

Generational Impact of Single-Parent Scholarships: Educational Achievement of Children in Single-Parent Families

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Abstract

The study explored the experiences of 35 children of former Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund awardees through qualitative interviews. Particularly, the study sought to understand their experiences in single-parent households, before, during, and after their parents pursued a college degree as well as how they perceived the impact of the scholarships, especially in relation to their own educational attainment. From the qualitative interviews, three main areas were identified: the hardships of single-parent households, the challenges and possibilities of single parents' higher education, and the generational impact of the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund. For each area, themes and subthemes were identified along with their thick description. The findings of the study emphasize the significance of single parents' educational and economic accomplishment in children's education and quality of life even though they also note the challenges within single-parent households, especially during the parents' college years. The implications of the findings are discussed.

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Introduction

In 2010, 15% of the population in the United States was estimated to live in poverty, and Arkansas had a much higher rate of 19% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Also, compared with married-couple headed households, the risks of poverty are greater for single-parent headed households, especially for female-headed households. While the poverty rate was only 8% in 2010 for married-couple headed households with related children, it was 36% for single-parent households with related children (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). This is particularly troubling considering that 34% of children in the United States were reported to live in single-parent headed households. In the state of Arkansas, specifically, 36% of children were reported to live in single-parent headed households, and 44% of single-parent households with related children were estimated to live in poverty in 2010 (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

Recognizing the significant impact of single-parent households on poverty, the Arkansas Single Parent Scholarship Fund (ASPSF) was established in 1990 after its initial implementation in two counties in Arkansas. The mission of the ASPSF is to improve the lives of single parents and their children, assisting single parents to complete postsecondary education, obtain skilled employment, and subsequently promote self-sufficiency and empowerment, in recognition of the significant impact of education on individuals' income (Gregorio & Lee, 2002; Rodriguez-Pose & Tselios, 2009; Williams & Swail, 2005). The ASPSF is a nonprofit organization organized at the county level throughout the state of Arkansas. As of 2011, there were volunteers of affiliates in 75 counties who administer single-parent scholarships for qualifying students. Single parents with one or more children under the age of 18 who are the residents in Arkansas are eligible for scholarships if they are considered economically disadvantaged while the criteria for eligibility, including economic status, may vary from county to county. The single-parent scholarships are intended to help single parents not only with their tuition but, if necessary, with living expenses, day care and other needs as they pursue higher education. As of October 2012, the ASPSF has offered 31,219 scholarships, awarding more than 17 million dollars (ASPSF, 2013).

The ASPSF (2013) reported that retention and graduation rates for their awardees were estimated to be 82% in 2010, which were significantly higher than the average retention and graduation rates for the state. In 2010, the

average 1-year retention rate for those entering college for the first time was reported to be 61.6%, while the graduation rates were 37.8% and 19.8% for 4-year universities and 2-year colleges, respectively (Arkansas Department of Higher Education, 2010). In addition, according to Holyfield (2008), 85% of the former scholarship awardees interviewed were the first in their family to earn a postsecondary education, and 48% of the interviewees had earned or were in the process of pursuing advanced degrees. She also found that 88% of the former awardees interviewed were working full-time, and 98% of those with full-time jobs had an income above poverty wages. Besides the positive outcomes in their education and employment, the former awardees interviewed reported increased level of self-esteem and civic engagement such as volunteering in community organizations (Holyfield, 2008).

While it is reported that the ASPSF has helped single parents with their educational and economic achievements (ASPSF, 2013; Holyfield, 2008), it is unknown how such parental educational and economic achievements affect their children. While existing literature supports significant relationships between educational and economic status of parents and their children (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009; Teese & Polesel, 2003), little is known in regard to whether such relationships hold specifically for single-parent households. Furthermore, existing literature is limited in presenting the perspectives of children in these single-parent households, especially in relation to the impact of parental educational attainment and thus improved economic status. To fill such a gap in current knowledge, this study explored the experiences of 35 children of former ASPSF awardees through qualitative interviews.

Impact of Single-Parent Households on Children

Existing literature indicates that children from single-parent households have a lower level of educational achievement (Bogges, 1998; Downey, 1994; Hill, Yeung, & Duncan, 2001; Krein & Beller, 1988; Manning & Lamb, 2003). However, they also note that there are variations in the level of impact the single-parent households have on children's educational achievement (Hill et al., 2001; Krein & Beller, 1988). For example, Krein and Beller (1988) found that a child's gender, the period of a child's life, and the length of time a child spends in the single-parent households mediate the relationship between family structure, especially single-parent household, and children's educational attainment: being male, being in preschool years, and spending more time in single-parent households increase their likelihood of low educational achievement. While Ploeg's (2002) study did not focus on single-parent households, it reported that children who lived with both of

their biological parents were more likely to attend and complete college, compared with those who did not.

