

Tenacious Ethiopian Women and Their Rise to Educational Success

by

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This dissertation uses narrative inquiry to explore the stories of 11 rural Ethiopian women who were extremely successful in their educational careers. One hour semi-structured interviews were conducted in Ethiopia with 35 women who had completed master's degrees. From these, eleven focal participants were selected whose parents had little to no schooling, voiced their family's struggles with poverty, and were from very rural areas in Ethiopia. After four rounds of coding were conducted, 17 categories emerged showing trends in participants' stories. Then each category was refined into two separate themes of Strategies for Endurance and Motivation to Envision a Brighter Future. These chapters look at specific ways participants persisted through the challenges that came their ways; they also show how and why participants were able stay motivated in the midst of many setbacks. Their stories provide insight into factors that contribute to the enrollment and retention of rural school girls all the way up through graduate school.

Furthermore, I apply American persistence theories to the Ethiopian context. Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Departure from Institutions of Higher Education was meant to analyze the decisions on why students persist in school or dropped out. Weidman's (1989) Socialization Conceptual Approach added to this theory by showing the social aspects that are important to this decision. Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework takes into account the strength minority students demonstrate in the school system. I found that Tinto (1993) and Weidman's (1989) theories were difficult to apply in the Ethiopian context but had some crossover relating to interpersonal and institutional contexts. This study makes a

contribution to Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth in the context of this developing nation.

Table of Contents

Dedication	xv
Acknowledgements	xvi
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research Question	3
1.2 Significance of the Study.....	3
2.0 Literature Review	5
2.1 Background Information	5
2.1.1 Ethiopia	6
2.1.2 Women in Ethiopia	8
2.2 The Education System.....	10
2.2.1 Primary and Secondary Education	10
2.2.1.1 Enrollment.....	11
2.2.2 Secondary Education	13
2.3 Higher Education.....	15
2.4 History of Higher Education	16
2.5 Higher Education Expansion.....	17
2.6 Technical Schools.....	19
2.6.1 Vocational Schools	19
2.7 Non-Governmental Education	20
2.8 How the Public Universities Function	20
2.8.1 Financing Higher Education	21

2.9 Post-Graduate Higher Education	23
2.10 Quality Assurance	24
2.11 Government Initiatives for Women	24
2.12 Educational Challenges.....	27
2.12.1 Enrollment	27
2.12.2 Challenges	29
2.13 University Challenges.....	31
2.13.1 Lack of Support Services and Academic Authority.....	31
2.13.2 Lack of Female Staff.....	32
2.13.3 Lack of Proper Facilities	34
2.14 Academically Based Challenges	35
2.14.1 Personal Challenges	36
2.14.2 Relationship Influences.....	37
2.14.3 Hostile Challenges	38
2.15 Circumstantial Challenges.....	41
2.15.1 Economic Challenges	41
3.0 Theoretical Framework.....	44
3.1 Tinto’s Model of Persistence.....	45
3.1.1 Pre-Entry Attributes.....	46
3.1.2 Goals and Commitment.....	47
3.1.3 Institutional Experiences	48
3.1.4 Academic and Social Integration.....	48
3.2 Community Cultural Wealth.....	50

3.2.1 Aspirational Capital.....	51
3.2.2 Linguistic Capital.....	51
3.2.3 Familial Capital.....	52
3.2.4 Social Capital.....	53
3.2.5 Navigational Capital	53
3.2.6 Resistant Capital	54
3.3 Concluding Thoughts on Framework.....	55
4.0 Methodology	57
4.1 Narrative Inquiry	57
4.1.1 The Interpretivist Approach	60
4.1.2 Steps in a Narrative Study.....	62
5.0 Research Design	64
5.1 Research Team.....	64
5.2 Location	65
5.3 Recruitment of Participants	66
5.4 Data Collection Procedure.....	68
5.5 Data Analysis Procedure.....	69
5.5.1 Coding	69
5.5.1.1 Coding the Interviews as a Whole Document	74
5.6 Validity	75
5.7 Limitations and Caveats	77
6.0 Results	79
6.1 Attributes of the Participants	79

6.1.1 Economic Status	80
6.1.2 Parent Educational Status and Occupation.....	83
6.1.3 Eleven Participants Chosen for Analysis	84
6.1.4 Participants' Attributes	86
6.1.5 Majors and Careers	88
6.2 Key Categories	89
7.0 Strategies for Endurance.....	94
7.1 Individual	95
7.1.1 Enduring through Hardship	96
7.1.1.1 Surviving a Lack of Family Support.....	102
7.1.1.2 Persisting in the Midst of Harassment.....	106
7.1.2 Preparing in the Face of No Teacher Support	111
7.1.3 Studying in the Midst of Housework.....	114
7.1.4 Thriving with Spiritual Sustenance.....	117
7.1.4.1 Interpreting Their Faith.....	123
7.1.5 Finding Odd Jobs to Stay in School	125
7.1.5.1 Funding Graduate School	130
7.2 Interpersonal.....	132
7.2.1 Leveraging Family Support	132
7.2.1.1 Financing Education.....	134
7.2.2 Relying on Friendships	143
7.2.2.1 Helping Each Other	144
7.2.2.2 Living with Friends.....	146

7.2.2.3 Giving Charitably	147
7.2.2.4 Walking to School	149
7.2.2.5 Choosing Friends Wisely.....	151
7.3 Institutional.....	154
7.3.1 Taking Advantage of Government Support	154
7.3.1.1 Tapping into the Gender Office.....	158
7.3.2 Attending Blind Schools	160
7.3.2.1 Benefiting Blind Students.....	162
7.3.3 Finding Support in Religious Institutions.....	164
7.3.3.1 Protecting Students.....	165
7.3.3.2 Supporting Students	166
7.4 Strategic Conclusions	168
8.0 Motivations for Envisioning a Brighter Future	170
8.1 Individual	172
8.1.1 Escape from Poverty	172
8.1.2 Dream of a Better Future	174
8.1.3 Intellectual Capacity to Succeed	178
8.1.4 Desire to Learn	184
8.2 Interpersonal.....	187
8.2.1 Families	187
8.2.1.1 Believers.....	187
8.2.1.2 Providers.....	194
8.2.2 Teachers	199

8.2.2.1 Financial Helpers	202
8.2.2.2 Advocates	203
8.2.2.3 Encouragers.....	203
8.2.2.4 Role Models	205
8.2.3 Others	207
8.2.3.1 Influencers	208
8.3 Strategic Conclusions	214
9.0 Discussion.....	215
9.1 Pre-Entry Attributes	216
9.1.1 Family Background and Familial Capital	216
9.1.2 Skills and Ability and Linguistic Capital.....	217
9.1.3 Navigational Capital	218
9.1.4 Prior Schooling.....	220
9.2 Goal Commitments.....	221
9.2.1 Intentions	221
9.2.2 Goals and Institutional Commitment.....	222
9.2.3 Aspirational Capital.....	223
9.2.4 External Commitments.....	224
9.3 Institutional Experiences	226
9.3.1 Academic Performance and Faculty/Staff Interactions	226
9.3.2 Resistant Capital	227
9.3.3 Extra-Curricular Activities	227
9.3.4 Peer Group Interactions.....	228

9.3.5 Social Capital.....	228
9.3.6 Spiritual Capital.....	229
9.4 Personal Normative Integration.....	229
9.4.1 Academic and Social Integration.....	230
9.5 Concluding Thoughts	230
10.0 Recommendations	234
10.1 To the Female Student	234
10.2 To the Families.....	236
10.3 To the Teachers.....	237
10.4 To the Institution	237
10.4.1 The Government	238
10.4.2 Religious Organizations.....	239
10.5 To the Qualitative Researcher.....	239
10.5.1 Coding	241
10.6 Conclusion	242
Appendix A Interview Questions.....	243
Appendix B Institutional Review Board Clearance.....	245
Bibliography	246

List of Tables

Table 1. Gross Enrollment Rates at Primary Level	12
Table 2. Net Intake Rate at Primary Level	13
Table 3. Enrollment and GER of Secondary by Cycle and Gender.....	14
Table 4. Public Institutions in Ethiopia April of 2013.....	18
Table 5. Estimated Expenses in Higher Education for 10 Months: Academic Year 2006-2007..	22
Table 6. Synthesis of Challenges Women Face in Higher Education	30
Table 7. Academic Staff in Higher Education Institutions.....	33
Table 8. Attributes of the Participants	81
Table 9. Region and Occupations and Schooling Levels of the 11 Participants' Parents	87
Table 10. Degrees, Majors, and Occupations of Participants	88
Table 11. Most Prevalent Categories in Participants' Stories.....	89
Table 12. Central Categories by Participant	91
Table 13. Outline of Chapters with Themes	93
Table 14. Participants' Voices on Parent Support	133
Table 15. Motivating factors from participants	170

List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of Ethiopia and Borders	7
Figure 2. Structure of Education System in Ethiopia	11
Figure 3. Secondary GER, Ethiopia and selected African countries	14
Figure 4. Trends in Graduates from All Programs of Higher Education by Gender	23
Figure 5. Trends in Undergraduate Enrolment in Government and Non-government Institutions by Sex.....	28
Figure 6. A Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College (Tinto, 1993).....	46
Figure 7. Nodes Showing Number of Items Coded and Referenced.....	70
Figure 8. Inside The Node: Encouraging Husband.....	71
Figure 9. Most Prevalent Items Coded in NVivo	74
Figure 10. How Participants Refer to God.....	119

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to female students in Ethiopia who are overcoming barriers daily to follow their dreams of obtaining an education. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother who not only has supported me and cheered me on in every educational endeavor I have pursued but who now lives her life to support education efforts in Ethiopia by tearing down barriers that keep girls out of school. You inspire me.

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1.0 Introduction

It was July 16, 2014 as I took a *bajaj*, a small taxi, down the streets of Sodo, Ethiopia. I arrived at the university with hundreds of Ethiopian students staring at me as I tried to find the English department. Walking up three flights of stairs, and passing man after man on the way up, I wondered where all of the female students were. I finally made it to the Chair's office, and greeted five more men coming out. Mr. Mekonnen¹ paired me with a female instructor, makda, who would teach English with me over the summer. I sighed with relief when I realized there was a female instructor. I was in Ethiopia to gain more knowledge of the higher education system in hopes of finding a topic for my dissertation. With my background in teaching English as a second language, it made the most sense to teach English for the summer and try to blend in with faculty in order to learn as much as I could. I learned from Makda as we taught Advanced English Speech together. She eagerly taught me about culture, resilience, education, and being a woman in Ethiopia.

She told of her grandmother not understanding the importance of getting an education and therefore having to do all of the chores at home, which included watching the cattle, as well as doing all of her homework. Being a clever girl, she decided she could do both and would read her lessons while taking care of the cows. On one unfortunate day, a cow was extra hungry and ate her textbook. To an American child this would be funny, with our clichés about the dog eating our homework, but for Makda this was devastating because if she did not return the school textbook, she would not be permitted to take the national exam. If she could not take the national

¹ Pseudonyms are used for participants and other informants in this study.

exam, she would not be able to continue her school journey. Neither she nor her grandmother had enough money to contribute to the cost of the textbook, which cost around 20 *birr*, a little less than one dollar. After crying for two days, she went to several neighbors and begged the money for the textbook and was allowed to take the exam.

