioritizing family and school is the norm. Free time generally means more time with family, rather than more leisure activities. Prioritizing family time over personal leisure activities is a tenet of intensive parenting practices that reinforces patriarchal motherhood directives. The impetus to be an involved and engaged parent becomes internalized.

Although many parents feel guilt, particularly when it comes to time with their children, it is most pronounced among mothers. With the seemingly divergent identities of student and parent "battling" for priority, guilt seems an inevitable outcome. While Crystal expresses that she feels "mom guilt" because she cannot do everything, she also takes comfort in her children being "healthy, well taken care of, and loved" (interview, 1 Nov. 2018). "Mom guilt" is socially constructed through the patriarchal motherhood concept of intensive mothering. Crystal responds to this by believing her school work is important for the family, mitigating her guilty feelings. What her education brings to her parenting and to her family's security and well-being in the future allows Crystal to work through the guilt and continue in her education. By accepting alternative definitions of being a good mother, Crystal subverts the compulsory requirements that patriarchal motherhood maintains.

3.2.1 "You don't ever get to stop being the parent": Patriarchal Motherhood in a Post-Secondary Context

Student parents are essentially invisible at the university. All student parent participants echo this to a degree. When P1 visited a Geography Club table and was openly ignored, her invisibility as a student was clearly at work. The discomfort of fellow students with her parental status also highlights her student parent invisibility. This led P1 to deliberately hide the fact she is a parent so as to maintain friendly relations with fellow students. At school, she "takes her parent filter off" (interview, 14 Sept. 2018). However, she negates this notion when she states "You don't ever get to stop being the parent" maintaining that she is always thinking about her children and whether they are all right. This is supported by the literature. Prokhovnik (1998)

asserts that "the . . . tendency to think in dualistic terms about public and private—the need to define oneself in opposition to, in rejection of, and in a hierarchy with something else, rather than in *connexion* (emphasis in original) to it—that needs to be overcome" (87). Essentially, being a student parent is not a dichotomy, but rather a united status. Student parents do not leave their parent status at home, despite periodic attempts to do so. At school, they remain parents as well as students. At home, they are students, as well as parents. These subject positions interweave and combine with one another, rather than remain separated in isolated spheres and therefore need to be regarded as a united role.

Graham sensed that some professors disapproved of his father status when his first child was born at the end of his undergraduate degree. Specifically, he felt that being a male student and possibly because he was in his mid-twenties and having children while in school, was viewed as "irresponsible" (interview, 28 Sept. 2018). Although it was not often vocally expressed, he could sense which professors were supportive and which were disapproving, by their attitudes towards him. I posit that this leads back to notions of where parenting belongs and who is considered the "appropriate" caregiver of children as well as who is an "appropriate student". Children are allegedly unwelcome in post-secondary institutions, and their care belongs in the private sphere, with mothers situated as the ideal caregiver. In this scenario, fathers, despite increased participation in parenting their children in the past decade or more (Doucet 2013), are expected to leave their parenting at home, as the assumption is that there is someone else, presumably the mother, to care for their children. This allows them to devote all their attention and efforts to their studies. The reality is that fathers are significantly more engaged as active fathers than in previous decades, and they share in the parenting responsibilities with their partners (Demo and Acock 1993, 323).

Palladino (2014) describes a new fatherhood that is parallel to intensive mothering with a focus on extensive time and attention with children. However, "both [discourses] exist in tension with older cultural models of men and women's complimentary family roles, such as the increasingly unattainable post-war era breadwinner/homemaker arrangement, but neither offers real solutions to the work/family conflict" (282). When Mark iterates that "it wasn't a hard decision to come back to school" (interview, 21 Sept. 2018) he accepts the demands of "new fatherhood." His previous work in construction made him a "worse parent" (interview, 21 Sept. 2018), as he could not spend much time with his children. Changing career direction allows him to be more present, and this satisfies his conscience. The literature reinforces the construct of new fatherhood. Pedersen (2012) maintains that "rather than feeling constraint and guilt, most fathers [feel] empowered to participate in child care when they want to be involved" (242).

Graham's recognition of the importance of family time over extra-curricular activities also follows this trajectory of good parenting. His determination to "relieve [his spouse] from her work at home when [he] can" allows him to be a good parent (interview, 28 Sept. 2018). This is supported by the literature. Schiffrin et al. (2014) suggest that there are societal expectations that "fathers 'should' be more child-centered in their parenting practices" (1077). Palladino (2014) suggests that "today's fathers, especially those who live with their children, devote much of their time and energy outside of work to parenting" (287). Both Mark and Graham assert that being fully involved in their children's lives on a daily basis, engaging with them and caring for their needs, is important. However, Palladino warns that "fathers also encounter contradictions when they try to live up to the standards of new fatherhood within a system developed under old fatherhood" (282).

Notions of invisibility of parenting in the post-secondary institution context links back to suggestions of the individualization and privatization of patriarchal motherhood, suggested by O'Reilly (2016). Graham's consciousness of censure of his parental status and P1's hesitancy in exposing her parental responsibilities underline the perception that parenting is the exclusive role of mothers "[located] solely in the reproductive realm of the home" (65). Patriarchal motherhood regulates not only mothers and the female body, but also men in their roles as fathers. The new fatherhood demand that fathers must focus as much time and attention on their children as possible subsists under the patriarchal motherhood sentiment of child raising. What further complicates the issue is that men are expected to adhere to patriarchal standards determining that paid labour, or education needs to be prioritized. This is reinforced by the literature. Palladino (2014) maintains that "scarcity . . . [of time with children] combined with the feelings of conflict both logistical and emotional, between work and home comprise the soil in which the seeds of intensive fathering are planted" (287).

The institution as a whole does not recognize student parents. The university holds regular events and festivities such as Fresh Fest or Ender Bender directed to "all" university students as well as the community, but none that specifically welcome children. There are activities and events that include children, such as Play Day or IScientists, but these are directed to the community as a whole, and are not specific to student parents and their children. All participants recognize this as a lack. Each student parent suggested they never attempt to participate in anything, as activities and events outside of class and class requirements take time away from family. The stakeholder in Counselling Services reiterates that "some events are not child friendly, even if they are allowed. For example, time can be an issue: if it's late, that's not good for children's bedtimes" (interview, 12 Oct. 2018) This further suggests a disconnect

between the university and its student body. When programmes, services, or events fail to address the needs of certain demographics, this suggests that children do not belong at the institution.

The University of Lethbridge is unaware of how many student parents are enrolled. Both the stakeholder in the Office of the Dean of Arts and Sciences and Dr. Mark Slomp, the Director of Student Access Services, concede that the university does not collect this information. The stakeholder in the Dean's office wonders "under what premise the University of Lethbridge would collect the information about parental status" (interview, 4 Oct. 2018), however Dr. Slomp admits this is information that could help the university begin knowing what student parents need. Being uncounted among the student body is a key example of the invisibility of parenting outside of the home. This is supported by the literature. Carleheden, Heidegren, and Willig (2012) assert that "to make people disappear by refusing to take notice of them, by demonstratively seeing through them, is a form of disrespect in the form of being the object of stigmatizing and devaluating attitudes, gestures or actions" (1). Although arguably unintentional, the University of Lethbridge's blindness regarding student parents eloquently speaks to its dichotomizing of who is a recognizable student and who is not. The traditional student being allegedly unencumbered with outside responsibilities, specifically without dependent children, is not only the ideal but is the only acceptable student. The student with children has partitioned attention and is unable to focus all attention on their studies. The implication is that student parents cannot fully commit to student responsibilities.

Invisibility is where the neoliberal university and the student parent collide. With neoliberal imperatives that demand increased involvement and dedication to studies and educational or extra-curricular activities to demonstrate commitment to education, the student

parent is left behind. The student parent, unable to fully participate in student life, is perceived as less committed to post-secondary study and is relegated to the periphery which renders them invisible. Additionally, the concept of "choice" in a neoliberal context suggests the university is not responsible for understanding student parents or answering their needs, which is evidenced by the experiences both Graham and Deirdre had with staff.

Although N.S. feels like she is "sacrificing [her] family", she also "needs to be a perfect example for [her] children", (interview, 25 Sept. 2018), and this involves her attending post-secondary study to increase her education. By pursuing her studies simultaneously with her son in college and her other children still in high school, N.S. believes her example will encourage them to work hard and pursue higher education (interview, 25 Sept. 2018). N.S.'s full-time combined duties at home, at work, and at school underline her desire to fully care for her family—including their physical, mental, financial, and emotional needs. The literature reinforces this idea. Johnston and Swanson (2006) assert that "IME (Intensive Mothering Expectations) create relationships that confuse dependency with intimacy, place sole maintenance of relationships on the mother, and model women's self-sacrifice" (510). However, "by modifying mothering expectations to reinforce their work decision, all mothers can claim their personal work status decision benefits their children" (517). Choices such as upgrading education also contribute to the well-being of the whole family.