Furthermore, previous studies noted that the lower level of educational achievement reported for children in single-parent households is largely attributable to the lower socioeconomic status of the family, including the lower level of household income (Boggess, 1998; Manning & Lamb, 2003; Ploeg, 2002). However, Hill et al. (2001) reported that family income did not play a significant role in the lower educational attainment of children in single-parent households. Rather, they argued that the stability of a family played as important a role as family structure in children's educational attainment.

In addition to educational attainment, children in single-parent households are reported to experience difficulties or challenges in other areas. For example, children from single-parent households are likely to have poorer behavioral and cognitive outcomes (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Manning & Lamb, 2003). Girls from single-parent households are also more likely to have non-marital births (Hill et al., 2001). However, it was also noted that these difficulties or challenges children in single-parent households experience were largely attributed to family income and other factors, including quality of home, a parent's education and mental health, and a child's gender and race, rather than family structure of itself, especially single-parent households (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001).

While the literature on single-parent families suggests the difficulties or challenges for children from this particular family structure, the majority of these studies are based on the use of secondary data (Boggess, 1998; Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Downey, 1994; Hill et al., 2001; Krein & Beller, 1998; Ploeg, 2002). Children's own perspectives on the impact of single-parent households are, thus, limitedly presented in the current literature: Even though there are some studies that explore children's perspectives, they mainly focus on hardships and responsibilities related to scarce financial resources and limited parental presence at home (Berridge & Romich, 2011; Dodson & Dickert, 2004; Millar & Ridge, 2008). Few, if any, studies have looked into children's perspectives regarding the impact of single-parent households on their educational attainment, especially in relation to their parent's educational and economic achievements.

In addition, there is a scarcity of literature on the programs that specifically target single-parent families, especially the ones that support single parents' postsecondary education. Considering the vulnerability of children and parents in single-parent households, more studies are needed that explore the effectiveness of programs that aim to support single-parent families. Particularly, it will add significant knowledge to the current literature on

single-parent families to investigate whether programs that promote single parents' secondary education contribute to positive outcomes on the families' economic attainment and the children's educational achievement.

The current study attempts to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of 35 adult children of former ASPSF awardees. Using qualitative interviews, the study examines these adult children's perceptions of the impact of single-parent households. Particularly, the study explores their experiences before, during, and after their parents pursued the goal of higher education, which was supported by the ASPSF. It also looks into their perspectives on the impact of parental educational and economic achievements, especially in relation to their own educational attainment. The study addressed the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do children of former ASPSF awardees describe their experiences in single-parent households before, during, and after their parents pursued a degree in higher education?

Research Question 2: How do children of former ASPSF awardees describe the impact of the scholarships on their parents and their families, including its impact on their educational attainment, at the time of the interview?

Method

Study Sample

The participants of the study were adult children, aged 18 or older, of former ASPSF awardees. Initially, the executive director of the ASPSF contacted volunteers of affiliates throughout the state of Arkansas and explained the purpose and the procedures of the study. The executive director then provided the contact information of 22 affiliates to the researchers, who subsequently contacted these affiliates requesting any contact information available for former awardees. The affiliates are responsible for maintaining contact information of former and current ASPSF awardees for their assigned counties, and the quality of such record-keeping varied among the counties. The research team received contact information of 135 former ASPSF awardees from the affiliates and attempted to contact these former ASPSF awardees via mail, e-mail, or phone. However, the contact information received was often of no use because many of the addresses, e-mail addresses, or phone numbers were not current. The research team was able to reach a total of 46 former ASPSF awardees, and these former awardees were provided the details of the study, including its purpose and procedures, and asked whether they would

be willing to provide the contact information of their adult children, aged 18 or older.

Out of the 46 former ASPSF awardees contacted, 34 provided the contact information for their adult children, which totaled 47. The research team contacted these 47 adult children via e-mail or phone. A final sample of 35 adult children of former ASPSF awardees participated in the telephone interview. These 35 participants represented seven counties throughout the state of Arkansas, which has 75 counties in total. The study, including its sample selection procedure, was approved by the university institutional review board.

As illustrated in Table 1, the majority of the participants ($n = 21$) were in their 20's with the average age of 21.5 years old. The participants were also predominantly White females with 69% ($n = 24$) of them being White and 66% ($n = 23$) females. Most of the participants reported that they were single ($n = 27$) and had no children ($n = 26$).

While the study was mainly interested in the participants' experiences as a child from single-parent households, limited information on their parent was also collected. It was found that the majority of the participants ($n = 31$) were from single-mother households. In relation to the parent's educational attainment, 77% ($n = 27$) of the participants reported that their parents had earned a college degree, and four participants (11.4%) had parents still attending college at the time of the interview. Four participants (11.4%) did not respond for the question on their parent's educational attainment.

Data Collection Procedures

Grounded in a constructivist theoretical framework (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1996), the study identified themes and patterns from the interviews in relation to the experiences of children in single-parent households before, during, and after their parents received one or more scholarships from the ASPSF. As noted previously, there is limited literature on the perspectives and experiences of children in single-parent households; therefore, a qualitative, exploratory study was appropriate in seeking out the personal understanding of their experiences as a child from single-parent households (Patton, 2002). A total of five researchers completed the interviews, and a semistructured interview guide was used to ensure the consistency of the interviews. However, the researchers were allowed to probe further where appropriate. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

Because of the wide geographic distribution of the participants, interviews were completed via phone from April 2011 to October 2011, and the interviews

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information.

Variables	Frequency (N = 35)	Percentage
Age^a		
20 or younger	18	51.4
21-25	11	31.4
26 or older	6	17.1
Gender		
Male	12	34.3
Female	23	65.7
Race^a		
White	24	68.6
African American	5	14.3
Hispanic	4	11.4
Native American	1	2.9
Missing	1	2.9
Marital status^a		
Single	27	77.1
Engaged/living with a partner	3	8.6
Married	3	8.6
Divorced	1	2.9
Missing	1	2.9
Number of children		
Zero	26	74.3
One	6	17.1
Two	2	5.7
Missing	1	2.9

^aThe total percentage may not exactly be 100% due to rounding.

lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes. After the participants provided their verbal consent over the phone, the researchers started the interview with brief demographic questions on their age, gender, ethnicity, marital status and the number of children, followed by the main questions of the study. The semi-structured interview guide used addressed the participants' experiences before, during and after their parents pursued postsecondary education with the receipt of scholarships from the ASPSF.

Data Analytic Procedures

After the interviews were transcribed, five researchers independently read and coded these transcripts identifying the emerging themes. The team participated

in meetings to enhance research collection consistency and discuss study findings. The researchers reviewed the emergent themes as a group, subsequently looking for consistent themes among the researchers and identifying the subthemes. Notes were taken during this process and these were used in the final analysis conducted by two senior researchers. Relationships among codes were determined and the codes were developed into broader, more comprehensive themes. Significant time and discussion were devoted to the process of data analysis, which was critical to the integrity of the study.

To ensure rigor, several techniques were used in the process of data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, the collected data were reviewed by multiple researchers. As described previously, each researcher independently completed the coding process, and then met to discuss and compare the emerging themes as a group. In this process, credibility was enhanced since similar themes were identified by all five researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In addition, multiple perspectives were portrayed by study participants, and such divergent themes were included as a part of the study findings to display the rigor of the analysis in the study. Thick descriptions were also provided in the findings, which improves transferability. All these efforts were made to ensure that the coalescing of themes was correct, speaking honestly about participants' experiences, and thus to present trustworthy and reliable data.

Findings

In the study, the qualitative interviews explored three time periods: before, during, and after the participants' parents pursued higher education with the receipt of scholarships from the ASPSF. The categories developed from these time periods include the hardships of single-parent households, the challenges and possibilities of single parents' higher education, and the generational impact of the ASPSF. The themes under the category of the hardships of single-parent households include financial hardships, limited parent-child engagement and emotional stress. The themes identified for the time period when the parents pursued higher education were additional stress, changes in household responsibilities, increased emotional strength of the parents, and changes in parent-child relationship. In relation to the category of the generational impact of the ASPSF, the participants described both explicit and implicit changes, and most of them reported increased stability of their relationship with parents. The themes identified for each time period were subsequently broken down into subthemes with further analysis. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants' identity, pseudonyms were utilized in place of their actual names in the findings reported.

Prior to College Years: Hardships of Single-Parent Households

When inquired about their lives before the parents received the scholarships, all of the participants reported that their families were under a lot of stress, particularly financial hardships, and many of them attributed this to the parents' low level of education and income. Mary and James stated,

It was a struggle, because she didn't have like a degree, she didn't have anything, and she was having to work, like, whatever she could get, without a degree. And it was really hard, it was a struggle for all of us.

We were poor. I remember living in little shanty shacks and doing whatever. I remember a lot of mice. It was tough. Right before she went back to school we were actually in a women's shelter.

According to Patricia,

I know when my brother was first born I think I was about 11. My mom worked for the Girl Scouts and she'd work a lot of nights and you know, she didn't have a [lot of] choice [for a job], it was pretty much the only thing [job] she could do [without a college degree]. . . . Like my brother had to use cloth diapers because we didn't really have money for disposable ones. No extras. No movies. No eating out.

Many participants commented that while their parents understood the importance of higher education, it was a great challenge for them to pursue it without additional support, because of the hardships the parents were experiencing as a single parent. According to them, the parents could not afford higher education despite their hard work. Linda noted, "She was a single mom and it was difficult and sometimes she didn't go to school, because she couldn't afford to."

Many participants also noted that their parents were not able to engage with them and their siblings due to time and financial restraints. Barbara said,

She was probably a lot more strict, with discipline and things like that, you know, making sure that we were home at a certain time, so she could know where we were at all times when she was working, she was busy getting things together. So, it was hard, that mom-connection kind of thing.