She continued to secondary school, which became a challenge because of the distance she had to travel from home to school, over two hours. Her grandmother wanted her to give it up, but two teachers came to her grandmother's house and told her how bright Makda was and how important her education would be. She was allowed to continue and thrived in the school environment.

When Magda arrived at the university, she continued to face struggles but of a different kind. She noticed that one of her professors was making the female students sleep with him. He would take each girl in the class home with him for three days at a time. When the male professor started to take an interest in her, she went to the Gender Office, an office on campus to help with gender issues at the university, and asked for advice on what to do. They told her to copy all of her assignments and grades and, if he tried to fail her, they would defend her. She was able to say no to the professor because she had the confidence to seek help. She still received a low grade in the class compared to her male classmates, which she thinks was completely unfair, but at least she passed the class and could continue. She fought her way through challenges all the way through her master's degree, and now she stands up for female students as a faculty advisor on the Gender Committee at her university. Hearing her educational journey made me curious to hear of other women's successes.

When reading the academic literature on female dropout and retention in higher education in Ethiopia, the literature shows a very bleak view. Each article highlights the many

challenges women face and the sheer number of women who do not make it to the university. If they do, they are either dismissed because of grades or drop out. The stories of the women who succeed are never told. But if we focus on the stories of the ones who succeed, their stories might inspire the struggling students, as well as education institutions, and government policies.

1.1 Research Question

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to examine the stories of rural Ethiopian women who have successfully completed their master's degrees as one step toward helping other women achieve educational success. I began by exploring the characteristics and strategies of Ethiopian women who obtain masters' degrees. But after interviewing participants and reading their stories over and over again, there was one question that I continued to ask: Why was each particular participant successful? In other words, what were the main strategies and motivations they had to successfully complete their primary education and continue to graduate study? This question enabled me to look at the participants' stories as a whole and find out what was happening in their lives to make them successful.

1.2 Significance of the Study

In 2018 Ethiopia went through enormous political change in its election of a new prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, who chose Sahle-Work Zewde to be Ethiopia's first woman president. Furthermore, he gave half of the ministerial positions to women, ushering in a new era for

women in the country. While many of us are ecstatic about the opportunities for women in this new era, we cannot forget the challenges that still remain for rural Ethiopian females in obtaining formal education. Few studies have focused on the educational success stories of Ethiopian women. In fact, the literature highlights the many obstacles to get an education, and studies continue to emphasize negative educational statistics pertaining to Ethiopian women. Yet the topic of female education is very important to Ethiopia and to other developing nations. World leaders have adopted sustainable development goals, several of which pertain to this study, including eliminating poverty, improving the quality of education, and attaining gender equality. The women I interviewed for this study have exceeded expectations and are thriving in a world that did not value women's education. I chose to interview women who have completed a master's degree because they not only survived the educational climate in primary, secondary, and undergraduate school but came back for even more education. We can learn from them so that educators, policy makers and female students can apply the factors and strategies that helped the participants to overcome educational obstacles to their own situation and see women flourish in higher education.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Background Information

When I began this project in 2016, I wanted to focus on higher education because it was such an interesting phenomenon to see rural women graduating with their master's degree. What I did not realize at the time was that these women had been overcoming challenges from the time they were four years old and even after they received their master's degrees. In interviews, participants discussed their whole education experience from the time they started school until the time they graduated; we also talked of their personal lives and their careers. I let participants guide many of the interviews, and, in some interviews, we spent the majority of the time discussing primary school because that was the most trying time for them and they had much to overcome in those years. For some, it was because of those years that they succeeded in university. My literature review, however, focuses more on the university experiences of women as that is what I was interested in when I began this work. I have included background information on Ethiopia and on the overall education system in Ethiopia, but the majority of my literature review focuses on issues in higher education that women must overcome.

I begin with a brief profile of Ethiopia and follow with the cultural and political laws that govern women. I then give background on the education system in Ethiopia and finally examine the major challenges women face in the higher education system in Ethiopia. I draw on qualitative and quantitative research conducted in Ethiopia to examine the gendered inequalities in higher education as well as examine government documents that inform the laws regarding women and education. The goal of this chapter is to provide an understanding of Ethiopia and to

give some background on the education system and the struggles women have in graduating from this system.

2.1.1 Ethiopia

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is a land-locked country rich in cultural heritage, which covers a total area of 1.25 million square Kilometers in the horn of Africa. It borders Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, and Kenya. Ethiopia is one of the oldest civilizations in the world and has had a federal republic government since 1994. The last king to rule Ethiopia was Haile Selassie, referred to as the 225th Solomonic emperor, who was followed by a socialist state under a military junta called the *Derg*, which fell in 1991. The current prime minister (2019) is Abiy Ahmed, who is making many changes in the country in favor of women, including appointing a woman through parliament as the first Ethiopian president, Sahle-Work Zewde, and appointing women to half the ministry positions in the country.

Ethiopia is famously known for Lucy, the remains of the oldest human being, and the Queen of Sheeba. The country goes by the Ethiopian/Coptic calendar, which is seven years behind the Gregorian calendar. Furthermore, they have 13 months in the year and celebrate the New Year on September 11. This is important to mention because sometimes it was hard to know the age of participants or when they went to school. Coffee was discovered in Ethiopia and is an important part of the culture. Ethiopians pride themselves as the only nation in Africa that was never colonized (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019; Molla, 2018).



Figure 1. Map of Ethiopia and Borders²

There are over 80 ethnic groups, but the 11 major ethnic groups in order of largest population to smallest are: Oromo, Amhara, Somali, Tigray, Sidama, Gurage, Wolaita, Hadiya, Afar, Gamo, Gedeo, Silte, and Kefficho. Furthermore, there are 12 major languages spoken in Ethiopia, with Amharic and English being the official languages. There are three major religions that people practice in Ethiopia; in order, they are Orthodox, Muslim, and Protestant, with a little over 2 percent practicing traditional religions and less than 1 percent practicing Catholicism. The estimated population as of July 2018 was 108,386,391, the second

² “Large political and administrative map of Ethiopia with roads, cities and airports,” 2019

highest population in Africa. The age structure in Ethiopia is as follows: 0-14 years of age comprise 43 percent of the population, 15-25 years 20 percent of the population, 25-54 years 30 percent, 55-64 years 4 percent, and 65 years and over 3 percent. Thirty percent of the population lived below the poverty line in 2014. The literacy rate for men over the age of 15 was 57 percent and for women was 41 percent in 2015. School expectancy for women was to complete eight years and for men to complete nine years (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019; Molla, 2018).

According to the CIA World Factbook (2019), Ethiopia has the lowest level of income per capita inequality in all of Africa. The Gross Domestic Product was estimated at \$2,200 in 2017; globally, they are ranked 204th. Forty-seven percent of the Gross Domestic Product is from agriculture, which makes up 85 percent of employment. Fifteen percent of the GDP is from industry, and 38.8 percent is from services. Around 84 percent of the population lives in rural areas. The monetary bill is called the *birr*. The exchange rate from *birr* to dollars as of January 25, 2019 is 28.5 *birr* to one dollar (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019; Molla, 2018).

2.1.2 Women in Ethiopia

Women in Ethiopia make up 51 percent of the population. The average women births 4.91 children (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Being a woman in Ethiopia can be a hardship, especially for women born in rural areas. Some of the daily tasks of women include fetching water from rivers and streams; walking long distances carrying food, water, and firewood; grinding corn and other grains; cooking over open fires; raising children; and being a good mother and wife (Mekonnen, 2009; Ofcansky & Berry, 1991). Mekonnen (2009), who wrote her dissertation on empowering Ethiopian women through education, describes being a good mother and wife as bearing children, cooking well, providing for family, submitting to one's husband,

not complaining, and always obeying (Mekonnen, 2009, p. 66). Women suffer from longer working days than men, women-specific illnesses, and “lack of adequate representation in leadership and decision making positions” (Prime Minister Office/Women’s Affairs Sub Sector, 2004, p. 2). There is gender-based violence towards women as well as gender mutilation and early marriage abduction. Few women are employed in professional jobs (Womenwatch, 2008).

The literacy rate for women age 15 and older was 41 percent in 2015, which is 16 percent less than men’s literacy rate at that time (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). There is a belief that girls are meant to be housewives and that sending them to school is a waste of resources (Mekonnen, 2009). Mekonnen (2009) also found that “the higher level of education a woman has the better the chance of having a better paying job” (p. 111). Sadly, she indicates that even though women can get better jobs through education, there is still a negative influence from the culture on women who consider going to school.

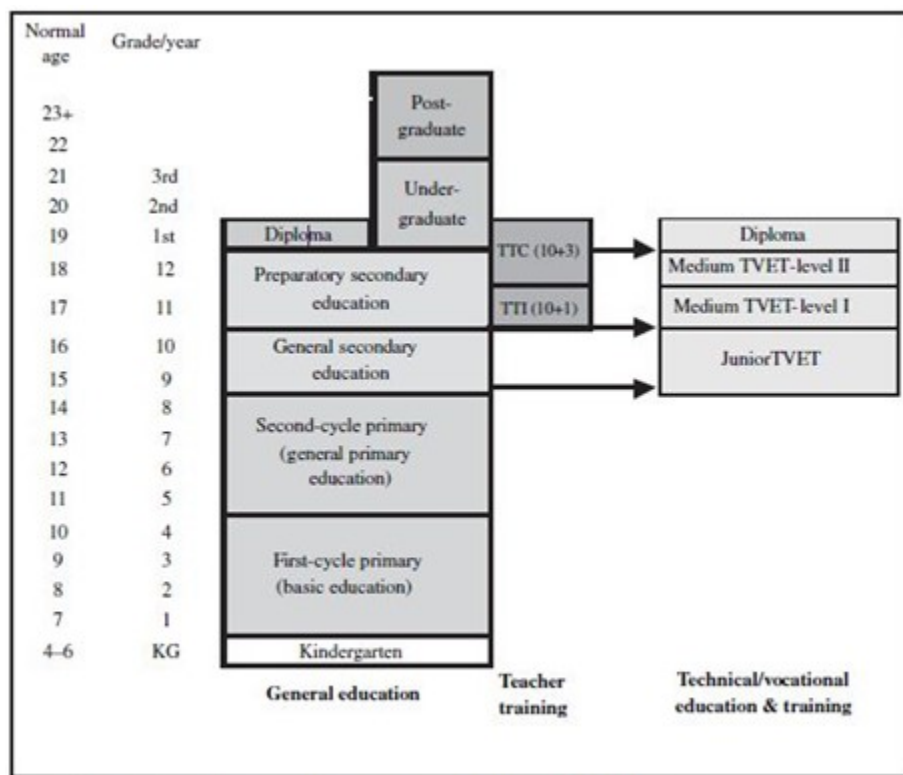
Marrying early is one hindrance to Ethiopian women finishing school. Even though the minimum legal age to marry is 18, Muthengi (2010) found that by age 18 almost half of girls are already married. The average age of marriage in rural areas is 14 years (Muthengi, 2010). When women in Ethiopia marry, they are usually forced to drop out of school and take care of their husbands and homes, thus creating a gender gap in education (Muthengi, 2010).

