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**A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY LIFE
TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF STUDENTS
FROM SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES**

By

Robert N. Skilling

**AN ABSTRACT OF
A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY LIFE TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF STUDENTS FROM SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

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The researcher's purposes in this study were to investigate the environment of family life and culture among students from single-parent families who were successful in school and to describe how the family as a dynamic social unit influenced their decision to succeed academically. The students' home settings, family experiences, family members' and students' school experiences, and the relationships between and among students, family members, and school personnel were examined.

The researcher approached school administrators, counselors, social workers, and teachers for guidance and help in identifying students who met the criteria for inclusion in the study. With the assistance of these school personnel, the researcher selected ten successful students and their custodial parents (in all cases, the mothers) for the study. The families lived in suburban communities within a 20-mile radius of a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. All of the students attended public schools. An interview format was used to collect the data for this study. All

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of the family interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for accuracy. The transcriptions were then summarized and the data analyzed.

It was found that the family culture from previous generations promoted the importance and value of education. The grandparents passed on a tradition of emphasis on the importance of education. This emphasis became even stronger with the successful students' parents' generation. All of the mothers were very involved with their children's education and had expectations for their children to attend college to prepare for rewarding and successful careers.

The families in this research had consistent structures for their children, including family rules, responsibilities, positive relationships with school personnel, a high level of involvement in school activities, expectations for their children to attend college, and an active interest in their children's academic progress. The family culture was complementary to the school culture in many key ways, i.e., high expectations, student responsibility, rules, and student affirmation. These positive interactions among the students, family, and school produced academic success. The symmetry of family and school cultures promoted stability and achievement for these successful students.

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Before I pursued by doctoral studies, my wife had never shoveled snow or mowed the lawn at our home. Needless to say, my wife's longsuffering and patience with my pursuit of a doctoral degree stand in tribute to her servant's heart and unconditional love. It is with tremendous respect and appreciation that I dedicate this dissertation to my lovely wife and best friend, Kay.

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Dr. Louis Romano was a great inspiration and support in his role as my committee chairperson. He was intimately involved with every decision pertaining to the achievement of my doctorate. I appreciate his encouragement, interest, and direction throughout my doctoral studies. He has been a tremendous mentor and friend.

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To my typist, Sue Miller, who put this work into proper dissertation format, special thanks. To my mother-in-law, Connie Gray, thanks for her many hours of transcription and editing. Her sacrificial time and support were a great boost in helping me see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The greatest appreciation is expressed to my wonderful wife, Kay, and our three children, Shay, Elizabeth, and Emily. Without their self-sacrifice, unconditional love, and support, this dissertation would not have become a reality. My wife and children are the greatest blessings, and I shall always be thankful for their putting up with my absence so many days and nights to complete my doctoral program.

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Special thanks to Dad, Mom, and brother Mike for their lifelong encouragement and support. Thanks to my brother Bill for his valuable insights and encouragement, drawing from his own personal experience while earning his Ph.D. He served as a driving force to persevere.

I am grateful to the ten families who shared their homes and lives with me. I appreciate their patience, courage, and openness, which made this study possible. The quality time I spent with these families served to enrich my life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The make-up of American families is rapidly changing. According to a 1991 U.S. Census Bureau survey of 57,400 households, the number of single-parent families has tripled since 1970, and most single-parent families are headed by women. According to the report, "The tremendous increase in the number of single parents has been one of the most profound changes in family composition to have occurred during the past quarter century" (Bianchi & McArthur, 1991, p. 10).

The percentage of children living with both parents is on the decline; it went from 87.1% in 1970, to 78.5% in 1980, to 71.9% in 1990. The tremendous change in the American family has implications for the educational system and the student population. The effect of change regarding the student population needs to be examined to be more widely understood. It is time to challenge the previously held assumptions, beliefs, and conclusions because they may no longer stand. Specifically, this investigator was interested in exploring and examining the effect of change on the single-parent families of successful students and in understanding the commonalities among those families that contributed to the students' academic success.

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For the purposes of this study, a single-parent family was defined as consisting of a child or children living with only one biological parent. By definition, no other adults were living in the single-parent family. The parent present in the home was the caregiver responsible for feeding, supervising, and supporting the child or children in the family. In contrast, a student living with both biological parents, in theory, has both parents sharing these obligations and responsibilities.

The formation of single-parent families is brought on by a variety of factors, ranging from death to divorce. In the past, the most common event precipitating a single-parent family was death of a spouse. In the 1990s, the more prevalent reasons are separation, divorce, and/or birth outside of marriage (Zill & Rogers, 1988). According to current population reports, the climbing divorce rate and the increase of births out of wedlock have dramatically increased the number of children living with only one parent (Blanchi & McArthur, 1991).

Although the increase in the number of children living in single-parent homes recently has started to slow, there are no indicators predicting a rate of decline. Recent estimates are that about half of today's children will experience living in a single-parent home and that one-third of today's children will experience their parents' divorce (Zill & Rogers, 1988).

Many researchers have emphasized the role the family plays as an essential part in children's education. Continued research on children of single-parent families is needed. Noller and Callan (1991) claimed, "Despite the increase[d] divorce [rate], we know relatively little about how the breakup affects adolescents" (p. 106).

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However, a factor that has been found to affect students' success or failure is whether or not both parents are present in the home. Concerning dropouts, Okey (1990) found that:

In homes where only a female parent was present, the dropout rate was found to be 66% greater than that of intact families. When the only parent was a male, this rate soared to 78%. If a child did not reside with either parent, the rate was 2-1/2 times that of intact families. (p. 3)

The family is a critical aspect of a student's success in school, as evidenced by the research cited above. Childhood experiences have an important influence on adolescents' lives. Many of these experiences are controlled and shaped within the family setting and structure. The researcher's primary aim in this study was to understand the family life of academically successful students from single-parent families. The researcher was interested in the culture of single-parent families and the common traits and characteristics of successful students from such households. The secondary aim was to examine the relationship of the students' family life with the school culture and to understand how that influenced students' success.

The task of understanding why some students of single-parent households learn and why others do not is a challenging endeavor. In Okey's (1990) study of why students drop out of school, he described two common reasons. The first reason he cited was the conflict and problems within the family. The second major reason was the family's relationships with the school. Okey's study indicated that students' dropping out of school is directly related to the family life and relationships as well as the communication and interaction of the family with the school.

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In 1992, Jeltres studied academically successful students of households in which a mother and a father were present. His findings included a family culture going back two generations that supported the school and that this was a key element for success of the student in the present generation. His findings also highlighted the fact that students who were successful were actively involved in school-sponsored activities. The successful students in Jeltres's study were rewarded for their achievements through leadership in clubs, participation on academic and athletic teams, receiving many awards, obtaining college scholarships, and receiving personal fulfillment as a result of their accomplishments.

Furthermore, students in Jeltres's study experienced good rapport with their parents and school personnel. The parents of these successful students were actively involved in their children's education. The families' views on education were influenced by the high degree of involvement and the communication received by the families from the schools. The cultures of both the family and the school were found to be similar, with the parents of these students being very involved in the school events, which accounted for a major part of their social life.

Statement of the Problem

An abundance of research has been conducted on the topic of at-risk students, and quantitative studies have substantiated why these students perform poorly and some of them even drop out of school. Students from single-parent families generally are put into the category of "at risk." Much of the qualitative research has been focused on the negative effect on students' success as a result

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of coming from a single-parent home. However, an important consideration has been overlooked—that is, students who come from single-parent homes who are thriving both academically and socially, despite the factors that led to their living in a single-parent home.

To understand better why some students from single-parent homes are academically successful, a closer look needs to be taken in order to examine the complex interactions that take place between the student and his or her family, the student and the school, and the student's family and the school.

Purpose

This qualitative study was undertaken to address the need for research on the features and aspects of single-parent family life that lead to students' success in school. The researcher's overall purpose in conducting this study was to investigate the conditions of families in which there was only a single parent and the culture among students who are successful in school. The intention was to gain a better understanding of why certain students from single-parent homes are successful, by examining the students' family experiences, their family history, and family-school interactions. This researcher was interested in understanding the behavior of successful students from single-parent homes and the factors underlying students' success in school.

A secondary purpose was to describe how the subjects' involvement in their families of origin as a dynamic social unit influenced their decision to work hard and succeed in school. The researcher was interested in discovering whether the

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students' perceptions of their families' views regarding the importance of education influenced those students' decision to succeed in school.

Research Questions

The questions posed in this research were similar to those Okey (1990) used in his study of dropouts and Jeltres (1992) included in his study of academically successful students from two-parent families. The questions were used as a structure and framework in deciphering information on successful students from single-parent homes and their families.

1. How do successful students from single-parent families describe and define their families? This question pertained to family roles, norms, values, and interactions, as well as the successful student's role as a member of his or her family. How do these students view themselves as an acting unit within their family structure? Attention was given to the ways in which the students objectified or symbolized their family experiences.

2. What is the successful student's family background, and how has it affected the student's attitudes? Understanding the family background contributes to understanding the success of the student. Are there successful role models within the student's family, and has this contributed to the student's being a success? How have family risk factors contributed to the student's aspirations to succeed?

3. How do these students and family members relate to and communicate with personnel of the student's school community? An effort was made to assess the depth of communication, level of involvement, and overall exchange between

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school and family. Teachers' attitudes and expectations due to familial configuration also were considered—did they stereotype?

4. What were the school experiences of family members of successful students from single-parent families? To understand the successful student's school experience, the attitudes and school experiences of their family members must be understood.

5. Is there a correlation between family experiences and the success in school of students from single-parent families? The researcher was interested in the students' home environments, including family values, beliefs, parenting skills, and how the family spent their leisure time together. This broad area of study was undertaken to help explain what meaning success had for the individual within the context of his or her family experiences.

6. How do family members' attitudes and beliefs about the importance of education influence the success of students from single-parent families? The researcher examined the ideas and thoughts pertaining to the importance of education held by the successful students' family members. What role did they see their families playing in regard to school and education?

7. What meaning does being successful have for students from single-parent families? An effort was made to understand what being successful meant to the students within the context of the findings regarding the previous questions. Consideration was given to why the students succeeded by examining the collective experiences of the families and their relationships with the school.

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8. How do students from single-parent families succeed? The researcher was interested in the students' ability to make positive choices that are foundational for success. These choices included resisting negative peer pressure, being involved in extracurricular activities, striving to lead rather than to follow, and choosing a healthy group of friends.

9. Does successful students' resiliency contribute to their success in dealing with their parents' separation or divorce? Did the fact that the students' parents separated or divorced somehow favorably influence the students' success? Is resiliency a factor that allowed the students to cope with the parental separation or divorce? Is there evidence that the students were members of families with a history of success, and did this have an influence on the students that transcended the trauma of experiencing their parents' separation or divorce? Did the psychological and social adjustments the students experienced as a result of their parents' separation or divorce contribute in any way to their drive to succeed?

The above-mentioned areas of inquiry provided the framework for the interviews and observation conducted in this qualitative study. These questions were developed to guide the researcher and to provide possible explanations and generation of hypotheses later on; however, such hypotheses differed from statistical hypotheses, which may be retained or rejected. As this study unfolded, many ideas for other studies emerged that were not anticipated at the beginning of this study. The researcher's line of inquiry was intended to assess common traits and

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commonalities from the data that would provide new insights into the attributes of successful students from single-parent households.

Importance of the Study

Undertaking this study was important because the researcher anticipated that it would provide insight into why certain students from single-parent homes succeed. American schools are barraged with criticism, and this study was undertaken to gather data about students from single-parent families who are successful and, it is hoped, to provide information to head off the criticism. The study was intended to provide a better understanding of the single-parent family's influence on the education of the child.

The findings from the research also will be helpful in producing insights into why students from some single-parent homes are successful. Potentially, common traits of some single-parent homes may contribute to students' academic achievement. It is anticipated that the findings from this study will lead to a better understanding of the single-parent family's influence on the education of the child. This influence was analyzed with regard to the following issues (similar to the issues examined by Jelles in his 1992 study):

1. The interaction between successful students and their families, and the families' relationships with the people and groups constituting the school organization.
2. The relationship of family members' experience with schooling and the student's decision to do his or her best in school.

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3. The problems a successful student encounters in being successful and whether being successful is worth the effort involved.
4. The perceptions successful students have of school.
5. The relationship between family experiences and being successful in school and in life.
6. The resiliency of the student from a single-parent family related to his or her parents' divorce.
7. An examination of parenting skills, values, family experiences, and how they spend leisure time as a family.

The Population

The study population included ten "successful" students and the custodial parent with whom they lived when they attended school grades K-12. Subjects were considered from suburban school districts within a 50-mile radius of a large metropolitan area in Michigan. Eighth graders through college students were considered for the study. The population included both males and females and any student who fit the criteria of the study, regardless of ethnic background.

The researcher sought the help of school administrators and social workers/ counselors in selecting students for the study. Choices were made, based on the administrators' and social workers' or counselors' knowledge of students who were successful both academic and socially and who were involved in school activities.

Successful students selected for the study had grades in the A and B range. Success also was demonstrated by their active participation in school activities such

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as academic clubs, musical groups, and/or sports. The students selected for the study were perceived to be positive role models, ones whom their peers looked up to and whose example they followed. The researcher conducted personal interviews with the selected students and the parents with whom they lived.

Delimitations

The study population was delimited to single-parent families comprising the biological parent with whom the successful student lived. In this study, all ten students lived with their biological mothers. Families with adopted children were not considered for the study. The sample comprised students from eighth grade to those who had completed their first year of college. Only successful students who had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better were selected for the study. The unit of analysis was the student and the parent with whom he or she lived. Another delimitation was that all students in the study were in single-parent families whose parents were divorced. Intelligence test scores were not considered as a determining factor regarding students' academic success. A final delimitation was the structure of the interviews—equal numbers of female and male students were selected.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms are defined in the context in which they are used in this dissertation.

Behavior. Moral conduct, the way the student works, and how the student reacts to his or her environment; the role the student plays in the family and at

school; the role the parents play in the life of the student; how the student interacts with his or her parents and siblings; and the student's actions at home.

Events. Occurrences regarded as having an influence on the student's attitudes and actions.

Experiences. Interesting or remarkable events in a person's life or something suffered by a person; all that has happened to an individual throughout his or her life or in a particular sphere of activity.

Interactions. The actions taking place between and among individuals, especially between the student and members of his or her family and among family members and school personnel.

Perception. Awareness or interpretation of something, based on one's physical senses or intuition.

Perspective. The evaluation of events or conditions according to a particular way of looking at them, i.e., the way the student sees his or her family's view of the importance of education.

Single-parent family. A family consisting of a child or children living with only one biological parent. By definition, no other adults are living in the single-parent family.

Successful student. A student who is active in extracurricular activities such as sports, music, clubs, and school-sponsored competitions; gets along well with faculty members and other students; and earns A's and B's in school classes.

Overview

Chapter I consisted of an introduction, a statement of the problem and purpose of the study, research questions, the importance of the study, a description of the population, delimitations, and definitions of key terms.

Chapter II contains a review and critique of the literature and research related to the following topics: the influence of family background characteristics on students' success, parents' involvement in their children's education, early childhood influences, parents' personality structure, the home environment, and characteristics of successful families.

The methods, materials, and procedures used to conduct the study are described in Chapter III. This chapter includes the sampling procedure, the survey instrument used in the study, and the data-collection and data-analysis techniques.

The findings from the surveys and interviews are presented in Chapter IV. The chapter includes a detailed summary of the data collected in the interviews with the ten families chosen for the study. Identifying patterns within and among the families are noted.

Chapter V contains a summary of the study, a review of the findings and conclusions drawn from the findings, recommendations, and the writer's reflections.

CHAPTER II

RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Introduction

The researcher's purpose in this study was to explore the conditions of family life and culture of students from single-parent families who were successful in school. The investigation of the successful students' family background, family experiences (including the impact of and adjustment to divorce), and family-school interactions was intended to reveal the basis and/or motivation that prompted these students to achieve. The influence of teachers' attitudes also was considered.

The families' attitudes and views regarding the importance of education and the family as a social unit and the students' involvement therein were examined. A secondary purpose was to examine these topics in order to find an explanation for the students' high achievement. Literature pertinent to the aforementioned topics is reviewed in this chapter.

The Influence of Family Background and Family-School Interactions on the Success of Students From Single-Parent Families

Family Experiences and Students' Resiliency

In their 1991 work, Zimiles and Lee measured the effects of divorce and remarriage on students' academic and educational perseverance. The researchers

compared the performance of children from single-parent families, intact families, and families in which the custodial parent had remarried. Earlier researchers (Chapman, 1988; Oshman & Manosevits, 1976; Parish & Dostal, 1980; Parish & Taylor, 1979; Santrock, 1972) found that children from single-parent families scored lower than those from intact families. However, according to Zimiles and Lee, "Mean achievement test scores for intact families exceed those for either step or single parent families by a comparatively small margin; the effect of family structure is statistically significant both before and after statistical adjustment (SES)" (p. 315).

Parish and Necessary (1994) compared 212 high school students from different familial situations regarding their self-description, along with the students' description of each of their parents. The researchers concluded that fathers' evaluations by children of divorce were greatly jeopardized and that students' self-evaluation and that of their mothers did not vary regardless of familial configurations. Other researchers (e.g., Parish, 1987a, 1988; Raschke & Raschke, 1979) suggested that most alternate family types may not be problematic for all involved.

Everett (1989) pointed out some good traits of children from single-parent-family situations, possibly occurring out of necessity because of their family situation. There is evidence that children from these families are good decision makers and that they have unique strengths and maturities. Everett placed responsibility on professionals "to facilitate the cognitive reframing of parents and children in such a way that hopefulness and a sense of assurance and control can be implemented

and sustained" (p. 5). Focusing on the positive can contribute to well being and future success.

Everett suggested that children's adjustments due to their parents' divorce often relate to change in schools, neighborhoods, and peers. Responsibilities and duties at home frequently are reorganized during the transition from two parents in the household to one, and adjustment to seeing the noncustodial parent less. Extended family relationships also undergo changes, frequently resulting in seeing the paternal extended family much less. In custodial-mother homes, the children often have to reconcile their mother's entering the work force and her being less available for guidance and supervision. Older children repeatedly have to assume responsibility for younger siblings, or a substitute mother is employed. Some children take jobs outside the home in order to contribute to the family income or to support their own physical needs. They often find it necessary to help with home repairs, cooking, cleaning, or shopping for food. Too often the battle switches from interparental conflict to one of economics.

Everett discussed seven variables that have a positive effect on the child's ability to adjust: (a) parents' ability to cope with and resolve anger and conflict, (b) the custodial parent's ability to resume her or his role as a parent, (c) the noncustodial parent's ability to sustain a satisfactory relationship with the children, (d) the resiliency and personality of the child to adjust to change, (e) the child's ability to seek and use outside support, (f) the child's ability to control or diminish anger, and (g) the gender and age of the child. Children who view consequences

as being within their place of control and who understand interpersonal relationships are more frequently those who adjust well. Making a study of these two critical points available could be beneficial to these children. Six points about parents' characteristics can cause a child to adjust positively: (a) a positive relationship between divorced parents, (b) agreement on how to raise the children, (c) effective use of support systems and positive adjustment by the custodial parent resulting in reduced stress, (d) a good management system by the custodial parent, (e) availability of the noncustodial parent, and (f) good parent-child communication.

According to Kurdak and Siesky (cited in Everett, 1989), "Research indicates that divorce can lead to 'different' but not necessarily 'disturbed' patterns of development" (p. 89). Some researchers have found that the child's stress during the parents' divorce is not necessarily attributable to the actual break-up but instead to the turmoil and conflict experienced. Removal of this tension and fear from the home may help in healthy child development. A positive social network of the custodial parent, family, and friends can also encourage positive child development.

Confirming the preceding research, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) claimed that two elements contribute to children's healthy adjustment to a divorce situation: (a) parents' ability to transform their conflict as a married couple to a cooperative co-parenting arrangement and (b) the children's ability to have contact with both parents at their will.

Garanzini (1995) contended that a child will have an entirely different impact of being in a single-parent family as a result of divorce versus death. When death

is a factor, there is much outside support from family, friends, and even the school. However, a divorce is often not discussed, and consequently there is often a smaller support system.

Adams, Miller, and Reavis (1989) hypothesized that children from divorce situations would be significantly different from children from intact families in terms of academic achievement, behavior, and school attendance. Two groups of seventh graders from a North Carolina middle school were randomly selected for the study-- 30 children from divorced families and 30 from intact families. The only independent variable was the family structure. Academic achievement was measured by means of achievement tests, school attendance was measured by the Student Information Management System, and behavior was measured by disciplinary infractions compiled by the teachers. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups in the areas of achievement and attendance. However, a significant difference was found in the area of behavior, implying that teachers and other school personnel should be aware of the needs of these children.

Interactions of the Family and the School

Hunsaker et al. (1995) related that:

In lieu of studying status and process variables, more recent studies have begun to investigate the impact of contexts on family processes that affect academic achievement. In this context research, it is recognized that families do not operate in isolation to influence achievement, but that communities and schools also have importance. Schools can be particularly helpful when they teach in ways that are congruent to the culture of the family and find ways of involving the family in the school culture. (p. 1)

Decker et al. (1994) wrote that research has proven many times that when parents are involved, children respond better and become more successful students. In the 1980s, during the school effectiveness movement, site-based management in some schools, school choice, and more and more research, it was found that parental involvement had a significant influence on student achievement. Decker et al. quoted Barton and Coley of the Educational Testing Service's Policy Center:

There is an intuitive level at which most of us recognize that the basic socializing and nurturing institution is the family—America's smallest school. When we take the time to think about it, it is common sense that the love and attention babies and children receive, the security they feel, the encouragement they get to learn, the intellectual richness of their home environment and the attention given to their health are all critical in the development of children who are able and motivated to learn. (p. 2)

In a 1994 U.S. Department of Education report entitled Strong Families, Strong Schools, it was revealed after 30 years of research that "there is a strong correlation between children's learning and family involvement" (Decker et al., 1994, p. 2). Education Secretary Richard Riley was quoted as saying, "The American family is the rock on which a solid education can and must be built" (Decker et al., 1994, p. 2).

Decker et al. went on to say that students who have high achievement scores have parents who respond to and interact with them, have high expectations of them, and see themselves as partners in teaching their children. Training of parents, especially those of lower socioeconomic status (SES), has encouraged them to work with their children, resulting in better school behavior, better use of language skills,

and better test performance on the part of the children. Evidence has shown that, when parents are involved, children do better and go to better schools.

Susan McAllister Swap (cited in Decker et al., 1994), Director of the University of Michigan's Wheelock Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, wrote:

The positive effects of parent involvement on student achievement are sustained across grade levels (preschool through high school), in programs that are home- or school-based, and from programs in low and middle income settings. However, parent involvement in low income settings, while effective in improving student achievement when compared to matched controls, still did not appear to bring achievement scores up to the national level. (p. 3)

It is widely agreed that the amount parents talk about school and choose to be active in their children's school matters is directly correlated to students' achievement.

Decker et al. (1994) shared a framework describing the benefits of strong home-school partnerships based on the research and practice of Oliver Moles and Diane D'Angelo of the U.S. Department of Education. According to this framework, teachers benefit through:

(1) Schoolwide training concerning families from diverse backgrounds; (2) Support from the principal for their efforts to work with families; (3) Tapping the knowledge, skills and resources of colleagues; (4) Maximizing limited resources and time through the cooperative development of grade-level homework and home learning activities; (5) A better understanding of parent expectations and closer communication with parents; (6) Attaining a higher rate of return on homework and greater involvement of families in home learning activities; and (7) Increased parental support and cooperation.

Administrators benefit through:

(1) Better communications between school and home; (2) Fewer parent complaints about inconsistent and inappropriate homework; (3) Better use of limited resources to address the critical need of linking home and school; and

(4) Improved school climate where children see parents and teachers as partners.

Parents benefit through:

(1) Opportunities to become partners with teachers and to shape important decisions that enhance their children's chances for success in school; (2) Consistent expectations, practices, and messages about homework and home learning activities; (3) Increased opportunities to engage in home learning activities with their children; (4) Access to schoolwide resources such as parent learning centers, homework hotline, homework center, parent workshops and home visits.

Students benefit through:

(1) More positive attitudes toward school; (2) Higher achievement in reading; (3) Higher quality and more grade-appropriate homework; (4) Completion of more homework on weekends; and (5) Observing more similarity between family and school. (pp. 20-21)

Christenson, Conoley, and Close (1992) stated that a quotation is worth a thousand words and went on to support the essence of this entire section by stating, "Trying to educate children without the involvement of their family is like trying to play a basketball game without all the players on the court" (p. 19). They contended that schools cannot possibly meet all their students' needs and that children learn, grow, and develop both at school and at home.

According to a survey done by Tyree and Grymes (1994), parents thought that positive relationships and interactions with teachers and school were important to a child's cognitive development. Parents also believed that their attitudes toward school personnel might be influenced by their own past school experiences. They would like to see school administrators recognize the parents as the most instrumental advocates and strengths in their children's education. This positive

attitude should also be reflected in the verbal interactions between teachers and parents. These same parents viewed on-site involvement by parents, such as in parent-teacher conferences and planned school functions and events, as another key to increasing their children's academic development.

A document entitled Speaking of Kids: A National Survey of Children and Parents (National Commission on Children, 1991) contained tables indicating that there is less parental involvement as children grew older, both at home and in school interaction. Another interesting corollary is that parents from single-parent families attended more events involving their children than did those from step-parent families, but both were far below the level of participation of parents from intact families. However, the contact with their children's teachers was equal in all three types of families, and attending other school meetings was only slightly lower in step- and single-parent families than in intact families. It is possible that the fact that there is only one significant parent in the family to meet all the obligations of the household makes it difficult or even impossible to attend all functions involving their children.