Also, the majority of the participants consistently perceived that the parents had a low level of confidence and self-esteem during this time period. Michael commented, "I know [due to her low level of self-esteem] she was more emotionally dependent upon someone else." In addition, many of the

participants reported that they also felt the stress and struggle their parents were experiencing. Maria commented, "I was stressed for her. I mean I was away at school. So I wasn't up here, but just talking to her on the phone, I mean, I know when she stressed so I was stressed for her just because I knew it was hard." Similarly, Barbara noted,

She was stressed. [For example] It upset her that [because] she [had to] worked so much she wasn't able to go to as much of our stuff, like at school. . . . It [watching her stressed] usually was really draining on me.

However, a few participants reported that their parents or they had not experienced such stress and struggle. An example of this was observed when Elizabeth stated, "She always had very high self-esteem. Like if she was stressed, she never showed it. She was, I mean, she was just busy. I was never stressed as well."

During College Years: Challenges and Possibilities of Single Parents' Higher Education

When exploring the time period during their parents' pursuit of higher education, the participants reported that the struggles and hardships their families had previously experienced did not change much. The participants consistently reported that their parents experienced a lot of stress during this time period, often more stress, because they had to take on additional academic demands while continuing their jobs and household duties. However, the participants noted that the parents had fully committed themselves to this added responsibility as a college student. John noted,

Honestly, I see him a lot more stressed out now than he was. Obviously that is understandable. I mean, college is a completely different world. I really see him trying a lot harder at what he does now, especially as he has gotten through more and more years of college. He obviously knew how important it was, but you just get more sense that he's really had his nose to the grindstone and is working hard. Most of what I remember from his college career was him working really, really hard at it. . . . It was more stress.

While the parents had increased work demands, many of the participants acknowledged that because of the scholarships, their parents were finally able to pursue a college degree. Reflecting this, Maria stated,

So, the semester that she got the single-parent scholarship, it was just a relief because it was just easier for her because she had that much more money that she could, you know, use for bills and things like that.

Another example was seen when Jennifer summarized the time that her mom found out she had received the scholarship. She stated,

I remember this one time she was debating if she should finish her degree or go try to find a job because it's financially very straining to stay in school, it really is. I know that first hand, so I was like, "Well, Mom, you're already in school. Just keep going." And she's like, "I don't know, Hon, I don't know." Then like a week later she calls me and she goes, "Guess what? I got my Single Parent Scholarship. I can go back for another semester." And I'm like, "Thank God!" you know, because had she not had the money, she wouldn't be able to keep going. She was able to make her house payment and put food on the table for her and my little sister, so she was able to continue in school, so financially it was tough but she was able to do it due to getting the scholarship, so it helped her in so many ways.

However, a few participants noted that despite the scholarships, their families continued to experience financial hardships while the parents were in school. An example of this continued financial strain is seen in the following statement by Robert:

Well, when she was going to school, I think it was a little bit tight financially, because we had to spend more money on books for her, but I'm not sure how much the scholarships covered, but I remember our finances being a little tighter when she was going to school. We hardly ever went out to eat or anything like that and on the weekends we would go to Sam's club (a retail warehouse club) to eat samples and that was like our quality time together. You know, we didn't go to movies but we knew that it was just a sacrifice that we had to make so she could manage. So, I remember while she was in school, money was really tight.

Many participants also noted that they provided additional support for their parents, especially with household chores, so that the parents could spend more time on their school work. An example is when Susan said,

If something needed to be done, she would just make me and my sister do it. That's just how it's been, like a lot of kids have set chores, but my mom has always just been like, if the (house) isn't clean or something is not clean, it's just my responsibility to do it.

Margaret stated, "It made me help out a lot more around the house. Watching my little sister, and stuff like that."

Even though the participants and their families continued to experience challenges while the parents were in school, the participants reported changes

in their parents, especially the parents' increased self-esteem and confidence. Some comments reflecting this theme included the following:

She definitely had more confidence in herself, and, you know, believing that she could do things, she worked more. You could tell she worked so hard. You could really tell when she would get a good grade it would be such a sense of accomplishment.

At the beginning she was like second-guessing herself on everything, but I think as she went on, she got good grades and stuff. It kind of helped boost her confidence. But I had to help her a lot more in the beginning definitely than by the middle.

I think it was empowering to her to be able to go to school and to say, "I'm making something of myself [even though] I may be a single parent and I may be an immigrant." I think it added a lot to her self-esteem.

Furthermore, some of the participants witnessed other positive social and emotional changes in the parents. These included observing their parents becoming happier and more focused, and expanding social networks. Michael described what had impressed him most when his mother started college education. He stated,

I think what stands out the most is that she seemed like that she had a lot more friends that she built relationships with. Even if they were short-term, she was social. Socially she was reaching out more. She seemed really happy about that. Because as a hairdresser it's the same, she did a lot of hair, but it was the same people each week. So she seemed excited to be meeting a lot of new people.

John stated, "He's made a lot more friends in college and gained tons more knowledge obviously and he seems to be a lot more (beaming) than he used to be."

When exploring the participants' relationship with their parents, there were different opinions in regards to the effect of the parents' college education. An interesting divergent theme involved the participants' reflection on how the parents' college years had changed their parent-child relationships. It seemed that the participant's age during this time often determined their response on how their relationship with the parents had changed. When the participants were old enough to share their educational experiences with the parents during this time period, they often described the relationship becoming closer. These participants particularly highlighted the time they had spent

together on school work and how this contributed to the closer relationship. Many participants also reported that they had helped their parents a lot with their homework. Mary and Jennifer who were older during their parents' college years reflected,

When my mom was in school, I was in school too. We would talk about our work together. And kind of try to help each other I guess.

So, whenever she is having a tough day in school, she calls me and I'm like, 'Just keep going, Mom.' And when I'm having a tough day in school in college, I call her and she tells me to keep going, so we definitely use one another as a support.

Another older participant, Patricia, made the following statement:

You know, she was home a lot more because she did her homework at home and my brother said sometimes they had to be a little quieter, but they would like study together. Me and my mom would go sometimes to like coffee shops and study together. And she started staying up a lot later, so I think it made all the bedtimes, it kind of pushed them back and everyone got to stay up a little bit later.

However, when the participants were younger during the parents' college years, the relationship tended to become more distant as a result of the parents spending more time on their own education rather than with their children. Dorothy and James who were younger during their parents' college years commented,

Because she spent more time on her homework so she didn't help me as much. But she did what she could.

Less groceries, less her being involved with me at school, less her and me going places, because I didn't have a car yet or anything. And more of me doing all the chores around the house, more me just going to my room and being quiet because she was in the living room on the computer doing her homework.

Finally, most participants reported that their parents' expectation of them changed during the parents' college years. Not only did the responsibilities in household chores increased but there was also more of an emphasis on the attainment of good grades and college education. Statements by Lisa and Nancy highlight this subtheme, "She got very good grades, and she started expecting very good grades out of me"; and "She continued to reinforce me

furthering my education, not just stopping at high school. She was saying if she could do it, she was and I saw her go through it, she was saying that I could do it." When describing how her mother had changed the expectation, Jennifer commented,

If I called my mother and told her that I wanted to quit school prior to her going to college, I think she would have been ok with it. Now she'd say, "No you can do it. Tough it out. You definitely can do it." I think she would be less lenient on me.

However, some participants noted that their parents had always had high expectations, particularly in relation to their educational attainment. Confirming this subtheme, John said,

Dad always cracked down on school anyway, so we always had the homework time and I always had that stressed and he was always there whether he was in school or not. You know, he always made time for family, so I wouldn't say that things changed much.

After College Years: Generational Impact of Scholarships and Parents' Higher Education

When exploring the effects of the ASPSF on the children of its awardees, the first impact commonly recognized by the participants was the explicit outcome of their parents' higher education. These came in the form of increased financial security and extra resources as well as an understanding of the steps and resources needed for college education. The enhanced financial stability and the increased knowledge of available resources were large incentives for the participants to pursue their own higher education.

While the scholarships offered financial resources that supported the parents' pursuit of higher education, the family's financial stability and security mostly came after the parents' graduation with their new jobs of higher income. An example of this was seen in the following comments: "I mean, it's just a lot easier, because she has more money, and she's not stressed out about what we're going to eat, or what we're going to do. We can get gas"; and "It provided better opportunities for my family. My mom was able to get a better job and better pay. It actually pushed me to want to go to school even more." Another example was when Helen was commenting on the impact of her mother's educational attainment. She stated, "We don't have all that stress anymore and she is able to take me and my brother out, do things for us a lot more." The participants also used the term stability when describing

their current quality of life. An example includes, "I'm in a stable environment and I'm not moving all the time and I have a very routine life. It's not very exciting and that's just the way I like it."

Several participants also commented that because of their parents' educational achievement, the parents were subsequently better able to help them financially with their college education. Thomas responded, "She was able to help me through college because she got her degree."

In addition to financial support, the parents' college education provided the participants with the explicit knowledge of the necessary steps toward college education. Seeing their parents prepare for and go through the college process was invaluable to them. Such experiences enabled the participants to understand what the college educational process entailed and what resources were available to them. William confirmed this through his statement, "Seeing how she got help and got grants, I really realized that there is financial aid out there, especially for people who don't have a lot." A comment by Karen also illustrated this increased knowledge and understanding, "It gave me a view of what to expect. I did get a sense by seeing what my dad went through. The available resources."

Lastly, another explicit outcome was the access to resources provided by the scholarships and its impact on the participants and their families. David reflected on the time his mother brought home their first computer, which was made possible with financial support from the ASPSF. He fondly expressed how this purchase changed his and his family's life. He stated, "For a fourteen-year-old who grew up in the sticks, the Internet and a computer was a big deal. A lot bigger deal than you'd think."