Student parents, as well as some stakeholders challenge tenets of patriarchal motherhood through actions of support and affirmation. Mark and Erinn have both experienced acceptance and ample support in the Faculty of Education. When deciding where to place education students in practicums, the faculty asks students to disclose their other responsibilities, including family needs. This elucidates that the faculty fully recognizes student parents and their commitments

outside of school. Mark feels accepted by professors and postulates that it could be that teachers in the education programme who come from the public school system see parenting as "normal", Erinn says that some instructors have told her, "if you need an extension, come and ask" (interview, 24 Sept., 2018).

Deirdre finds the art department completely supportive, maintaining that some of her fellow students and professors are welcoming to her daughter, providing a space where her child can wait comfortably when she comes with Deirdre. Some fellow students have befriended her daughter and expect her to be present. Further, one professor Deirdre had in her first year had a great impact on her—not only for Deirdre as a student, but also as a parent—and she has continued seeking this professor out for mentorship and support. Being seen and welcome allows the student parent to find a place of "being" at the university. P2 has also found a staff member who has expressed ongoing support and awareness, and she considers this staff member a friend. When academic and support staff contest patriarchal notions of where parenting belongs, it empowers student parents.

Modeling projected future realities is another concept that informs student parenting. Deirdre "wants to show [her] daughter that she can do whatever she wants" (interview, 24 Oct. 2018). Being an effective parent means paving the way for the next generation, and attending post-secondary education helps reinforce this idea. Deirdre implies that she is a good mother when she models being a productive and diligent student in higher education. This belief is supported by the literature. Van Rhijn, Lero, and Burke (2016) maintain that "the children of student mothers, in particular, are more motivated to attend college when their mother successfully completes her program; however, this is decreased if the mother is unsuccessful in

her academic pursuits" (15). By persevering in studies, student parents, particularly student mothers, are performing the "good parent" operative by preparing their child for their future.

Future betterment is not the only motivation for student parents, but also current rewards in the family. When Erinn reflects on how her education helps her "see how [her] children learn and how their brains work", (interview, 24 Sept. 2018) she is suggesting that her education can contribute to her parenting skills. Despite the challenges in pursuing another degree while raising her children, her children will benefit in the now because of new knowledge that informs Erinn's mothering. As P2 considers how her university education "helps [her] teach [her] children new things and answer their questions" (interview, 13 Oct. 2018), she brings her education into her parenting directive. University classes then become a dual education, one that is intellectual for the individual and the other that is parenting education that supports the family.

3.2.2 Discussion: "Being a parent has really blown my mind about how I think about things"

Student parents have a multi focus when approaching post-secondary education. They not only have personal goals of education and careers in mind, but also families, partners, and children, who are part of the process, and will remain important parts of the student parents' lives well after the post-secondary education is complete. The merging of parental and student roles is not only inevitable, it is central. Nurturing and supporting student parents in specific and sometimes specialized ways is valuable if the University of Lethbridge wants to retain student involvement and help all students succeed. Success for student parents entails student and parenting success.

Each interviewee indicates that the University of Lethbridge can do more to support student parents. The first step is to identify and engage student parents in a conversation about their needs. Although the stakeholder in the Arts and Sciences Dean's Office maintains that "not

all parents need the same thing" (interview, 4 Oct. 2018), suggesting some who are "well off and a parent . . . may not [need] as much as someone who is working and is a parent", (interview, 4 Oct. 2018) the literature suggests that most student parents in post-secondary education do struggle financially and find balancing studying and parenting to be challenging (Brooks 2012; Burke 2016; Dupreza and Butler 2001; Fehr 2013; Flores 2013; Gerrard and Roberts 2006). As the University of Lethbridge does not collect data on student parents, gathering this information could assist in understanding the scope of student parents attending university. Recently, a professor at Ryerson University added a classroom policy specifically addressing children in the classroom. Outlining measures for the student parent, as well as other students, this clearly demonstrates not only a support for student parents and their needs but also a clear directive to everyone, student parents and non student parents alike, about who is welcome in the classroom. Dr. Shiri Pasternak drew inspiration from a family friendly policy created by Dr. Melissa Cheyney that states "it is my belief that if we want women in academia, that we should also expect children to be present in some form" (Cheyney 2019, n.p.). Student parents interviewed for this research indicate they would welcome classroom policies, so they understand where the professor stands on children and parenting needs. Brooks (2012) suggests that "social policy in [some] areas [influences] the way in which student parents are constructed" (432). The university itself and individual professors can help shape student parent experience by adjusting policies to reflect student parent needs.