Teachers' Attitudes

Kim (1994) surveyed 14 teachers concerning their attitudes and involvement in the lives of the "at-risk" students in their classrooms. Thirty-three fifth-grade students also were surveyed concerning their attitudes about teachers' involvement. Kim stated that teachers must be aware of the children who make up their classrooms as coming from problems of sexual and/or physical abuse, single-parent

families, alcoholic parents, or having experienced divorce or death in their families. She stated, "The divorce of parents can cause dramatic effects on children and often lead to confusion" (p. 8). A result could be children's getting involved in fighting or, in a more passive way, by withdrawing. These children believed that if their teachers were aware of their students' home situations, the children would be able to cope better and improve their study habits in school. Teachers, being consistent in their students' lives, can give them the emotional support necessary, understand their misbehavior, and make the children understand that the problem is not their fault. They can be the child's friend as well as a good listener. In the case of divorce, the child who has to go from one parent to another may experience immense instability. Kim quoted Allers as saying that "children need education, not only about math, science and spelling, but also about life and death, and how to survive trouble" (p. 12).

Children from single-parent families are not a new phenomenon in our classrooms. Although this population seems to have grown over the past ten to twenty years, the number of children from single-parent families is similar to that found in our parents' classrooms. However, while the cause for single-parent families many years ago was the death of one parent, today the main cause for single-parent families is divorce. (Fredericks, Rasinski, & Ritty, 1991, p. 604)

The preceding quotation offers an interesting slant that was not considered in other research reviewed for this study. The authors went on to state that, whereas death is natural and divorce is considered unnatural, teachers, parents, and children more often encounter difficulties related to the divorce than to the single-parent experience. Fredericks et al. were concerned with teachers' attitudes about divorce

and how those attitudes are transmitted to their students, as well as the influence this can have on students' actual achievement. "Too many times what we expect of children happens" (p. 605). Sometimes problems are not related to the single-parent situation but rather can be "child oriented." Students do not become "good" or "bad" simply because of their family configuration. They do not come to school expecting to argue with teachers; however, they could just be having a bad day. The school may be the only source of stability and familiarity for many children when facing a divorce situation, and teachers should not hesitate to refer children to the school guidance counselor, school psychologist, or school social worker if they feel inadequate to handle the situation.

Obiakor (1992) addressed the problem of possible failure in school faced by young people today and offered methods of helping these young people succeed in educational programs. He wrote, "Education, historically, has been called to effectively respond to social, economic, cultural and political problems" (p. 1). Obiakor believed that at-risk youngsters are often misidentified, misassessed, misdiagnosed, and misinstructed. Included in his list of at-risk students were those from single-parent families. Baer (1991) explained:

We need to understand who these kids are. They have potential; however, they don't know it. They need what we all have to offer, but they won't believe it. In a way, they may want to fail because there is a kind of comfort in that. After all, it's what they know best. Failure is a restful place to be. Nobody bothers them much because they can't be expected to give or participate. . . . The crucial point to remember is that in spite of all these obstacles, these kids have all the potential that other kids have. (p. 25)

In today's society, students from at-risk situations face certain global problems. According to Shoaf (1990), "Many children today struggle to cope with a world more uncertain and more frightening than ever before" (p. 13). School-related problems that challenge at-risk children include the theory that "worth can be assigned to individuals and groups by measuring intelligence as a single quantity" (Gould, 1981, p. 20) and that these students have low or negative self-esteem because of failures in school. Another school-related problem is that there are not enough realistic role models or teachers who understand their cultural values and learning styles, and educators are failing to encourage cultural acceptance and diversity. The misconception of relating a low SES with poor culture, values, morals, behaviors, and intelligence is also a great social obstacle to these young students.

Obiakor (1992) offered the following ingredients for solving this social problem:

1. Teachers must play a major role to maximize the potential of at-risk students. They should reward and encourage self-responsibility when possible, being the students' advocates when parents fail.
2. A developmental model (not a deficit model) should be instilled in all stages of identification, appraisal, training, evaluation, and placement.
3. The emphasis should be on measurable, quantifiable, and describable variables, and perceptions and categorizations should decrease.
4. Life-skills training programs should be developed and implemented.

Hamburg (1991) added that "there is much that can be achieved if we think of our entire population as a very large extended family—tied by history to a shared destiny and therefore requiring a strong ethic of mutual aid" (p. 19). He pointed out:

We have to move beyond the easy and pervasive recourse of passing the buck. It is our responsibility—each individual, each institution and organization, every business, all levels of government. We cannot lose sight of the fact that wise investment in human capital is the most fundamental and productive investment any society can make. Constructive development of our children is more important than oil or minerals, office buildings or factories, roads or weapons. The central fact is that all of these and much more depend in the long run on the quality of human resources and the decency of human relations. If these deteriorate, all else declines. (p. 20)

Everett (1989) supported the preceding conclusions, saying that children spend more time in school than anywhere else outside the family and that schools can provide supportive services in order to alleviate stress among families experiencing divorce by recognizing their special needs (for both parents and students). Recognizing that divorce is a major disruptive experience for all family members and often requires adjustment for which they are not prepared, professionals (teachers, school staff, counselors, practitioners, doctors) must broaden their understanding in order to facilitate intervention. In a survey of 76 teachers, Everett found that the teachers had a tendency to stereotype at-risk children as not able to function academically, socially, and emotionally as well as those from intact situations. However, teachers expected the same from students from divorced families as those from remarried families. The concern is the effect of these stereotypes on the teacher-student interaction.

Clark (1983) stated that most high achievers had impressive experiences in early school years with their teachers. They recalled special teachers who had given them individual attention and who had taken time to work with them and provide opportunities to play responsible leadership roles in their classrooms.

Werner and Smith (cited in Benard, 1995) confirmed the preceding contention. After a 40-year study, they found that "among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of resilient children, outside of the family circle, was a favorite teacher" (p. 1). This teacher was a confidant and a positive role model, as well as an instructor. Noddings (cited in Benard, 1995) articulated that youths who have a caring relationship with a teacher have a motivation to want to succeed. It is a given that anyone, especially children, will do things and work harder for those people who have earned their trust and love.

Family Attitudes Regarding the Importance of an Education and Family as a Social Unit

Family Attitudes Toward Education

McGrath and Repetti (1995) presented a paper in which they examined parents' satisfaction with their children's school achievement and the value they placed on their children's academic success or failure. A survey of 240 parents along with 179 children confirmed the belief that "parents' attitudes toward their children's academic performance may directly, or indirectly, shape children's perceptions of their academic competence" (p. 2). Children may perceive themselves to be academically competent even though their actual school

performance might be less than perfect when their parents' level of satisfaction with their performance correlates with their perception of academic competence. Most often, parents who valued academic success had children who believed they were competent academically.

Clark (1983) wrote:

A mother who directs her children toward moral values in society, while strenuously curtailing their contact with potentially negative or "bad" community influences, can usually obtain the children's respect. As this respect is attained, it is possible for the mother to effect a strong education orientation in her child. It is particularly important that the child learn the appropriate values at an early age so that the child's value orientation may become a way of life. (p. 62)

Mrs. Hayes, a single parent who had worked continuously since her teen years, migrated to a large midwestern city with her parents and was initially positive about the move. As a teenager, she had quit school to be married, which she now regretted. Her mother's encouragement to complete her education had never left her thoughts and was a major reason she continued to encourage her own children to graduate, reflecting that it had not seemed as important when she was a teenager to get a diploma as it did today. She stressed the importance of family unity and expected the older siblings to care for the younger ones, a responsibility they accepted. While in the early grades, her children were expected to study and to do as well as they could. She did not hesitate to credit them for their accomplishments and reinforced acceptable behavior. The responsibility given at home was reflected in school at an early age, with more responsibility given as they were able to handle it. The children grew up with an air of emotional control and self-awareness, with a

clear idea of their goals for the future, willing to work and compete to reach them. This family had familial communication and interaction in which the parent was dominant but not domineering. All knew who was in authority; however, the child was allowed free expression.

Mrs. Hayes's youngest son excelled in mathematics, resulting in much praise and reinforcement based on his accomplishments in that subject. However, his eighth-grade reading level was below the national norm, and because he was tentatively admitted to a selective technical school based on his high mathematics score, he worked during his freshman year to improve his reading skills. Due to his success, most of his aspirations now grew out of school-oriented activities. After having encouraged educational attainment, his mother was very happy with his value system and his strong sense of direction.

Mrs. Hayes showed involvement in her son's schooling by visiting teachers periodically during regular school days as well as during formal open houses. She did not believe education was all up to the teacher but was always interested in what her children were doing and how things were going at school. Another important aspect of their family life was their regular parent-child talks to assess the importance of schooling, giving the child a better understanding of the purposes behind his parent's expectations, which might account for the child's high valuation of schooling.

Bloom (1964) discovered that the parents' reinforcement of children's activities in school and the value they placed on education directly correlated with

the children's academic development. Before then, it was almost unanimously believed that the responsibility for education belonged to the schools.

The Family Social Unit

In his research, Clark (1983) found that "no matter whether the family unit consisted of one or two parents, specific psychosocial orientations and home activity patterns were seen clearly time and again in the high achievers' homes" (p. 111). Parent-child interpersonal communication was warm and nurturing, parents strongly encouraged educational pursuits, behavior limits were clear and consistent, and how the children used their time was continually monitored. Parents who used these techniques were most often drawing from their own upbringing. The children, as a result, felt a deep, consoling loyalty to the parents' wishes and desires and to their own refinement through achievement-related activities. When parents were asked to describe their early home relationships with their own parents, the picture often was the same, thereby supporting the theory of intergenerational transmission of behavior patterns. As a result of moving their residence and having limited educational and economic opportunity, the parents could not reach their own potential; however, they were able to maintain the values, psychosocial patterns, and organization in order to pass them on to their own children. These parents were aware that their own parents had been diligent and direct in supervision, had clearly defined role boundaries, and had come to understand that the economic survival needs of the family would come first. The first generation of parents had not attained a high level of education and had not necessarily pushed their daughters into higher

education. Their main focus had been on organizing the family for economic self-sufficiency and personal survival, but at the same time passing on a deep appreciation of the need for education for the children. These families ceremoniously helped their children with homework, and the elders routinely met to discuss family circumstances and to make plans for the future. These children (the mothers in the research group) grew up wishing they could have furthered their own education and, because they were economically unable to do so, were working to provide an opportunity for their own children to achieve higher education.

Benson and Rochlkepartain (1993) reported on risk and resiliency of youths in single-parent families. They contended that it is tough to be a single parent, and children who live in such a family structure are not in an ideal situation. However, the families can be supportive and healthy with special effort by the family and with the support of the community, individuals, and institutions. The authors maintained that:

Youth who thrive in single-parent families are almost twice as likely as those who do not, to report feeling support from their family, turning to a parent for social support, having a parent involved in schooling, and having explicit parental standards. (p. 9)

In Speaking of Kids: A National Survey of Children and Parents, the National Commission on Children (1991) indicated that most parents and children from both married and single-parent families, reported close and satisfactory relationships with each other. Surprisingly, this relationship in single-parent families was only a few percentage points lower than that in intact families with happy marriages, but it was higher than that in intact families with unhappy marriages and in both happy and

unhappy step-family situations. However, most parents (especially single parents) reported much stress related to serious economic concerns. From this survey, it was established that marriage or the presence of two adults in the household is often a buffer against poverty. Moreover, the children who seemed most in need of guidance indicated a much lower level of parental daily involvement in their activities and had little communication concerning issues important to young people. According to the Commission,

While children in single parent families indicated as much closeness with their custodial parent as children in two parent families reported with both of the parents, the absence of one parent clearly takes its toll on children and custodial parents. On average, the financial and emotional aspects of daily life tend to be more difficult for single parent families. (p. 20)

The Commission also reported that single parents were two or more times as likely to worry about their children's physical safety and long-term outcome (i.e., completing school and job outlook) as their counterparts from intact families.

Senander and Kantor (1990) examined the effects of parental divorce on the social development of college-age individuals. The researchers studied five areas, including parent-child relationships in both intact and divorced families. Both groups rated their relationship with their mothers higher than that with their fathers, although the difference in divorced families was more pronounced. When the father had custody, however, this pattern was reversed. In that arrangement the relationship between the custodial father and the child was rated higher.

Many researchers have indicated that a key family characteristic that can affect a student's success in social class. However, Greene (1986) pointed out that

more than the family's SES can cause a student to succeed or fail. He wrote that family interpersonal relationships have a great effect on children. The home has to provide the love, affection, understanding, and emotional security important to children's normal development. When these characteristics are absent, failure is often the result. When low SES is a factor, often a lower level of purpose or mission is present in both the parent and the student.

Clark (1983) indicated that when successful students were very young, their family social units taught them the difference between right and wrong and what social behavior was acceptable at a particular time but perhaps inappropriate at another time.

Parents managed to inculcate a positive educational attitude in these young children by buttressing their moral teachings with displays of love during home activities, expectations for responsible independence, and trust toward the child. (p. 113)

Clark stated that, through the above-mentioned experiences, parents gave their children the belief that they had a positive effect on what happened in the home and that they were helping to improve themselves as well as the well-being of the family. Parents reinforced this belief with liberal praise and special attention.

Clark continued by saying that early home activities such as singing, conversation, reading aloud, family discussions including extended family, creative art activities, writing exercises, and emphasis on verbal articulation give children the basic student-related skills (communication and listening skills; self-appraisal; and verbal, observational, and analytical skills). Adolescent achievers most often stick to the learned family norms and standards but retain the right to have a "mind of their

own." Parents must offer reassurance and consolation if students fail in a task, in order to avoid self-blame and to put failure in the proper perspective. By reassuring the students' self-regard and sense of adequacy, parents help their children avoid using scapegoats but rather instill a quality of self-esteem, which allows them to practice and work until they have taught themselves. From these families come students with a sense of independence and autonomy and a willingness to take responsibility.

Chapter Summary

Much of the research concerning single-parent families has dwelled on the negative factors involved in families with only one parent in the household and the failures their children experience. Consequently, much of the research reviewed for this study had a fatalistic slant concerning students found in this at-risk family structure. The researcher reviewed literature on social changes, the correlation of family and school culture, schools'/teachers' involvement with students, family history, family attitudes and experiences, family-school interaction, internal dynamics of family relationships, and the resiliency of students from single-parent homes and the dynamics and demographics of the above-mentioned considerations that encourage academic success. Repeatedly, the statistical information on students who are products of single-parent families has not taken into consideration the constructive interpersonal relationships between parent and child and between these families and the educational institution. Positive interpersonal relationships between school and family, i.e., school-family partnerships, and between parents and

children, consistency of family and school cultures, and family support of student activities have produced the desired result for children in single-parent families in order for them to achieve academically.

In this review of literature, however, the researcher endeavored to call attention to the positive qualities of single-parent homes and the resulting predictable and healthy development of children in these familial configurations. Consideration also was given to what researchers have said about the negative aspects of children who are classified as at-risk, with emphasis on single-parent families.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methods and procedures used in carrying out this study are explained in this chapter. The study design, the research questions, selection of the sample, and the setting for the study are presented. The methods of analyzing and interpreting the data are described, and a narrative of actual field procedures is provided.

The Study Design

The processes used in this qualitative study, which is descriptive in nature, are much like those used by both Okey (1990) in his research, "The Family Perspective on the Individual's Decision to Drop Out of High School," and Jettes (1992) in his dissertation, "A Study of the Relationship of Family Life to the Academic Success of Students." Clark (1983) described his conception of similar studies, stating that both studies treat the individual family as a "unity of interacting persons, each occupying a position(s) within the family to which a number of roles are assigned, i.e., the individual perceives norms or role expectations held individually or collectively by other family members for his attributes and behavior" (p. 16).

The researcher's purpose in this study was to describe and explain the relationship of family life to the academic success of students from single-parent families. To achieve this purpose, two premises were central. The first premise was that family perspective is best understood by examining the interactions between and among the family and the individual, the family and the school, and the individual as a family member and student in school. The second premise was that the family is a significant reference group for understanding the behaviors of the academically successful student.

It is challenging to make sweeping generalizations from a small number of families, as in the case of this study in which ten families were interviewed. However, commonalities and characteristics of the families who were interviewed can be organized and social processes can be determined. The data referring to the similarities and generalization and behavioral characteristics of these selected families can be analyzed.

The researcher selected families for this study from samples of single-parent family units living in suburban communities. This analysis focused on the structures, processes, and interactions of family members with each other, as well as with school personnel. The specific categories of family structure and processes were similar to those used by Jelles (1992) in his study. The analysis of data was organized around the accumulation, interpretations, and conclusions based on the following themes:

1. Family data. Specifically addressed under this topic were the names, ages, ordinal position of each family member, and church affiliation. Home settings and physical description of students and the prominent parent were considered, as well.

2. Family experiences, culture, values, and leisure time activities. Examined here were the rules and consequences of both home and school for the student. Custodial parents' beliefs and ideas concerning parenting skills, along with family activities shared, were considered.

3. History of family education. A brief history of the educational experiences of the students' parents and grandparents was discussed. The attitudes toward and values the generations placed on education were defined, as were the students' study habits, goals, and aspirations. Parents' expectations of their children were examined, as well.

4. Students' and parents' school involvement. This category concerned the parent-school relationship and parents' involvement in the students' activities. Also included were the students' and family members' relationships with teachers and other school personnel, their extracurricular activities, and their perceptions of schools.

5. Impact of divorce. Another focus was the determination of the effects of the parents' separation or divorce on the students. The resilience of the students academically, socially, and emotionally was appraised.

Research Questions and Suppositions

In this study, the researcher attempted to understand the unique interactions among the successful students and their families and between family members and school personnel, and thereby to comprehend how these interactions influenced students' academic success. The inspiration for this emphasis was derived from Clark's (1983) study of school achievement, Okey's (1990) research on dropouts and family culture, and Jeltres's (1992) research on academic success and family culture. These researchers found that family culture is a more powerful determinant of school success than family demographics. In this study, the researcher established and relied on categories of family structures and processes to assist in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. In addition to these categories of family structures and processes, nine research questions were posed to guide the study.

As Okey (1990) stated, "The nature of this study was a search for, rather than a testing of, a given explanation or theory, requiring that these questions represent broad and flexible areas of inquiry, not rigid categories" (p. 69). As the sample was developed and the interviews progressed, the research questions were refined for each area.

The research questions presented below are similar to those Jeltres (1992) used in his study of academically successful students. The research questions for this study were developed specifically to construct the steps of inquiry to examine the interactions of successful students from single-parent families. Following the

questions are the tentative, yet expected, findings regarding each of the research questions.

1. How do successful students define their single-parent families?

The researcher expected to find that the students thought they came from home environments in which love, support, and high expectations existed. Also expected was a significant relationship between students' success and how students defined their families.

2. What is the students' family background? The researcher expected to see a correlation across the generations of success with school and learning. It was expected that there would be a significant relationship between students' success and the single-parent-family interactions with school personnel.

3. What are family members'/students' experiences and communication with school personnel? It was anticipated that students' custodial parents would have positive relationships with school personnel in their experiences both as previous students and as parents. Further, it was expected that the quality of family members' current relationships with school personnel would reflect their past relationships. The background of family members' relationships with school personnel was believed to have an influence on how school personnel viewed the student. The researcher expected to find a significant relationship between a student's success and the school experiences of his or her family members.

4. What were the school experiences of successful students' family members? The researcher anticipated that the positive relationships and

experiences with school had been evident in the students' families for several generations. He also expected that the students had experienced and were currently experiencing the same positive experiences. The researcher expected to find a significant relationship between students' success in school and their family members' experiences.

5. **Is there a relationship between the family experiences of the successful students and how they are succeeding in school?** Experiences of students within their families were expected to have a dramatic effect on the students' level of success. The researcher anticipated that the families' values, structure, stability, emphasis on education, beliefs, faith, and morals were major factors contributing to the students' success.

6. **How do successful students' custodial parents and extended family view the importance of education?** The researcher anticipated that the successful students' custodial parents and extended family members would provide a high level of support and create a climate in the home that would parallel the climate of the school. The researcher also expected to find that both the students' family members and school personnel had high expectations for the students to achieve and work up to their ability level. Further, it was expected that family members would place strong emphasis and value on the importance and necessity of education and that the successful students would be fully aware of the family's support of education and its importance. The researcher also expected to find a

significant relationship between students' success and how their custodial parents and extended family members viewed the importance of education.

7. What meaning does being successful have for successful students from single-parent families? The researcher expected that the students would have an understanding of what it takes to be successful, as well as the will and determination to be successful. It was also anticipated that the students would see themselves as the key players in terms of accomplishing their success or making it a reality in their experience. The researcher expected that there would be a significant relationship between students' success and the meaning that success had for those students.

8. How do successful students from single-parent families succeed? The researcher expected that the successful students were able to resist negative peer pressure, strive to be leaders and not followers, and choose to be active in extracurricular activities. The researcher expected to find a significant relationship between students' success and their choice to use their innate abilities to achieve their goals and expectations.

9. How do successful students from single-parent families cope with and process their parents' separation or divorce? The researcher expected that successful students who lived with one biological parent had the resolve and resiliency to overcome the effects of such traumatic situations as separation and divorce. The researcher also expected to see a significant relationship between students' success and their ability to cope with major stresses in their lives.

Selection of the Sample

To acquire information to develop a list of potential candidates for this study, area administrators and school counselors were contacted for their input and expertise. The researcher shared the intention of the study with these school personnel and requested their participation in identifying successful students from single-parent families. With the assistance and support of these personnel, students were identified who fulfilled the criteria of the study and whose cumulative school records (CA-60) were examined to verify the minimal academic standard of a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better. The researcher was able to work from a pool of 30 possible candidates, from whom ten families were selected who fit the criteria most completely. The researcher contacted school personnel from the students' earlier years to verify their social and academic success. These individuals included former principals, school secretaries, school counselors, and teachers.

The scope of the study was limited to students and their families from suburban populations. Urban and rural populations were excluded because the researcher had no previous experience working with either of these two populations. Furthermore, the nature of this qualitative investigation required some parameters on the length and scope of the study.

Single-parent families with a student who was high achieving were the participants in this study. In the study, all single parents with whom the children lived were their biological mothers. This was not by design, but it happened to be the arrangement in each of the units of study. There was a diversity of socioeconomic

status (SES) among those interviewed. The mothers' occupations ranged from being on disability or doing factory work to being an independent business woman. In eight of the ten families in this study, the fathers provided no financial support. Family size ranged from one child to three living in the household with the single parent.

Although the researcher interviewed the biological mothers and the high-achieving successful students only, he did ask questions about the siblings' performance and success in school. The students who were interviewed ranged in age from 13 to 19 years. This age range included students in eighth grade through college sophomores. The researcher believed this would allow for an adequate span of time to critique students' success over a sustained period of living in a single-parent family. Students who had lived in a single-parent family for a minimum of four years were interviewed for the study; these students had lived in a single-parent home from 4 to 17 years.

Setting for the Study

The study was conducted in suburban communities located near a large metropolitan area in the Midwest. It is one of the fastest growing areas within that particular state. The suburban communities where the interviews took place consisted primarily of working-class populations. The families in these communities were extremely supportive and proud of their schools, as evidenced by the fact that the local millages had been defeated only once in the past 20 years. The schools were seen as a hub for family and social activities. It was not unusual to have

children attending the schools whose ancestors for a number of generations had attended the same schools. There was a high level of loyalty to the schools in those communities.

This particular part of the Midwest was considered a Bible-belt area, and the large metropolitan city had been nicknamed The Little Jerusalem. Churches were located on practically every corner. The study population was not overly religious, however, as reflected in the interviews. Many families had religious background and denominational preferences, but they were not presently pursuing active church involvement.

The largest employer in the area was the furniture industry, and the area also has been referred to as the furniture capital of the world. The suburban communities that were the setting for the study were, for the most part, land locked. The entire surrounding areas had been developed, for the most part. Within the particular area of study, there were many fast-food restaurants and automobile plants. The suburban communities that were the setting for the study were located approximately 15 miles from the large city.

Although the areas were primarily land locked, the number of students attending the area school had been steadily rising over the past decade. Many of the local school districts had either added on to existing buildings or had built new schools to accommodate the increasing enrollment.

The communities overall were predominantly white, with about a 15% minority population. The minority population has been steadily increasing in recent years.

The ten families who participated in the study were diverse in their ethnic composition.

The size of the school system varied from 2,000 to 8,000 students districtwide. The high school student population ranged from 450 to 2,000 students. Students who attended these schools were primarily white and were primarily from lower- to middle-class families. Their interests, attitudes, and lifestyles reflected great diversity.

Research Methodology

The research methods included interviewing ten successful students and the single parents with whom they lived. The researcher used a tape-recorded-interview format so that he could interpret the data accurately. The primary document was the tape-recorded interview, and the transcription was a written secondary document.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher distributed three surveys to the selected families. Participants were asked to complete the Family Characteristics Inventory, the Family Risk Factors Questionnaire, and the Family History Survey. The surveys were distributed in advance of the interviews to allow students and their parents to acquaint themselves with subjects that would be discussed during the interviews so that they would be better prepared to respond and answer the questions. The researcher's intention was to have no surprises during the interview process, and all responses were recorded with no judgmental response on the part of the interviewer.

The researcher began with approximately 30 single-parent families suggested by school administrators and/or social workers/counselors. From these 30 suggested families, ten were selected. The data for each family were collected by using semi-structured interviews and observation. The interviews were conducted using a specially developed outline that allowed for "unencumbered" inquiry into the functioning of the family unit. The interviews were not rigidly structured, and additional questions were formulated to follow up on or clarify answers to previous questions. The interviews focused on eliciting the following types of information: background information, home living patterns, educational orientation, and school experiences.

To allow for precise recording of information from students and their custodial parents, the researcher chose to use a taped-interview format. This allowed for optimal listening to and observing of students and parents. The researcher did not want to risk losing the ability to observe the physical surroundings and the nonverbal communications of the person being interviewed by having to focus on taking notes throughout the interviews. This also provided the opportunity for excellent eye contact and the ability to affirm and to be able to respond to the interviewees' responses with follow-up questions to clarify and to probe more deeply for a complete explanation of their thoughts and ideas.