The other outcome of the ASPSF came at an implicit level. Implicit changes are often difficult to see or touch, unlike money or other tangible resources, but it is something a person can often feel within themselves. Such implicit outcomes include greater personal expectations, and an increased self-esteem and belief in their own abilities. Just witnessing their parents successfully earn a degree in higher education was an instrumental element in the participants' own desire to succeed in and continue on with their own education.

Consistently, the participants commented that they had never known anyone who had achieved such high educational goals before their parents' success. Witnessing this process greatly increased their own confidence in their abilities to pursue and complete higher education. The comments from several participants included: "It's really given me a perspective on how important it is and I've gained a lot more respect for my dad. He really had to balance a lot and seeing him be able to make it through to the other side, it means a lot more than just seeing him go to school"; "I saw from what my

mom went through that it wouldn't be easy, but it would be worth it"; "I wasn't a straight A student so I never thought it was an option. Seeing her going to school and actually seeing her stick with it and completing it, I think it really motivated me"; and

You're born in the lower class and a lot of times you stay in the lower class. This enables people to show their true potential and move out of the lower class. Without her going to school I might still be working at Tyson's (the largest U.S. processor and marketer of chicken, beef, and pork, based in Arkansas). But I'm going to Taiwan next year to teach English.

By observing their parents' increased confidence and drive, the participants also grew more confident and motivated. Lastly, the participants showed their increased assurance in their own future possibilities. One participant's statement showed this new belief, "I can do and pursue what I want now."

In combination, both explicit and implicit outcomes significantly have affected the children's own commitment to higher education. The participants consistently recognized the significance of a college degree in a person's life after witnessing their parents' hardships, especially as a single parent. Mary's comment reflected these ideas. She stated,

It made me realize how hard it is when you don't have a degree when you haven't went to college. It makes you really realize that you need to go to college. Unless, I mean if you don't, it's going to be really, really hard.

Charles also noted, "It was just like seeing other people who have degrees, and it's kind of comparing them to the people who didn't. (For) the people who have degrees life was much better than people who didn't."

The participants' commitment to higher education was also demonstrated by their level of educational attainment. At the time of the interview, most participants were either enrolled in a higher educational institution or held a degree in higher education (Table 2). Among the 35 participants, 22 were currently attending school, and one of them was pursuing a master's degree. Two participants held a bachelor's or associate's degree (an academic degree usually awarded by community or technical colleges), and 6 had one or more years of college education completed but were out of school at the time of the interview. Most of the participants who were not currently in school, however, were planning to return to school in the near future. For example, one participant got pregnant during her high school years, which made it difficult for her to pursue a college degree, and another participant was currently serving in Navy but both were committed to returning to college. Only one participant was not planning to obtain any further higher education at the time of

Table 2. Participants' Educational Attainment.

	Frequency (N = 35)	Percentage
Currently enrolled in higher education	22	62.9
Bachelor's or associate's degree attained (no current enrollment)	2	5.7
One or more years of college education attained (no current enrollment)	6	17.1
No college education	5	14.3

the interview, who reported her occupation as an apprentice at a vision center at the local retail store.

Another impact of the ASPSF recognized by the participants was on their relationships with their parents. These included increased closeness, enhanced respect, and subsequently a greater sense of pride toward their parents. As described earlier, many participants described positive relationships with their parents before and during the parents' college years. It was noted that such positive relationships got stronger since the parents had obtained a degree in higher education. Many participants reflected not only an even closer relationship, but their greater pride in the parents. Tim stated, "As a child of the single-parent, there are hard times. But whenever a parent works hard to go to school and achieve something like that, it gives you some dignity toward your parent." Patricia also commented,

I realized she was a whole lot smarter than I gave her credit for and I guess we kind of got to know each other more, like intellectually, and by reading her papers, I found out more about stuff . . . childhood, and like the way she felt about things. So that was pretty interesting.

Also, such stronger relationships often had a lot to do with the fact that the parents now had more time to spend with the children, and the participants witnessed much more confidence and happiness in their parents during their time spent together. For instance Betty stated, "She wasn't able to spend much time with us while she was in school. Now that she's finished we hang out more and have more family time than we were able to." Richard also stated, "She's making so much more money now so we can go out and have fun. She can take us all out. She's so much less stressed and she has all this passion."

During this time period, most of the participants reflected on decreased stress in their family and increased closeness with their parents, but a few participants noted that their families had not experienced much improvement

and the strained relationship with their parents had not changed. For instance, Susan stated, "I mean sometimes people think that all I got to do is get a degree so everything is better now. But obviously that's not always the case because you have to find work afterwards." In addition, those participants who reported difficulty in their relationship with the parents during the parents' college years commented that such distant relationship had not been recovered even after their parents earned a degree in higher education. As described previously, the participants' strained relationship with the parents during the parents' college years was partly because of the reduced time together: They reported that they had spent much time with their grandparents or fathers.