Spaces that welcome children and student parents is a common request from all student parent interviewees. Whether a general family friendly space or a drop-in care centre with a nominal cost (possibly added to tuition and fees), student parents want a place that recognizes

parental needs and welcomes minor children. Several interviewees suggest a "welcome pack", with information on services and supports, would benefit student parents as well.

The University of Lethbridge can begin the conversation by inviting student parents to share their goals, challenges, needs, and expectations, and by acknowledging that student parents are a valid part of the student population. Student parents bring value and energy to a post-secondary institution, contributing to the body of student knowledge and the university community. As the stakeholder in Counselling Services asserts, "why should students have to wait to go to post-secondary school? Why can't the institution adjust to support student parents" (interview, 12 Oct. 2018)? Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid (2009) maintain that "institutional supports for all . . . student parents have the potential to attract and retain a diverse and intellectually rigorous student body that includes talented mothers and fathers" (454).

Through observing and listening to the stories of my participants, I can attest that they are passionately devoted to their studies and their children and will continue to pursue higher education and parent their children with dedication to both roles. Lack of motivation is not a factor in their decisions around school, even when they have to alter plans or reduce course loads. Student parents' unique needs are not insurmountable and can be met when understood adequately and recognized as legitimate. If post-secondary institutions sincerely desire to support and welcome all students, they must consider student parents as part of that population. The future of post-secondary education depends on student retention, and student parents are part of this equation. Supporting and engaging student parents will strengthen the university community and ultimately illuminate the student parent.

Chapter Four — Conclusions & Suggestions for Further Research

This Honours Thesis project suggests several avenues for further research on the topic of student parenting.

LGBTQ student parents: This research elicited data from six cisgender heterosexual women and two cisgender heterosexual men. Involving LGBTQ student parents in the research may add more dimensions to understanding the student parent experience. Additionally, such a study would provide a voice for LGBTQ student parents.

Indigenous student parents: My study almost exclusively consisted of student parents who are white. Missing were the experiences of racialized and Indigenous student parents. Although attempts were made to include Indigenous student parents, this was not realized. Understandably this is likely due to their already busy schedules and demands for input on many studies looking for Indigenous perspectives. Regardless, it would benefit future student parent research to hear the voices of all student parents, including Indigenous student parents. It is important to engage with Indigenous students with a nuanced understanding of the marginalization and exploitation that has often accompanied research with colonized communities to ethically engage in community research with Indigenous participants (Dean 2018, 34).

Extended family support: As evidenced in my study, as well as other student parenting research, extended family support is extensively present in student parents' lives. However, little direct research about the topic is readily available. This is an area that would add to the data on student parent experience.

Biases contributing to the lack of student parent support: Decades of research suggest the same challenges and experiences of student parents. The primary findings are that student

parents exist, they often face challenges and barriers, and few institutions provide supports and resources. Understanding the social constructs and internalized beliefs that inform the continual neglect and obliviousness to student parent needs is an avenue for future inquiry.

The student parent experience is still a site for more research. As this population will likely continue to grow (Moreau and Kerner 2015; Peterson 2016; Hinton-Smith 2016;), student parents will continue to need support and provision.

Peter Kahn (2014) claims that “student engagement in higher education has increasingly become a matter for concern in recent years” (1005). The stakeholder in the Office of the Dean of Arts and Science echoed the same sentiment when voicing a concern about retaining students. Potentially, a significant segment of the student body are student parents. Although we do not have exact numbers at the University of Lethbridge, the statistics do suggest more student parents will consider enrolling in post-secondary education on a continuing basis. It is crucial to be aware of this when surveying student engagement and retention.

This study contributes to the data on student parents addressing the concepts that inform student parenting experience and recognizing their valuable contribution to post-secondary study. Evident from the interviews is that student parents face significant challenges, but also experience many rewards both educationally and in their parental roles. While student parenting is invisible at the institution, the imperatives of reproductive labour and patriarchal motherhood insist that the student parent manage their dual roles effectively and unceasingly. Student parents feel and respond to these imperatives, working through the neoliberal mandate that requires increasingly individual and self-governing efforts in pursuing their studies. However, student parents also subvert the patriarchal motherhood notions by asserting their own ideals of what being a good student and good parent requires. They also challenge the neoliberal directive that

emphasizes individual effort by seeking support for their student parenting needs from outside sources. The imperative now falls on post-secondary institutions to recognize and respond to the realities of student parenting experiences; they have a duty to adjust their focus and include student parents as important members of the institution. When the University of Lethbridge involves student parents in the conversations and recognize them as valuable members of the student body, the institution and the university community as a whole will benefit significantly.