The interviewing process for research has been a widely used format of study and a well-accepted method of research. Gorden (1969, 1980, 1987) spelled out the precise structure and appropriate methods for the tape-recorded-interview format.

In his 1969 publication, Gorden identified five major benefits of the interview format versus the questionnaire method. The five advantages he identified are as follows:

1. The interview provides more opportunity to motivate the respondent to supply accurate and complete information immediately.
2. The interview provides more opportunity to guide the respondent in his or her interpretation of the questions.
3. The interview allows a greater flexibility in questioning the respondent.
4. The interview allows greater control over the interview situation.
5. The interview provides a greater opportunity to evaluate the validity of the information by observing the respondent's nonverbal manifestation of his or her attitude toward supplying the information.

This format of study allowed the researcher to have flexibility in gathering the information and to focus on predominant patterns while gathering data. There is no standard method for studying single-parent families. The researcher used the field methods of interview and observation with the families interviewed in this study. These procedures allow for a wide latitude of methods while conducting exploratory research and provide the opportunity to realize dominant patterns in small groups in the process of gathering data.

The data for each family in the study were collected over six months during spring through fall of 1996, after the 160 interview questions used in the study were approved by the researcher's doctoral committee. Approximately 100 questions were asked of the students, and 60 were addressed to the biological, custodial

parents. The specially developed questions were largely extrapolated from Jeltres's (1992) study, as a basis for continuity and replication for comparison of the two studies. The interview format was not tightly structured, and unique follow-up questions were posed within each individual interview for clarification and more complete responses to initial questions. The interviews were designed to gather information on the following themes, which were the same as those Jeltres used in his study:

Background information: General background of parents, including their work history; attitude about present environment and life circumstances; social experience of the student as a child; early childhood functioning; early parental influence (moral training and values); church participation; and past, present, and future ambitions of students.

Home living patterns: Parents' concept of child rearing; family decision-making process; parental expectations in terms of children's behavior; role responsibilities in the home; sibling relationships; interaction with kin, neighbors, and friends; method of parental control; parental handling of students' time and space; students' attitudes toward parents and other adults; family outdoor activities and travel; and daily routines.

Educational orientation: School plans and goals of parents and students; career plans of parents and students; parental aspirations for children; parental expectations of children; learning customs in the home—for example, reading, hobbies, games, and other activities; and students' self-concept.

School experiences: Students', parents', and grandparents' school experiences; parental involvement in school activities; contact with school—for example, exchange of information, quality of interaction, level of involvement, and communication process; and parents' expectations of the school.

Students' perceptions of the impact of their parents' divorce or separation: Students' attitudes about their parents' separation or divorce; their personal sense of the impact of the separation or divorce on their educational endeavors; and their views about their present relationship with their mothers and fathers.

After selecting the candidates for the interviews, the researcher called each participant to discuss more fully the structure of the interviews, explain the protocol, and answer any questions the interviewees had. The researcher explained the consent form (approved by the Michigan State University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects—UCRIHS) to the families and discussed the three surveys each of the participating families would be asked to complete. The surveys were an introduction of the topics and ideas that would be covered in the interview process, which allowed the participants to have time to formulate their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of personal experiences.

The first of the three surveys was the Family Characteristics Inventory (Appendix A). This survey contained 20 items to which each student and custodial parent responded together, using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Does not fit our family at all) to 5 (Fits our family very well). The Family History Survey (Appendix B) was designed to gather demographic information related to each of the

family units interviewed. The Family Risk Factors Questionnaire (Appendix C) consisted of 12 items. This questionnaire was used to discover possible characteristics about the family that might indicate dysfunctions such as alcoholism, substance abuse, unemployment, physical abuse, and mental abuse. The interviewer endeavored to be nonjudgmental while recording the interviewees' responses.

The researcher notified the interviewees that their confidentiality would be protected and that they could refuse to respond to any question they did not want to answer. Every attempt was made to communicate all aspects of the interview process to the interviewees so that, ideally, there would be no unpredictable viewpoint during the interviewing.

Procedures Followed in Conducting the Study

Following the UCRIHS procedures, the researcher sought and obtained the committee's permission to conduct the study (see Appendix D for the letter of approval). Once the requirements were met and UCRIHS had granted permission, the researcher followed a procedure of maintaining the anonymity of the potential subjects. Area administrators sent letters (composed by the researcher) to the potential subjects, who had been identified with the assistance of the school counselors and social workers, asking them to consider participating in the study. If they were interested and willing, these individuals mailed a response card to the researcher's home, inviting him to call them to discuss the nature of the study in detail. Once the researcher received response cards, he called the potential

respondents, informed them about all aspects of the study, and assured them that their answers would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used in the research report to protect their identity. Once the student and custodial parent agreed to participate in the study, they were given a consent form (Appendix E) to sign. All participants agreed to sign the consent forms.

Eight of the ten interviews were conducted in the families' homes; two of the interviews were administered in the researcher's home. The interviews lasted from one-half hour to two and one-half hours. Only one interview was needed with each family. However, the researcher asked the participants' permission to call them after the interviews to clarify their responses, if necessary. Calls were made to follow up on information from some of the respondents when the researcher was transcribing the interviews.

The structure of the interview was to interview the successful student first and then his or her custodial parent. The researcher invited the custodial parent to be present while her child was being interviewed. In seven of the ten interviews, the custodial parent elected to sit in the room while her child was being interviewed. In all cases, when the parent was being interviewed after the child, the child chose to leave the room. The researcher reminded the respondents that they could refuse to answer any question, but none of the students or parents refused to answer any of the questions. Respondents were informed that the interview would be tape recorded, and all of them consented to that method.

Data-Analysis Procedure

After each interview was completed, the researcher transcribed the data to provide an accurate and precise analysis. Using the more than 300 pages of transcription derived from the tape recordings, the researcher categorized, charted, and summarized the responses. He then was able to begin to determine common traits and characteristics evidenced in the interview responses.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This researcher works in a school district where many of the students come from single-parent families. Therefore, he has a strong interest in the surroundings, family life and support, and culture and any other elements or different environment these students experience that might encourage or cause them to accomplish above-average participation and grades during their elementary, secondary, and/or college years. Another purpose in this study was to discover how the subjects' interrelationships with their peers, families, and school personnel could influence their decision to work hard in order to achieve success. Does the subjects' perceptions of their families' view of education influence their decision to succeed in school and their social lives? To gain this information, the researcher investigated the family experiences, family history and demographics, and family-school interactions of selected successful students.

To introduce the successful students and their families, the first section of this chapter contains a description of their home settings and family composition. The next section contains demographic information on the successful students and their families, which includes the parents' statistics, specifically, age, occupation, religious

affiliation, educational level, and other background characteristics that may have influenced the parents' and children's accomplishments. Presented also are the students' school experiences and the interactions between and among the students, family members, and school personnel. Outside support from community members, other adult relatives, and/or friends; social involvement; and family discipline are discussed in order to better understand these successful students and their families. Another section deals with the parenting skills, family experiences, and family values that they believed promoted success. The last section of the chapter concerns the impression the parents' divorce had made on the students.

Each of the preceding elements is considered through the eyes of the student, as well as those of the prominent single parent, along with the researcher's observations. To protect the families' anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation.

Home Settings of the Families in the Study

The ten families involved in this study varied in terms of home setting and whether they owned or rented the home in which they lived. The geographic location and physical features of each family's home setting are described in the following pages, based on their own opinion and in some cases on what the writer observed. Other pertinent demographic data also are included.

The Burton Family

The Burtons lived in a cream-colored bungalow with green shutters in a good neighborhood that, they agreed, fit their family very well. They rated their school district 4 on a scale of 1 to 5. The house was neat and functional; it contained seven rooms and a basement, with the upstairs finished as a third bedroom. The large backyard appeared functional as a gathering place for neighborhood children while they were growing up. Amelia felt very safe in this home, which she had lived in all of her life, as well as in the school and the neighborhood.

The Cruise Family

The Cruises described their home as a wood-framed, sand-colored, two-story home with three bedrooms, located in a suburban area. They considered their home to be located in a good neighborhood (rated 4 on a scale of 1 to 5) that fit their family well. They rated the school district 3 on the same scale, although Jerry felt safe there, as well as at home and in his neighborhood.

The Baker Family

The Bakers lived in an aqua-colored mobile home in a nice neighborhood. They owned their home, which had two large bedrooms and seven rooms in total. They were in the same school district as others in the survey, and they rated it the highest (5). Collette took full advantage of the teachers' time and advice and listening ears and felt very comfortable doing so; she thought this was a great advantage of a smaller school. The writer thinks that certainly must have influenced

the family's rating of the school district. Collette also felt very safe in her neighborhood, home, and school.

The Green Family

This family lived in what they considered a good neighborhood in a white one-and-one-half story, seven-room bungalow, which they owned. The family had lived in this suburban area for 21 years. They rated both the school district and neighborhood 4 on a scale of 1 to 5. Karen considered herself safe in her home, school, and neighborhood.

The Cusino Family

Marvin Cusino and his sister, along with their mother, lived in a two-story townhouse. There were many townhouse units in the suburban area in which this one was located, with its brick and wood exterior. The three-bedroom interior was very clean, neat, and tidy. They rated their school district 4 on a scale of 1 to 5, and they rated their neighborhood 3 on the same scale. Marvin did not feel really safe at home because there were gangs who had guns and who might shoot into the front door, but at school he felt very safe.

The Ferris Family

This family of four females had lived in the same five-room apartment for the past 14 years; however, because the mother thought it was no longer in a good neighborhood, she would like to move. Jane loved her school so much that she had suggested she could live with a friend if they chose to move. Because Jane was so

involved in school and community activities, she did not know her neighbors well and did not feel a closeness to any of them. The apartment was very clean, neat, and attractively decorated in a country theme, but they rated their neighborhood 2 on a scale of 1 to 5 and rated the school district the same by a composite opinion of all members of the family. Jane felt very safe in her school, and although she said her neighborhood was not the best, nothing serious had happened there.

The Rose Family

Denise Rose had lived with her mother and stepfather and younger sister for the past two years. Before that, she had lived in a single-parent family for about six years with only her mother and sister. The three-bedroom, suburban, nine-room home where they were currently living was very nicely landscaped and was owned by her mother and stepfather. The interior theme was country, with a scattering of antique oak pieces and appeared very well kept. They rated their neighborhood 4 on a five-point scale and gave the school district a rating of 5 on the same scale. When asked how safe she felt in her neighborhood, Denise replied, "Yeah, very safe, and sometimes I might feel more safe than I should. We live next door to the park, but a lot of things happen there, but I wouldn't be scared to go there in the dark."

The Stone Family

David Stone had no siblings and lived with his mother, Ginger, in a five-year-old brown bi-level home with nine rooms, including three bedrooms. They had

purchased the house new in that suburban neighborhood, where they felt very safe. In the backyard there was a large swimming pool, which lent itself to his mother's strong interest in swimming. The yard was landscaped in good taste, and David and Ginger were adding more shrubs and lava rock. The interior of the house was done in neutral colors with modern decor; however, they were replacing the neutral-colored carpeting with green carpet. David's bedroom was furnished with a stereo system, a television, and a video-cassette recorder. A room in the basement was rented to a special education teacher. Their basement also housed a large studio in which David could explore his hobby of drawing. Overall, in this writer's eyes, the home was extremely clean, very bright and cheery, and inviting. Mrs. Stone also appeared very pleased to show the researcher her fur coat collection. The Stones rated their neighborhood and school district 4 and 3, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 5, and David felt safe in all three areas--home, neighborhood, and school.

The Hobbs Family

Dan Hobbs lived with his mother and two beautiful, healthy-looking cats in a rented six-room, two-bedroom home in a suburban area that they agreed fit their family very well. This white aluminum-sided house with black shutters had a full finished basement and a fenced-in backyard. The interior was decorated with attractive pictures that Mrs. Hobbs had snapped with her own camera. The new couch with several throw pillows, new desk, and rocking chair rendered the living room very adequate. They rated the neighborhood 5 on a five-point scale; Dan felt

very safe there. He was somewhat apprehensive about his safety at school; however, he gave a rating of 5 to his district as a whole.

The Bonet Family

Russ Bonet and his mother and younger sister lived in a suburban townhouse development where there were six units in one building; several townhouses nearby had the same wood and brick exterior. The seven-room, three-bedroom interior may have had a colonial theme, but due to the family's low income level they were unable to have a specific decor. Russ's mother took pride in what she claimed was the not so up-to-date computer she had on a desk in the corner. The Bonets thought their neighborhood was average, and Russ said he felt safe there, although at times there were some not-so-perfect neighbors; he cited the neighbors who had just moved in across the street about a month ago who had already been evicted. They considered their school district to be a 4 on a scale of 1 to 5 and several times mentioned the advantage he had being from a smaller district rather than a much larger one he had experienced in earlier years, largely because it could be more personal, more one on one. Russ also stated that he felt safe in his school environment.

Analysis of the Findings

A compilation of the home settings of the families who were interviewed is shown in Table 1. Two families rented townhouses, one family rented a house, one family rented an apartment, one family owned their own mobile home, and the five

remaining families owned their own homes. On a Likert scale rating of 1 to 5, the families' average assessment of their schools was a 4, a strong indication of satisfaction with the academic quality and educational opportunities of their schools.

Table 1: Home settings and demographic characteristics of families in the study population.

Family	Family Composition	Parents' Level of Education	Employment	Geographical Setting/Home Ownership
Burton	Parents divorced Mother Male, 20 *Female, 16 Female, 14	Father and mother-- College one year	Both factory workers	Suburban--1-1/2 story bungalow, own
Cruise	Parents divorced Mother *Male, 15 Female, 10	Father--high school grad. Mother--college grad.	Father--technical worker Mother--preschool teacher	Suburban--two-story wood, own
Baker	Parents divorced Mother *Female, 19 Male, 28 Male, 21--not with mother	Father and mother--high school grads.	Father--truck driver Mother--volunteer work	Own mobile home
Green	Parents divorced Mother Female, 19 *Female, 17 Male, 15	Father--high school grad. Mother--college 1-1/2 years	Father--truck-body repairman Mother--account consultant, finance services	Suburban--1-1/2 story bungalow, own
Cusino	Parents divorced Mother *Male, 15 Female, 5	Father--GED, some college Mother--college grad.	Father--temporary services Mother--factory worker	Suburban--three-bedroom townhouse, rent

Table 1: Continued.

Family	Family Composition	Parents' Level of Education	Employment	Geographical Setting/Home Ownership
Ferris	Parents divorced Mother Female, 28 Female, 26 *Female, 17	Father--B.S., master's, work on Ph.D. Mother-- business school, 1 year	Father--unknown Mother--disabled	Suburban--five- room apartment, rent
Rose	Parents divorced Mother Stepfather *Female, 17 Female, 16	Father--college grad. Mother-- technical training	Father-- unemployed Mother--surgical technician	Suburban--nine- room home, own
Stone	Parents divorced Mother Male, 15	Father--college grad. Mother--three years college	Father--unknown Mother--realtor, supervisor of retirement home	Suburban--nine- room bi-level home, own
Hobbs	Parents not married Mother Male, 30 Female, 28 Male, 27 *Male, 13	Father--9th- grade education Mother--high school education	Father--unknown Mother--factory worker	Suburban--six- room home with finished basement, rent
Bonet	Parents divorced Mother *Male, 18 Female, 17	Father--GED+ Mother--three years of college	Father--unknown Mother--credit union teller	Suburban-- seven-room townhouse, rent

*Indicates successful student who was interviewed.

Nine of the ten students who were interviewed felt safe in their schools, and eight of the ten indicated secure feelings relating to their homes and neighborhoods. Overall, this could be interpreted as meaning that the issue of safety and security did not present itself as a barrier to the students' success. Due to the variations in the living arrangements of these students, it was obvious to the researcher that the students' accomplishments did not hinge on their home settings.

Family Composition and Educational History of the Successful Students and Their Families

The students and their parents are introduced in this section, which includes background information such as names, ages, siblings, ordinal position in the family, and educational history of previous generations. A description and history of the families, as well as their religious persuasions, also are included. This composite of the researcher's observations and the responses of the students and their parents follows, with emphasis on the student interviews.

The Burton Family

Amelia, an attractive, tanned, dark-haired young woman, was going to be 17 and a senior in high school in the fall. She described herself as an outgoing, fun-loving girl with many friends. Her bubbly personality was obvious to the researcher. She had grown up in a family with a brother who was three years older and had been a popular and successful athlete in high school. He now was working as a security guard and also was with United Parcel Service. He was single and had no current plans for college. Her younger sister, 14 years old, would be a freshman in

high school in the fall, having improved her academic standing greatly in the past year, working to overcome a learning disability.

Amelia had a belief in God and, until a few years ago, had taken an active part in her church; she said she had very little free time now. She loved her mother very much and considered her to be her best friend. Therefore, the influence from her mother had been very positive for her self-esteem, accomplishments, and pursuit of higher education. She also felt a high level of support from her friends' parents, her mother's relatives, and the community. Even with all this support, however, Amelia thought it was her own decision to be successful as she always liked the attention from being positive, saying she had seen what negative actions had done for some of her friends. Her description of success was "Going somewhere. Don't take the easy road; you have to work for it." Because she had a flair for mathematics, she planned to go on to college to become an engineer. She was excited to think about her future but considered it "a long way out there."

Jack Burton, age 46 and Amelia's father, had been a factory worker for the past four years but had not lived with the family for approximately five years. He had remained single since the divorce. Amelia described him as a man who had a problem with alcohol and, perhaps as a result of that, seemed to be a very negative person and not a good provider for his family. His support of his children's activities came by way of putting them down for what they did not accomplish rather than pointing out the things they did well. Amelia had turned that negative approach into a positive experience by determining to prove his statements wrong. She saw her

father occasionally, but not on a regular basis. Amelia said she did not really know her dad, even though during the first few years of her life "he was around but not really there." Jack had a Lutheran background. He had participated in football and basketball while in public high school, maintaining a low B or high C average. His mother (Amelia's grandmother) had graduated from high school and worked in factories for a number of years; she was currently working at a school. Amelia's paternal grandfather had dropped out of school while in elementary school. A victim of abuse, he had been on his own from age nine or ten.

Sandra Burton, age 43 and Amelia's mother, told the researcher that both she and her husband had a year of college, but during those years college had not seemed as important to her as getting married and having a family, and to Jack it had seemed most important to get a job rather than finish college. Sandra's stepmother had strongly encouraged her and her older brother to get an education; however, as both of them had dropped out of college, she believed that her younger sister may have suffered from that fact, in that she had not been pushed as much as the older two children to attend college. Sandra and Jack were married when she was barely 19 and he was nearly 22. Both Jack and Sandra were smokers.

It was obvious that Amelia received her mother's outgoing, bubbly personality. Sandra had been a factory worker for the past two years, in order to improve her income and leave the stress from such jobs as office worker, office manager, and bank teller. "I can handle the physical stress [of the factory job], but the mental stress was getting too much," she stated.

Sandra came from a broken home also, but was raised by her father and stepmother, which she agreed was the best situation. She did not have contact with her biological mother until she was engaged to be married. "Jack and I looked her up and invited her to our wedding." Apparently she had had a nervous breakdown and asked the father to care for the family until she was able. However, Sandra's stepmother would not agree to giving up the children after raising them for a year or so; therefore, they stayed with their father and stepmother. Sandra's birth mother had a high school education, and her father dropped out of school in the eighth grade, which Sandra thought was normal in her father's era. Her stepmother, however, had a year of college and was a very successful woman. She believed her stepmother was the major driving force in her life, encouraging college. Sandra attended Catholic grade school and public high school, where she participated in the student council and Future Teachers organizations. She maintained only a low B or high C average, saying she believed she could have done better. After attending one year of community college, she dropped out in order to be married. Her religious affiliation was Roman Catholic.

The Cruise Family

Jerry Cruise, 15, was a neat-appearing, well-groomed, slender young man with red hair; he was of average height. Jerry was going to be a sophomore in high school in the fall and had a grade point average of 3.7 to 3.8. He had attended preschool and had attended the same school system since kindergarten. When asked to describe himself, he replied,

I am into Star Wars and Star Trek, and I am a Christian and I am an avid believer that there's a government conspiracy to hide their findings in Roswell in 1947 when they discovered a crashed alien ship. So really our country is run by military dictators, and I'm just trying to bring that to light to anybody I can.

Jerry lived in a single-parent family with a younger sister, Rena, age ten. Rena was entering fifth grade and also did well in school. She was currently involved in ballet and computer classes as well.

Jerry and his family regularly attended a local Baptist church. For the most part, Jerry said, his family background was solid; he described his mother as caring and well meaning. However, "Sometimes she is not very open to accepting my views or liking what I do 'cause like I watch a lot of TV," he stated. The primary person who expected him to succeed was his mother, who loved him but, he thought, did not give him a high level of support. When asked what part his parents played in building his self-confidence, he replied, "None; it came from within."

Jerry thought that the communication between him and his mother was not all that positive. "I get her advice, but not all the time am I seeking it," he stated. Jerry felt support from two other nonparent adults, his Uncle Doug and Denny, a friend of his mother's.

There were clear rules and consequences at home and at school, and Jerry thought that his neighbors would probably report any of his wrongdoings if there were any. He believed that his mother and teachers had high expectations of him, and he spent three or more hours per week in school sports, clubs, and organizations. His religious activity exceeded one or more hours per week, and he

placed a high value on helping other people. Jerry said he was always truthful and believed it was important not to be involved in sex, alcohol, or drugs.

Jerry was optimistic about his future, had high self-esteem, accepted others of different races, could plan ahead and make good choices, and was able to resist negative peer pressure. He resolved conflict nonviolently and believed he had empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills; he definitely believed there was a purpose for his life.

Mr. Cruise, Jerry's father, was described as highly intelligent; however, he had given in to drugs, alcohol, and nicotine and therefore had not been a stable figure in his family's life. He had been a victim of physical and mental abuse as a child. His disease had caused him to jump from job to job; as a result, he had been unable to support his family financially for the six years since the divorce. He recently acquired a job at C-Tech and, for the first time, had regularly been paying support for his children. Also, he had spent some time with his children recently, but he declared that a regular schedule of visits would be impossible due to his job. Mr. Cruise had received only a high school diploma, having had a grade point average of little more than 2.0, which Martha, Jerry's mother, thought was due to lack of any support from his parents and lack of initiative on his part. She also thought that possibly the reason he had not gone further even with such high ability was that it would have taken some effort on his part and, up to that time, things had been very easy for him and hence he lacked perseverance. In his family, they had been allowed to quit rather than being encouraged to put forth more time and effort.

Martha Cruise, Jerry's mother, presented herself as an honest, kind, and very dedicated, patient person. She considered her family to be middle class. She worked two jobs in order to support her family and still found time to take a very active interest in her children's education. Perhaps her interest was enhanced by the fact that she, herself, worked in the education field. She was a petite, 40-year-old brunette.

Martha's higher education consisted of two years of junior college and two years at Grand Valley State University, majoring in psychology and sociology, where she earned teacher certification in early childhood education. She had a high level of support from her parents to get a college degree; because they had not had an opportunity to attend college themselves, they wanted to see their children do better. Martha stated, "I'm the youngest of five children, and they [her parents] said they would put all five of us through college as long as we remained single and as long as we did well and it was our own will to go."

Her parents put Martha through the first two years of junior college, but at that time Martha decided to get married; therefore, it was up to her husband and her to finance the next two years. While in high school, Martha had been involved in gymnastics, bowling, and Future Teachers of America. She regretted that she did not get into the National Honor Society as, in her senior year, she had been more involved in having fun rather than concentrating on the books. However, she proved herself in college, being on the dean's list and graduating with better than a 3.5 grade point average.

Martha had been a preschool teacher for 18 years, and for the past four years she had worked for J. C. Penney as a telemarketer in addition to her teaching job. She loved to bowl, swim, and snow ski, but she had very little time for these interests. She had lived in the same house for the past 17 years and had been a single parent for six years.

Jerry's maternal grandmother had completed only tenth grade because, as the oldest child, she had been required to quit school to care for her younger siblings. Also, because she came from an impoverished family, she had been embarrassed to wear the same outfit to school every day. Martha's father had been able to complete eight grades before being forced to curtail his education in order to help his father in the trash business. They also made buttons from the shells of clams they dug out of the Grand River. Martha thought that Jerry's paternal grandfather had not graduated from high school; he had died when Jerry's father was only a year old. Because she had no contact with her former husband's family, she was not sure of their educational level.

"Oh yes, definitely," Martha replied when asked whether educating one's child is a basic function of a parent. A lot of her time was spent with educating the children outside of school and getting them into programs to supplement their own school program. For instance, she had Jerry enrolled in a world history class the summer the interviews were conducted because their school did not offer that course by itself. That, along with American history, is important for those who plan to attend college, Martha believed, and their school district offered only group social

studies. When Jerry was attending his history class, his sister Rena was attending ballet and, later in the day, a computer class that was offered by their own school.

When asked what expectations she had for her children, Martha replied,

. . . Not only that they are successful in school but that they are happy with themselves, that they grow up, not that they choose a career that is all powerful, but they choose a career that they will be happy with and won't be stuck in a dead-end job. They will enjoy their lives, and they need a good education to have those choices.

Martha said that her son did not talk about his schooling much with her because he was a private-type person. However, he did talk about his debate team as that was one of his major interests. Martha's communication with her daughter was much easier because she was more of a social person.

The Baker Family

Collette, 19 years old and a college sophomore in the fall, was an extremely poised, articulate, responsible, and active young woman. Her dark hair and beautiful brown eyes were part of her natural beauty. The researcher observed a friendly, outgoing person who loved life and worked to get the most out of it. Collette said of herself, "I'm just a normal kid who likes to go out and wants to have fun with my friends, who worries about school and worries about homework and likes to go out for movies and pool." Her friends might describe her as the mom of the group, outrageous, or the dare-devil, but some might not know what to think.

During high school, Collette had worked at Old Country Buffet, and during her freshman year in college, she had had two or three jobs on campus for a few hours here and there. The summer she was interviewed, Collette was working at a bank

and hoped to continue there during her college years. Collette was the youngest of three children. Her brother Dan was 28 years old and just recently graduated from college. He had an interest in being a lawyer. He was a natural academically and did very well in school. He had graduated from high school somewhere in Georgia while living with his father. Her 21-year-old brother was currently in the Marines, going to Officer's Training School. He had been very athletic in high school, reaching the state level in wrestling competition. Collette said he had done very well in high school, but "he's not a brain surgeon." Both boys had lived with each parent after the split; however, most of the time it was just Collette and her mother. When asked what her family meant to her, Collette replied,

I love my family; I love my mom, I love my Dad. I mean, what else is there besides family? Think about it! My mom had to learn to speak English, and she's still working on it. My dad, I'm proud of him, he's getting back on his feet after a lot of hardship.

Besides her mother, Collette considered her teachers to be her role models.

Collette described her mother as very outgoing, very relaxed, a people person, sometimes a little too outgoing, and she could cook you up anything. She did not work and was very good with kids. Collette described her father as stubborn, fun-loving, and knowing what he wanted to do and going after it. He was very educationally minded but had run into a problem with alcohol. He was now a recovering alcoholic, starting over again. Both her parents expected her to succeed. Collette was a very strong and self-confident person, and as a result she did not seek her parents' advice very often, perhaps because she saw them at their weakest times.

The adults in the community where Collette lived supported the young people, she thought. They provided parks and other activities for them. She also believed these same adults had confidence in youths by providing opportunities for them to volunteer in community projects. She participated in therapeutic recreation, odds-and-ends cleaning, and working on various fund-raisers on a voluntary basis.

Collette was just expected to be responsible; therefore, she set her own boundaries most of the time. Her parents passed on strong values, and she knew her mother generally worried about her, so she tried to let her know where she would be and whom she was with. Collette did not have a specific curfew, but she just knew what time to get in, especially if there was school the next day. She also believed her neighbors would report to her mother anything they thought she was doing that was in bad taste. She had confidence in her choice of friends and believed her best friend was very responsible. College did not take music lessons or theater and did not attend church, but she was involved in organizations at school and in the community.

Collette placed a high value on doing for others in order to help reduce hunger and poverty. She stood up for what she believed and tried to tell the truth no matter what, unless she thought it might hurt someone. She had no problem with racial differences and believed she had empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. This young woman was optimistic about her future.

Emily, Collette's mother, was 51 years old and had been born in Amsterdam, Holland. She had completed high school (with a B average) in America, but she had

not become too involved in extracurricular activities because of the language barrier—only about a quarter of her daughter's activity level, she said. She had spent 800 hours training in cosmetology and was sorry she had not completed that study. She was Jewish but was sympathetic to other religions, saying, "I'm very interested in any religion." Emily did not attend any church or synagogue, however. The researcher noticed how well-groomed, cute, kind, warm, friendly, and outgoing she was. She was a very positive and encouraging person, as well. Emily did not have a job at the time of the interview but spent much time volunteering at a local hospital. She had been a single parent almost seven years and had lived in her present home for six years. She had received almost no support, either financial or caregiving, from her children's father.

Emily's mother (Collette's maternal grandmother) had had 12 years of education in Europe, which Emily thought was higher than high school here. She spoke four languages and was very brilliant, according to Emily. Emily's father had had 15 years of education and was an accountant who valued education greatly and encouraged his children to learn as much as possible.

Collette's father, born in Detroit, Michigan, had completed a high school education, had earned about a B average, and had participated in many sports while in school. He took a few college classes but did not complete a course. He was a truck driver. Collette's paternal grandparents had graduated from high school and definitely placed a high value on education. These grandparents were the first

couple of this generation, from the families interviewed thus far, who had finished high school.

The Green Family

This kind, gentle, soft-spoken, tall, blue-eyed blonde had a sweet smile. Karen was 17 years old and would be a high school senior in the fall. She described herself as a hard worker who liked to learn and was interested in many things. She believed her friends would characterize her as a good listener and trustworthy. To support the fact that she was a hard worker, she was currently working two jobs. The summer of the interview, she was working in the mail room in a bank and was also working at a pharmacy, where she continued to work during the school year. Even with all this activity, she maintained a 3.75 grade point average.

Karen was the middle child in this single-parent family; she had a 19-year-old sister and a 15-year-old brother. Her parents had separated when Karen was 11 years old, which may have made the two sisters closer. Her family meant a lot to her, especially her mother and sister ("I can talk to her about everything"); she claimed her brother was young and immature. Karen did not see her dad very often (only about every two or three months) and said she did not like him much. However, the researcher detected a bit of pride when she told of her father's earning his high school diploma just a few years earlier. She was proud of her mother as she was a hard worker and had passed that trait on to her daughter. Karen said she would like to have a family some day but would like to raise her children in a two-parent home, with the ability to stay home with them for a while, but she did think

she had a solid family background through her mother, whom she described as follows: "She is caring, she gives up a lot for us, especially a lot of her free time. She is always reading, everything. She cares a lot about us and worries about us, and she is a good listener and she's a good person." Karen said she would willingly seek her mother's advice or counsel, feeling a high level of support and love from her.

"Childish" is how Karen described her father. She claimed that he was not very good with a lot of things like kids, especially teenagers—or adults, for that matter. He was also very critical, according to Karen.

Karen said she received support from several nonfamily adults, as well as from neighbors; however, she would not accept support from her father. She also sensed usefulness as a young person in her community. Karen did have clear rules and consequences at home, as well as at school, and always tried to communicate to her mother where she planned to be. She also thought her neighbors would report to her mom anything undesirable with which she might be involved. Karen was encouraged by the high expectations she thought her mother and teachers had for her.

In a typical week during the school year, Karen was involved in at least three hours of band practice, as well as track and other organizations at school. She also attended the Christian Reformed church each week with her family, did no reading for pleasure, and had very little homework. She placed a high value on helping other people if she saw a need and stood up for what she believed most of the time. She

accepted and took personal responsibility for herself and did not get involved with sex, drugs, or alcohol. She tried to plan ahead and make good choices for herself and possessed empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. Karen felt comfortable with people of different racial backgrounds and resisted negative peer pressure. She believed her life had a purpose, although she had not figured it out yet; she was optimistic about her future.

Mrs. Green, 50 years old, appeared relaxed and supportive, was kind, and, unlike her daughter, had brown hair. Katy had worked several years in data entry, but for the past seven years she had been an account consultant in financial services at a local bank. She loved to read almost anything and enjoyed needlework. She had lived in the same seven-room home for 21 years and had been a single parent for six years.

Katy's father had a high school education and worked as a plasterer. Her mother also had graduated from high school and was a stay-at-home mom. Her parents emphasized being consistent and responsible for what was given her. They encouraged education and realized its value; as a result, Katy had attended college for one and one-half years. However, she had found a job that supplied what she thought was a good income and consequently chose to leave college. In addition to her regular studies, Katy had participated in choir, band, and 4-H while in high school. Her grade point average was 2.7.

Karen's father worked as a truck-body repairman. Because he had quit school after eighth grade, he had not participated in any extracurricular activities in

high school. Katy said he had not been a very good student. However, he obviously valued education as he had earned his high school diploma at about age 40. After the separation, he met his child-support obligations, unlike many of the other fathers in this study. Perhaps the fact that alcoholism or substance abuse was not a factor here contributed to the fact that he was able to support his family financially. It is unknown what level of education Mr. Green's father had completed as he had been disabled for a number of years. However, his mother had graduated from high school.

The Cusino Family

Marvin, a 15-year-old African American male, was a very energetic, outgoing, nice-looking young man with much charisma. He was short and had an athletic build. It was obvious to this researcher that this student had social skills well beyond his years. He was often responsible for the care of his five-year-old sister, Myra, and still was able to maintain his busy schedule of playing football, basketball, and track, as well as excelling academically. He had been chosen to participate in AAU, a basketball team made up of the best in the area; they played other higher-level teams from all over Michigan.

Marvin described himself as having a sense of humor, kind of low key, and one who could be serious. He always wanted to do the best he was capable of doing and thought he was fun to "hang around." He set fairly high goals for himself and thought everyone should always want to do their best, never just mediocre. He was taking drivers training and therefore had no job—just before beginning his

sophomore year in high school. Marvin's little sister, Myra, would begin kindergarten in the fall; he described her as not really shy but only appearing that way when she was trying to be cute.

Marvin had compassion for his father, even though he was not a good role model for his son. In fact, he rather covered for his father, saying he had made a few bad decisions but that he was trying. Mr. Cusino had a general education diploma (GED) and had taken a few college courses. He had been involved in substance abuse and as a result had been in and out of prison. Currently, Marvin saw his father almost every other week, although it had not always been that often. Marvin saw his family as a supporter, someone who provided for him, and was very proud of his mother. He had bonded with many of his teammates and considered them his best friends. He thought they would describe him as fun to be around and said some who did not know him as well might call him a showoff.

Marvin felt solid family support, especially when his mother brought all of his cousins to cheer him on in sports. "It's like I had my own cheering section," he said. Sometimes his mother had to leave a game early, but she always supported him. Marvin also considered his mother to be hardworking, stating, "We have our conflicts, but I think it's male-female differences." In describing his father, Marvin said,

He works hard, but he kind of does things wrong. He has bad judgment, lacks commitment. He grew up basically by himself because he didn't get along with his stepdad, so he works hard but [has] bad judgment. Like he'd miss so much work, he'd get fired. . . . He smokes marijuana and wastes a lot of money on it. Dad wants me to be the person he wasn't.

Marvin felt a great deal of love at home but said he pretty much made his own decisions. He believed he had the support of his teachers, coaches, and his best friend Mac's parents, saying "that's my second home." He was good friends with the adults in his community and believed they valued youths. The rules and consequences at home were very clear from his mother, and those at school were as well. Sometimes his friends did not model responsible behavior, but Marvin did not yield to their pressure if he thought it was not right, particularly drinking and smoking. Marvin said that, playing sports, he would probably collapse trying to run up and down the field if he gave in to those vices, and he did not think he ever would.

Marvin's family attended the Pentecostal church regularly; his mother was youth director there. He was always ready to help anyone who needed something, especially in the area of sports. He was able to make good choices and to plan ahead; he also possessed sensitivity and friendship skills. Marvin got along with people of different races, saying that, if he did not, "I wouldn't have any friends around here." He said everyone has a purpose for their lives, but "you probably don't know it until you end up with it." He always wondered what he was going to be and just kept looking ahead.

Doris Cusino was a 39-year-old factory worker. She was a nice-looking, caring, very concerned parent with high expectations for her children. She also was an accomplished seamstress and coordinated weddings on the side. Her interests included sewing, eating, and church activities. She and her husband had been

separated just two years, but she considered that she had been a single parent for the past six or seven years because of all of their problems.

Doris had attended Calvin College for four years, majoring in education, but she was not a teacher. She had maintained nearly a 4.0 average in high school and had been very active in extracurricular activities; she had been vice-president of her class and president of the Afro-American Club, excelled in art, played sports, wrote poetry, and received an award on a workshop project. Her mother had completed an eighth-grade education, but she was not sure how far her father had gone in school because he had died when she was very young. Doris did receive encouragement and support from her mother to continue her education because she herself had not been able to finish high school.

Mr. Cusino had received the equivalent of a high school diploma and had taken a few college courses, in which he was quite unsuccessful, having received little support from his family. He had not been active in extracurricular activities and had not been popular in school. He had given no financial support to his family. Doris perceived that lack of support from his mother, who was a teacher, contributed much to his failures. He basically had been raised by his grandparents, who loved him but just did not know how to raise him. They had a pastorate in northwestern Michigan. Mr. Cusino's father, Marvin's paternal grandfather, died while he was young; therefore, Doris was not sure of his educational level.

The Ferris Family

Jane Ferris was born two weeks after her mother and father separated and had never met her father. In this researcher's opinion, Mr. Ferris had missed a most interesting and important part of his life. Jane was 17 years old and would be a senior in high school in the fall; she had a grade point average of 3.7+. Jane was a very attractive young woman, with blond hair and blue eyes; she had been elected Homecoming Queen during her junior year of high school. She lived with her mother and two sisters, both older than she was. Helen, 26, was a veterinary technician; Shirley, 28, was a teacher who would be moving to another state soon for a teaching position.

Jane described herself as outgoing, but but very studious, and one to think about things before making a decision to embrace them. Her friends might say she was energetic, always willing to stand up for what she believed in, one who took control, a leader. She had just recently been promoted to manager after two years of employment at a local fast-food restaurant. When asked about her family, Jane replied,

My family has been there for me throughout everything. They are the reason I am here today. Without them, I don't know what I'd do; they taught me pretty much everything I know. They taught me how to handle certain situations, my morals, everything I have accomplished in life I owe to them.

"It was like having three mothers when I grew up," Jane said, due to the wide age span between her and her two sisters, who were 10 and 12 years older than she was. Jane was very proud of everything they had taught her, and she would like to

raise her own family with the same outlook on life, rules, and morals. When asked to describe her mother, Jane replied,

Strong, she cares about me so, and sometimes I don't realize how much she does. She is always there for me and my sisters. She was like the most wonderful person, she just never stops giving of anything of her time and effort, and she'll do anything. I play sports and she is always there.

Of her family life, Jane said there was a high level of love and support. She could talk to her mother about anything; she said, "I don't keep secrets from my family." She also felt a great deal of support from other adults in her life, namely, teachers, coaches, and parents of her friends. Jane believed young people were respected and given responsibility in her community, especially in churches. She found time in her busy life to include volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity, as well as kitchen work for another charity. Her curfew was midnight, and if she was one minute late, she was grounded, so she was careful to be punctual. Jane's mother also knew where she was at all times. She believed there were definite rules and consequences in school as well, so, not wanting the repercussions, she was careful to follow their regulations as well.

Jane and her family attended church each week, but because of other obligations, she had had to cut some of the extra activities there. She enjoyed reading for pleasure when there was time. She also tutored other students to help them out. Jane stood strong for her values and would not give in to peer pressure, volunteering in grade school to encourage the younger children to do the same. She had no problem with people of other races and thought she had good friendship skills. Jane did not like violence and therefore sought to resolve any conflict through

communication. She believed her life had a definite purpose and was optimistic about her future.

Marge Ferris, Jane's 52-year-old mother, suffered from a physical disability that prevented her from holding a job. The researcher saw her as a loving, devoted mother who was very proud of her daughters. Mrs. Ferris was a graduate of a one-year business school beyond high school. She was Catholic and attended church regularly. She related that Jane's father had a master's degree in special education and had several hours toward his Ph.D. degree. She said she had been an average student while in school and thought her daughters had inherited their high level of academic achievement from their father. Because there had been no contact or support received in the past several years, she knew nothing of what her ex-husband was doing. There was a sense of belonging in their family, and they believed they were a reliable and dependable family who established reasonable goals for themselves. The Ferris family was one of the few families in this research in which there had been no alcohol or substance abuse (usually in the father's life). However, they had experienced abuse, unemployment, and disability. They had made no traumatic moves and considered themselves to be in a lower income bracket.

Mrs. Ferris said she was an avid sports fan (almost any kind) and, perhaps because her daughters had been and still were actively involved in so many sports, her interest had grown immensely, and she attended all activities in which her

children were involved, if at all possible. In high school, she had participated on the swim team.

Jane's maternal grandmother had been a registered nurse and her grandfather a high school graduate. Her paternal grandparents were from Germany. Mrs. Ferris was not sure of their educational level. However, she did know that both sets of grandparents encouraged and supported education.

The Rose Family

Very happy and optimistic, with a good outlook on life, is how this 17-year-old soon-to-be college freshman described herself. Denise Rose was an outgoing, sincere, attractive young woman with a very dark tan and dark brown hair. When she was ten years old, her parents divorced, leaving just Denise, her eight-year-old sister, and her mother. They lived in that arrangement until two years ago, when the mother remarried. Currently, Denise lived with her stepfather, mother, and younger sister, with scheduled visits from her stepfather's three children—a 16-year-old boy and girls 10 and 20 years old.

Denise had graduated from high school with a grade point average of 3.83, one of the top ten in her class. She said this of her family:

My family means a lot to me, always somebody to back you up. Like if you have troubles with your friends, you can always count on your family. Even if you haven't treated them very nicely, they're still there for you. They are someone to lean on, support.

Denise really loved her mother, saying she was a good role model. She agreed her mother had done a good job raising her; however, she would prefer to raise a family

with a father figure involved. She was proud of her parents, especially her mother and what she had done. She thought she had been very successful. At present, she was not too proud of her father, calling him "Mr. Bachelor," who was living a life like a teenager, using drugs and drinking, just a big party. He also had recently lost his job.

Denise's goal was to be on the dean's list while completing college. Then she hoped to go on to graduate school, have a family, lots of kids, have a comfortable income and a good job in order to help other people with what she had.

Despite the divorce, Denise gave her parents credit for the direction she had before the divorce, in that it kept her on track after the divorce. She always brought church into the conversation when mentioning success or self-confidence. Her mother was faithful in taking her regularly to a Lutheran church, where she learned morals, beliefs, and values. A solid family background on her mother's side also may have contributed to Denise's success.

Denise believed her mother never had had a chance to achieve what she wanted to be when she was young because she fell in love and married before she could complete career training in college. Now that she was remarried, she was so happy and so proud and was seeking to better herself, taking classes at a community college. Denise described her mother as

a very loving person, and I can talk to her about anything in the world. She puts up with a lot of stuff. I love her a lot, and I look up to her a lot. . . . I really love my Dad, I do, but he left my mom for another woman when I was ten, a week before Christmas, when I was in fifth grade. I always looked up to him before that, but he had an affair with that girl for a long time. Right now, that

girl has left him, and he is really partying, and I feel like he's my age. How can I look up to him?

Denise felt a high level of love and support from her family and willingly sought her mother's advice and counsel. She said that, after moving from her old neighborhood, she did not know her neighbors as well and consequently felt she was not close to them in order to receive any level of support from them. In her old neighborhood, she had felt a lot of support. Her parents were not as actively involved in helping her succeed in school as she would have liked, especially her dad. She explained: "Mom was always making me study, do my homework, but I kind of looked at her to kind of wait 'til the last minute to get involved. But she always tried to attend all the things I was involved in. I like to depend on myself."

Denise's mother did have high expectations of her as she thought Denise should go further than she herself had. Denise was sure her father did also, because "he wanted to feel like he had contributed to something good." Denise's mother did not set rules clearly, but Denise knew when she had done wrong and received punishment as deserved, being conscious never to repeat the wrong. However, she thought her school did provide clear rules and consequences.

In a regular week, Denise spent time practicing music, was involved in sports and religious activities, had lots of homework, and was again beginning to read for pleasure. She was self-motivated to do well and cared a great deal about her school, as well as helping others who had a need. In this area, she thought she could help younger children by going to elementary schools to encourage those who had problems, telling them that it was possible to overcome difficulties. She stood

up for what she believed and withstood peer pressure, and she told the truth "99.9% of the time." Denise planned ahead and made her own choices, believing there was a definite plan for her life. With her high self-esteem, Denise was very optimistic about her future.

Denise's mother, Connie Barber, age 40, was a young-looking blonde with blue eyes; she appeared very fit. While in high school, she had been active in band, cheerleading, sports, and baton twirling; she had graduated in the top ten of her class. Just out of high school, she had started nursing school but fell in love and quit school to get married. Soon after marriage, she was able to get into a surgical technologist program at a local hospital and had been working in that area for 20 years. Currently, the same program requires a college education. Connie enjoyed her pets and was beginning to collect a few antiques. To better herself, she was taking classes at a nearby community college. She attended a Lutheran church regularly. Until her marriage two years before, she had been a single parent for about seven years. Her mother had a high school education, and her father completed grade school. They did not encourage her to attend college as much as her brothers as they felt men needed to be better educated than women did. However, they did tell her they would help her if she wanted to go to college, except they wanted to pick the field of study. Connie believed parents should let their children know that getting an education is important, but the parents cannot do it for them.

Denise's father had been about a 3.0 student in high school and had been involved in football. He had a bachelor's degree in computer science but recently had lost his job. Both of his parents completed high school educations, and his father immediately went off to war. His mother, Denise's paternal grandmother, encouraged her son to get an education; however, his father had died when he was young. Denise's father supported his family financially but had not spent quality time with his children. His involvement with Denise's school had been almost nonexistent, but he had attended her graduation.

The Stone Family

This 15-year-old with an athletic build, brown eyes, brown hair, a nice smile, and lots of charisma was extremely creative. David Stone enjoyed his pet dog and drawing. He described himself as outgoing, one who liked sports and girls, and a hard worker who worked at a local fried chicken chain. He would be a junior in high school in the fall, with a grade point average of about 3.5. His family, which included his mother's immediate family, had motivated and supported him a lot as positive models, and he was very proud of them. He said, "That's what keeps my grades going; if I didn't have them, I probably wouldn't really care." When asked whether he would raise his family as he had been raised, David replied, "Yeah, she [mom] was strict. If I could find a different way, I'd try it, but I'd want my son to be raised up like I was."

David was proud of his mother and looked to her as a good role model. The only contact he had with his father, who lived in Pennsylvania, was an occasional

telephone call on his birthday or at Christmas time. He felt accepted by his peers and credited his mother for building his self-confidence by always being there.

David expected to become wealthy someday, with a good job that he enjoyed. He had a solid family background of hard workers, starting with his mother, who held two jobs, and his uncles (her brothers), who had been very successful running their own businesses. David described his mother as a very hard-working person who "puts everyone else in front of herself, gets everything else done before she spoils herself. I think she needs to go out more often, and I think she appreciates the way I look at that." David felt a great deal of love in his home and appreciated the encouragement to make good grades and the positive communication between him and his mother. However, he rarely asked her for advice unless he and his friends were unable to come to a decision. He also was pleased with the relationship he had with the principal of his school, which had developed since David became involved with Student Congress.

David was unable to describe his father, who had not been a part of this youngster's life since he was three years old. Mr. Stone had no visiting rights and lived in another state, where he had become involved in drug abuse. He had, however, achieved a 4.0 grade point average in high school, and had earned a four-year college degree in business. His mother had been a school teacher, but it was not known what education his father had received. Mr. Stone's parents had encouraged education for their family.

David said the adults in his community did not value young people enough because they thought things had to be the same as when they were young. He recently had spent 80 hours volunteering in the retirement home where his mother was employed, saying the elderly patients enjoyed the spark he brought into their lives. David was clear on the rules and consequences both at home and at school. His mother always knew where he was, and his responsibilities at home were numerous, especially because his mother was so busy with two jobs. Along with all of his extracurricular activities at school, he attended Catholic church at least every other week. He rarely had a time out with his friends when he did not have something to do as they would get a game of basketball or some other sport going. Reading for pleasure was not in David's schedule, and he did not have homework every day. He enjoyed helping others, going out of his way to assist his fellow employees. David always stood up for his convictions and never failed to tell the truth. He had used his ability to plan ahead and his empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills to an advantage at work. He was positive about having a great future and knew his life had a purpose.

Forty-year-old Ginger Stone, David's mother, was slender, fit, blonde, blue-eyed, and very busy. She had worked in real estate for the past 15 years and had been a supervisor at a retirement home for the past two years, as well. She attended church weekly with the patients at the retirement home; she had been raised in the Catholic faith. She had been a single parent approximately 12 years.

Her second marriage had ended shortly after her move to that area from the eastern side of the state, a move she considered quite traumatic.

Ginger had attended a private parochial school for 12 years and had maintained a 4.0 grade point average. Her parents had expected her to attend college as she had received a scholarship. However, she "left the scene," and by the age of 19 had a high-paying job and was driving a Corvette, which made college seem very unnecessary to her at that time. Nevertheless, later on she attended college for almost three years. Both of her parents had doctorate degrees and obviously valued education.

When asked why she thought her son was good both academically and behaviorally, Ginger replied, "First of all, if he couldn't do it, I would accept it, but because he has the potential, it would be very unacceptable to me if he didn't do it. There is no reason why he shouldn't do it."

The Hobbs Family

Dan Hobbs was a tall soon-to-be 14-year-old eighth grader with brown hair and glasses. He had an athletic build and would be playing basketball the upcoming year for his middle school, where he had approximately a 3.0 grade point average. His friends might say he was weird, funny, and kind of intelligent, Dan said, and he believed they modeled responsible behavior. He described himself as funny and fun. He was the youngest of his mother's four children and the only one still living at home. His half-brothers, ages 30 and 27, were police officers; both were married and had children. His half-sister, 28, also was a police officer. Each of these three

older children had college degrees in criminal justice from Michigan universities, and they were great role models for Dan. He said they were very good to him and took him a lot of places. He was proud to talk about his three nieces and two nephews, as well.

Dan thought his family had done a good job raising him. He said he might raise his family similarly, but just a little bit differently. He did not have a regular job, but a neighbor hired him to care for her yard.

Dan was very proud of his mother, who was a good role model. When asked to describe his father, Dan said he could not do that because he had seen him only about four times in his life. Mr. Hobbs had completed ninth grade, and it was believed he had undiagnosed attention deficit disorder (ADD). Possibly because of that and the fact that he had had an abusive father, he had turned to drugs. His father, Dan's paternal grandfather, had dropped out of school but was able to acquire a good job, so he had not felt the need to get his diploma.

Marsha, Dan's mother, was "loyal, nice, hard working, and takes me everywhere," Dan said. She attended all of his karate tournaments unless she had to take pictures at a wedding. She was very supportive and expected her son to succeed. Dan's family life provided a high level of love and support, and he believed they had positive communication. He was willing to ask his mother's advice. Other than his family, Dan felt support from several adult neighbors, as well as from his school. His community actively supported all the young people living there, and he also enjoyed entertaining the younger children in his neighborhood.