2.2 The Education System

2.2.1 Primary and Secondary Education

Primary and secondary education followed a structure similar to the United States until 1994. From 1962 to 1994, the system had a 6-2-4 structure, (grades K-6, 7-8, 9-12) six years of primary school, two years of middle school, and four years of high school, but in 1994 Ethiopia went through many changes, including a new government and constitution. The new government made changes in the education system to reflect the needs of Ethiopia. Now their system is 4-4-2-2: eight years of primary school, two years of general secondary education, and two years of preparatory education (High School) (The World Bank, 2005). According to the World Bank (2005) and demonstrated by Figure 2, the students take eight years of primary school, usually from the ages of 7-14. The purpose of primary education is to provide functional literacy. The first cycle of secondary school, which is called General Secondary School, is to prepare students for technical and vocational options, as well as for Preparatory Secondary Education. The length of this program is two years and concludes with a test called “Ethiopian General School Leaving Certificate” (EGSLC). If students do not pass the exam, they cannot go to the next level but can join one of the technical vocational education training schools. Only students who pass the exam can move up to the second cycle of secondary school, called Preparatory Secondary School. Preparatory Secondary School is also two years and is focused on preparing students for college. Students are usually 17 to 18 years old while going through preparatory secondary school. When students complete these two years, they take the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (GSECE). If they pass this exam, they can continue their education in the university. As shown in Figure 2, students who complete eighth grade can begin a junior

technical school. Student completing 10th grade can enter technical training schools or teacher training colleges, preparing students to teach grades 5 through 8, or teacher training institutes, preparing teachers to teach grades 1 through 4 (Ministry of Education, 2011; The World Bank, 2005).



Note: The duration of postsecondary courses may vary by field of study.

Figure 2. Structure of Education System in Ethiopia³

2.2.1.1 Enrollment

Ethiopia has strived for universal primary education, which resulted in an increased Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) of students in primary school from 20 percent in 1993-1994 to 61.6 percent in 2001/2002. Ethiopia has also been expanding teachers and classrooms to reach

³ The World Bank, 2005, p. 24

the population (The World Bank, 2003). In 2010-2011, the Gross Enrollment Rate stood at 96.4 percent. (See Table 1). Girls still lag behind boys in enrollment, but they are catching up quickly. The Net Intake Rate (NIR) shows even more of an increase from the 2006-2007 school years to the 2010-2011 school years. The NIR shows the percentage of the population at age 7 that began first grade. Table 3 shows the most current NIR. From 2006-2007, the NIR was 62.6 percent and in 2010-2011 it was 91.3 percent. Needless to say, Ethiopia is making huge strides to educate the citizenry and to promote primary education.

Table 1. Gross Enrollment Rates at Primary Level⁴

Gross Enrollment Rates at Primary Level									
Year	Primary 1st Cycle (1-4) (%)			Primary 2nd Cycle (5-8) (%)			Primary (1-8) (%)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girl	Total
1999 E.C (2006/07)	122.9	111.2	117.1	68.3	53.7	61.1	98	85.1	91.7
2000 E.C (2007/08)	133	122.5	127.8	64.8	55.5	60.2	100.5	90.5	95.6
2001E.C (2008/09)	126.7	118.4	122.6	65.6	60.5	63.1	97.6	90.7	94.4
2002 E.C (2009/10)	123.2	114.3	118.8	67.4	63.5	65.5	96.6	90.1	93.4
2003 E.C (2010/11)	128.8	119.1	124	67.4	64.8	66.1	99.5	93.2	96.4y

⁴ Ministry of Education, 2011

Table 2. Net Intake Rate at Primary Level⁵

Net Intake Rate at Primary Level			
Year	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Total (%)
1999 E.C(2006/07)	64.1	60.9	62.6
2000 E.C(2007/08)	94.3	89.7	92
2001E.C(2008/09)	84.3	80.1	82.2
2002 E.C(2009/10)	78.8	74.5	76.7
2003 E.C(2010/11)	94.2	88.4	91.3

2.2.2 Secondary Education

Even though Ethiopia has seen a huge increase in primary education, the numbers for secondary education are still very low. In 2002, the Grades 7-12 GER was low compared to other nations with similar circumstances. Figure 3 illustrates that Ethiopia's ranking with several other African countries, showing it ranked lower than the Democratic Republic of the Congo and lower than the average of Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2011 the GER in Ethiopia was not much higher. Table 3 shows that GER in secondary first cycle in 2010-2011 was only 38.4 percent, and in the secondary second cycle the total GER was only 8.1 percent total (and even less for girls at 6.7 percent) (Ministry of Education, 2011). Even though Ethiopia is working very hard to increase the numbers of students going to school, when only 8.1 percent of the high school aged population is enrolled, an even lower percentage make it to university.

⁵ Education Management Information System (EMIS) Ministry of Ethiopia, 2011

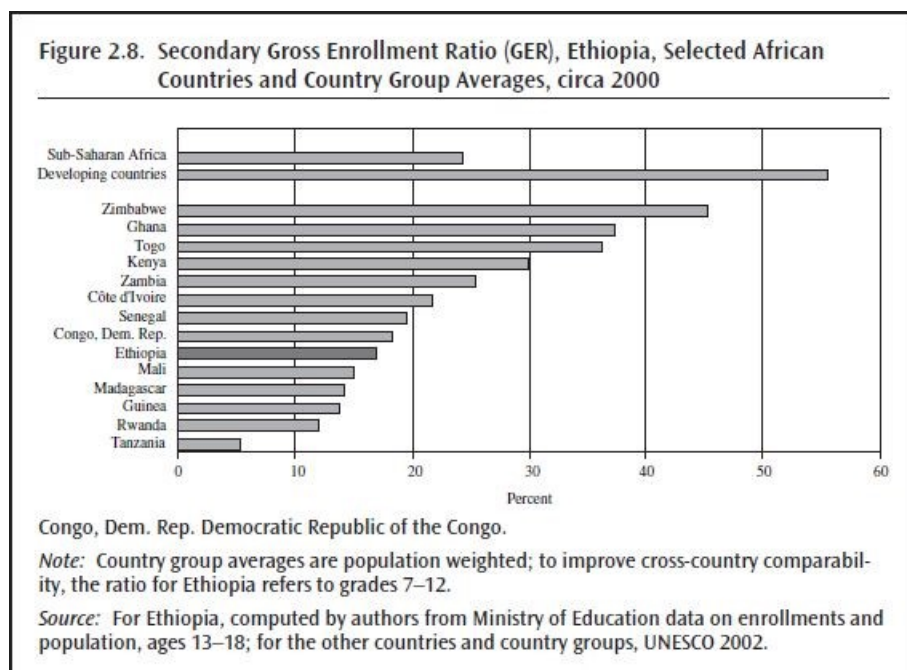


Figure 3. Secondary GER, Ethiopia and selected African countries⁶

Table 3. Enrollment and GER of Secondary by Cycle and Gender⁷

Cycle	Secondary 1st Cycle						Secondary 2nd Cycle					
	Enrollment			GER %			Enrollment			GER %		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1999 E.C. (2006/07)	760,674	462,968	1,223,662	45.7	28.6	37.3	117,000	58,219	175,219	7.3	3.7	5.5
2000 E.C. (2007/08)	793,228	514,691	1,307,919	44.4	29.6	37.1	130,533	62,911	193,444	7.8	3.8	5.8
2001 E.C (2008/09)	803,389	578,936	1,382,325	43.7	32.4	38.1	146,547	58,713	205,260	8.5	3.5	6
2002 E.C. (2009/10)	818,28	634,570	1,452,850	43.5	34.7	39.1	156,194	86,886	243,080	8.9	5	7
2003 E.C.(2010/11)	807,251	654,667	1,461,918	41.8	34.9	38.4	169,571	118,645	288,216	9.4	6.7	8.1
Average Annual Growth Rate	1.50%	9.00%	4.50%				9.70%	19.5	13.20%			

⁶ Source: The World Bank, 2005, as cited in UNESCO, 2002

⁷ Source: Ministry of Education, 2011

2.3 Higher Education

Equality in higher education has been a struggle across the continent of Africa. Lumumba (2006), writing for UNESCO, concludes that it doesn't matter how old the university is, gender equality is still a problem. She was referring to the University of Sierra Leone which was founded in 1876 and had only 19 percent female enrollment in 2000. She explains that former French colonies have even more gender disparity at the higher education level than do English former colonies, and countries whose main religion is Islam have even higher gender disparities in higher education (Assié-Lumumba, 2006). UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (2015) found that the ratio of males to females enrolled in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa is 64 females to every 100 males. In Ethiopia, the ratio is 34 females to every 100 males (Ministry of Education, 2017). Since women's enrollment rates are significantly lower than men, we must look at reasons why this is happening.

Tertiary education in Ethiopia includes Colleges of Teacher Education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and Higher Education Institutions. The Ministry of Education defines higher education as "programs which are offered as undergraduate degree for three, four, or more years and specialized degrees such as Master's and PhD programs" (Ministry of Education, 2017). It is an interesting time to study higher education because of the phenomenal growth in higher education in the country. In 2001 there were only two public universities in the country, but as of 2017 there are 38 universities with plans to build more (Ministry of Education, 2017; Nording, 2008; Teshome & Kebede, 2009).

2.4 History of Higher Education

Ethiopia has a 1,700-year tradition of elite education through the Orthodox Church, though higher education as we know it today did not begin until the first university was established in 1950 with the opening of the University College of Addis Ababa's biology department, which enrolled 70 students. Later, Alemaya College of Agriculture, which had been under the University College of Addis Ababa, established itself as a separate university in 1985 ("Historical Background," 2011; Wagaw, 1990). In 1970, tertiary enrollment reached only 3,500 people out of a population of 34 million. The tertiary enrollment ratio was 0.2 percent, one of the lowest in the world (The World Bank, 2003).

To the detriment of the higher education system, in 1974 a socialist military coup overthrew the government and established an oppressive government known as the Derg. "The Derg adopted many of the radical ideas espoused by the university community-land reform, nationalization of industries, linguistic independence, creation of a national communist party, rural service for university students-but ultimately alienated many students and academics" (The World Bank, 2003). Guerilla warfare ensued and the Derg blamed the university system for the civil unrest, therefore beginning an anti-intellectual climate. "Government intervention in university affairs expanded, including security surveillance, repression of dissent, mandated courses on Marxism, prohibition of student organizations, appointment of senior university officers, and control of academic promotions" (The World Bank, 2003, p. 1). This went on for 20 years and caused the university system to be cut off from the western world, also resulting in academics leaving the Ethiopian university. In 1985, Alemaya College of Agriculture under Addis Ababa University broke off and became its own university, currently known as Haramaya

University. In 1994, a new democratic government was established and, with it, a return to focus on education (The World Bank, 2003).

2.5 Higher Education Expansion

The new government focused on increasing tertiary education across Ethiopia, including opening many technical training schools as well as universities. They approved a Higher Education Proclamation in Parliament in 2003, which encouraged major university and technical school expansion across the country. This proclamation also encouraged private tertiary education to expand, which in 2003 was enrolling 21 percent of all tertiary students (The World Bank, 2003). They began by developing six established colleges into universities. Then they continued higher education growth every year by turning colleges into universities or by creating new universities. The education sector's goal was to reach 5 percent of the college-age cohort between 2005 and 2010. By 2007, they had only reached 1 to 2 percent of the Ethiopian age cohort, but they continue to increase enrollments every year (Ministry of Education, 2011; Yizengaw, 2007).

By 2008, Ethiopia had only produced 50 PhD candidates, whereas now they are on track to produce 5,000 PhD candidates (Nording, 2008). This expansion was possible because of the support of many non-governmental agencies that aided the government in this endeavor (Semela, 2011). See Table 4 for a list of the public universities along with the region and institutional web address.

Table 4. Public Institutions in Ethiopia April of 2013⁸

University	City	Website
Adama University	Adama	http://www.adama-university.net/
Addis Ababa University	Addis Ababa	http://aau.edu.et
Addis Ababa Science and Technology University	Addis Ababa	Not available
Adigrat University	Adigrat	Not Available
Aksum University	Axum	http://aksumuniversity.org/
Ambo University College	Ambo	http://www.ambou.edu.et/
Arba Minch University	Arba Minch	http://amu.edu.et
Asosa University	Asosa	Not available
Bahir Dar University	Bahir Dar	http://www.bdu.edu.et/
Bule Hora University	Bule Hora	Not Available
Debre Birhan University	Debre Birhan	http://www.dbu.edu.et/
Debre Markos University	Debre Markos	http://www.dmu.edu.et/
Debre Tabor University	Debre Tabor	Not Available
Dilla University	Dilla	http://www.dillauniversity.edu.et/
Dire Dawa University	Dire Dawa	http://www.ddu.edu.et/
Gonder University	Gonder	http://www.uog.edu.et/
Haramaya University	Haramaya	http://www.haramaya.edu.et/
Hawassa (Dehub) University	Hawassa	http://www.hu.edu.et/
Jijiga University	Jijiga	http://www.jju.edu.et/
Jimma University	Jimma	http://www.ju.edu.et/
Mada Walabu University	Bale Robe	http://www.mwu.edu.et
Mekelle University	Mekelle	http://www.mu.edu.et/
Metu University	Metu	Not available
Mizan Tepi University	Mizzan	Not available
Semera University	Semera	http://www.su.edu.et/
Wachamo University	Wachamo	Not available
Welkite University	Welkite	Not available
Wolaita Sodo University	Sodo	http://www.wsu.edu.et/
Woldiya University	Woldiya	
Wollega University	Nekemt	http://www.wuni.edu.et/
Wollo University	Dessie/ Kombolcho	http://www.wu.edu.et/

⁸ Source: Ministry of Education, 2013

2.6 Technical Schools

2.6.1 Vocational Schools

There are two types of technical schools in Ethiopia: Colleges of Teacher Education (CTE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). According to the Ministry of Education (2011), both of these systems are not classified under higher education but are their own separate sector. Colleges of Teacher Education programs take three years to complete and are open to graduates of tenth grade. In 2010-2011, there were 32 colleges for teacher education. There are 20 different concentrations students can choose from including: Amharic, English, Local Language, History, Geography, Civics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Educational Planning and Management (EDPM), Adult and Non-Formal Education (ANFE), Music, Art, and Health and Physical Education, Language, Social Science, Natural Science, Mathematics, and Aesthetics. The total number of graduates for 2010-2011 was 26,802, 40 percent of whom were female. In higher education, only 27 percent of the graduates in 2010-2011 were women (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The Technical Education Vocation and Training schools are “aimed at marketable and entrepreneurial skills” and also comprise a comprehensive human resource development program and market-oriented programs (Education Management Information System (EMIS) Ministry of Ethiopia, 2011, p. 55). Students can enroll in these schools as graduates of 10th grade as well as students who drop out of school, as well as “marginalized groups in the labor market” (p.55). In 2010-2011, there were 496 TVET institutions in Ethiopia, including private and public with 112,450 graduates, of which 48 percent were women (Ministry of Education, 2011). It is interesting that TVET institutions are having greater success in graduating females than are

teacher programs and universities. About half of the participants in this study first went to a TVET school and then got their degrees later.

2.7 Non-Governmental Education

The Ministry of Education not only has increased the infrastructure of public universities but has also encouraged private schools to open. Ethiopia's private higher education sector is growing at an incredible pace. There are currently 38 private higher education institutions in Addis Ababa alone and 28 private schools scattered around Ethiopia. The private schools are for profit but are accredited by the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) through the Ministry of Education. Several of this study's participants attended these universities for graduate school.

2.8 How the Public Universities Function

The Ministry of Education defines higher education institutions as "institutions that are giving three, four or more years of undergraduate programs, as well as those offering postgraduate programs (masters and PhD)" (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 59). The Fall/Spring school year begins in September and finishes in July. The language of instruction is English. The universities are accredited by HERQA, which is under the Ministry of Education. (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Students are assigned and accepted to a university based on the score of the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (GSECE) and results obtained from eleventh and twelfth grade. All students are eligible for university, but because there are few spots not all are accepted to public institutions. Therefore, students are placed into a university by a cut-off score on the GSECE as well as on their grades from eleventh and twelfth grade, depending on the number of places in the university and the field of study. Special privileges are given to female students and students from disadvantaged or remote areas (Ministry of Education, 2011). Universities have summer and evening programs for students not admitted, and many choose to take this path. Summer and evening school is also open to people with jobs hoping to better their careers (“Higher Education Finance and Cost-Sharing in Ethiopia,” 2008). Several of the participants chose this route.

2.8.1 Financing Higher Education

The government will cover the costs for primary level through tenth grade; however, students going on to obtain a degree must finance their own education. According to Yizengaw (2007), Ethiopia has used a funding model adopted from Australia called *cost sharing* to help students get through school. Students are required to pay for at least 15 percent of their tuition and all of their living expenses while in the university. They do not have to pay this upfront unless they have the funds to pay for it. Students agree that they will be charged a graduate tax after they graduate from college that will pay back the government for their university degree. Students do not have to pay the tax the first year after they graduate but will have to start paying it the second year. Students can also choose to pay their tax by teaching for a specific number of years. If they do this, the government will waive the tax. The top scorers on the GSECE are the

only students who receive scholarships (“Higher Education Finance and Cost-Sharing in Ethiopia,” 2008; Yizengaw, 2007). An example of the cost and living expenses in Ethiopia can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Estimated Expenses in Higher Education for 10 Months: Academic Year 2006-2007⁹

		Public	
		Low Public	High Public
	Special "One-Time" or "Up Front" Fees	NA	NA
Instructional Expenses	Tuition*	626 <i>Birr</i> [\$272]	1,998 <i>Birr</i> [\$868]
	Other Fees	NA	NA
	Books & Other Education Expenses	521 <i>Birr</i> [\$227]	1,040 <i>Birr</i> [\$452]
	Subtotal Expenses	1,147 <i>Birr</i> [\$499]	3,038<i>Birr</i> [\$1,320]
Student Living Expenses	Lodging	600 <i>Birr</i> [\$260]	600 <i>Birr</i> [\$260]
	Food	1,800 <i>Birr</i> [\$783]	1,800 <i>Birr</i> [\$783]
	Transportation	100 <i>Birr</i> [\$43]	500 <i>Birr</i> [\$217]
	Other Personal Expenses	869 <i>Birr</i> [\$378]	1,800 <i>Birr</i> [\$782]
	Subtotal Expenses of Student Living	3,369<i>Birr</i> [\$1,465]	4,700<i>Birr</i> [\$2,043]
	Total Cost to Parent & Student	4,516<i>Birr</i> [\$1,963]	7,738<i>Birr</i> [\$3,364]

⁹ Source:(“Higher Education Finance and Cost-Sharing in Ethiopia,” 2008) National currency *Birr* converted to \$US by 2005 World Bank ICP purchasing power parity estimate \$1=Ethiopian *Birr* 2.3 * Simple interest calculated on total owed by student after one year grace period following graduation. Interest Rate used is average of bank rates while student in school.

2.9 Post-Graduate Higher Education

There has been a significant increase in the number of postgraduate degrees awarded as well. Before 2001 there were only 50 PhD holders in the country, and in 2010-2011 6,250 Ethiopians graduated with a postgraduate degree; out of that 6,250 graduates, only 899, or 14 percent, were female percent (Ministry of Education, 2011; Nording, 2008). These numbers show that the education system is very young but continues to grow. Can Ethiopia sustain and build a strong university system when so few instructors and professors have masters and PhD degrees?

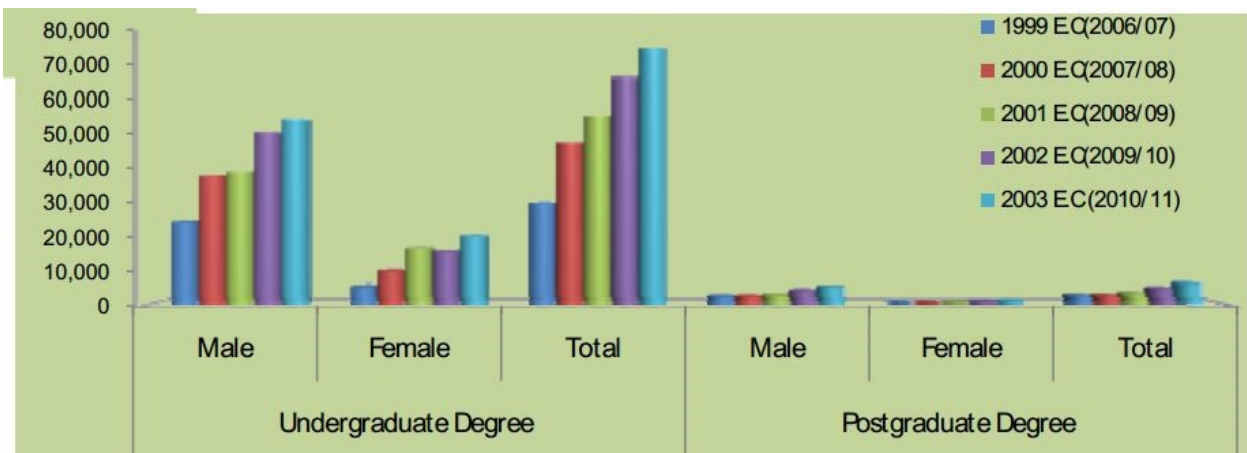


Figure 4. Trends in Graduates from All Programs of Higher Education by Gender¹⁰

¹⁰ Ministry of Education, 2011

2.10 Quality Assurance

It is important to mention quality because of the growth rate in all levels of education and the lack of qualified staff to fill the great need of educating a nation. Even at the secondary level, there is concern that students are unprepared for university level work, especially in science and mathematics (Semela, 2011). Furthermore, the teaching staff of both private and public institutions do not meet the minimal requirements of the Ministry of Education. Because the Ministry of Education is not able to fill academic staff vacancies, they are asking for Ethiopian academics abroad to come back to Ethiopia and teach in the universities.

Another problem that students struggle with in the university is the inability to buy books and supplies, so not only do some students arrive from their secondary education having teachers with lower educational backgrounds but they cannot afford textbooks when they get to university. In Semela's (2011) article on quality assurance, she pinpoints several important factors that could help improve quality. She argues for the need to boost English language skills at the secondary level, revitalize teacher education, improve engineering and science staff as they are teaching 70 percent of the students, increase the unit cost of higher education, and improve working conditions and salaries of academic staff (Semela, 2011, p. 422).

2.11 Government Initiatives for Women

Even though the numbers of women are low compared to men in higher education, Ethiopia has embraced all of the major world mandates for education. For example, they have ratified The Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the

Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), the Millennium Development Goals, the Maputo Protocol (which is the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa), and since 2015 they have been fully engaged in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals of Quality Education and Gender Equality (Addis Ababa University, 2015). Just by ratifying these documents, the government is taking a stand against gender discrimination; women, however, are still really struggling in the country. Part of this could be because of ingrained beliefs about women.

The former constitution was biased when it came to women. Unequal treatment of women was part of a Civil Code established in 1960 that stated "the husband is the head of the family. . . the wife owes him obedience on all lawful things which he orders" (*The Civil Code Proclamation of 1960*, 1960, p. 107) . The laws also would not allow women to own land. These laws were enforced until the new constitution in 1994. Even though the laws have changed, the culture still emphasizes female obedience to men.

Under military direction, it wasn't until 1993 that the government began trying to combat discrimination against women. This happened after the military regime, *the Derg*, was overthrown and the new democratic government formed. First the government implemented the National Policy on Women (NPW), which recognized that women had been oppressed and marginalized in Ethiopia and promised to implement affirmative action in education, eventually allowing 25 percent of university spots to go to marginalized ethnic groups and women (Gebiremichael, 2010).

Then, in 1994 the transitional Government of Ethiopia adopted the Educational and Training Policy (ETP), which had an enormous impact on all levels of education but also made education inclusive for women (Gebiremichael, 2010; Women Watch, 2008). The new

constitution, written in 1994, under Article 25 “guarantees all persons equality before the law, and prohibits any discrimination on grounds of gender” (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995). This is a major difference from the former constitution.

Two other policy documents, The Higher Education Proclamation (2009) and the Five-Year Strategic Framework for Enhancing Women’s Participation in Tertiary Education in Ethiopia, 2004-2008 (2004), contain strong implications for university policy on women. The Higher Education Proclamation (2009) provided the opportunity for admission of disadvantaged groups, including women, into the university. The five-year strategic framework aimed at increasing female enrollment in higher education, reducing attrition of female students, increasing numbers of academic faculty, and establishing a gender and women’s studies degree. They identified affirmative action, assertiveness training, tutorials for weak students, counseling services, and gender offices on each university’s campus to help females succeed (Ministry of Education, 2004; Molla, 2012).

Even though all of these policies are aimed at helping women achieve education, Molla (2012) critiques the documents for not addressing equity and fairness enough. He concludes that the reforms within the policies are “inconsistent with the need for financial and political commitments required to tackle deep-rooted structural factors that affect women in HE . . . the problem of gender inequality has been represented as a question of simple disparity in enrolment, and this undermines the more important issue of equity and social justice” (p. 212). He uses assertiveness training as an example of not looking at the deep structural problems within the society. Why would women need to go through assertiveness training if Ethiopian men treated them with respect? Therefore, policies encourage women to enroll in higher education, but there are still cultural and structural barriers that compete with their right for an education. The next

section will shed light on some of the everyday struggles a female in Ethiopia goes through because of the cultural and structural barriers to get an education.

2.12 Educational Challenges

2.12.1 Enrollment

Ethiopia continues to have higher rates of women enrolling in higher education, but female representation in higher education is still disproportionately lower compared with men. In 2010-2011, Ethiopian women comprised 27 percent of the total higher education population (Ministry of Education, 2017). Figure 5, taken from the Education Statistics Annual Abstract (2017), shows the enrollment of males and females in government and non-government universities. In Ethiopia, government institutions are run by the federal government, and non-governmental institutions refer to private institutions. The data in Figure 5 represent the numbers of 30 out of a total of 38 government universities in the country (eight universities did not respond) and 35 out of 98 non-governmental institutions (63 did not respond). The dates are in the Ethiopian calendar and not the Gregorian calendar used in the West. Therefore, 2008 E.C. is actually the 2015-2016 academic calendar in the West. The Ethiopian New Year is always in September, and the school year starts after the New Year begins. Female enrollment rates continue to climb. In 2015-2016, 34 percent of those enrolled were females, representing a growth rate of 7 percent over a six-year period.

Not only are enrollment rates low, females also continue to drop out of the university at alarming rates. Semela (2007) finds that fewer females were enrolling in the university and

higher numbers were dropping out. Semela used qualitative and extensive quantitative data to look at factors contributing to gender disparity at Debu University in Ethiopia. He looked at enrollment statistics over a five-year period and discovered that not only do fewer women enter the university, high numbers of them drop out. He found that 23.6 percent of enrolled students were females, but that 51.6 percent of dismissals or dropouts were also female (Semela, 2007, p. 82). Even with following world mandates and government policy reforms in favor of women, the fact remains that fewer women continue to graduate compared to men. The next section will delve into some of the reasons why women are not graduating and will highlight some of the problems they face while attending the university.

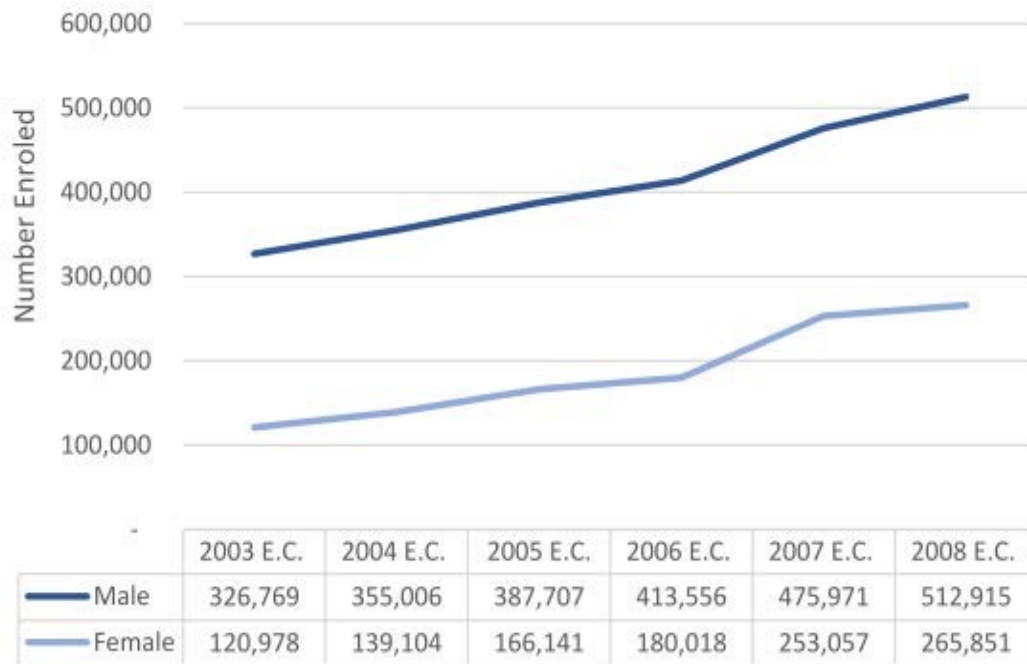


Figure 5. Trends in Undergraduate Enrolment in Government and Non-government Institutions by Sex¹¹

¹¹ MoE Ministry of Education, 2017

2.12.2 Challenges

This section focuses on six studies (Demise, Shinebaum, & Melesse, 2002; Melese & Fenta, 2009; Mersha, Bishaw, Asrat, & Nigussie, 2009; Mersha, Bishaw, & Tegegne, 2013; Molla & Cuthbert, 2014; Semela, 2007) ranging from 2002 to 2014 on educational challenges females go through while attending university. I have compiled the findings in Table 6, which shows the multiple challenges found in each study. I sorted them into six themes: university challenges, academic challenges, personal challenges, hostile challenges, circumstantial challenges, and economic challenges.

The six studies were chosen because they zeroed in on problems and challenges Ethiopian women face once they arrive on campus. The authors were diverse in their methods, which included quantitative and qualitative data and surveys, focus groups, interviews, and statistics. Some focused on a specific university and others included several universities in Ethiopia. Data came from faculty, staff, and students.

Table 6. Synthesis of Challenges Women Face in Higher Education¹²

University Challenges

Lack of support services (academic, gender, counseling)
Absence of supportive authorities (staff, teachers, etc)
Lack of proper facilities
Lack of security in dormitories
Safety

Academic Challenges

Difficult workload/inadequate to complete
Lack of strong academic preparation in Secondary School
Inability to plan
In a department not interested in

Personal Challenges

Shyness/lack of assertiveness
Relationship influences
Homesickness/not able to adjust
Fear of failure
Carelessness
Addicted to drinking, smoking, disco houses
Tension

Hostile challenges

Verbal and physical harassment
(from male students, staff & instructors)
Negative attitudes towards female students
Rape
Asked for sexual favors

Circumstantial Challenges

Pregnancy
Family Issues
Marriage
HIV/AIDS

Economic Challenges

Shortage of money to support oneself

¹² Sources: Demise et al., 2002; Melese & Fenta, 2009; Mersha et al., 2009, 2013; Molla & Cuthbert, 2014;

2.13 University Challenges

2.13.1 Lack of Support Services and Academic Authority

One of the challenges addressed in each study was the lack of support services available to students. This included academic services as well as counseling services (Mersha et al, 2013; Molla & Cuthbert 2014; Melese & Fenta, 2009). Even though there are services available to students, they often do not know about these services. In a survey of 108 students, 77.8 percent did not know that there were counseling services on campus, and the ones who did know had never been to the office to receive counseling (Melese & Fenta, 2009, p. 7). Melese and Fenta go on to say that this is one of the major causes of female dropout at the university. Molla and Cuthbert (2014) argue that sexual harassment is exacerbated by not having counselors to turn to.

Who do women go to for support? Each university is required to have a Gender Office to lend “special support” to female students so they can have a safe place to be counseled, share complaints, and receive financial help, but usually the Gender Offices do not have enough staff members and are unorganized (Semela, 2007). These offices are running with a shortage of budget, which holds true for all higher learning institutions in the country (Mersha et al., 2013,). The Five-Year Strategic Framework (2004) promised counseling and gender offices for support, but there is really little support for the female student (Mersha et al., 2013, Semela, 2007).

Students also indicated a lack of support from staff and faculty: “Most instructors were not taking them (their problems) seriously and did not attempt to extend sympathy and support” (Semela, 2007, p. 87). Molla and Cuthbert did in-depth focus-groups with female students and female faculty. Their findings provide powerful examples of how female students can feel powerless when talking to authority.

The challenge is that whenever a female student is harassed by her male teacher and complains to the department head, no action is taken. Rather, all his friends would take it as an offense against their dignity and seek to avenge the complaint. [...] To be honest, if I were the victim I would prefer to stay silent (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014, p. 769).

Women are afraid to report sexual harassment because of the fear of repercussions. Other participants in Molla and Cuthbert's study agreed that they should not go to the dean to complain because of fear of revenge, victimization, and stigmatization. Students do not feel like they have a safe place to lodge their complaints, and the lack of female staff can play into this hardship. Mersha et al. (2009) found from their survey of male and female students that males get more academic help than female students, which affects their GPAs. Students who said they received support from instructors had stronger GPAs than did students who said they did not have instructor support (Mersha et al., 2009, p. 44)

2.13.2 Lack of Female Staff

Not having enough female faculty on college campuses can be discouraging to women. They are not able to see other people like them succeed, and they do not have women to turn to when struggling with uniquely female issues (Melese & Fenta, 2009; Rask & Bailey, 2002). In Ethiopia, because more men have achieved higher levels of education, there is a lack of a female academic presence on college campuses. Table 7, with data from the 2017 Education Statistics Annual Abstract, shows the numbers of male and female academic staff in government colleges. Academic staff refers to those who teach on the university campus, whether full-time or part-time, and government refers to public universities. The female academic staff was only 9

percent of the overall academic staff in 2011-2012, though female staff numbers continue to increase each year; in 2015-2016, the female staff numbers rose to 12 percent.¹³

Some universities have even lower percentages of female staff. For example, in 2010 Wolaita Sodo University only had 12 female staff out of 255 (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 278). Several researchers, including Semela (2007), Amazan (2009), and Mersha et al. (2009), argue that the lack of women faculty leads to attrition as females do not have role models to follow. Female students who go to school with fewer female faculty have a disadvantage. Semela (2007) emphasizes the need to have women academic staff not only to meet equality standards but to establish same-sex role models. Mersha et al. (2009) find that female students would like to see more female instructors even if female instructors' are not as qualified as male instructors.

Table 7. Academic Staff in Higher Education Institutions¹⁴

			2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
			E.C.(2010/11)	E.C.(2010/11)	E.C.(2010/11)	E.C.(2010/11)	E.C.(2010/11)
Government	Ethiopian	Male	16,359	18,141	18,171	21,547	23,196
		Female	1,631	1,910	2,218	2,443	3,259
		Total	17,990	20,051	20,389	23,990	26,455
	Expatriate	Male	600	1,611	1,587	937	1,241
		Female	121	237	225	141	196
		Total	721	1,848	1,812	1,078	1,437

¹³ There is a calendar error in Table 7. 2004-2008 is the Ethiopian calendar and the Gregorian calendar should read 2011/12, 2012/13, 2013/14, /2014/15, 2015/16

¹⁴ Ministry of Education, 2017

One reason behind the lack of women staff is the lack of qualifications. For example, in 2015-2016 only 137 Ethiopian women had PhDs at government universities compared to 1,205 men, and only 1,384 women had master's degrees compared to 12,830 men (Ministry of Education, 2017). Mersha et al. (2009) call for universities to allow female staff who have lower grades to teach class. Amazan (2009) believes the lack of female staff has to do with traditional gender roles. It is hard for women staff to be part of the university life because they have other duties they must complete and have a hard time balancing their roles, one divorced female academic says:

I've been working and earning and raising kids and teaching. . . I don't have much time for research. . . those men, in a sense they do have time because they do have wives, wives to represent them into the society anywhere, wives to look after their kids, wives to do everything. . . they do have so many assisting systems. . . this is man's country in every sense. (Amazan, 2009, pp. 7-8)

Ethiopian women are expected to work hard in their fields and still uphold their reputations as good mothers and wives; therefore, their professional careers can suffer.

Amazan (2009) encourages women from the diaspora to come back to Ethiopia to be good role models for women in order to encourage a favorable change in their society. Table 7 shows that there have not been more than 237 female expatriate staff each year, which means there is room for growth.

2.13.3 Lack of Proper Facilities

Another problem women faced was lack of proper facilities to do their work. For example, women attend class during the day and are not able to go to the library at night for fear

of sexual assault. They are less advantaged than men who can spend their evenings in the library studying (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). They also mention that they do not have separate facilities for studying, attending to medical issues, and recreational space. Separate facilities for women are important to protect them from harassment and to give them a safe place to study. Furthermore, the dorms are overcrowded and they lack security; female students are worried that their things will be stolen (Demise et al., 2002). It is interesting to note that this study was published in 2002 and looked specifically at Jimma University, yet in 2009, Mersha et al. (2009) found a lack of security in the dormitories as well (and Jimma University was included in that study). Universities are aware of the issue but have not remedied the situation.

On top of the struggle with facilities, there are also supplies shortages and large class sizes. Large class sizes and lack of opportunities can add to the burden to study that students face in the Ethiopian university. Semela (2007) observed that the library at Debu University only had 10 to 20 books at the circulation desk for courses taken by 100 to 200 students. One student I met in Ethiopia this summer said when he was given the major of Computer Science and went to his first class, no one in the class had ever touched a computer. Later he said they would watch the teacher's lecture on how to do something, but they had no computers to practice on (personal communication, July 20, 2016). These are major challenges in obtaining a good education at the university.

2.14 Academically Based Challenges

As female students fight for resources, places to study safely, and respect from their male teachers and peers, they can face academic struggles which could be caused by a weak secondary

education, difficult course load, a lack in organizational skills, and placement in majors that they never chose. Semela (2007) points out that their “previous academic experience in secondary schools was not enough to prepare them for university education. . .” (p.87). He confirms that students coming from rural areas are even less advantaged in their secondary schooling than students coming from city schools. When students are not able to get academic support, it compounds the situation. Mersha et al. (2013) found that students struggled with planning and organizing their academic timeline. This could be because of other factors, like jobs, competing with their academics. Furthermore, in Ethiopia students are placed into majors and departments based on test scores and do not get to choose which university they want to go to. If a student was dreaming of being a doctor, and now has to be in the school of social work, it can be demotivating (Mersha et al., 2009). Melese and Fenta (2009) surveyed 130 readmitted students at Jimma University and found that 43 percent of the students did not join the university of their choice and 80 percent of the students did not get selected for the major they had wished to pursue. This study is especially moving since these students had already been dismissed and have now returned to the university. These factors might indeed have a significant impact on students’ success in higher education.

2.14.1 Personal Challenges

One of the strong personal challenges that women report is a lack of being able to be assertive. It was something that was mentioned in every article as a challenge for female students, often with with phrases citing students’ lack of “self-esteem,” “self-confidence,” “assertiveness,” or “shyness.” Yelfign Worku (2001), who was head of the Gender Department for the Ministry of Education, shares why female students might feel this way:

In school, there is a gender bias both in the classroom and outside. In the classroom girls are not seen or heard. They are taught to be shy and quiet. They are outsmarted by boys and are not assertive enough to bring up their problems. The fear of making mistakes in the classroom and being laughed at by boys makes them not answer or ask questions. If the teaching methodology is only “talk and chalk,” girls are more at a disadvantage than boys. (p. 99)

Melese and Fenta (2009) argue that universities should do assertiveness training to help women “develop the necessary social skills to manage interpersonal and academic situations more effectively. . .” (p. 9). They surveyed 130 readmitted students at Jimma University and found that 78 percent of the students had not received assertiveness training, and the 28 percent who did were taught by upper level female students. These seniors taught them the positive and negative experiences they had at the university and helped them to be aware of their environment. Furthermore, they taught them how to get along with male students and not to feel inferior. the authors conclude that because the university does not offer assertiveness training, students are unable to handle the pressure and drop out.

2.14.2 Relationship Influences

Another personal struggle was relationships with the opposite sex. Semela (2007) explains that in Ethiopian culture women are expected to obey men. This plays out in university life when a female student has a boyfriend. At the time the student starts studying, her boyfriend may call her and then she must obey him, especially if she is coming from a traditional family where males make the decisions (p. 86). Furthermore, 75 percent of the women Semela (2007)

interviewed thought it was the right choice to obey a boyfriend. A female student's work suffers because she does not have the freedom to say no.

2.14.3 Hostile Challenges

Negative Attitudes

Ethiopian girls and women “face repressive gender norms that may impede them from achieving their career/educational aspirations” (Molla, 2012, p. 211). Students are looked down upon in their academic studies. As an example, Molla and Cuthbert (2014) share a statement from one of their interviews with a female student on her experiences in dealing with professors after receiving a bad grade:

It was the end of the semester . . . I was shocked and devastated to see a really bad grade in a course. I went to the lecturer's office and asked him to let me see my paper. Then another teacher came in and interrupted our discussion. He soon started joking on me. They did not see me as one of their students who came to check on a result but rather as a female, possibly lazy student, who sought a favour in an exchange for a sexual offer. . . He asked me: ‘Do you think you can score better than you already have?’ and continued laughing. They continued making mockery out of me, a female not accepting a low grade . . . From that moment onwards, I never visit my teachers in their offices. (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014, 766)

This student was clearly looked down upon just for being a woman. These professors treated her cruelly because of their stereotypes of women and their assumptions that she wanted to pay for a better grade with sexual activity.

Some students and instructors stereotype women because they think they got into the university because of affirmative action and not because of their own merit. Gebiremichael (2010) argues that the negativity rubs off on female students, affecting their self-esteem and academic self-concept. Mersha's et al. (2013), in an extensive questionnaire given to 400 female students and 200 male students across five universities, found that students had significantly favorable attitudes towards affirmative action. Therefore, there is a positive belief that affirmative action is helping women achieve education, even though some of the students stereotype females in a negative way.

Harrassment

Sexual harassment of female students is prevalent in all of the studies mentioned in this section, and many more studies include information on sexual harassment of female students (Admassu, 2010; Mergo, 2013; Molla & Gale, 2015; Wondimu, 2004). Semela (2007) indicates that 10 percent of women are raped: "Females do not feel safe to stay in libraries, laboratories and even classrooms to study, as dormitories are overcrowded and not at all quite [sic] and conducive for individual study" (p. 91). Molla and Cuthbert (2014) confirm Semela's report with a story from one student interviewed in 2010:

On one evening I had to prepare for an exam . . . I was reading in the University library at night. At around 2 am this male student came to me and asked what time it was. I told him. He came closer and seated next to me. Then he [moved] his leg and touched my feet. After a while, he tried to physically abuse me. I escaped and went to my dormitory crying. I did not expect this kind of aggressive behavior in a library. Library was supposed to be a safe place. Sadly, male students do not take this action seriously. [They]

try to simplify it just an expression of a natural and harmless feeling. This is not true for me. It is a cruel offense one may encounter. (Molla & Cuthbert, 2014, p. 769)

This student's experience is not uncommon, and it leaves a female student with nowhere to study. Where can they study where they would not face some kind of harassment if they cannot even study in the library? Universities can be volatile environments for the female student, but issues can also vary from university to university depending on the leadership of the university.

Some universities are known for harassment of women, while others are praised for the work they have done to stop harassment on their campuses. For example, Haramaya University recognized that they were experiencing female attrition at alarming rates and decided to increase support for women at the university. The Dean of Students says that support begins the minute students arrive on campus. The dormitories at Hamaya University are protective in nature. Students can access supermarkets, cosmetics, beauty salons, cafeterias, and lounges to watch television from their dormitory. Females do not have to go out and risk being assaulted. The Dean of Students also says they give female students orientation on how to deal with problems and who to go to for help. They also train the women through empowerment programs to become assertive, and train them on health and reproductive issues. Furthermore, they have a girl's union that helps disadvantaged students with donations of sanitary napkins, stationery, and other daily essentials (Vsointernational, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d).

Haramaya has also established a strong policy to protect women from sexual harassment. Each student receives a copy of the anti-sexual harassment policy. Another policy the university has implemented to combat attrition is that students who would have usually been dismissed due to poor grades go through intensive tutoring and then are able to register the following year.

These policies for women happen when the university, from top down, decides that women are important and can put aside large amounts of money to support projects like these as well as nongovernmental organizations working with the university to increase support for women (Vsointernational, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d;).

2.15 Circumstantial Challenges

Sometimes there are challenges that students did not plan on. A family member dies and the student is needed at home, or the student gets married and decides not to continue her education. Another cause of dropping out can be pregnancy. In Semela's (2007) study, three of the 20 students interviewed left school for a year because of pregnancy. Mergo (2008) found that at Haramaya University, on average seven students give birth per year. She also indicates that many students who get pregnant will have an abortion. Mersha et al. (2009), in an interview with a university nurse, says that four to five students come in weekly asking about pregnancy. Her findings suggest that most of these pregnancies happen in the first year of college when students are no longer under their parents' control and when they do not have adequate awareness of how to interact with the opposite sex. She suggests that social and academic orientation could be helpful in addressing these women's questions.

2.15.1 Economic Challenges

Mersha et al. (2009) found that economic status was a challenge to graduating female students who were from a lower socioeconomic status. They tend to drop out because of a lack of

family financial support and domestic responsibilities (p. 140). Many students are coming from very poor areas and do not have money for copies, sanitary napkins, and stationery (Mersha et al., 2009, 2013; Semela, 2007; vsinternational, 2010a). Lack of aid is a great burden to their studies. Unfortunately, some Ethiopian women fall into prostitution because they have no way to earn money, which can lead to sexually transmitted diseases, botched abortions, and unwanted pregnancy (Mersha et al., 2009).

Issues caused from poverty affects many Ethiopians but can be even more burdensome for female students because of the role women play in society. Amazan (2009) gives a stereotypical picture of the Ethiopian woman: “The image of Ethiopian women is characterized by carrying heavy barrels of water; bending under heavy bundles of firewood, crouching over fires in kitchens cooking *injera* or sitting in the markets/streets with their youngest child clinging on them or at their breast while selling goods” (2009, p. 7). Because of family expectations for the women to do the work at home in much of Ethiopian society, families would rather support the male child with education than the female child. This situation sometimes leaves women with a dilemma (Rose & Al-Samarrai, 2001). How do they pay for their books and their bus ride to the university? But young women who are graduating are able to figure that out.

Challenges for females begin the day they are born in a rural community and continue throughout their lifetimes as they must travel long distances to get an education and prove that they are worthy of earning that education. Females have fewer resources than males, fewer role models to follow, not as much academic support, and more risk for harassment. What if these structures do not improve? When the cultural and structural barriers keep a student from succeeding, how does one break out of that pattern? How can women thrive (like some do) in a hostile environment with limited resources? Prior studies on Ethiopian higher education focus on

the challenges but not on the successes in education, and there is virtually no literature on females who complete graduate work. If we can figure out the skills that women use to overcome these obstacles, we can pass them down to other women and see more women succeed.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This section will examine educational persistence in higher education in order to give insight on why the women in this study were successful.

Students stay in school and drop out of school for a number of reasons. Many theorists have debated these reasons for the past several decades (Metz, 2004). Persistence is “that process that leads students to remain in higher education and complete their certificate or degree regardless of the institution from which the certificate is earned” (Tinto, 2010, p. 54). This definition fits the Ethiopian context because the female student persists to get a degree even when the university situation is not favorable to her. Most studies on persistence in the Ethiopian context have focused on the lack of persistence because of the absence of resources as well as the academic preparedness of female and rural students, but they have not hypothesized on why students persist even when there is a lack of resources (Amazan, 2009; Mersha et al., 2013; Molla & Gale, 2015; Semela, 2007).

Much like some of the literature on minority educational attainment in the U.S., a considerable amount of literature on Ethiopia focuses on why women fail (due to sociocultural structures and/or personal characteristics) rather than those structural and individual factors that contribute to women’s success (Harper, 2012; Semela, 2007). Therefore Tinto’s (1993) model of student persistence and Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework could provide some context regarding why some Ethiopian women excel in college.

3.1 Tinto's Model of Persistence

Vincent Tinto (1993) is one of the most prominent theorists on college dropout, retention, and persistence. His 1993 Longitudinal Model of Departure explains how “interactions among different individuals within the academic and social systems of the institution and the communities which comprise them lead individuals of different characteristics to withdraw from that institution prior to degree completion” (Tinto, 1997, p. 113). The model, seen in Figure 6, has the following characteristics:

pre-entry attributes (prior schooling and family background); goals/commitment (student aspirations and institutional goals); institutional experiences (academics, faculty interaction, co-curricular involvement, and peer group interaction); integration (academic and social); goals/commitment (intentions and external commitments); outcome (departure decision— graduate, transfer, dropout) (Metz, 2004, p. 192).

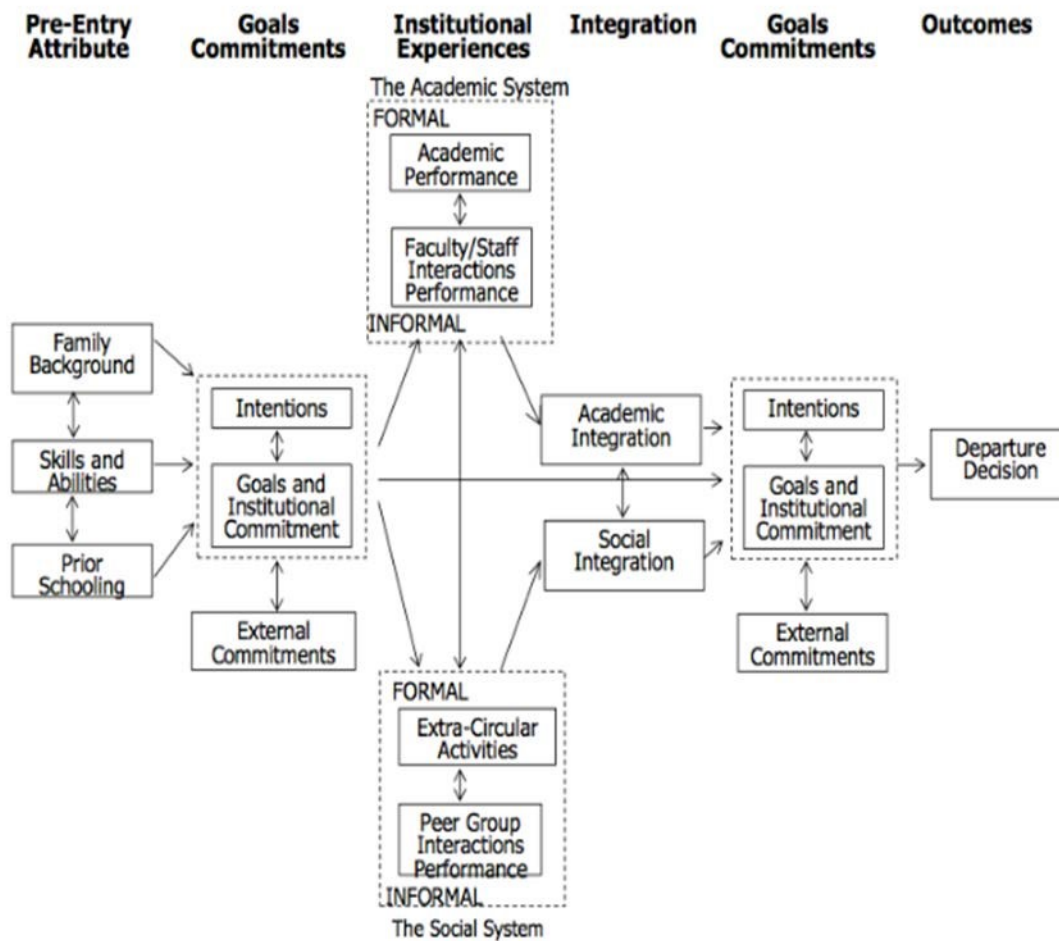


Figure 6. A Conceptual Schema for Dropout from College (Tinto, 1993)

3.1.1 Pre-Entry Attributes

Pre-entry attributes describes the background of the student. What is their family background? Which skills and attributes do they possess? What was their prior schooling before the current college? These questions can help explain student choices as they arrive to school. Metzner and Bean (1985) added grade point average, high school performance, and

psychological variables on student outcomes. Bean's model (1980) shows that the background characteristics of students must have a part in how they interact in the higher education system. Pascarella (1985) suggests that student effort and precollege traits directly influence cognitive development. Levin and Levin (1991) also find that background characteristics play a significant part in persistence of minority students. In Ethiopia's case, students from cities have an advantage over students from rural areas because they most likely have access to good schools and teachers. Students whose parents were educated also have an advantage over other students.

3.1.2 Goals and Commitment

Examining student commitment is crucial longitudinal studies on college dropout. Commitment refers to the degree of attentiveness to their area of study (major) as well as the degree of commitment to the university they are attending (Tinto, 1993). What are the intentions of the student? Do they have a goal for why they are getting a degree? What external commitments do they have that could keep them from attaining their degree? Commitment could be a key as to why some female students continue to strive for college success. One example of a determined and committed female from Ethiopia was a blind student I met in 2016; when asked why she went through so much hardship to get a degree, she replied, "Because there was nothing else for me in the village" (personal communication, June 3, 2016). Her commitment to get a degree was so strong because she knew she would not survive in her rural village without an education; this belief was enough motivation to get her through hard times.

External commitments are also significant in this stage. If a student has to work and is splitting her time between job commitments and school, or if a student is married and has a child,

her commitment could be split because of household duties. External forces can be negative or positive influences on a student's goals and commitments (Connolly, 2016).

3.1.3 Institutional Experiences

Institutional experiences involve formal and informal interactions students have at the university that influence their persistence, whether it is through their academic performance, interaction with faculty and staff, or peer interaction during extracurricular activities (Connolly, 2016; Tinto, 1993). Bean's (1992) model demonstrates that institutional quality and opportunity are the two most important influences of commitment in the institution. Astin (1985) suggests the intensity of students' involvement with the university affect whether students persist. Tinto (2010) spent much of his later career focusing on the institutional conditions on student retention. He focused on expectations of the student and university support for the student, assessment and feedback of the university, and involvement of the student.

In the Ethiopian context, good "institutional experiences" could also speak to persistence, but those experiences might be a challenge for female students to access. In one study of two universities in Ethiopia, female students "highlighted the hostile learning environment as a key concern" (Molla & Cutherbert, 2014, p. 765).

3.1.4 Academic and Social Integration

Tinto (1993) proposed that the better integrated the student is with the university academically and socially, the more likely a student will complete his or her degree. Metz's (2004) summary of the persistence literature shows how Tinto's theory formed over time. Tinto

(1975) was influenced by Durkheim's (1953) study on suicide (departure), which showed that if people were not able to acclimate to their environments, departure would result. Astin (1977) and Pascarella (1985) find that a student's dominant peer group has the most impact on whether a student stays or leaves. Astin (1985) argues that financial aid, when packaged through loans, grants, and scholarships, is not as good of a determinant for persistence as one single work-study award. Students are more likely to persist when they are working at the university and interacting with faculty and staff; therefore, work study is better for the student because of the element of involvement in university life. In Ethiopia, students are taken outside of their ethnic culture and usually placed in an environment far from home, even with a language different from their native tongue because of a government initiative that wishes to promote understanding between different ethnic groups. Ethiopian women also have the additional burden of having to integrate in an environment dominated by male faculty and staff (Melese & Fenta, 2009).

Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Institutional Departure shows over time how students' background, goals and experiences at the college level impact their decisions to stay or leave. This model has been used in countless studies, including in South Africa (Bitzer & Troskie-De Bruin, 2004), and has the potential to be informative in the female Ethiopian context.

Weidman's (1989) socialization conceptual approach incorporates parts of Tinto's model but also points out outside influences on university students. For example, he incorporates the importance of students' relationships with their parents and how that relationship can influence performance at the university. In addition to parents, he references groups outside the university, including friendships, community organizations, and employers, all of whom can impact students' success and socialization to the university (Weidman, 1989). These aspects of student

success are particularly helpful in the Ethiopian contexts because of the strong family and friendships that many Ethiopian students have.

3.2 Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso's (2005) framework on Community Cultural Wealth looks at students through a lens of success instead of deficit. Her focus on the positive attributes of people of color in the U.S. relates well to the Ethiopian context. This framework illustrates how students' cultural wealth and strength makes them successful even though they might struggle in the school system's culture. "Community cultural wealth is used by Latinos in order to survive the institutional neglect of the U.S. public school system that has historically failed them" (Luna & Martinez, p. 4, 2013). This framework is helpful to apply to a study on successful Ethiopian women, who have also been "historically failed" by the education system in their country. The framework was not intended to be used as a theory on persistence; however, I argue that the cultural strengths Yosso (2005) references also play a part in why successful female students are able to persist. Other studies have also used her work to discuss persistence (Espino, 2014; Luna & Martinez, 2013).

Community Cultural Wealth came as a response to Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) Cultural Capital theory, which shows that the upper and middle classes have more knowledge and assets that are deemed valuable to society. If students are born into a class whose knowledge is not valuable to the majority, then they can go to school to gain that knowledge and social mobility. There is an assumption that people of color are disadvantaged because they do not have the cultural knowledge of whites and therefore cannot advance their social mobility and therefore

continue to be “disadvantaged” in the school system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Yosso, 2005). Community Cultural Wealth challenges this belief and instead reveals all of the cultural benefits people of color bring to school with them, thus transforming the negative view into a positive one. If Ethiopian women’s persistence traits are recognized and seen as valuable, they may be treated differently in college.

3.2.1 Aspirational Capital

Community Cultural Wealth looks at different “capitals,” or strengths, one possesses. Yosso (2005) refers to Aspirational capital, Linguistic capital, Familial capital, Social capital, Navigational capital, and Resistant capital. “*Aspirational capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real perceived barriers” (p. 78). Women who are able to attain a master’s degree in Ethiopia demonstrate Aspirational capital. They are faced with structural and cultural barriers every day, including lack of role models; lack of female professors; minimal administrative and advising support; and verbal, physical, and/or sexual harassment by male students and teachers, yet they maintain hope in spite of these structural obstacles (Mersha et al., 2009, 2013).

3.2.2 Linguistic Capital

“*Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style (Faulstich Orellana, 2003)” Yosso, p.78). Most Ethiopians speak their ethnic dialect and Amharic, the national language. Additionally, English is the academic language in high school (grades 11 and 12) and higher

education, which indicates that multilingualism is an important component of success for any Ethiopian student, male or female. I do not know if successful female students have stronger linguistic backgrounds. In Ethiopia, city students have an advantage because the teachers and school systems have better knowledge of English. In rural areas students have much less access to English; however, if women are able to pass the English exam to gain entrance into the university, they must have linguistic skills. Nega (2009), in a study on pre-university English proficiency, finds that poor English language skills of teachers were prevalent throughout secondary schools in Ethiopia. Linguistic attainment is not discussed in depth in the literature on Ethiopian female students.

3.2.3 Familial Capital

Familial capital “refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (see Bernal, 1998, 2002)” (Yosso, p. 79). For many Ethiopians, the family institution is important and provides education, care, and support (Admassu, 2010, p. 5). There are, however, some traditional duties of females that make it harder to go to school. For example, Rose and Al-Samarrai (2001) find that girls have more household chores than do boys, so the opportunity cost of sending girls to school is higher than that of sending boys. In addition, families want to protect their daughters, and, in some parts of Ethiopia, there is still the practice of kidnapping to get brides. Families fear that by sending their girls to school they could be at increased risk of kidnapping. Furthermore, there is a fear that girls will no longer want to do the household chores or get married if they are educated. “An educated girl may not only be too old for marriage but also may be less willing or able to undertake demanding housework” (Rose & Al-Samarrai, 2001, p. 55). While “familia capital”

can help girls and women to stay in school (Rose & AlSammarrai, 2001), some traditional family practices including early marriage and gender roles could be detrimental to girls' education.

3.2.4 Social Capital

“*Social capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources” (Yosso, p. 79). Student expectations are also shaped by the knowledge they receive on campus through relationships with faculty, staff, and students. However, students with low social capital struggle to find these connections. In Ethiopia, women struggle to develop these relationships. Mersha et al.'s (2009) study found that males receive more support from teachers and have more Social capital in the form of relationships with peers and authority figures, while “female students receive less information, share less experience about the academic and social life in higher education and less guidance from their friends and teachers” (p. 37).

3.2.5 Navigational Capital

“*Navigational capital* refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (p. 80). Makda, the academic I mentioned in the introduction, told a story that represents Navigational capital. When she was in college, her professor took each female student to his home for three days. If the student didn't comply, he would fail her. Makda went to the gender office, an administrative unit on campus, and asked what she should do. They encouraged her to document all of her work and keep it so that if the professor failed her she would have proof that she had completed the work (personal communication, June 15, 2014). She was able to use her navigational skills to escape her professor's advances. Strong connections are important in the

Ethiopian culture. For example, the Global Affairs Canada (n.d) website outlines important cultural customs for people who wish to travel to Ethiopia. They stress the significance of relationship dynamics and emphasize the importance of personal relationships with Ethiopians in order to accomplish goals.

3.2.6 Resistant Capital

“*Resistant capital* refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (p.80). Makda showed Resistant capital in refusing to sleep with her professor. Molla and Cuthbert (2014) argue that “women may contribute to sustaining the social structures that oppress them through their conformity, whether willingly or otherwise, to the existing roles, norms, expectations in their daily practices and interactions” (p. 762). Resistant capital is a challenge for a woman who has low self-esteem, which is one of the characteristics described of Ethiopian female students in several studies (Demise, Shinebaum, & Melesse, 2002; Gelaye, Arnold, Williams, Goshu, & Berhane, 2008; Molla, 2012; Molla & Cuthbert, 2014).

Community Cultural Wealth addresses some of the aspects of educational success of the Ethiopian woman. Yet Yosso’s model is still missing many pieces to make a strong case on why some Ethiopian females are able to succeed. For example, economic capital was left out because Yosso (2005) argued that many times white people have more economic capital than do people of color. Ethiopian women from rural areas are usually significantly poorer than women in richer areas, and many times the finances to go to school are only paid to male children. However, women who succeed are able to find ways to fund their schooling (Rose & Al-Samarrai, 2001).

Another form of capital that Yosso (2005) alludes to but does not foreground is spiritual capital (Verter, 2003). Espino (2014) asserts that one participant in her study only persisted through graduate school because of his relationship with a higher power. Espino concludes that more work needs to be done in order to determine if spiritual capital has currency in why students persist. It could be hard to determine if successful students have more spiritual capital than other students because Ethiopia is quite religious, and many students could claim spiritual help regardless of finishing school or not. The literature on Ethiopian female persistence has not addressed spirituality.

3.3 Concluding Thoughts on Framework

The Community Cultural Wealth framework is strong and comprehensive, especially in looking at marginalized people's experiences through a success paradigm. An interesting aspect of this framework and Tinto (1997) and Weidman's (1989) frameworks are that they do not include gender exclusive traits. For example, anyone could have Aspirational capital if they have high aspirations. Boys from rural areas in Ethiopia will also struggle to get to college and stay in college because they are usually coming from an extreme poverty background, just like rural girls. Furthermore, many young women and men are coming from a different ethnic background than their peers at an institution and have to navigate a different culture from their own. Therefore, it is important to mention that even though these issues are not necessarily gendered, I was careful in my analysis to listen to the gendered perspectives of the participants. For example, how did poverty touch their lives differently because of their gender?

Looking at characteristics and strategies that Ethiopian women use to complete their education, Tinto's (1995) model and Weidman's (1989) argument that students' background, university, parents, and friends could all potentially impact their educational experiences helps to inform my thinking on the Ethiopian context. Furthermore, Yosso's (2005) framework opens ideas about different capitals students might use to strategically navigate the university atmosphere (Chenitz, 1986).

4.0 Methodology

The main purpose for this dissertation is to explore the educational success stories of Ethiopian women in order to gain an understanding of factors that help garner their success. In a place where so few women are able to graduate from college and many women cannot even dream of going after a career, it is important to study the lives of women who were successful so that we can learn from their stories and share them with others who wish to make their dream a reality. I chose to do a qualitative study because I wanted to focus on individuals to find out what motivated them and how they were able to be successful in their education; I wanted to hear their stories in a way that might not have been possible through a quantitative study. I chose to use narrative inquiry as my research design because it emphasizes stories as a source of data, stories that can be powerful tools for educating us on the *how* and *why* of educational success. I used an interpretivist approach to narrative inquiry because I am interpreting their stories through my understanding.

4.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry is an informative qualitative research method. Through stories, we are brought into intimate moments in the lives of other human beings who have something powerful to share. These stories could have great significance to the world around us. Atkinson (1989), in “Life Story Interview,” says “a life narrative highlights the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes, and lessons of a lifetime” (Atkinson, 1985, p 125).

The stories that were shared with me in this study were “lessons of a lifetime” and come with underlying themes, issues, and circumstances. They are powerful narratives of educational experiences that give insight into individuals, families, communities, and institutions. The Personal Narrative Group (1989) argues, “The truths of personal narratives are the truths revealed from real positions in the world, through lived experience in social relationships, in the context of passionate beliefs and partisan stands” (p.263). Hearing stories allows us to learn from real people whose stories can have a significant impact. