

Student parents break tradition of mom at home

"You're thinking too much about yourself, why don't you stay at home with your children more often?"

To many young parents enrolled in some form of education, statements like the one above, spoken by relatives or friends, may continue to haunt them. At times, a small morsel of guilt will result.

But some women at the College are helping to explode the myth that being a mother means caring for your child from birth to high school graduation. The reality for many of these women is that economics will not allow them to play the traditional role of mother, and expect to make ends meet.

a direct correlation between the amount of time spent with the child and the child's growth. A majority of the women argued this point. One mother felt that quality time is just as valuable as an abundance of the same. "During the time I'm with the children, I work to play and interact with them, and more importantly, guide them in safe and unsafe situations," she said.

The student-grandmother works on appealing to formal manners. "I find that I get a lot more from the child in this way," she said.

The consensus of the entire group of women was that too much time is just as bad as no time at all. Three found that



Mother and child spend time together getting to know each other.

Story and photo by Kelly Laughlin

"What is being a 'total' mother? Does it mean applying the total day, or... 'making the home the center of your existence'?"

The guilt complex for one woman, who has spent a good share of time as both a mother and grandmother, is "important to not sustain. It interferes with your studies."

Another woman, Janet Bowers, a sophomore at the College, is a divorced mother with one little girl. Her opinion is, "it would absolutely be great if I could be a total mother to her, but circumstance won't allow it."

What is being a "total" mother? Does it mean applying the total day, or, as one student-mother put it, "making the home the center of your existence?"

Leru Bevns, who has two children, one seven years, the other three, said, "the image of myself is much better since I began school. I found that staying at home all day did get to be a dredge. I remember the time when I had eight hours to clean house. Now I have one hour, and I get more accomplished."

Bowers, who stayed at home the first six months after her baby's birth before beginning her college education, found that "my child's needs were different. She doesn't always want to be with me. She's very outgoing little girl—her growth means more to me than being with me all the time. She really needs to socialize with others," she said.

Carolyn Russ, mother of two children, one 15 months and another almost three, has the help of her husband in raising their children. "Dad watches them while I'm not here," she said. "He helps a lot in caring for them while I am at school."

Quantity and quality time are two factors that concern some skeptics of contemporary parenting. A good number see

the extended time of the 'Home' situation caused boredom for them. One said, "I found that I would get frustrated and begin to take out my aggression in the wrong way."

Where do these women keep their children while attending school? For two, sitters and day care centers do not apply. One student takes care of her young grandchildren and another, Russ, depends upon her husband to care for the children while away.

Finding a sitter can often result in hassles. Discovering one that fits a person's own

"Being a student and a mother almost forces you to plan out your time effectively."

idea of a good sitter can be a tedious task. Bowers looked for two years before she found the right one. To her it meant "a sitter that I could trust in, and know that she will raise my girl the way I would."

For the student-grandmother, there's a definite preference to a relative as a sitter. "A relative is usually more reliable and less expensive. In my case, taking care of a six and 11 year old, five to eight hours, four days a week, it should almost be a requirement that the children receive the same kind of love and security given to them in their earlier years," she said.

Day care is available at the College from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday. For most single parents it's the most convenient type of care. One parent said, "I know that my child is going to get a good education while I'm not around. Many times this can-

not be provided by a sitter because they don't have very much teaching background."

How do the children feel about the situation? Many are too young to make a response. For them it's perfectly natural. All of the parents agreed that it's important that the child be fulfilled by more people than

just immediate parents and relatives. "My four-year-old thinks it's really great. She goes to school now, and feels very grown up since I'm going to school like her," one parent said.

The problem, according to the women, is rarely getting the child to accept the parent as both student and mother. More often than not, the problem is helping the child understand that it's time for mother to study. A few of the mothers find it helpful to study after the child is asleep. Another has, as her son said, "private time with the books. She'll say that she needs a certain amount of time alone, and I'll know what to do," he said.

Others are still finding it quite difficult to get started. Bevns said, "Once I was writing a term paper, and she rolled on it, which makes it pretty hard to get anything accomplished."

The grandmother-sitter said, "My two grandchildren are a boy and a girl--rivals--this means that I often have to play referee, and can't concentrate on what I'm doing."

Whatever the circumstance, mixing studies and sitting rarely works. "I usually try to get as far away from the children as possible while studying," one mother said. "I love them very dearly, but there's a time and a place for

everything." Many of the mothers stressed 'organization' as the main ingredient in a successful college/mother role.

"Being a student and a mother almost forces you to plan out your time effectively," one mother said.

Though parenting and school don't jell right away, one mother said, "it's really a great experience, both for the children and for myself. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

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