Discussion

The participants' description of their lives before their parents received the scholarships was consistent with prior literature on the experiences of children in single-parent households (Fitzpatrick, 2008; Polakow, 1993). Financial hardships were common experiences for the participants interviewed, and the participants witnessed their parents' struggle, including their low level of self-esteem and confidence. Many participants also reported limited time spent with their parents. It is noteworthy that many participants recognized the parents' low level of education as one of the main reasons for their financial difficulties. Their perception is consistent with the literature that reports the significant relationship between a person's level of education and income (Allegretto, 2006; Chiswick, 1971; Gregorio & Lee, 2002). Such perception seems to be based on their own experience of the changes in the family's financial situation, which was closely related to the parent's attainment of a college degree.

For the majority of the participants, these hardships they had experienced discontinued on their parents' graduation from a college. One of the most prominent changes the participants noted was the family's financial stability, which also affected them and their family in other areas. With a college degree, the parents were able to obtain a job with a higher level of income, and it brought more stability and opportunities to the entire family. For example, the participants commented that the financial security had enabled the family to have a stable housing and to enjoy leisure activities, all of which they could not have afforded in the past. They also said that their parents could now offer financial support for their own college education. Since the participants' experience of the changes in the family's economic status was tied to the parents' higher education, such experience served as a great motivation for the participants to pursue a college degree.

The financial stability the participants and their families experienced with the parents' college education reiterates the significant role of higher education in determining an individual or a family's socioeconomic status. The findings support that college education is one of the influential factors for an individual's income level: For example, in 2012 the median income for young adults aged 25 to 34 who have a bachelor's degree was estimated to be \$47,900 while the comparable figures for those with and without a high school diploma were \$30,000 and \$22,900, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, considering income disparities between males and females, college education seems to be more critical in addressing the financial hardships of female-headed single-parent households: In 2012, female-to-male earnings ratio was reported to be 0.77, indicating a lower income level for females in comparison to males (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013), and this implies that families headed by single mothers with no college degree are likely to experience substantial financial difficulties.

Considering the critical role of higher education in an individual or a family's income level, such programs as the ASPSF should be expanded to address the economic disadvantage of many single-parent families, majority of which are headed by females. In the study, the findings offer additional evidence for the positive impact of a parent's higher education, especially on the family's socioeconomic status: Programs like the ASPSF that support parents' higher education should thus be further advocated and expanded as an effective approach to help single-parent families to overcome the poverty and its impact.

The need for such programs is even more crucial, considering the difficulties single or unmarried parents may experience in completing college education (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010; Mitchell, 2003; Yakaboski, 2010). For instance, single mothers often share their challenges in pursuing higher education (Kahn, Butler, Deprez, & Polakow, 2004; Mitchell, 2003; Ratner, 2004): in many cases, these single mothers had to give up on college education for low-paying, low-skill jobs in order to keep their benefits from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. The literature further notes that economic mobility is very difficult to achieve, especially for children from single-parent households with limited resources and parenting (DeLeire & Lopoo, 2010; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Solon, 1992). Therefore, the current public policies for low-income families, including single-parent families, should be reexamined and redirected in a way that supports a parent and/or a child's higher education, rather than forcing their engagement in workforce in sacrifice of their educational opportunities, because without a college degree it is very difficult to get out of the cycle of poverty.

The findings of the study also show that the parents' educational attainment affected not only the economic status of the participants' family but also the participants' educational outcomes. In addition to the availability of financial support from their parents, the participants' observation of the parents' efforts and success in higher education had a significant impact on them: Many participants noted that their confidence in their own ability to succeed in higher education increased after witnessing their parents' completion of college education. Many participants reportedly felt that they could successfully earn a college degree if their parents were able to do it despite many responsibilities and hardships as a single parent.

Furthermore, the participants felt more ready for college education because they became aware of what to prepare and what to expect, based on their parents' experiences. This finding is consistent with the existing literature that reports the significant effect of cultural capital on an individual's educational attainment. Cultural capital is often defined as knowledge of or familiarity with dominant or high-status culture, which in many cases leads to feelings of confidence and entitlement (Reay, 2004). It is reported that cultural capital has a larger impact on a person's academic success than her/his inherited, innate talent (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Bourdieu, 1986). In relation to college education, cultural capital can be viewed as knowledge of what a college life involves, including the values and environment of higher education as well as different human and financial resources (Bourdieu, 1986; McDonough, 1997). It is consistently testified that children whose parents do not hold a college degree are disadvantaged because this cultural capital of knowledge and competence is often transmitted through parents (De Graaf, 1986; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

As a result, in the current study, all participants interviewed, except one, were currently pursuing or planning to pursue higher education. This finding implies that the significant relationship between parent and child's educational status (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2007; Morgan et al., 2009; Teese & Polesel, 2003) may hold for single-parent household: It can be stated that children who have parents with higher education, whether they are from two-parent or single-parent families, are more likely to earn a college degree. Specifically, the findings of the study highlight the role of a parent's college education in aspiring and preparing children's higher education, not only with her/his financial support but also with her/his knowledge and experiences. This finding offers a better understanding of the mechanism underlying the association between parent and child's educational attainment, and future studies should further investigate this mechanism of how parental education affects children's educational outcome.

Another finding of the study that should be noted in relation to the participants' education was the changes in the parents' expectation on their children's academic performance. While a few participants commented that their parents always had high expectation, many participants reported that their parents' expectation had significantly increased since their pursuit of higher education. This heightened expectation may be an additional factor that contributes to the participants' educational attainment since a parent's expectation is documented to be related to children's academic achievement (Davis-Kean, 2005; Seginer, 1983).

While the main focus of the study was the impact of parental educational attainment on their children, the study also reports the changes within the parents. The participants noted their parents' increased self-esteem and confidence since their pursuit of higher education. They also observed the parents' expansion of social network with their college education. Considering that many single parents have limited social support, which is often relied on for survival rather than upward mobility (Cook 2012; Stack, 1974), this finding presents important implications: Higher education is a key factor for single parents to expand their social network or social capital, which will allow them a privileged access to resources that they did not have (Portes, 1998).

While the study reports the positive impact of parents' higher education on children and the whole family, it also notes the challenges single-parent households were faced with during the parents' college years. Many participants had to take additional responsibilities within the household in the forms of child care and chores in order for their parents to invest more time in studying. The participants accepted these responsibilities as a necessity for the parent and the family as many children in single-parent families do (Berridge & Romich, 2011; Dodson & Dickert, 2004). However, the impact of such household tasks should be further explored, especially in relation to children's well-being and academic achievement because prior studies report that a significantly larger amount of chores at home children in single-parent families perform result in limited time on school and extracurricular activities as well as high level of stress (Dodson & Dickert, 2004; Winton, 2003).

Furthermore, it was noted that the majority of the participants were in their teens during the parents' college years, subsequently offering support to the parents with child care and household chores. Therefore, it is unknown how plausible it is for single parents with very young children, 10 years old or younger, to pursue higher education. Future studies should explore whether a single parent's needs vary, depending on the child's age, and whether the child's age affects the parent's likelihood of successfully completing higher education. It is likely that financial support alone may not be sufficient for single parents with young children to pursue and earn a college degree.

During the parent's college years, the participants also experienced decreased time spent with their parent, which was already limited due to the parent often working more than one job as the sole breadwinner in the family. While older children seemed to understand such changes, the reduced time with the parents seemed to have had more impact on younger children: The younger children in the study reported that their relationship with the parents had become more strained while the parents were in school. This finding is quite consistent with Millar and Ridge's (2008) study in the United Kingdom that described children's unhappiness with their limited time with the mothers after the single mothers had left income support and taken paid employment. According to them, this was especially true for younger children because they wanted to spend more time with their mothers. This finding suggests an additional challenge for single-parent families with younger children, and the developmental needs of these younger children should be considered in programs for single-parent households, along with the needs of the parents. Future studies that examine the impact of the amount of time a child spends with parents, especially in single-parent households, can offer guidance for such programs.

Study Limitation

While the findings of the study are promising in addressing the economic and educational difficulties children in single-parent households are likely to experience, they should be interpreted with caution. First, the sample of the study has very limited generalizability. While there is no information available on the number of the former ASPSF awardees, the ASPSF awarded more than 30,000 scholarships since 1990; it is noted that the number of scholarships one single parent receives vary. Out of all former ASPSF awardees, the research team was only able to obtain contact information for 135 former awardees, and the final sample of the study included 35 adult children of 29 former awardees. As a result, it is likely that the findings of the study are biased toward those with positive experiences in relation to their parents' receipt of the ASPSF. In other words, the former ASPSF awardees and their children who successfully obtained a college degree and subsequent economic stability were more willing to participate in the study, in comparison to those who did not.

In addition, as noted previously, the majority of the participants were in their teens during the parents' college years, and this may have skewed the findings of the study as well: Single-parent families with children of different ages, especially young children, may not be appropriately represented in the study findings.

Future studies of a larger scale should be completed to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs as the ASPSF in educational and economic outcomes of children in single-parent families. Furthermore, because of the exploratory nature of the study, no conclusion can be drawn on the effectiveness of the ASPSF, especially in relation to educational outcomes of children in single-parent households. Studies that examine the net effect of the ASPSF or similar programs should be completed in the future.

Conclusion

The study explored how parents' college education affects the children and the whole family in single-parent households, which was supported by the scholarships offered in Arkansas. The participants of the study, who are children of former scholarship recipients, consistently noted the economic mobility of the family and their own educational attainment, which was made possible with their parents' college degree. These findings of the study emphasize that more resources and support should be provided for single parents in their pursuit of higher education, which will have positive generational impact, contributing to children's successful educational attainment.

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