Rules and consequences were very clear at home, as well as at school. Dan often left a message on the answering machine to let his mother know where he was going, being careful to let her know where he was at all times. Dan did not attend church with his mother. He felt self-motivated to do well in school, really caring about the school and helping other people. This youth read for pleasure at least two or three hours per week and said he always told the truth. He took personal responsibility for himself, stood up for his beliefs, and acted on his convictions. He liked to plan ahead and always tried to make good choices. Dan was comfortable with those of different races and believed he had sensitivity and friendship skills. If someone insisted on fighting, he tried to take them down with his martial arts moves, in a way that would not hurt them. He was proud of everything he did and was very optimistic about his future.

Marsha Hobbs, Dan's mother, was the youngest of 11 children. Her mother had been a homemaker with a grade-school education. Her father, who also had only a grade-school education, worked in a cleaning business and previously had been a truck driver. Marsha proudly said of her dad, "He was a very hard worker and never retired, working until he died at the age of 73." Marsha herself had quit school when she was a junior in high school. She went to work to support herself and was married at a young age. Soon she found herself divorced, with three small children to raise, and it was then she felt the need to work toward her high school diploma if she was to impress upon her children the importance of an education. "Because I was so shy, I did not take part in any extracurricular activities while in

school," Marsha said. She also confessed to being a mediocre student, knowing now that she could have done much better. Her parents had not pushed education; rather, they had emphasized getting a job.

Dan did not have as many chores at home as the older children had, probably because he was the youngest, his mother said. She did not believe he was spoiled, as the older children intimated, "because he knows just how far he can go." Dan was fortunate to have his mother's first husband take an interest in him, and he had promised to help with college when the time came. Marsha believed that some parents do not take an interest in their children, or they are working too much, causing the youngsters to misbehave or even drop out of school. She explained that it is the parents' basic function to educate their children, saying, "If you don't educate them, how are they going to learn anything? The school picks up on a certain amount, but education doesn't start and end at school." Marsha expected her children to be the best that they could be and to be in jobs they could enjoy.

The communication Dan's mother had had with the school was best at the elementary level. She thought this was because so many teachers are involved in middle and high school, and teachers cannot know their students as well, having them only one hour a day as opposed to all day long.

Marsha attended all of the activities in which her son was involved and claimed to have a high level of involvement in his school. She believed Dan was happy in school but was very selective about whom he chose as friends, saying some were girl friends. Some students had picked on him because of his karate

experience, trying to get him to prove himself; the Hobbsses had had to press charges to get them to stop harassing Dan. The students were made to pay damages and to send Dan a letter of apology. Marsha had had another conflict in trying to explain to the middle school personnel that someone had to help make sure Dan took his medication for ADD. After problems arose because Dan had not taken his medication, they agreed to assist. For the most part, Marsha believed the teachers were very involved, very caring. Dan's father had taken no interest in his son, nor had he made any contact with the school concerning Dan.

The Bonet Family

Russ Bonet, 18, was a tall, blue-eyed young man with brown hair; he would be entering college in just a few days. His physique matched his interest in sports, namely, wrestling and football. Russ's first love was wrestling, and he had a high goal of perhaps becoming a world-champion wrestler by working on it one step at a time. His white Cutlass Calais Oldsmobile, which sat outside during the interview, appeared bright, shiny, and clean, which matched the pride Russ had in his car. This car was also used as leverage by his mother when she did not think Russ was performing his best at whatever he was involved in doing. This seemed to have a major effect on Russ's behavior pattern because he did not want to lose the privilege of driving that car.

Russ described himself as a hard-working outdoor person who enjoyed fishing and hunting, going to movies, or just hanging out with friends. He thought his

friends would consider him outgoing and "pretty cool," even though they had some squabbles from time to time.

When asked what his family meant to him, Russ quickly replied, "They are my life; if I didn't have them I wouldn't have anybody, really, because my grandparents live a long way off and an aunt and uncle does too. All my other relatives are out of state." Russ was quick to give his mother credit for the way she had raised his sister and him, saying she was always fair and not like other parents who favored one child over the other.

Russ described his mother as one who worked hard trying to raise two children, always being good to them, never cutting them down or hitting them (with the exception of when they were younger and needed a whipping). Sometimes, when he observed others not being respectful to women or other adults, he got upset with them and therefore was thankful his mother had raised him as she had. Sometimes it was hard with only one income to get by on, but they managed.

Russ felt confidence in his mother and could ask her anything. If she did not believe she could answer his questions, she would find someone who could. It was obvious that Russ had a high level of love and support in his family at home, and he agreed that he had the same support from an aunt and his grandmother. His school also provided a caring and encouraging environment; Russ said that the principal was always watching out and making sure everything was all right. Russ also thought that this community valued young people and that there were many volunteer activities in which young people could get involved. He enjoyed helping

out at football games by spotting or doing whatever was needed. The rules and consequences were clear to Russ, both at home and at school, but he did not think neighbors would report undesirable behavior to his mother.

Reading had become a pastime for Russ, and currently he was reading about the life of Colin Powell. He always told the truth and would stand up for his convictions, although he noted that his best friend did not always model responsible behavior. Russ thought his life had a definite purpose in helping people by being a fireman. He did not believe his self-esteem was very high yet, but he said that it was improving.

Sue, Russ's mother, was 44 years old and slightly above average in height and weight. Her hair was straight and hung midway down her back. Sue's hobbies included reading, working with computers, doing things with her children, and sometimes sewing, knitting, or crocheting. Currently, she was a teller at a credit union; her official job title was financial service representative. Previously, she had worked in a factory, in a fast-food restaurant, as a truck driver, and had attempted to start her own business as a seamstress. She had no particular religious preference, stating she believed in reincarnation and the New Age movement. The family had lived in their present home for ten years. Sue had been a single parent for 17 years, except for a second marriage that lasted less than a year and included many traumatic moves. Her children's father had given her almost no financial support over the years, nor had he helped with child care.

Sue's mother (Russ's maternal grandmother) had been able to earn her high school diploma after her daughter did; she then attended junior college for a short time. Sue did not know her natural father. Her stepfather, who had helped Sue's mother raise her, had graduated from high school with honors and been offered scholarships to college, but instead he had chosen to go into the armed services. The children's father had received a GED at Sue's urging. Later, he had taken mechanic training and auto-body classes. He had been employed as a security guard, taxi driver, and mechanic, and had attempted a business with race-car memorabilia. Sue had taken a year of schooling to be a dental assistant, but she had been unable to get a job, so she had gone back to college for two years of computer training. Her parents had encouraged education, believing it was very important; they had placed a lot of emphasis on homework. In high school, Sue had been unable to take part in extracurricular activities because she was the oldest of five children and her mother needed her assistance; also, because they lived so far out in the country, transportation was a problem. Their father was not involved either. Sue had a learning disability that was not recognized back then; as a result, she had a 1.9 grade point average.

Sue had numerous responsibilities for her children at home, but sometimes she "had to really get on them." Their duties included doing dishes, taking out the trash, and often helping with house cleaning.

Because Sue had always encouraged and supported her children academically and in everything they attempted, she believed they had very few behavior problems and were able to succeed scholastically. At one time, Russ had

been involved in a Native American project for school, so she took him to an Indian pow-wow, taped what they were permitted to tape, and actually interviewed an Indian. She commented to this researcher that single parenting is not as easy as many people think it is, but that single parents can raise good children, contrary to what many people believe.

Analysis of the Findings

The ages of the students included in this research ranged from 13 to 19 years; these students ranged from eighth grade (middle school) through the freshman year of college. Of the 40 grandparents, the educational backgrounds of 12 were unknown, 3 had dropped out of high school before graduation, 7 had completed eighth grade, 12 had completed high school, and 6 had graduated from college; of those 6, 2 had earned a Ph.D. degree. Several of the grandparents had not furthered their education because there was a need for more income or for more help with the families at home. Although many had been unable to achieve higher education, they had strongly valued education and supported their families in their pursuit of education.

Of the 20 parents, one had dropped out of high school before graduating, three had graduated from high school, ten had started college or career training but had not finished, one had completed junior college, and five had graduated from college, one with a master's degree (see Table 2). Of the ten custodial parents, nine had attempted college; of that number, three had graduated, two with bachelor's degrees and one with an associate's degree. The remaining custodial parent had graduated from high school. Table 1 indicated the parents' level of education and

Table 2: Educational backgrounds of successful students' parents and grandparents.

Family	Paternal Grandfather	Maternal Grandfather	Paternal Grandmother	Maternal Grandmother	Father	Mother
Burton	G	G	H	H	D	D
Cruise	U	G	X	X	D	C
Baker	H	C	H	H	D	D
Green	U	H	H	H	H	D
Cusino	U	U	C	G	D	C
Ferris	U	H	U	C	M	D
Rose	U	G	U	H	C	D
Stone	U	P	C	P	C	D
Hobbs	X	G	U	G	X	H
Bonet	U	H	U	H	H	J+

Key:

X = Dropped out of high school before graduating
 G = Completed eighth grade
 H = Graduated from high school
 D = Started college/career training but did not finish
 J = Graduated from junior college
 C = Graduated from college
 M = Master's degree plus hours toward Ph.D.
 P = Ph.D. degree
 U = Unknown

their current employment. Each of these parents placed a high value on education, and each of the students who was interviewed expressed a strong desire to obtain a college degree. These students valued education as a means of obtaining a good job and thus the avenue for a prosperous life, which also supported their drive for a high grade point average in order to obtain their educational objectives. A strong characteristic of all of these students was their conformity to school and home rules.

Parenting Skills, Family Experiences, and Family Values

The purpose of this section is to bring to light the parenting skills that were considered a key to these families, the family experiences (vacations, shorter times spent together) each had had together, and the family-school relationship in order to determine which characteristics were common to all of the families and the resulting success of the students. The values each family instilled could also be very important to success, and those values also are included here for purposes of comparison.

The Burton Family

Sandra, Amelia's mother, regarded her listening skills to be one of the best assets she used for successful parenting. She said she had not given specific responsibilities to her children because she was quite a perfectionist and did not think they did a job well enough to please her. She was trying to overcome that and had done better lately.

The Burton family's vacation times often were spent with Sandra's sister, her husband, and their child; they also spent time around the sister's pool on shorter

family excursions. Although she used to enjoy sewing and counted cross-stitching, Sandra stated that her children were now her hobbies. She tried to support them in any activity in which they participated, if her job allowed. Sandra stated,

Now that they're older, we go shopping and they enjoy that. Now that they're older, too, they want a one-on-one with me, so we go out to dinner or something of their choosing about once a month. Each child has very different needs, so it's real important to be with each one alone as often as I can.

The family had attended church regularly until the past few months. Now, however, Sandra did not feel she was getting anything out of it, although she said she knew that was not a very good reason for not attending.

Sandra had tried to teach her children the value of being honest, abstaining from premarital sex, having high self-esteem, and being able to care for themselves. She based her expectations for each child on that child's unique abilities.

The Cruise Family

When asked what she thought was the key to being a good or successful parent, Martha, Jerry's mother, replied, "Sacrifice; their needs need to be first before my needs, especially in education. Many times I put their needs before my pleasurable needs; the role of a parent is to sacrifice." Martha said that when the family went on vacation they tried to include some form of education along with pleasure. Their most recent trip included the zoo in Toronto, Ontario. Shopping was a big pleasure for the females in the family during that trip, but Jerry did not enjoy that too much. The family also had been able to visit Walt Disney World in Florida.

Martha said she needed to work on the list of responsibilities around the house for her children. Currently, their duties included doing dishes, taking out the

trash, helping with laundry, and vacuuming. Sometimes they cleaned their rooms. Martha's expectations for Jerry's grades were very high because he had scored so well on various "achievement" tests. His score on the SAT was "off the board." "I'd better see all A's, not because I'm controlling or overpowering, but because of his high ability and the fact that he doesn't have homework," Jerry's mother said. She thought that other youngsters misbehaved and perhaps even dropped out of school because of their parents' low expectations and the lack of follow-up and concern.

The Cruises' family times together included going to movies, but as Jerry got older, his interests varied so much from his mother's that it had become increasingly more difficult to find entertainment to suit all of them. Attending her Baptist church as a family was a very important part of their week. The values Martha tried to teach her children included:

. . . Be very caring of other people and other people's needs. I have a family rule in our house that we do not put down and call names, and I expect that it carries through. We have religious values, we believe in God. Money is not necessarily the means to the end. I think that it was a good thing that happened out of the divorce, that we had to tighten up. We learned that we needed to work for what we had. Before [the divorce], these kids had anything and everything they wanted. They were getting spoiled, and now they know that things don't necessarily get handed out to you.

The Baker Family

The key to being a good and successful mother, Emily believed, is "always being there and telling them that no matter what they do you will back them and that you'll give them that love and support." She believed that if children misbehave or

even drop out of school, they most likely were neglected, and that caring and sharing between parent and children were not part of their lives.

The Baker boys lived part of the time with their father, so they were close to him; Collette maintained contact with him by telephone, which both of them enjoyed and desired. Collette and her mother did not travel much for vacation times, but instead Emily tried to make any time they had together quality time. She would rub Collette's back when she came home tired; in turn, Collette often read to her mother and shared everything with her. Emily was an excellent cook, which made holiday times special. When the television was on, they often watched documentaries, which they still enjoyed. Sometimes the television was thrown out for a week or so, and more time would be spent reading.

Emily had aspired to teach her children to be good people and "to make each day the best. I've made mistakes, but my kids have learned to give me the unconditional love."

Responsibilities of the children in the home were specified. However, they were not always followed because no father figure was present, and the mother had down times trying to cope with the separation. Emily gave total credit to her daughter for her success, both academically and behaviorally. She stated, "That's just the way she is. She knows what she wants; she goes for it. She enjoys learning." Emily firmly believed that education has to start in the home. When Collette had not wanted to go to a new school, her mother cheered her on, and she learned to love it.

The Green Family

"Love them where they're at, whether they are academically good or academically a little inferior. Just love them where they're at, and I think that gives them the most success," Katy replied when asked the key to good parenting. She also said that, because of her children's ages, they did not do much together because everyone was so busy and had such varying interests. Shopping and Sunday dinner after attending the Christian Reformed church each week were their steady leisure-time activities. The children did not spend quality time with their father. Katy agreed that it would be better for them if she did require her children to do more chores at home.

When asked why her daughter Karen had done so well academically as well as behaviorally, Katy replied, "Academically she was given the gift of intelligence. I would like to think that she is a success because we have worked with it and encouraged her to do good work." She also believed that when youngsters misbehave or even drop out of school, "they are possibly looking for attention or don't have the skills to do the work or are not encouraged to do it."

Katy tried to teach her children to do their very best with the abilities they had been given—for their own sakes, as well as for their country, and "of course, there's a religious angle on that also." She felt a responsibility to educate her children to the best of her ability.

The Cusino Family

Doris Cusino put a high priority on prayer, believing it is the main key to successful parenting. Being a good role model and giving support also were very important to her.

Doris saw that each of her children had responsibilities and chores around the house. She thought Marvin was a good student because of his natural ability and his high self-esteem, which she supported. She had high expectations for him, knowing his ability and because of having to deal with his father. She told him, "I'm not raising a son, I'm raising a father, a husband, and a good human being, so I'm hard on him, probably too hard." The values she tried to instill in her children were to be good people, be dependable, make good plans, be honest, and really love their brothers and sisters. She thought it was very important for parents to be involved in their children's education, and she believed she had been highly involved.

The Cusino family attended the Pentecostal church together each week and participated in other church activities as well. They also attended Marvin's games to cheer him on, and they went to movies together. The children's father was beginning to spend quality time with them, which Doris encouraged because she wanted them to know their father. She trusted him not to do drugs while he was with his children.

The Ferris Family

Time, love, and patience are the three keys to good parenting, according to Marge Ferris. Marge said that she and her older daughters were able to enjoy some

activities together, such as shopping, movies, and going out to dinner, but Jane often was too busy to join them. Marge said there was much love in their home, and each member supported and encouraged the others in all they did to reach their potential. She believed that each child should have responsibilities around the house. Discipline was moderate and consistent, and educational goals were very important to them. Marge declared that it is important for parents to take an active part in educating their children, saying,

I would like to see them all go through college, but if they do the best that they can do, that is fine with me, and if they excel, that's just gravy over the potatoes. It's really great, but I just want them to be happy and to do the best they can in whatever they choose.

Jane's behavior had never been a problem because "she has seen what happens to those kids that are not socially responsible, and that's not what she wants for her life," according to Marge. She expressed that peer pressure and the fact that some parents just do not care are the reasons why some children misbehave and get into trouble. The main values Marge had tried to teach her daughters were to respect other people and to be honest and loving.

The Rose Family

Denise Rose's mother, Connie, gave religion the number-one priority in her list of keys to good parenting. With that foundation, she thought she must also roll with the punches, be ready for change, be flexible, and be open to conversation whenever her daughters wished to talk (even in the middle of the night). When she first divorced, she had tried too hard to be a friend to her daughters, and as a result

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thought she lost a certain amount of control. Therefore, she believed there is more to parenting than just being their buddy. After getting counseling for herself and her children (which they did not want), she had been able to regain some of the control.

For family times, the Roses would go shopping, go out for birthdays, and go on vacation as often as possible, even though it was hard; they also spent a lot of time with Connie's family, who were very supportive during that time. When the children were younger, Connie said, they were able to be more structured with definite chores and responsibilities around the house, but with the girls' schedules becoming so filled, the responsibilities had to change according to their spare time.

Connie gave a great deal of credit to Denise's self-motivation as being the main factor in her success. She thought Denise had to work harder for what she achieved than her younger sister did, and therefore accomplished a bit more, not becoming so easily discouraged. Connie believed it is a family thing that causes misbehavior and school dropouts. She had always tried to instill in her girls the importance of education, and even though they had gone through some tough years, the direction had already been set.

The values that were important to Connie and that she was teaching her girls were to have good morals, always keep close to their church, and be a kind and caring person. She expressed that Denise was sensitive to the point of getting her heart broken trying to help others when she saw a need.

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The Stone Family

Ginger summed up the key to being a good parent in just one word: Love. David never saw his father, because his mother had been given total custody. She kept him pretty busy with several responsibilities around the house when he was not involved in school activities or work. They also enjoyed shopping, eating out, and going to movies together, and Ginger tried to plan a family vacation as often as possible.

David had learned the value of hard work from his mother, who currently was working as a supervisor at a retirement home as well as dealing in real estate. She believed, "There is no such thing as a free lunch." She did not take money from anything or anyone, not David's father, her family, or the system. Ginger also believed that education absolutely must begin in the home.

David mentioned another of her parenting skills—that of always being there for him. He was thankful for her positive support and role model.

The Hobbs Family

Marsha's key to being a successful parent was to be involved with the children and to get them involved. She said,

My kids had to spend an hour on homework [each day], and they had to be involved in one school sport, and back then they were involved in Young Marines, where they went to six weeks of boot camp, being responsible for their own uniforms—pressing them, starching them, polishing boots. They worked as a unit, and if one person goofed up, the whole unit paid for it, so they learned to work together as a team.

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The preceding statement support's Marsha's belief that involvement is a big key to being a good parent. She exclaimed,

Kids need to expect discipline so that the fear is there whether or not discipline is carried out. It will make them more conscious of doing something wrong because of fear of punishment. Dan has to earn what he gets; it's not just given to him. He takes care of things better if he earned it.

Dan and his mother took several weekend trips together as he was involved in 40 karate tournaments a year in Michigan. Leisure time was spent visiting friends in northern Michigan.

Dan's mother always impressed the value of work ethics on him; she agreed she should take more time to attend church with him. Her faith was Catholicism.

The Bonet Family

Russ Bonet's mother, Sue, thought the key to good parenting was:

. . . a lot of love and a lot of understanding and communication. Without communication you don't have any kind of relationship with anybody. I may not always agree with what the kids have to say, or they might not agree with what I have to say, but we listen to each other. I may still have to dominate and rule in the end, but later I might go back and think about it and go to them and say, "I thought about what you said, and you were right, but you must understand my point of view," and then we would compromise.

Sue said that the family used to do more together than they did now because, with everyone's work schedule, it was almost impossible to find each one free to go. During the summer, they spent a lot of time swimming. They did not always have much money, so they had to be creative and do things like that, which did not cost a lot. The preceding week, Russ had taken his mother to a movie, which they enjoyed together.

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The values Sue tried to teach her children were to give everybody a fair chance, that family is important, always to respect their elders and all people in general, and to treat all women like ladies.

Analysis of the Findings

The number-one attribute of a good parent was unconditional love and support. Also frequently mentioned was good communication, prayer, and religious commitment. Other key attributes mentioned were spending quality time with the children, being flexible and involved, personal sacrifice, patience, and understanding.

These families placed a high priority on spending quality time together when it was at all possible. It had, however, become increasingly difficult to find time as the students had become so involved in school activities, as well as holding jobs. The most commonly shared leisure activities of the families included shopping, attending movies, going out to dinner, vacationing, and attending church.

Values the parents tried to instill in their children that were mentioned most often were the importance of education, honesty, a good work ethic, religious values, doing their very best, love and respect for others, dependability and kindness, and the recognition that family is important.

The Successful Students' School and Home Experiences

In the preceding section, the successful students' family leisure-time experiences, family values, and the parents' philosophies regarding the keys to

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effective parenting skills were reviewed. Attention was given to these family views and interactions and the significance they had for the successful students within the dynamics of the family as a social unit. It was argued that the successful student's family is characterized by family members spending quality time together, positive communication, religious practice, sacrifice, honesty, responsibility, unconditional love, self-confidence, self-esteem, dependability, and a sense of connectedness.

In this section, the research findings regarding the successful students' school experiences are reviewed. The emphasis changes to the successful student as a representative of his or her family. The researcher anticipated that the successful students' positive relationships and experiences with the school would correlate with the students' families for several generations. The researcher expected to find the pattern of behavior that the student displayed at home to be congruent with the behavior that the student practiced at school. Therefore, student behavior would parallel the expectations of school personnel. Students would establish positive relationships with school personnel because that was the expectation and value learned within their home settings. The researcher expected to find a significant relationship between students' success in school and their family experiences.

Within the school settings, there are two major aspects of student relationship and performance. The first aspect includes class performance, relationship with school personnel, academic expectations, adherence to rules and regulations, and general attitude in class. The second aspect is related to peer relationships and informal settings with school personnel. In the following paragraphs, the successful

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students' school experiences are reviewed on an individual basis, followed by a summary of the findings for all the students included in the study.

Amelia Burton

Amelia had lived in the same house all of her 16 years and, as a result, had attended the same school system all of her life, beginning with preschool. Her high school grade point average for the past three years was 3.326. Although her school did not offer a special program for the gifted and talented, Amelia had taken upper-level curriculum including Mathematics 4 and Senior Composition. She had received awards for her participation in basketball and Poms and had been nominated for the National Honor Society. Other extracurricular activities included choir, play productions, and, for a short time, band. Amelia had regular attendance in school and had a positive view of education, which she believed was necessary to get a good job. When asked about self-esteem, she replied, "Yes, I'm a self-confident person in other people's eyes, I guess, but probably I'm not really. I want to do things and I think I can, and usually I end up doing it, so I guess that I am."

Amelia thought she had a fairly good relationship with her teachers and other school personnel. She stated that sometimes it was easier to talk to some of the teachers than the counselor, possibly because she did well in their classes so they gave her some special attention. Amelia had not set her goals too high, so as not to be unrealistic and unable to reach them; therefore, she would not be hurt. Although she did not consider herself a leader in school, she had a good relationship with her peers, and they respected her for not doing the drug scene and for the fact

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that her boyfriend was another race. On the other hand, Amelia said she was a leader at home and at work, anywhere outside of school. She considered herself a very truthful person and could tell her mother anything, not hesitating to admit if she had made a mistake.

Amelia had a job at McDonald's and drove her own car to school and work. A typical day for her was as follows: Get up at 6:30 a.m., drive to school, hang out with friends in the hall until classes begin, go to practice after school if required that day, drive home and go to work, come home again and do homework (which she stated was very rare), and then go to bed.

When asked whether she had clear rules and consequences at home, Amelia replied that they were clear, but that her mom was willing to compromise if the situation warranted it. And "Yes, I always tell my mom where I am going." When there were conflicts in her life, Amelia believed in resolving them nonviolently, talking things out. She enjoyed helping other people if there was a need, if she thought they had tried to help themselves. She also did some reading for pleasure when time permitted.

Jerry Cruise

Jerry did not have a job yet, so his day was fairly routine—go to school, attend classes, eat lunch, more classes, come home, watch television ("Tasmania" on Fox), or possibly have one or two friends over to play cards (Star Wars or Star Trek). He had been active in the gifted and talented program, student council, Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), and the varsity debate team at his school. Jerry had

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about four close friends and a few others he "kind of" knew. He thought others hated him, possibly due to his high grade point average. Like his friends, Jerry had a great love for science fiction. He described his friends as a mixture of successful and not-so-successful students.

Jerry had set a high goal of becoming a Supreme Court justice in order to "oust the military dictators in this country." He had his eye on an Ivy League college, maybe Georgetown. Jerry's role model was his Uncle Doug (his father's brother), who lived in Florida. Jerry believed he might be able to live with him while attending college, in order to save room and board.

Some teachers at Jerry's school had treated him differently, he thought, because he was capable of doing above-average work. They had asked him to help teach or grade papers. However, he did not like his school because "most of the classes are useless or irrelevant." He had had a few disagreements with the teachers in school, and although he agreed it was very hard for anyone to change his mind, he thought his relationship with the school personnel was good, overall. He quickly described himself as a leader rather than a follower and regularly attended school with a high view of education. Good grades came easily for Jerry, and he had very little homework. However, he did not feel accepted by his peers.

Collette Baker

College did not attend preschool. In high school, she had earned a 3.7+ grade point average and ended up ranking third in her class; her best friend had won the salutatorian honor by just one-quarter of a point. A typical school day might

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include arriving there about 6:30 a.m. to hang out with her teachers whom she loved. Sometimes she did homework, read, or just talked. Collette then attended classes, seeing many of the same people over and over again because it was a small school. After lunch she had more classes, and after school she attended meetings (SADD or YI) or had tennis practice, depending on the season, or maybe she went to work. After coming home, she talked on the telephone with her friends, did homework, watched television, and then went to bed. Collette worked very hard her senior year of high school and received many awards. Elks National Foundation Award, U.S. Marine Corps Outstanding Athlete Award, U.S. Reserve Outstanding Award, Volunteer Service Award, and high school honors awards are just some of the recognitions Collette received. She continued in that manner in college, having just received the Most Promising Freshman award.

Before beginning college, Collette declared a political science major. But after her first year, Collette was trying to decide what she could do with what she liked and, as a result, had sort of an undeclared major. "Being a success is a person's choice," according to Collette, who stated that success cannot be forced on someone. She thought that someone might be able to help, but it has to be an effort on each individual's part.

Collette loved her teachers and said that some of the scariest ones were the best teachers she ever had. She believed her teachers would take an extra moment to help if one had a problem; whether it was an academic difficulty or a problem at home, they would always listen. Collette was a very self-confident person, although

she sometimes did have her doubts. She had had very little student-teacher conflict, but when it did occur, they were able to talk it out. She had received the Teacher's Pet award during her senior year, awarded by her peers. She just laughed as everybody received something like that. She did believe, though, that she had a very good relationship with the teachers and staff, crediting the fact that she came from a small school.

Sometimes Collette set her goals so high that she became frustrated. She did not consider her social life too exciting, even though she had a close-knit group of friends, as they did not go out and party or smoke or get into trouble. She considered herself a leader and did not want to compromise her values.

During high school, Collette was always on the honor roll, took part in extracurricular activities, was a member of the Quiz Bowl team, took college-preparation classes, served on the student council three years, participated in tennis and softball, and was a member of the National Honor Society. She missed very few days of school.

To Collette, success meant setting a goal and working to reach it. It did not necessarily mean you had to reach that goal, just that you had done your best to reach it. She had set high goals for her life and would work hard to achieve them. After completing college, she would decide whether to go directly into a career or to seek more education, but she did believe her life had a definite purpose. Collette had felt much support from her family; her mother would tell her she needed to keep going, and her dad told her she could do anything she decided to do. She knew her

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mom always backed her, but because her mom had not had the benefit of higher education, Collette could not go to her for help with homework or advice on a project. "She does possess a lot of common sense, and she is an excellent cook," said a proud Collette. "I know my family loves me." She also felt a strong acceptance from her peers. Collette said that, as she looked back, she could think of high school with fondness. She thought it had been a positive experience, but she felt she was ready to move on.

Karen Green

Karen had attended preschool, then a Christian grade school, and finally a public high school, where she participated in extracurricular activities such as band, art, and track. She had many friends, whom she had chosen because they were nice people, and she got along well with them. They shared many of the same interests with Karen as they were in the same classes, were Christians, liked to run, or enjoyed band together. Karen said her best friend modeled responsible behavior.

Karen's typical day at school included arriving just a few minutes early so she could hang out with her friends before classes started, as she did not take time between classes. She went home after school or the extracurricular activities of the season and drove to work in her own car. She planned to attend a community college after graduating from high school, and then perhaps on to Grand Valley State University. Karen had not yet made a decision regarding her field of study. She thought it was her decision to be successful, saying, "I guess it's whatever I do with it." She consistently had been on the honor roll and had received awards in

Spanish, English, band, and track. She enjoyed school and liked most of her teachers, believing she could talk with most of them. A few teachers seemed to favor her because she caught on quickly.

Some of Karen's friends teased her in fun because of her ability to be a top student, but she just laughed it off. Most of the time, she felt self-confident and thought school had been a positive experience. Karen thought that she was a leader some of the time when she was in a class that was easy for her, but not so if it was more difficult. The other students in this study often made the same comment. Karen was not a discipline problem, saying, "I'm scared to be because if I get into trouble [at school] I would lose privileges [at home] too. I don't like it when other kids mess around and take up time and I can't be learning."

Karen was a member of the National Honor Society and participated in a gifted and talented program in mathematics; she had had regular school attendance. Karen had felt support from her mother, being lifted when she was down, through her positive support and encouragement. She believed it is necessary to go to college in order to get a good job and therefore be able to live comfortably, without worrying about mortgages or loans. Karen felt successful and accepted by her peers.

Marvin Cusino

Marvin had not had the opportunity to attend preschool. In high school, a typical school day for Marvin started at 6:30 a.m., when, after getting ready, he rode his bike, walked, or got a ride to school from a neighbor. If he arrived in time, he would "grab some breakfast" and possibly go to the art room, one of his passions.

After attending morning classes, he had lunch and might play basketball or go to the art room again. In fact, he said, "My art teacher says I'm going to go to college and learn art [and] then come back and be her trainee. And when she retires, I'm going to take over." After his afternoon classes, Marvin had practice for the sport of the season. He took his little sister to his weight training because his mother worked third shift at a factory.

Being only 15, Marvin had not yet made a definite decision about a career but said he definitely was going to college. "If I want to be a lawyer, I want to go to the University of Michigan," he said. Marvin had considered being an architect, but that entailed a different type of drawing. He had enrolled in a short course in animated drawing while visiting Disney World and really enjoyed that type of art.

When asked whose choice it is to be successful, Marvin replied, "I wanted to be successful. If I do good in school, then I can play sports. I want to do well. I don't want to do smokes. Mom gives me extra motivation." Marvin had received many awards in school, for academics as well as sports. He had been voted the Most Valuable Player in football as well as basketball, had broken records in track, and had received English and Presidential Fitness awards and others he could not recall. When asked about a role model, Marvin replied,

My mom—I'm taking a totally different path than she would be taking, you know. I love my dad, but I wouldn't want to be like him or follow the path that he took. He had the type of life that you could write about and have a best-selling novel. So I don't really know.

Marvin said, "All my teachers are cool. I never had any hate relationships."

He had had trouble with one teacher, but after his mother investigated the problem,

she decided it was a personality clash and that Marvin had to adjust his attitude. She went to school to talk to the teacher and gave him credit for not letting the conflict affect Marvin's grade. She said that if Marvin was having a problem in the class, he would sit there and draw pictures, which attracted the attention of other students. He seemed to be able to retain what was being taught, so the teachers did not object, but his mother did not like him not paying attention, so she asked the teachers' help. Even with that clash, Marvin said, "I don't think he didn't care; I just think that we just didn't connect." He once had had a problem with the basketball coach, and after talking it out, Marvin said "he's like a big brother to me now." He had also received the Student of the Month award, which also attests to the fact that he had a good relationship with the school personnel.

Marvin contended that he was a very self-confident person, saying, "I don't want to rely on anybody else because you don't know if they will always be there." He was teased for being good in sports, so he reasoned that if he did not call attention to something he thought was outstanding, it would die out. He said if they saw it happen, all right, but if they did not, then, "Oh, well!" The only discipline problem he admitted was talking too much. In grade school, the older students had often picked on Marvin, but he had just "toughed it out." He never got into any fist fights and tried to stay away from those kinds of youths, stating, "If you hit them back, you will not solve anything. It will just cause a fight at another time."

That Marvin was a natural leader was evidenced by the fact that he had been captain of both his football and basketball teams. He admitted that he liked to help

people out, and although not every day at school was exciting (like exam time), it was pretty good. He had always been on the honor roll and had received gold medals for reading 100 books, the most ever, for the March of Dimes.

Marvin was not old enough for National Honor Society, but he had a positive view of education and had regular attendance at school. To Marvin, success meant the following:

There's a different level of success for everybody. . . . I might be successful in one thing, and he might be successful in something else. You are successful if it's the best that you can do. You can't really put a lid on success because what is success for you may not be success for me.

Marvin's goal was to achieve a 4.0 grade point average every year. In sports his goal was to be on the varsity team and do his best for the team. "Mom has taught me to have a positive attitude," he said, and she had also advised him not to brag, be modest, but be proud. He had very little homework, and getting good grades just came naturally to him. In this writer's estimation, that gave Marvin license to feel successful in school.

Jane Ferris

Jane had attended preschool before beginning her school career, in which she was very active. Her responsibilities included being president of her senior class, president of SADD, a member of the Spanish Club, a member of the student advisory board for SADD Michigan (1 of 15 chosen after much screening from all over the state), a member of National Honor Society and the yearbook staff, and

secretary of Student Congress. She managed all of this while still participating in one sport each season, namely, softball, cheerleading, and basketball.

Jane had many friends who had the same beliefs that she did. They did not drink or smoke, and they were all Christians. Jane said, "We all stick together, and people really respect us." Jane's best friend was a lot like her, and they would do anything for each other. She commented, "I always thought you had to be part of the group that partied and everything to get elected homecoming queen, but they apparently respect me, so that taught me something different."

For Jane, a typical school day started by arriving at school about 7:30 a.m. or at 6:30 to catch up on labs or other homework she had if she had missed some classes due to other commitments. After school she attended an average of three meetings before rushing off to cheerleading, softball, or basketball practice. Then she arrived home and talked on the telephone with her friends for a short time before doing any homework (which was rare), then possibly back on the telephone again until fairly late, as she required very little sleep. Jane called her plan book her best friend on days like those. She related that, with the busy schedule her senior year, college should seem easy.

Jane had her eye on the University of Michigan for a while, but said she most likely would attend Western Michigan University because it would cost less and she planned to go into aviation, wanting to be a pilot. She had felt that call since seeing the Challenger blow up when she was in second grade. Jane had considered being an astronaut; however, without 20-20 vision one cannot get into the Air Force. She

had also contemplated a career as an aeronautical engineer, but because mathematics was not one of her better subjects, she had decided against that. A goal in college was to be on the dean's list every semester; however, she was keeping an open mind as to her major.

Jane had made the choice to be successful but gave her mother and her sisters much of the acclaim due to the way she had been raised. She would not want to disappoint any of them. Among the awards she had received were the superior honor roll (higher than 3.5 grade point average), National Honor Society, and awards for creative writing, citizenship, sports, leadership, and attitude. Although Jane was very proud of each award she had received, one of her favorites was being named to the all-district softball team. She did not hesitate to name both of her sisters and her mother as her most important role models, but she gave her teachers and coaches a great deal of credit in that area, as well.

Jane told of teachers who had given her more responsibility to lead things in class, run errands, and sometimes, if she spoke out of turn, it was ignored because this was not normal for her. This was not always easy for her, as other students noticed it. Jane's relationship with the school personnel was excellent. She recalled only one occasion when she did not think a teacher had treated her fairly. In fact, she had received personal letters of congratulation from two of them, after she had been chosen for SADD, Michigan. Jane loved her school and felt very self-confident, and even though she had been teased for being a good student, she just decided to ignore the taunters as they usually were not good students, and she

thought they were just jealous. Education to Jane meant everything because "without an education you can't get anywhere in life anymore. I don't want to be second class the rest of my life." Jane thought it was so wasteful to get into trouble and have to spend time in detention not talking to anyone. She wanted to be a positive leader because of her family, as well as for herself. She remembered a time in junior high when she had been quite immature and not so pleasant with her mother, but she thought she was well past that stage now. Along with her other commitments, Jane had managed to be a member of an academic team and had served on the Student Council. She said, "Success is doing the best that I know I can do. It may not be up to other people's standards because I'm not them, but as long as I've tried my hardest and I'm happy with where I am, I feel it's been successful."

Jane's expectations for herself included graduation from college and probably getting married. She was not too sure about having children as she might be gone a good amount of time being a pilot. When asked what part her mother had played in her self-confidence, Jane responded,

I was the youngest, and so I was the center of attention all the time. So I think that helped a lot. They treated me so well when I was young, and ever since then, I never doubted as they always told me I could do anything I wanted to do and I believed it. So I've had the confidence to do anything I ever wanted to do.

Jane believed she was accepted by her peers. She said that good grades just came naturally to her but expressed concern about college classes. (She knew she would have to work harder for good grades in college.) She never missed much

school and was proud of her family name, even though she had never met her father.

Denise Rose

Denise was another very active teenager, being involved with SADD, Youth Initiative, National Honor Society, the yearbook staff, band, Spanish Club, Junior Prom (setting it all up), graduation and baccalaureate ceremonies, as well as volleyball, cross-country, pom poms, and track. She had also served on the student council, holding the office of treasurer her senior year. Denise's closest friends worked at the same fast-food restaurant, where she had recently been given the responsibilities of manager. Denise said her friends might say she was happy, outgoing, and crazy at times; she hoped they would also say she was easy to talk with and fun to be with. She had chosen those friends because she was comfortable with them; with them she could be herself, and they shared the same values of not smoking, drinking, or doing drugs. She also felt free to decline if she did not want to do what they were doing, without feeling peer pressure. They also played sports, and, especially in cross-country, she felt a part of a big family. Denise felt accepted by her other peers as well, as she got along with everyone, although she did not hang out with many of them because she did not agree with what they did.

For Denise, a typical day at school included arriving about five minutes ahead of time, going to three classes, eating lunch, and then going to three more classes; then, most of the time, she went to sports practice. She also worked whenever her schedule would allow, although a 17-year-old may work only 18 hours per week

during the school year. Denise's day also included meetings of the many organizations in which she was involved. All of these responsibilities during a typical school day did not allow her much spare time, so her schedule remained fairly routine. Denise said she had to work hard for her grades; consequently, she had a lot of homework.

Denise planned to study business in college but had not decided what she would do with it. At one time, she had thought she might be interested in a career in accounting, but after taking those classes in high school, she became bored with them. Now she was considering management of some kind and said she had always had a dream to own a hotel. It was her choice to be successful. "People help out, but it's your own [choice]," she said. At first, when she thought it was expected of her, she resented it, but as she matured, she realized people wanted it for her because it was the best for her. So now it was her choice.

Among the many honors Denise had achieved were the superior honor roll, the John Philip Sousa award for leadership, the Save and Volunteer award, the Outstanding Youth Volunteer award, two scholarships, the Marine Distinguished Athlete award, the Top Student in Accounting award, a Spanish award, a senior athletic award, and Honors Majors awards in business, mathematics, science, and music.

Denise said she considered her mother an example but not actually a role model because she wanted to be her own, totally different, person. She really liked the teachers she had had in school, and she liked going to school "a lot."

I had a combination of young and older teachers, and so I had a combination of hard teachers and not-so-hard teachers. They really made me think, and if I wasn't thinking enough, they'd let me know, or if it was too easy for me, they would give me something more. They taught me how to study and what school is about. I've heard from some of my friends who are in college, that my high school really prepares you well for college.

In her entire school career, Denise had had only one teacher she did not respect. He had favored the members of the team he was coaching, so if a student was not on that team or a cheerleader, he was not always fair, she thought. Only one teacher had sent her to detention—at that, unfairly, as she had not been doing all of the talking. For the most part, school had been a very positive experience for Denise, and her relationship with the teachers and staff was very good. She thought it helped that she was so involved and that her mother had had some of the same teachers when she was in school.

Denise thought she had lost a best friend once because she was able to achieve higher grades than her friend was. "We are still friends but not as close," she commented. She did believe one can be a good person and not get an education. For some people that would be all right, but not for Denise, as she believed that, to do better in this world, one needs to get an education. "I mean, Mom didn't have a college education, and she does have a really good job."

Denise had begun her educational experience in preschool, in the same district in which she graduated from high school. She had had regular school attendance except when she had several surgeries on her knee. Denise defined success as

... not quitting, going after what you want and not what other people want for you, not stopping, keep going. My goal is to always go to college, even if it's just taking one class, because you're always learning. The only people who will reach success in this world are the ones who look at life with a positive attitude.

David Stone

David had attended a private school from the ages of three to six years. Since moving to the area five years ago, he had been active in Student Congress (being class representative), Spanish Club, basketball, soccer, baseball, and track. He had many friends from school as well as work; they all were athletic, and many of them worked together. His best friend modeled responsible behavior most of the time; however, most of David's friends did not have as many home responsibilities because they had both parents at home.

A typical school day for David might begin early in the morning, when he studied for tests or finished any necessary homework. Then he attended all of his classes, had lunch with his friends, and then attended afternoon classes. After school, David did homework, perhaps went to work, or played basketball, baseball, or track. He believed this year would have many variations in a day because so many different things were happening; he would be able to drive and had saved his money to buy a car.

David's eighth-grade counselor had helped him plan his high school schedule in order to prepare for a career in law. He had his eyes on the University of Michigan but said he might consider Grand Valley State University. David's grandfather, who retired as judge after practicing law for a time, may have been a

positive influence on this career choice. To date, David had been on the superior honor roll; had received awards for baseball, basketball, and track; and had been named Star Employee at work. He respected his teachers, relating that he had never had an uncaring teacher. He had felt little difference in the way they treated him as compared to the other students, except maybe toward the end of the year, "because they appreciate me a little more." He did not recall ever having a conflict with a teacher, but he said that if he did, he would talk it out.

David said that he was not always a peaceful person and had been in a few fights when he was younger. Now, he said, "It's just dumb." The researcher thinks David's high self-esteem and maturity had helped bring about that change. David considered himself a leader who was well liked and one who had a good relationship with his teachers and other school personnel. Sometimes he had to work hard for his grades, but he had always been on the honor roll, participated in extracurricular activities (sports), been a member of an academic team and student congress, and appreciated his family name. He had a positive view of education, saying "it will determine my career," and he had a good attendance record except for a period of recuperation from surgery. To David, success meant "being able to take care of myself, not having to worry about being behind."

Dan Hobbs

Dan had attended preschool in the same school district he had attended all his life. His five or six close friends attended his school, and he had many more friends from outside of school. Dan had chosen the friends he had because he

thought he could trust them. Dan rode his bike to school to attend "different classes all day long," but he considered it fun. His activities changed a lot each day. College was in his future, he said, and he would probably major in criminal justice, following in the footsteps of his older siblings. However, rather than being a police officer, he was considering a job with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). One brother advised him that "whatever I believe in, I should do." Being successful was his choice as he was good in school, and he realized that no one else could do it for him. He had not had conflicts with his teachers but said that if he did, he would want to talk it out as he said they were all nice and none had been uncaring.

Dan's high self-esteem was a direct result of his training in martial arts. He declared,

If I didn't have karate, I'd probably be shy around everybody. I do a lot more stuff now than I used to do. I go to tournaments just about every weekend and have to perform in front of five black-belt judges and possibly thousands of people in the stands.

When Dan was teased for being a good student, he tried to just back away to avoid a fight. Before fourth or fifth grade, he did have some behavior problems at school, but with maturity and his martial arts training, he no longer got into scuffles. His education was important in order to attend college someday, he said. Unlike many of those interviewed, Dan considered himself a follower rather than a leader; however, he did not yield to negative peer pressure. Dan had had good school attendance. He described success as working very hard, and being determined, committed, and willing to sacrifice. He felt accepted by his peers, and he did not have to work hard to get good grades.

Russ Bonet

Russ was involved in three extracurricular activities; these included wrestling, football, and helping with theatrical productions until his senior year, when he decided to try out for a part. He earned a part and was able to see how much enjoyment he would have by actually being in the play rather than in the stage crew.

A typical school day for Russ began at 7:00 a.m., when his alarm rang and he started getting ready for school. He arrived about 7:45 and had breakfast before going on to classes. Between classes, he might take a few minutes to visit with friends at his locker. During his lunch time, Russ spent time playing basketball in the gym or whatever else might be going on at the time there. After completing afternoon classes, he attended his sport-of-the-season practice session or play practice if he was involved.

Russ was a slower-maturing young man who said of himself that he finally woke up when he became a senior in high school and decided he must "get with the program" because this would affect the rest of his life. As a result, Russ was able to maintain a little better than a 3.0 average his last year of high school.

Russ was planning on starting college a couple of days following the interview. He planned to study in the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) area in order to become qualified to be a fireman. He thought the nearby fire department had had a great impact on his choice of occupation. He had observed them helping people when their houses were burning, which included more than just fighting the fire. This led him to experience a strong urge to help people out by being a fireman.

Another role model for Russ was Bruce Baumgardener, a world champion heavyweight wrestler. He had taken medals at the Olympics in Barcelona and just recently in Atlanta, Georgia. He was a 37 year old who was competing and winning against men sometimes ten years younger than he was, even though he was considered to be old to still be an active wrestler.

Most of the teachers in Russ's school career had been very effective and helpful to him. He thought they would help almost any student who asked for help. Russ did not believe any of them had treated him differently, nor could he think of any who did not really care about their students. He could relate to the younger teachers best, but overall he thought his relationship with teachers had been good and his school experience had been positive, with a good attendance record.

When some of the members of the football team teased Russ for being on the wrestling team, he decided that they were the ignorant ones. Wrestling was what he enjoyed, and they were not going to cause him to quit what he liked so much.

"Mom wasn't like a drill sergeant or nothing," but Russ knew if he got into trouble at school she would "whip my butt" or take his car, so he wanted to avoid trouble although he did get into some minor fights. He was proud of the fact that his mother had taught him to respect people, especially the elderly and women. He had received awards for participating in football and wrestling and had been given the varsity award for participating in and receiving a varsity letter for three years in wrestling during his high school career.

Russ's definition of success was "just to succeed in life. Basically, do—whatever—the best I can and be all I can be and put my best effort toward what I

want to do in life. And I should be able to do it if I have the heart to do it." Russ had fairly high expectations for himself but believed it was like climbing a ladder—just one step at a time.

Mom did a lot when I was in junior high. When I didn't have the best grades, she never ragged on me or called me stupid. She just said, "I just want you to do your best," instead of being negative. Some of my friends would say that their parents would just yell at them, but my mom would just tell me to do my best and that she'd like me to bring it up at least one grade.

Russ felt accepted by his peers and considered himself successful even though he had not done as well in his earlier years, saying he just had to work harder. He did not consider himself totally a leader, saying he was a little of a follower as well.

Analysis of the Findings

The successful students in this study had an evident respect for school personnel. This was supported by the virtual absence of conflict with teachers, administrators, and student peers. Overall, students were supportive of school policies and regulations, which were similar to the rules and practices in their homes. Karen Green explained that she chose not be a discipline problem, saying that "I'm scared to be because if I get into trouble there [school], I would lose privileges here [home]. I don't like it when other kids mess around and take up time and I can't be learning." Most respondents shared this expressed concern about school behavior and its consequences.

Some students indicated an occasional conflict with a teacher or other school personnel. However, each shared that he or she would resolve a conflict by taking

the initiative to speak with the school personnel with whom they had the conflict and would desire to reach a positive resolution. These students rated school personnel very favorably, and many referred to them as positive role models. They thought that the majority of the teachers were caring and concerned about them as individuals.

The students rated their schools as positive. All of the students who were interviewed stated that they had a very positive view of education. They all expressed a desire and commitment to attend college.

These students had evidence of excellent academic success at school. Nine of the ten students had been on the honor roll, some had graduated in the top ten of their class, and most had been invited to be and/or were members of the National Honor Society. Seven out of ten of the students had been members of academic teams, seven out of ten had participated in gifted and talented programs, and eight out of ten had elected upper-level-curriculum courses.

Success was also evidenced by the students' participation in extracurricular activities. Five out of ten students had been members of the student council, and most of the students had been involved with sports, band, musicals, and/or plays.

All ten of the students reported regular school attendance. Eight of them had attended preschool. Most indicated their commitment to community service. Table 3 contains a compilation of the above-mentioned characteristics and activities of the successful students' school experiences.

Table 3: Summary of characteristics of successful students' school experiences.

Student	Characteristic of School Experience											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Amelia Burton	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Jerry Cruise	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Collette Baker	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Karen Green	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Marvin Cusino	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Jane Ferris	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Denise Rose	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
David Stone	Y	Y	Y	U	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dan Hobbs	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Russ Bonet	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y

Key:

- A = Honor roll
- B = Participates in extracurricular activities
- C = Member of an academic team
- D = Special program/gifted and talented program
- E = Basic/upper-level curriculum
- F = Student council
- G = Family has good name
- H = Uncaring teachers/negative teacher examples
- I = Honors/top ten, National Honor Society/athletic awards
- J = Regular school attendance
- K = Positive view of education
- L = Attended preschool

- Y = Evidenced
- N = Not evidenced
- U = Unavailable

**Interactions Between and Among the Students,
Family Members, and School Personnel**

In the first section of this chapter, the home settings and backgrounds of the students and their families were described and discussed. The second section focused on the family data, background information, and educational history of the successful students' grandparents and parents, as well as religious preferences. The third section included an examination of the students' family experiences, family values, and parenting skills, whereas the fourth section was concerned with the students' school experiences. This section centers on the theme of the families' interactions with the school. Specifically, the researcher examined the family influence with regard to school experiences, the family-school relationship, and the individual students' decisions to be successful. In the following paragraphs, the investigator shares his findings related to the interactions between and among the successful students, their parents, and school personnel.

Parents' Involvement in the School

Eight of the ten custodial parents in this study reported a high level of involvement with the school. High level of involvement was defined by the parent's setting appointments, conferring with teachers, observing classes, calling the school to check on the child's progress, and attending parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and other scheduled school events. Two of the ten parents described their involvement as average, which would include attending parent conferences, open

houses, and other scheduled school events. The level of involvement of the parents in this study is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Parents' involvement with the school.

Family	Level of Involvement	
	Mother	Father
Burton	Average	Negative
Cruise	High	Non
Baker	High	Non
Green	High	Non
Cusino	High	Non
Ferris	High	Non
Rose	Average	Low
Stone	High	Non
Hobbs	High	Non
Bonet	High	Non

Note: The mothers were asked to indicate the degree of involvement that described both them and their absent husbands.

Key:

High involvement: Sets appointments, confers with teachers, observes classes, calls school to check on child's progress.

Average involvement Attends parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and other scheduled school events.

Low involvement: Occasionally attends parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and other scheduled school events.

Negative involvement Goes to school only when required to deal with matters of discipline or problems with attendance.

Noninvolvement: No evidence that parent ever went to school.

For many of the custodial parents (in this study, all were mothers), their level of involvement decreased once their children advanced on to middle and high school. When their children were in elementary school, there were more opportunities for them to provide leadership and to be involved. Another factor that affected level of involvement was that, once the separation and/or divorce from the child's father had occurred, it most often necessitated these mothers' entering the work force, thus limiting their options of involvement at their children's schools.

The involvement of the students' fathers was essentially nonexistent. Only on very rare occasions did a few of the fathers enter their children's schools. This was the case even though they were encouraged both by their children and/or the children's mothers. The researcher also was interested in the fathers' attendance at parent-teacher conferences and whether they attended separately or with the children's mothers. There was no indication of any father in this study ever having attended a parent-teacher conference with the child's mother, and only a few had ever attended at all. Of those who attended a parent-teacher conference, no father attended more than two conferences during his child's primary and secondary school career.

How the parents felt when they entered their children's schools was another element of family perspective that was examined. The custodial parents in this study shared that they felt welcomed and comfortable when entering their children's schools. The students' custodial parents were very supportive of the school activities in which their children were involved. They indicated that they did not miss

one of those events unless they had a scheduling conflict. The parents' social lives often comprised the school activities.

A third component of the family perspective was the overall impression that the teachers and school personnel were excellent role models, caring, and interested in student concerns and needs. Parents shared that they stressed the importance of respecting authority and that school personnel were deserving of their children's respect. Even when students had a conflict and/or disagreement with a teacher, they still were expected to treat the teacher with respect.

The final element of the family perspective that was considered was the quality of communication. Parents were pleased with the communication they had with school personnel and would contact the school when it was necessary. On the rare occasions when their children were having trouble at school, the parents would take it upon themselves to contact the school to assist in facilitating a resolution to the problem. Parents shared that the school would take the initiative to contact them at times when their children were struggling and would advise them on a course of action. These students so seldomly had problems at school that most parents said they never were called by the school or needed to take the initiative to contact the school on their children's behalf. Furthermore, the information that their children shared with them about school generally was positive in nature.

The following portion of this section highlights specific information shared by the custodial parents pertaining to their relationship with school personnel, and their level of involvement in and support of school activities and events.

The Burton family. Sandra, Amelia's mother, thought it was very important for parents to work with the school to educate their children. She considered her involvement with the school about average because the restrictions of her jobs prevented greater participation.

The Cruise family. Martha was very familiar with all of her children's teachers and the principal. She served on the School Improvement Committee at the high school and attended the parent-teacher group meetings at the elementary level. Martha considered her participation in school-related activities to be "high involvement." She did have disagreements with the school personnel concerning the curriculum, but she backed off to save her energy to get the children into what she believed was the proper supplementary education. She thought her son was not challenged enough in school but tried to be positive so that he would enjoy a constructive experience while there. She had nothing but good to say about the elementary level in their school district and thought the upper levels were gradually improving.

The Baker family. Emily, Collette's mother, attended any activities at school, if possible, in which Collette was involved (she even accompanied her to a car wash to cheer them on). Therefore, she considered her level of involvement to be high. Collette's father lived out of state and did not attend activities or conferences, but he did attend his daughter's graduation. Emily always felt welcome in the school Collette attended and said the teachers were great.

The Green family. Katy attended many of the activities in which her children were involved, went to all of the scheduled conferences, and had not been afraid to call a teacher or the counselor. Therefore, she considered her involvement to be high. She said the children's father was not involved in any school activities. Katy thought her relationship with school personnel was fine, and she felt comfortable at the school. As the children grew older, Katy gradually became less involved as "mother isn't needed there as much."

The Cusino family. Doris had not had as much communication with the school as she would like because, until recently, she worked second shift at a factory. However, she would often go to classes or check with teachers and coaches to see whether there was anything she could do (type rosters or anything) to help them because she could not attend most of the activities. Occasionally, she could get off of work to participate, but often she would send a friend to take her place. She believed her son's school staff was very supportive, very positive, and very good; she always felt welcome and confident when she entered the school. Despite the fact that she worked second shift, Doris found time to be involved in the carnivals, Marvin's workshop, and class trips or to help out in class; therefore, she rated her involvement high. Marvin's father's involvement was almost nonexistent with the exception of attending a few games when Marvin was playing.

The Ferris family. Marge Ferris considered her involvement with the school to be very high, even more so as the children grew older. She also believed that her relationship with the school and personnel was very good. She said, "I go to all the

conferences, and if I have a problem with a teacher or get any note home, I've always made sure I've called to find out what the problem is."

The Rose family. Connie Rose had been more active in her daughter's education when the youngster was in elementary school because she had a part-time job and therefore had time to work a little at the school. When Connie was forced to work full time, she was limited in terms of the time she had to take an active part in school activities, but she still attended as many functions as possible. She did get involved in preschool, Funfest, band boosters, and senior all-nighters. She expected her children to succeed in education and wanted them to be happy and to be able to get good jobs. She believed her level of involvement in her children's school was average as they were good students, and as a result she did not need as much contact with teachers and other staff at the school. Connie did feel welcome and relaxed at the school when attending conferences and other activities.

The Stone family. Ginger expected nothing but the best for her son and said it was absolutely necessary for parents to be involved in their children's education. She had not been involved in any parent-sponsored activities for the school due to lack of time, but she had never missed an activity in which David was participating. Therefore, she considered her school involvement to be high. Ginger felt good, relaxed, and welcome at David's school and described the teachers and school personnel as good, overall.

The Hobbs family. Marsha strongly believed that parental involvement was essential. She shared that "if the kids went on campouts, I volunteered as a cook.

And I got involved with school. If they had to be disciplined at school, they were also disciplined at home." Marsha always made sure the children's homework was done, attended every conference, acted as room mother, was active in the parent-teacher organization, was treasurer of the sports boosters, did fund raising, and helped run the concessions stand. Also, she called community residents to encourage them to vote.

The Bonet family. Russ's mother had attended all the activities in which her children had been involved, if at all possible. She believed her level of school involvement might be average because she did not actually call teachers just to see how her children were doing. If there was a problem, however, she worked with the school to resolve it. Their father was not involved with the school. She had, however, been involved with the senior parents, band boosters, bingo for wrestling, concessions, and a talent show. It is possible that she rated her level of involvement too low—it sounded like a high level as other parents stated. She appreciated the school and staff overall, with a new principal and vice-principal. The school was "pretty good as far as education," she stated.

The Individual's Decision to Be a Success in School

The students in this study believed that success was a personal choice and that it came from within the individual. They shared that family support was important in enhancing students' success, but it was not the basis for success. These students unanimously stated that it is the individual's choice to capitalize on his or her gifts and abilities to be successful; they believed that an individual might

have the ability to be a great success and yet lack the motivation to obtain success.

Jane explained that success is

... my choice. I can do whatever I want with my life, but the way my mom raised me, she had a lot to do with it. My mom wants me to be successful, and I want to do what my mom wants me to do. I also do what I want to do. And my sisters—I love to follow in their footsteps, and they were both successful in school, so they were really good role models.

All of the successful students in this study had high expectations for themselves, as did their parents and teachers. The students shared that they were self-confident and that their parents had contributed to their feelings of self-worth. Success breeds success; the more the students succeeded, the more their self-confidence grew. When asked whether they thought they had been successful, all ten students responded positively. They attributed part of their success to the loving and caring foundation they had received at home.

When the students discussed the meaning of success, they made it clear that doing one's best is what counts, not being the best. Collette Baker commented, "To me, success means setting a goal and working to reach it. It doesn't necessarily mean you have to reach that goal, just that you have done your best to reach it."

Marvin Cusino said,

There's a different level of success for everybody because I might be successful in one thing and he might be successful in something else. You are successful if it's the best that you can do; you can't really put a lid on success because what is success for you may not be success for me.

And Jane Ferris shared that "Success is doing the best that I know I can do. It may not be up to other people's standards because I'm not them, but as long as I've tried my hardest and I'm happy with where I am, I feel it's been successful." All of the

students had a personal perspective on what it takes to be successful, whom they considered to be responsible for their success, and how they were going to continue to be successful.

For the most part, the successful students were accepted by their peers and thought they had a group of friends with whom they could relate. They all had common interests and values.

Some of the students had to really apply themselves in order to be successful academically. Others achieved academic success without much of an effort. This might be explained by a variance in aptitude and/or intelligence quotient among the students who were interviewed.

Success also was apparent in the students' immediate families. The custodial parents (mothers) were considered to be successful by their children. The parents described themselves as successful in the endeavors they had chosen. The siblings, as described by the successful students and their parents, were also considered to be successful. Most of the siblings had had similar school experiences, including academic success.

Students' success is, in part, a by-product of their determination, will, and motivation to be successful. Another contributing factor is the family experiences and culture that have been a part of the students' lives since childhood. The family value of education and the positive view of education going back two generations instilled a healthy respect for the importance of a good education and served as a model and motivator for student success, no matter what obstacle the students had

and would overcome to achieve their personal goals. Finally, the individual's attainment of success begins with his or her personal aspiration to succeed and is enhanced and cultivated within the social unit of family life.

Analysis of the Findings

This section contained the findings regarding the interactions between and among successful students, family members, and school personnel. The analysis of data relating to the family perspective on students' success demonstrated a high level of involvement on the part of custodial parents in school-sponsored activities and parent programs, as well as an active interest in their children's schooling and in attending school activities and events (see Table 4).

All families had a positive outlook and reported a healthy exchange of communication with most teachers and other school personnel. They felt very comfortable entering the school or contacting school personnel concerning their children, if necessary, to resolve any problems or to discuss the students' progress. This indicated an excellent school-family, family-school relationship.

Within many of the families who were interviewed, certain risk factors were prevalent, including alcohol and substance abuse, low SES, divorce, emotional abuse, and lack of a positive male role model. Despite these risk factors, the students were successful and optimistic about their futures. This led the researcher to believe that the unconditional love, support, and faith of one parent, as well as the individual's determination to succeed in the face of adversity, can transcend all of the deficits. Finally, the care-giving parents were proud of their children's success and

expected them to do their best at all times. They did not tolerate self-pity, saw the very best in their children, and cultivated a loving home environment in which the successful student could communicate openly and reach his or her full potential.

The Impression Their Parents' Divorce Made on Students

The students and sometimes the prominent parents expressed how they thought the students and other siblings had been affected by their parents' divorce. The responses are presented in this section.

The Burton Family

Amelia Burton thought she had a lot of control over what happened to her in her life and said that her parents' divorce affected her very little. If anything, "it was for the better because they fought too much." She thought it affected her brother in school as it was his senior year, but she also said the fact that her grandmother had been dying at the same time might have had some influence. The divorce had little effect on school for Amelia because, as she stated,

We choose to do what we do, and you can't blame your activities on what happened to your parents. . . . I cried when my dad first left that night because most of my friends still had their father there, and now my father was leaving. But I accepted it fast. I was probably the first to accept it better of us children. . . . I think single parents kind of make it better because of a closer relationship with their kids.

Sandra, Amelia's mother, believed Amelia just removed herself from a bad situation when her father was there and retreated into her books; therefore, she did well no matter what was going on around her.

The Cruise Family

Jerry thought his parents' divorce had little impact on him as he was only nine years old at the time. He said it was not really his problem, and he learned to be more independent as a result. He also felt no disadvantage educationally by coming from a single-parent family.

The Baker Family

Collette's parents divorced when she was 12 years old. When asked what impact the divorce had made on her, she replied,

It was horrid. Really, it was one of the worst times. I don't know how to explain it to people who really haven't, I mean, how do you explain that your parents are being split? And Mom and I moved around a lot, I mean a lot. I couldn't make friends, I got beat up quite a bit, I mean we just moved from school to school, place to place, building to building. I didn't see my brother; he was with my father. I didn't see my father all that much. Bad words [were] said around the table, so it was really a horrid time. I really hated it. It took a long time to get over it; it took a long time to get back. I didn't start with leaving my house, seeing people again, making real friends, doing things outside of school until about tenth grade. It was two years until I went to college. It was at that point I knew we were going to move again, so what's the use of getting up off the couch, why bother to leave the house, why bother. . . . Schooling was always there, it was a constant, and I always knew it was going to be there, and I always tried hard, I think, because I needed the approval and teachers were there, they were always there. They had to show up for work, they got paid. I guess it was kind of like they took over when your parents weren't there, I mean role models.

Collette thought that coming from a single-parent family might have helped her in school, knowing she had to make it for herself. She thought others with two parents might not know what a value education can be because they might be spoiled or have it too "cushy." However, some students who come from single-parent families might feel a responsibility to earn money, especially if there are

younger siblings and, consequently, might drop out of school to help with the family income. Another theory she had about students from single-parent families dropping out of school was that they might be looking for a substitute family; thus, they might get into the wrong group or gang and not have the best influence from those peers.

The Green Family

Karen seemed well adjusted to her parents' divorce and was close to her mother. The strength and support her mother provided appeared to have stabilized Karen during that time. She said that many students in the public school she attended were from single-parent families, very different from the Christian school she had attended. Her mother stated, "Her grades stayed okay; it's almost like the grades proved that everything was okay." In Karen's words, "I just deal with it as things come up." She did not feel at a disadvantage educationally, coming from a single-parent family.

Karen's older sister was an above-average student, and her younger brother was slightly average but would rather work on his car than study. Karen speculated that other students who come from single-parent homes sometimes struggle more or even drop out of school, perhaps because their parents had to work more and thus were not there for them. Or they may have had bad parents, she theorized.

The Cusino Family

Marvin's parents had separated two years ago, when he was 13 years old. He was not one to show his feelings, so most people could not tell he was going

through anything unusual. He thought that possibly the separation had been easier for him because he had been older when it happened. He believed that coming from a single-parent family had not affected him educationally, as evidenced by his high grade point average, and he continued to do his best. Doris, his mother, said it was almost as if her husband had not been around for six or seven years as he had been very unsupportive during all that time.

The Ferris Family

Jane was not yet born when her parents separated; therefore, she knew no other way of life. However, because her mother had left her father, Jane blamed her for a while "because I didn't understand."

In my ninth-grade year, I wanted to meet him [her father], but my mom didn't want me to talk to him. So we went looking for him through a post office box number, but we never did find him. It was hard on my mom; it was hard on me, too.

Jane felt no disadvantage educationally by coming from a single-parent family. She said that maybe it might have helped, saying her dad "may have been a jerk." Other children in her situation may put a lot of blame on their parents and have a hard time accepting such a drastic change in their lives and therefore might take it out on school; as a result, they might not be very successful, Jane speculated.

The Rose Family

Denise Rose was ten years old and in fifth grade when her parents got a divorce. Until that point in her life, she felt like she had everything she wanted in life and was very, very happy; her life was perfect. She expressed that the divorce

made her try harder, but she was not able to explain why. She thought that it possibly had to do with her attitude about life; she had school going for her, so "Why let one thing depress your whole life?" Her mother stated that Denise became very hard to deal with at that time and that she seemed to pour herself into school. When asked how she came to terms with the divorce, Denise replied,

For a while I didn't, and I still haven't really. When I have my family, how do I explain that [the divorce] to my children? I guess I came to terms with it because I was the strong one. My mom was very weak, she wasn't expecting it. My sister was only in the third grade, so she didn't know what was going on. I had to do a lot of growing up: making sure the house was picked up, watch my sister, and try to help Mom when she came home in a bad mood.

It appears that Denise did not let the divorce defeat her because of her attitude that she could accomplish anything that she wanted to achieve. She seemed to become a stronger person. "Others would think it was the end of the world," said Denise. They may not have had a church background and maybe never felt the love she had in her home, she expressed, and therefore they might just give up. However, she had already been taught right from wrong.

The Stone Family

David Stone did not remember when his father lived in their home; he was only three years old at the time of the divorce. Therefore, he thought the divorce had no impact on his life. He did not feel any disadvantage educationally by being from a single-parent family as his mother was always willing to help. Being a success was his choice and was not affected by the divorce, he theorized, because he was too young to miss what he did not remember. If he had been older, the divorce

might have affected him as it does other students who remember both parents living in the home, he thought.

The Hobbs Family

Dan Hobbs's mother and father were never married, and Dan did not remember his father's ever being in the home. As Dan was the youngest of four children and was 12 years younger than his next older brother, he had the advantage of three older siblings and a mother to be his role models and to guide or "spoil" him. The researcher believes this could have taken the place of a father who was never there for him. Obviously, Dan's mother was a very strong person to raise the three older siblings after a divorce when they were young. Each of them achieved the highest honors academically, and each had a college degree and a respectable job. Mrs. Hobbs must be given much credit for this, and the writer believes Dan will mature with the same work ethics, moral values, and discipline as his older siblings. Dan had never felt at a disadvantage academically because he was from a single-parent family.

The Bonet Family

Russ was only 20 months old when his father left home and had had almost no contact with him since then; therefore, he was unaware of any effect the divorce had on him. However, he said there were times when he did miss having a father figure around the house. Russ thought that "everybody has the same opportunities

and that you just have to go for it." His sister, who was almost 17, was even more successful in high school than he was.

Analysis of the Findings

Not one of the students felt at a disadvantage academically because he or she was from a single-parent family. They all agreed that being a success was their own decision; others might encourage them, but it was up to them to work toward success. All but one of them were honor roll students; the other student had maintained a low B average until his senior year, when he decided to apply himself and achieved higher than a B average that year.

Eight of the ten students indicated that they felt little or no impact from their parents' divorce. One of the two who indicated that it was horrid stated that it might have helped her academically knowing that she had to make it for herself. The other poured herself into school and did not let the divorce defeat her because she chose to have a positive attitude. She believed her church background supported her, as did the love she still had at home. Five of the ten students were relatively young at the time of the divorce and therefore did not remember their father's presence in the home; this might explain their feeling little or no impact from the divorce.

Based on the students' perceptions of the impact of the divorce, the researcher was led to conclude that the risk factors of their parents' divorce that these students experienced did not affect their attitudes, commitment, or responsibility for their own success (see Table 5).

Table 5: Summary of family facts/risk factors.

Family Fact/ Risk Factor	Family									
	B U R T O N	C R U I S E	B A K E R	G R E E N	C U S I N O	F E R R I S	R O S E	S T O N E	H O B B S	B O N E T
Regularly attend church with child	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
Age when parents separated/divorced	13	9	12	11	8	0	12	3	0	2
Feel disadvantaged educationally?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Remember father in home?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
Mother supportive/role model	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Father supportive/role model	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Made a traumatic move	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Father helped financially most of time	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Father alcoholic/substance abuser	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Unemployment of primary caregiver/welfare	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Years as single parent	4	5	7	6	7	17	5+	12	25	17
Student's decision to be successful	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Key: Y = Yes
N = No

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher presented and analyzed various aspects of the families in this study—the relationship among family members, peers, and school personnel; activities, values, and family history and education; and the impact of the divorce on the children—and how these factors affected the students' ability and/or determination to be a success.

The first section contained a discussion of the families' home settings and the students' feelings of safety in their neighborhoods, homes, and school. The second section concerned the family compositions, history of family education, and religious preferences. Section three included family values, family leisure experiences, and custodial parents' views on parenting skills. The successful students' school experiences were examined in the fourth section. Section five concerned the interactions between and among the students, family members, and school personnel. The level of parent involvement in the school was discussed, as was the individual students' decisions to be a success in school. The impact of the divorce on the students' success, as viewed by the students and their custodial parents, was addressed in the sixth section.

The family and school cultures in this study had certain commonalities. High expectations, responsibility, and rules and consequences were shared by both of the cultures within which the students interacted. The custodial parents of the successful students valued education and stressed the importance of their children's obtaining the best education possible by setting goals, doing their best, and not

settling for less than a college education. The family culture and the individual's personal determination to succeed were two of the most crucial factors contributing to the success of the students in this study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

The researcher's purpose in this study was to describe and explain the family perspectives of students from single-parent families and their success in school. The interactions between and among the successful student, the family, and the school were examined. The study was structured to determine the family's experience with school, the successful students' experience with family, and the successful students' experience with school. Finally, the successful students, the families, and the school were investigated wholly, and the results of these relationships and interactions were disclosed.

The preceding chapters presented an introduction to the study, a review of the related literature and research, an explanation of the methodology, and an analysis of the data collected in this study. In this chapter, the general findings are presented first, followed by the findings pertaining to each research question. The presuppositions and tentative conclusions are reviewed and either supported or revised, based on those findings. Next, conclusions pertaining to the findings are given. The findings are then compared to those from previous research. Finally, the

findings and limitations of the study are used to derive and determine ideas and suggestions for further research. The researcher's reflections conclude the chapter.

Summary of the Major Findings

The family backgrounds related to the level of education of the successful students' grandparents were varied. Twelve of the 40 grandparents did graduate from high school. However, only 6 of the 40 grandparents obtained any schooling beyond high school. Many of the students' grandparents found it necessary to terminate their schooling early because of the needs of their families. They were required to enter the work force to support their families economically. The students' parents explained that their own parents placed a high value on education in spite of their own predicament and encouraged their children to complete their high school education. The grandparent generation valued education and, when possible, offered financial support to their children to have the opportunity to attend college. This was supported by the fact that 16 of the students' 20 parents started and/or completed a college education (see Table 2).

It was typical for the parents to have been active while they were in school; some of them had achieved academic honors. The emphasis and value placed on education increased with the students' parents' generation. Nine of the ten mothers had attended college, and all ten of the mothers, with whom the students lived, valued education greatly and had the expectation that their children would attend college. The mothers were very in tune with their children's present progress and

ability levels. All believed their children would reach their full potential by attending college and obtaining an education to facilitate an excellent career.

It was evident that the family culture from generation to generation promoted the importance and value of education. The grandparents were strong proponents of their children's receiving a quality education, and this carried through with stronger emphasis on their children's education. The students' custodial parents took a very active interest in their children's academic and extracurricular activities. Eight of the ten single-parent mothers reported that they had a high level of involvement with their children's schools. These mothers set appointments with school personnel, conferred with their children's teachers, observed their children's classes, and called school to check on their children's progress when they thought it was necessary. They also attended parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and other scheduled school events (see Table 4).

Among those who were interviewed for this study, many similarities were apparent in the successful students' family experiences. The similarities included a strong family structure, high expectations for their children, clear family rules, chores and responsibilities at home, emphasis on the importance of school, positive relationships with school personnel, a high level of involvement in school activities, an expectation that their children would attend college, an active interest in their children's academic progress, close monitoring of their children's whereabouts, respect for authority, an effort toward positive communication and listening, and a genuine attempt to support each other. Although the students did not always agree

with their parents' counsel and advice, they communicated respect and appreciation for their parents' commitment to their success and the sacrifice their mothers had made to make their needs a top priority.

The students themselves were extremely active in all facets of school life. These successful students' school experiences included: Nine of the ten students were on the honor roll, all of them participated in extracurricular activities, seven were members of academic teams, eight had upper-level academic programs, five were members of the student council, all ten reported that their families had a good name, they all had regular school attendance, and eight had attended preschool (see Table 3).

These students' successes had been recognized through awards for academic achievement, community service recognition, school awards, college scholarships, leadership in clubs, and participation on athletic and academic teams. All of the students shared a positive view of education and, overall, thought that their school experiences had been positive.

The interactions between and among successful students, their custodial parents (mothers of the students in this study), and school personnel were extremely positive and conducive to the students' success. The students' mothers were supportive of and active in their children's education. The high level of involvement and communication with school personnel was instrumental in shaping the family perspective on education.

The cultures of both the family and the schools were mutually supportive of each other. The school personnel and parents alike reported having high expectations for the successful students. Responsibility and structure were common components of both settings. The school served as the hub for the family's social life. The students were involved in many aspects of school life, and their mothers centered their lives around their children's activities.

The custodial parents all believed that education began in the home. Each felt a personal responsibility for enriching and enhancing her child's learning. They sought out extra classes that provided instruction in areas not offered at their children's schools, involved them in community events, and planned their family vacations around educational opportunities for learning. The parents saw their role in educating their children as a partnership with the school. They stressed the importance of their children's respecting school and emphasized that the children were responsible for their personal learning and needed to embrace and make the most of the opportunity to learn that the school provided. The students' parents modeled a healthy respect for their children's schools and teachers and expected the same from their children.

Findings Pertaining to the Research Questions

The researcher proposed tentative expectations regarding the findings for each research question before the interviews with the custodial parents and successful students took place. In the following pages, the researcher reviews the

anticipated expectations and either supports or revises the presuppositions based on the study findings.

1. How do successful students from single-parent families describe and define their families? As the researcher expected, the students reported that they came from homes in which the single parent was loving, supportive, and high expectations for them to succeed. Overall, the students had great respect and appreciation for their custodial mothers. They were connected with their families and described a close relationship with both their mothers and their siblings. They saw themselves as important within their families and believed they were contributing members of the family. The value of education, strong self-esteem, and high expectations were a result of the family life.

Strong structures were a common component of these students' home lives. These similar home structures included strong communication between parent and child, encouragement and support of educational learning and advancement, accountability and clear consequences for inappropriate behavior, supervision of students' whereabouts, trust, caring and concerned environment, and a basic underlying faith and belief in the children's abilities to succeed. The parents were in tune with their children's gifts and abilities and expected them to do their best in all their endeavors. None of the parents allowed their children to feel sorry for themselves or to use life's setbacks as an excuse for being less than they were capable of being. There was no room for the students to operate as if they were

victims of their circumstances. The expected significant relationship between students' success and how students defined their families was found.

2. What is the successful student's family background, and how has it affected the student's attitudes? The researcher expected to find a correlation across the generations of success in the successful students' family background with school and learning. The researcher found a pattern of emphasis on the value and importance of education all through the generations. The parents strove to pass on the same support and the expectation that education is the key to success in life. The successful students' parents reported the sacrifices and priorities they had made on behalf of their children's education. These parents reported that their own parents had sacrificed and made available the best educational opportunities they could provide. Even if the financial resources were not available from their own parents, an effort was made to instill the importance and value of obtaining the highest level of education possible. The parents in this study were fully aware of what their educational opportunities had meant for their own personal success. Whether they had a college education or not, all of the parents of successful students encouraged and expected their children to achieve a college education in order to be prepared for the best possible career opportunities.

3. How do these students and family members relate to and communicate with personnel of the student's school community? The researcher anticipated that the successful students' custodial parents would have had a positive relationship with school personnel, both when they themselves had been students and presently

as a parent. The findings supported the notion that the parents strove for positive relationships with school personnel. The successful students' parents reported that they felt welcomed and relaxed when they entered their children's schools. They explained that if they had a problem or concern with school personnel, they would either call or make an appointment to arrive at a resolution to the problem. None of the parents reported any unresolved conflict or ongoing animosity with the schools. They strove for excellent working relationships with school personnel. In general, when the parents had been students themselves, they strove for a positive relationship with their teachers and other school personnel. The descriptions of their experiences with school personnel were not marked by ongoing conflicts or problems. Most had enjoyed their experiences and wished that they could have been as involved as their own children were able to be. However, they currently were enjoying the involvement they were able to have by attending their children's school activities and events.

For the most part, the successful students presented positive attitudes to their parents about their school life. They saw school as a place where they could grow educationally and be involved in any activity that interested them. They also had a strong appreciation for the relationships that they themselves had developed with school personnel, especially teachers, and the relationships they had built with peers who shared similar values and interests.

4. What were the school experiences of family members of successful students from single-parent families? The researcher expected to see a connection

between the students' success and that of previous generations within their families. This connection was proven to be true; however, previous generations had not had as many opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities because fewer activities had been available at that time. Furthermore, economic considerations, i.e., help needed at home or transportation, had hindered participation in school-sponsored events, specifically in the grandparents' generation. Although school involvement varied between generations, there was a pattern of positive responses to school experiences by family members.

5. Is there a correlation between family experiences and the success in school of students from single-parent families? The researcher anticipated that the families' values, structure, stability, emphasis on education, beliefs, faith, and morals would be factors contributing to the success of the successful students. It was interesting to the writer that, in many ways, each of the families was unique. Values, beliefs, faith, and morals varied from family to family. Some of the families stressed that their strong faith in God was the foundation for their success, and others had terminated their religious practices altogether. However, each of the families placed an emphasis on values and morals that they imparted to their children. The parents had definite ideas about what they believed was appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

The most common characteristic among all of the families was their emphasis on and value of the need for education. Eight of the ten students had attended preschool. Priority was given to the students' homework and its completion. These

single-parent homes provided stability in spite of the social, economic, and psychological adjustments required as a result of the separation and the trauma of divorce.

The keys to successful parenting, as reported by these single parents, included good listening skills, sacrifice, being supportive, unconditional love, acceptance of their individuality, prayer, quality time, patience and understanding, encouraging involvement and being involved with the children's lives, and promoting healthy communication. Many of these parenting skills were foundational within each of these families, which influenced their children's academic success.

6. How do family members' attitudes and beliefs about the importance of education influence the success of students from single-parent families? It was anticipated that the home would provide a high level of support, furnish a climate parallel to that of the school, have high expectations for the student, and place a strong emphasis and value on education. The custodial parents of each of these students took an active interest in their children's education. They worked hand in hand with the schools in establishing a consistent structure, expectations, and respect. The cultures of both the home and the school were complementary, providing consistency and stability, which promoted the students' personal and academic success.

In each of these families, education was stressed as an important avenue to obtain economic success. Some of these families actively pursued educational experiences such as classes during the summer months to expand their children's

learning, and family vacations were planned to include experiences to enhance the children's knowledge. Extended-family gatherings allowed the students to observe adult conversation, which modeled problem-solving techniques, planning, respect, and commitment.

7. What meaning does being successful have for students from single-parent families? It was expected that these students would have an understanding of what it takes to be successful and the will and determination to succeed. This expectation was validated by all of these students' recognition of the importance and value of an education as a means to reach their goals and therefore be a success in life. All of the students had set personal goals to pursue a college education. The students shared that acquiring an education would result in a better life. As expected, the students saw themselves as the key players in accomplishing their personal success.

Currently, these students viewed their success in light of their academic and extracurricular achievement. This was evidenced by the many awards, honors, and leadership opportunities afforded them.

8. How do students from single-parent families succeed? The researcher expected to find that the successful students were leaders and not followers and surrounded themselves with others who had similar values, morals, and convictions. It was further expected that successful students would be able to resist negative peer pressure and stand up for what they believed was right, and to set and achieve goals. The information the students provided supported those assumptions. The

students in this study described themselves as leaders, and all of them surrounded themselves with friends who shared common values, interests, and goals. All of the students who were interviewed responded in the affirmative when asked about their ability to stand up to negative peer pressure. These students had high morals, and most of them commented on their resistance to drugs and alcohol. They all set high goals for themselves and believed they were responsible for their own success. They stated that nobody else could make it happen for them. These students expressed appreciation for the support of their families. They believed that the love, encouragement, and guidance of their custodial parents were catalysts for their success. Yet they still believed that each individual is responsible for and the key player in making his or her success a reality.

These students shared that their custodial parents modeled success through their ability to overcome adversity. They believed their mothers had successfully provided a positive upbringing for them, and they appreciated the sacrifices their mothers had made to provide a decent life for their families.

The most common trait about success that the students shared was the belief that success does not mean being the best, but doing the best with the potential one has. The students in this study were living examples of their convictions. Their many individual accomplishments serve as evidence of the personal successes of each of them.

9. Does successful students' resiliency contribute to their success in dealing with their parents' separation or divorce? The researcher expected to find

that successful students from single-parent families were resilient to the setbacks they had encountered in life, including their parents' separation and divorce. For all of these students, their parents' divorce had had a profound impact on their lives. The students were able to describe how they viewed and processed their parents' divorce. All of them were determined not to allow the divorce to detract from their academic success. Most of them saw the divorce as an issue between their parents over which they had no control. For some students, their parents' divorce was a relief, removing tension and stress from the home environment. The divorce, for some, served as a strong impetus to succeed. Some of the students shared that their lives actually had improved with the one parent moving out of the home. Seven of the ten families reported that the father was a substance abuser, which might account for the relief that some of the students reported since this factor had been removed from the home. Most of these students still had care and concern for their fathers, regardless of their personal problems. As a result of having one parent in the home, some of the students shared that they received more individual attention from the custodial parent.

For some of the students, the reality of their parents' divorce continued to be something that they grieved. However, none believed that it presently hindered or in the future would impede their personal success.

These successful students' coping skills and their resiliency concerning their parents' separation and divorce served as character builders and provided them with the strength and tools to process and handle any adversities they might encounter.

These students are an example of the fact that, even if you are dealt blows and defeats, you can pick yourself up off the ground and continue to move forward and achieve whatever you put your mind to. Success for these students was not a by-product of all the right opportunities and a perfect family, but rather an inner resolve and determination to succeed in spite of whatever circumstances they happened to encounter.

Conclusions

In this study, consideration was given to students' family background. The cultures of both family and school life were analyzed for their influence on the students' choice to be successful. The families' school experiences were examined to determine their significance and influence on the students' decision to be a success.

The custodial parents in this study had great belief in their children's abilities. They had high expectations for their children and insisted that they always did their best. The students realized that their mothers sacrificed for their good and provided them a stable home in which to flourish so that they would have no excuse for not reaching their full potential.

The families' experiences and expectations transferred to the school setting for these students. The parents in this study believed they were in partnership with the schools to provide an education and leadership experiences for their children to grow and develop their personal potential. The students had a healthy respect for education and school personnel. All shared a positive view of education and saw

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the opportunity to attend school as a springboard for them to be a success in life. Each of the students had set goals, which included the aspiration to attend college, and they anticipated exciting and rewarding careers. The students in this study had already experienced success first-hand as a result of having achieved previous goals and expectations. Success breeds success! In the case of this study, these students had obtained a level of confidence from previous success they had experienced, which facilitated their expectation of success in the future.

The custodial parents cultivated their relationships with their children. They strove to provide a caring and nurturing home environment. They desired to have positive communication with their children and put forth an effort to be there for their children and to listen to them. They believed these parenting skills were essential for their children to thrive and be successful in school and in life. This researcher concluded that single-parent families can provide a stable and cohesive structure, as well as produce academically successful students.

Comparison of the Findings With Those From Jelles's Research

Having presented the general findings and conclusions from this study, the researcher now examines his findings in comparison with those from the study by Jelles (1992), who inspired this study as a result of his recommendation of research on "family life and culture in single-parent families with successful students." In Jelles's study, academically successful students from intact families were examined in relation to family life. In comparing Jelles's findings with those from this study, the potential exists to report and highlight both similarities and differences concerning the impact of family life in these differing familial configurations on students' success.

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This study was inspired by Jelles (1992), who studied the relationship of family life to the academic success of students in intact, two-parent families. Jelles recommended that further research be done on the relationship of family life to academic success of students from single-parent families.

Because the present researcher and Jelles were dealing with similar components in their research, many of the findings from both studies regarding successful students were comparable. The similarities of the findings from both studies are examined in the following paragraphs.

In both studies, it was found that, out of necessity, the students' grandparents had had to enter the work force at an early age, but they hoped for a different experience for their children. They hoped that their children would graduate from high school and supported the idea of their going on to college.

The parents of the students in the two studies had graduated from high school; many had gone on to college, and a few had completed graduate school. As students, these parents had enjoyed their school experiences, but they had had fewer opportunities for extracurricular involvement than their children did. The parents of the successful students in both studies placed a very high value on postsecondary education. Each succeeding generation passed on a stronger emphasis on education and its importance for a successful career. The students' parents wanted them to have greater career opportunities than they themselves had experienced. They all believed education was the foundation for their children to reach their full potential and happiness in life.

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Jettes look at the successful students' family experiences and found that the family culture that was supportive of the school culture continued into the successful students' generation. Aspects of these family life experiences that were similar to what this researcher found included the following: family rules, norms, and expectations were clearly set forth; family members expressed strong positive feelings about the necessity of school; school personnel and parents worked together in a partnership for the betterment of the students; parents and students were involved in school activities; parents stressed the importance of a postsecondary education; there was continuity of supervision and close monitoring of the children's performance; parents taught their children values and morals and a strong sense of right and wrong; parents emphasized the importance of communicating with and listening to their children; family members supported, trusted, and respected one another and demonstrated respect for others; the parents involved in the students' lives were good role models; and parents helped their children develop positive self-concepts.

In both studies, the successful students' school experiences included active participation in school-sponsored activities. The students described themselves as leaders, not followers. These students were well liked and rarely had discipline problems or negative peer relationships. All of the students had a positive view of education and had set goals and personal expectations to attend college and, for some, graduate school. They all believed it was important for them to strive to do their best and that they were personally responsible for their own success. They

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believed education would prepare them for productive and rewarding careers. They desired satisfying careers with choices and anticipated financial security.

The findings from these two studies also indicated that these successful students had received rewards for their achievements, were leaders in clubs and organizations, participated in academic and athletic teams, received college scholarships, and overall were pleased with their personal accomplishments. Almost all of the students reported good experiences in school and expressed positive attitudes toward education.

The interactions between and among successful students, their parents, and school personnel were found to be generally positive. The parents were actively involved in their children's education. This high level of involvement influenced the family perspective on education in a positive way. The communication between the students and parents and school personnel was constructive and healthy.

Jeltes and this researcher found that the cultures of both the families and the schools were mutually supportive. The students and parents reported that both the parents and school personnel had high expectations for the successful students. Responsibility and structure were common components in both settings. The school was the center of activity for these families' social lives. All of these students were extremely active in school, and the parents centered their lives on the children's activities and involvement.

The parents in both of these studies had the philosophy that parents are the key players in their children's education and that education begins in the home.

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These parents took personal responsibility for enriching and enhancing their children's learning. To these parents, education of one's child involved a partnership with the school. These parents respected the school and put forth an effort to establish excellent rapport with their children's teachers and with school personnel in general.

Although many of the findings from these two studies were similar, the most pronounced difference was in the area of family risk factors. Jelles reported minimal or no existence of risk factors in the two-parent families he interviewed. The families in the present study reported a variety of risk factors within their families. The most prevalent risk factor was that the students in this study were from homes in which there had been a separation and divorce. Although many family risk factors were reported by most of the families of successful students in this study, none was dwelled on or perceived as a barrier to the students' ability to continue to succeed. Students had processed and were processing family problems, but each of them conveyed a resiliency to withstand the adversity and a drive to continue to succeed in spite of it. For these students, their personal responsibility to do their best and be successful transcended the family risk factors and/or family problems.

The comparison of the data from these two studies revealed many mutually supportive findings related to the academic success of students. It is evident that the family relationship and structure, relationships and communication with school personnel, student determination and personal responsibility for success, and value on education of previous generations were the most common attributes of the

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families in these two studies that contributed to these students' academic success. The students in the present study defied the volumes of research reporting the negative impact of risk factors on students' academic success. The most important indicators of student success are related to the family life and relationships, as evidenced in this study.

Recommendations for Further Research

This researcher focused on the family's influence on students' success in school. The study was conducted with students from single-parent families in which the mother was the custodial parent. All of the students in the study attended public schools and had grade point averages of 3.0 or higher. The study took place in communities within a 20-mile radius of a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. Additional research needs to be considered and carried out related to other aspects of how and why students from different single-parent family configurations succeed in school. The following are topics to consider for further study:

1. A comparison of family life and culture in families of successful students whose single parents never married.
2. A study of family life and culture in single-parent families of successful students in which the parent is a homosexual.
3. A random study of students from single-parent families to compare their family lives and cultures regardless of the students' achievements.
4. A study of the impact that having a parent who is a substance abuser has on students' academic success.

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5. A replication of the present study with only male students from single-parent families.
6. A replication of the present study with only female students from single-parent families.
7. A replication of the present study with families in another part of the United States.
8. A replication of the present study with all participants from a minority racial or ethnic background.
9. A study that is focused specifically on the impact of divorce on students' success.
10. A replication of the present study with students from single-parent families who live with their fathers as the custodial parents.
11. A replication of the present study with students who live with their grandparents.

Reflections

Jeltes's (1992) study of successful students from intact families revealed patterns of the family and school cultures. Jeltes's findings were consistent with those from the present study. The families in this study viewed education as the most important means for their children to succeed in life. The parents with whom the successful students lived expected their children to succeed and were committed to working closely in a cooperative partnership with their children's schools. The family experience was an important element in the students' accepting and

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embracing the role of the school. The parents' self-sacrifice, ability to deal with adversity, views on parenting, and support created an environment that was conducive to the children's success.

In this study, all of the successful students' custodial parents were their mothers. These mothers could serve as an inspiration to other struggling single parents: that they can provide the support necessary for their children to succeed in overcoming the adversity they have encountered. The risk factors shared by the families in this study did not prevent the students' success. The parents did not allow their problems and difficulties to get in the way of their parental functioning. They provided solid supervision, strong emphasis on academics, and high expectations. It was evident to this researcher that these positive parental skills and attributes were stabilizing forces for the child to succeed that overcame any of the risk factors that were part of these families.

Many successful students in the educational system come from homes headed by single parents. The opportunity to study a few of these students was enjoyable and rewarding. Despite some difficult circumstances, these successful students were committed and determined to make something of their lives. All of the students held high expectations for themselves personally and had the drive and dedication to achieve their goals. It is likely that these students will do very well in college and will pass on a heritage and culture of success to their own children some day.

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Educational researchers can promote the success of students from single-parent families by focusing on the common traits of families of students who are successful. By investigating the characteristics of single-parent families with successful students, they will discover the similarities that cultivate an environment that is conducive to students' success. These commonalities can serve as a model for struggling families who are searching for proven techniques and parenting skills to implement within their families.

The successful students in this study came from various living arrangements and opportunities. The families were diverse in terms of their life styles and/or interests, including their religious preferences or practices, how they spent their leisure time, and their views on life in general. Although each of these families had unique characteristics, all had a common focus on the importance and benefits of a good education. The philosophy and value that these students had acquired about the importance of an education were directly related to what was modeled and taught in their homes. This common philosophy and value of education were the key factors contributing to students' academic success. Finally, the students in this study accepted personal responsibility for their learning and were committed to achieving their goals. Each believed that the individual is primarily accountable for his or her own success.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORY

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FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS INVENTORY*

Family Name _____

Date _____

The following statements fit some families better than others. Please circle the number that best describes how well each statement fits your family.

		Does not fit our family at all		Fits our family some		Fits our family very well
1.	We live in a good neighborhood.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Our family talks things out.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	There is an opportunity for each member to express himself in his own way.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	We have a sense of humor.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	There are activities which we all enjoy doing together.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	We respect each other's feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	In our home, we feel loved.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	We have the right kinds of friends.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Discipline is moderate and consistent.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Educational goals are important to us.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	There is a sense of belonging in our family.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Our family is a reliable, dependable family.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	We establish reasonable goals for ourselves.	1	2	3	4	5

		Does not fit our family at all		Fits our family some		Fits our family very well	
14.	We encourage development of potential in all members of our family.	1	2	3	4	5	
15.	We express appreciation of what we do for one another.	1	2	3	4	5	
16.	We plan ahead.	1	2	3	4	5	
17.	We share experiences.	1	2	3	4	5	
18.	We live in a good school district.	1	2	3	4	5	
19.	Father is a good provider.	1	2	3	4	5	
20.	There is enough money for special things.	1	2	3	4	5	

***Please fill out this questionnaire as a family.**

APPENDIX B

THE FAMILY HISTORY SURVEY

FAMILY HISTORY SURVEY

1. Name _____ 2. Telephone _____

3. Address _____

4. Mother's occupation _____ 5. Company _____

6. Title _____ 7. Years employed _____

8. Father's occupation _____ 9. Company _____

10. Title _____ 11. Years employed _____

12. Number of marriages: Mother _____ Father _____

13. Number of years as a single parent _____

14. Children Age Gender

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

15. Any deaths in the immediate family? _____

16. Do you own or rent your home? _____

17. How many rooms? _____

18. Does anyone outside the immediate family live in the home?

19. Mother's birthplace _____

20. Mother's educational level _____

21. Mother's religious affiliation _____

22.

23.

24.

22. Father's birthplace _____

23. Father's educational level _____

24. Father's religious affiliation _____

APPENDIX C

THE FAMILY RISK FACTORS QUESTIONNAIRE

FAMILY RISK FACTORS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Has there ever been any alcoholism/substance abuse in your family?
Yes No
2. Have you ever had a problem with alcoholism/substance abuse?
Yes No
3. Has there ever been any physical, mental, or sexual abuse?
Yes No
4. Has there ever been any unemployment in the family? Yes No
5. Have you ever collected on welfare/ADC/Social Security disability?
Yes No
6. Have there ever been any traumatic moves that had to be made?
Yes No
7. Because of factors, have you terminated religious practices?
Yes No
8. Do you or any family member smoke?
Dad Yes No
Mom Yes No
Student Yes No
9. Are you in the lower, middle, or upper income bracket? Please circle one.
10. Is there a poor male role model in the family? Yes No
11. Does anyone have a criminal record? Yes No
12. Has anyone ever failed or been retained? Yes No

APPENDIX D

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

1996

Reviewer #13

From: Rob Skilling

RE: IRB# 96-291

Title: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY LIFE TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF STUDENTS FROM SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

Before subjects sign the consent form the risk involved by their participating in the study will be explained orally. The following is a written script of the information about risk that will be explained to each potential participant.

Limited confidentiality will be provided to all subjects.

Only I (principal investigator) will have access to the written notes.

The written notes will be stored in my home.

Names of those interviewed will be changed in the written report of the findings.

The risk of possible identification by those familiar with the setting is remote, yet exists. This is a risk common to this type of study.

The list of those selected for interview will be known only to the principal investigator.

A neutral site will be selected for the actual conducting of the interviews. This may include the private residence of the respondents. The possibility exists that someone may see us talking and be aware of the fact that I am interviewing people for my study, however this seems highly unlikely.

Given these safeguards, the risk of identification must be viewed as minimal. The chance that the interviewee may reveal details of the study is beyond the control of the principal investigator.

UCRIHS APPROVAL FOR
THIS project EXPIRES:

MAY 20 1997

SUBMIT RENEWAL APPLICATION
ONE MONTH PRIOR TO
ABOVE DATE TO CONTINUE

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**

May 22, 1996

TO: Robert Skilling
8478 Woodruff Drive SW
Byron Center, Mi. 49315

RE: IRB#: 96-291
TITLE: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF FAMILY LIFE TO
THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF STUDENTS FROM SINGLE
PARENT FAMILIES
REVISION REQUESTED: N/A
CATEGORY: 1-C
APPROVAL DATE: 05/20/96

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete. I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project and any revisions listed above.

RENEWAL: UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Investigators planning to continue a project beyond one year must use the green renewal form (enclosed with the original approval letter or when a project is renewed) to seek updated certification. There is a maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

REVISIONS: UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB # and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

PROBLEMS/CHANGES: Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, investigators must notify UCRIHS promptly: (1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or (2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (517)355-2180 or FAX (517)432-1171.

Sincerely,

David E. Wright
David E. Wright, Ph.D.
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:bed

cc: Louis Romano



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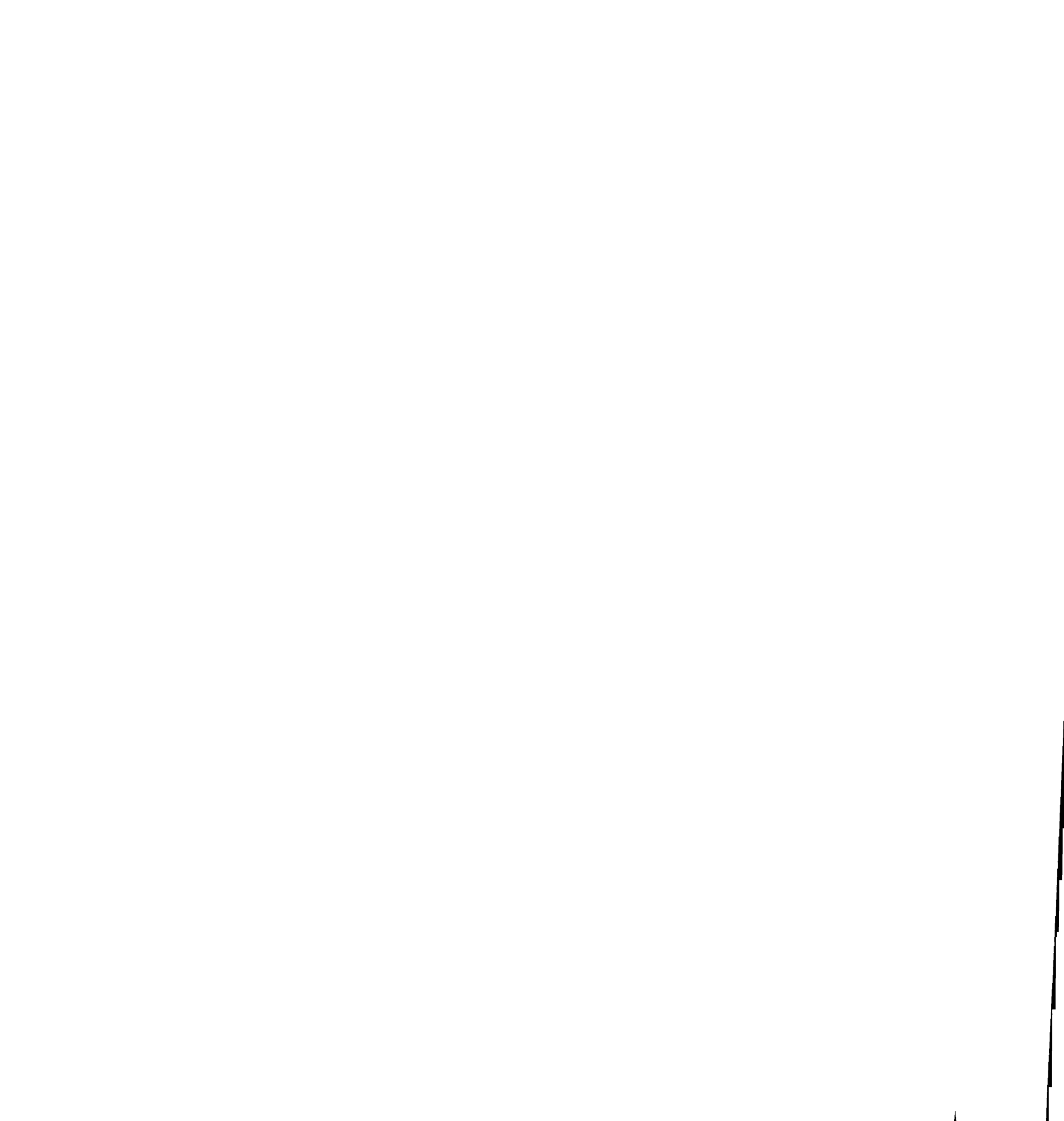
University Committee on
Research Involving
Human Subjects
(UCRIHS)

Michigan State University
232 Administration Building
East Lansing, Michigan
48824-1046

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*The Michigan State University
IDEA is Institutional Diversity,
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*MSU is an affirmative-action,
equal-opportunity institution*



APPENDIX E

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

To whom it may concern:

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of why some students from single-parent families are successful in the regular school system. I will be asking you some questions about your family background, your family experiences, and how other members of your family experienced school. In addition, I will be asking you about your family's involvement with your schooling. Finally, I will be seeking permission to talk with other members of your family.

This interview will take approximately one hour. If we do not complete all of the questions, I'd like to talk to you again. The total time involved in our interviews will not exceed three hours.

All the results will be treated with strict confidentiality, and your name will not be used in any research report.

Participation is voluntary; you may choose not to participate at all, refuse to answer some questions, or discontinue the interview at any time. There is absolutely no penalty for taking any of these actions.

If you wish to have a copy of the general findings of this report, one will be furnished upon request.

By signing this form, you indicate that you understand the purposes of the study.

Guardian (if under 18 years of age) _____

Respondent's name _____

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