Recommendations

- Communal space for student parents and children with play equipment, toys, tables, and comfortable seating where parents can study while children play and babies sleep.
- A “welcome packet” with resources and information for student parents that may be specifically directed to student parents or will be helpful to them even if not only for student parents.
- Drop-in centre that provides childcare for limited time and is staffed.
- Institutional and classroom policies about to children in the classroom and on campus, that specifically address the needs of student parents.
- Extra-curricular activities/events that are accessible to student parents and (if applicable) their children.
- Change tables in bathroom stalls.
- Comfortable places around campus to for nursing mothers to feed their babies.
- Address access to grants and scholarships for part-time study, as many student parents are in part-time study.

- Guidance for student parents in building and creating a CV that would incorporate their parenting experiences.
- Count student parents. This can be done either through the application process, or through regular surveys each semester.
- Engage student parents in discussion to gather input for any proposed changes to policies or procedures that address student parenting needs.

Appendix A: Poster

ARE YOU A U OF L STUDENT WHO IS ALSO A PARENT ?

What are your experiences as an undergraduate student parent at the University of Lethbridge?

How does the University support you as a student and as a parent?

I am conducting research on the perspectives of student parents at the University of Lethbridge for an honours thesis. If you are interested and are a full-time student parent with one or more minor children at home, I want to hear your story. This interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes of your time.

For more information please contact Mary Siever at mary.siever @uleth.ca

Research supervisor: Dr. Suzanne Lenon

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Appendix B: Invitation

(Sample)

Dear ____________ ,

My name is Mary Siever and I am a fourth year WGST/English student at the University of Lethbridge. Because of my own experiences as a student parent, I am interested in researching the topic of students who balance parenting while pursuing post-secondary education. As a mother of 6 children myself, ranging in age from 3 years to 19 years, I understand how student parenting can look, from one perspective. For the past 3 years I have been researching student parenting and preparing for this honours thesis.

You are invited to participate in a research study on student parenting. This project is part of my course work for my Honours thesis (WGST 4995), titled "Late Nights in Lethbridge: Parenting and the Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education."

This research will require about 30-60 minutes of your time for a one-on-one interview at a time and location of mutual agreement. During this time, I will interview you about your awareness of services and resources available to student parents at the university. I will audio record the interview with your permission. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, I will take written notes during the interview. There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this study; however, you will contribute to a better understanding of how post-secondary institutions can help student parents have successful academic careers.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. I will take several steps to protect your anonymity and confidentiality: (i) You have the choice to use a pseudonym; (ii) I will destroy the audio recordings at the completion of my honours thesis; (iii) the transcribed interview will be password protected. The only other person who will have access to the transcript of your interview is my honours thesis supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Lenon; and (iv) the interview transcript will be shredded and the digital file will be deleted from my computer at the completion of this course

The information collected from this study will be presented at a public talk in the Spring 2019 semester. No personal information will be disclosed in the context of the presentation. Your

identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym if you so choose, and no clips of audio recordings will be shared in the presentation.

If you require any additional information about this study, please contact me at 403-915-4441 or mary.siever@uleth.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Lenon, at 403-380-1876 or suzanne.lenon@uleth.ca.

Appendix C: Consent Form

(Sample)

You are invited to participate in an honours thesis research project called “Late Nights in Lethbridge: Parenting and the Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education”.

This consent form should give you the basic idea of what your participation will involve. You will be participating in a 60-90 minute interview that will be recorded with your permission. You will have 2 weeks to review the transcript. Please take the time to read this carefully and to ask any questions. You will receive a copy of this form to keep for your own reference.

- The purpose of the research project is to gather information from student parents who are attending classes at the University of Lethbridge and discover the resources available and the experiences of student parents as they pursue post secondary education and parent their children under the age of 17. The objective is to develop a clear understanding of the experiences of student parents and supports that contribute to their success in parenting and studying.

- Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions, should you wish, and you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. You may email me or contact me personally to withdraw and we will discuss at that time how much of the previously gathered information you wish to keep in the study or if you wish to have it deleted. All confidential and gathered information thus far will then be destroyed and your consent form returned to you, or destroyed .There are no anticipated risks to your participation in this study. You will not be paid to take part in the study, nor will you benefit directly from your participation in this study. However, your participation may help increase our understanding of the experiences of parents attending post secondary education. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

- All interviews and personal details will be kept securely online in a password protected file on my computer, that only I have access to. Only I will have access to the data. As I intend to pursue graduate studies and may participate in future presentations, the transcripts will be kept for further analysis and presentation, with your permission. Names will be kept private unless otherwise indicated by yourself.

- You have the option to request that your interview be anonymous, though this may only be partial as you may be identified through aspects from the interview. This means that your name and any other names that you mention in your interview will not be included in the transcript, any publications and public presentations. Only myself and my supervisor will know your name. Please choose one of the following:

_______ My full name may be revealed in any presentations and publications from this research

———-I would like my first name but not my last name used.

———--I prefer anonymity. The Principal Researcher will utilize a pseudonym (e.g. Participant #1) in any publications and presentations, and my identity will not be revealed.

- In terms of recording the interview:

I agree to be audio recorded for this interview:

______YES
______NO

______ I agree that a digital recording of my interview will be transcribed and utilized by the researcher in scholarly and public presentations and publications.

____ (Printed name of participant)

____ (Signature)

____ (Date)

____ (Printed name of researcher)

____ (Signature)

____ (Date)

Appendix D: Interview Questionnaire

Biography
Name:___________________________
Age:____________________
Marital/Partner status:________________________
Year of study and major:_____________________________
Number of children:___________________
Children's ages:__________________________________

Experiences

1. How did your two roles of parenting and being a student come together?
2. What does your average day look like with school and parenting? Please describe a typical day.
3. What is your course load like this semester?
4. What parental responsibilities do you have on a day-to-day basis?
5. What has encouraged or supported you in pursuit of your education?
6. What barriers have you experienced in pursuit of your education?
7. In what ways does being a parent shape your student experience?
8. And how does being a student shape your parenting?
9. How well do you feel you are successful in balancing/juggling your roles as a student and a parent?

Support

1. Do you have support from a partner or others in your parenting responsibilities?
2. Do you access childcare? If so, is it on or off campus?
3. What services do you access on campus for student support? Do these services support you as a parent as well?

4. Are your professors aware of your parental status? Do they support you as a student parent? Please describe how this looks.
5. Have you ever needed special consideration for parenting needs that conflicted with your studying or class assignments/responsibilities? If so, what measures did you take to receive accommodation? Was your professor supportive? If so, in what way?
6. Can you describe your experiences with support staff?
7. What resources for parents are available at the university? Do you use these? If so, how does that look?
8. In your experience, does the University of Lethbridge demonstrate an investment in student parents?
9. Can you describe specific ways student services enhance your learning experience?
10. What, if any, student organizations are you involved in?
11. What would you like to see at the University of Lethbridge to support you as a student parent?
12. What programmes or services would help you as a student parent?
13. What supports and resources in the community would help you as a student parent?
14. What are your plans when you graduate?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't discussed?

Appendix E: Stakeholder Questionnaire

1. Do you have student parents approach you for assistance (counselling, academic advising, other service support) who identify themselves as such?
2. Are you aware of any services specifically designed to support student parents at the University of Lethbridge?
3. Are you aware of past institutional support for student parents?
4. What are some gaps that you perceive exist in helping student parents?
5. How well does the U of L do in terms of support provision?
6. What would the ideal be for supporting student parents if financial and personnel resources were not a barrier?
7. What resources do you see that are needed for student parents?
8. Are you aware of resources off campus to support student parents and do you refer students to such supports?

Appendix F: Interview Participants

Student Parent Participants

Participant 1 (P1) 4 September 2018

Participant 2 (P2) 13 October 2018

Bridge, Crystal. 1 November 2018

Earl, Deirdre. 24 October 2018

Graham. 28 September 2018

Low, Mark. 14 September 2018.

N.S. 25 September 2018.

Roberts, Erinn. 24 September 2018.

Stakeholders at the University of Lethbridge Participants

Krein, Kristin. Campus Women's Center. 5 October 2018

Slomp, Mark. Student Services. 17 September 2018.

Stakeholder in Arts and Sciences Dean's Office. 4 October 2018

Stakeholder in Counselling Services. 12 October 2018.

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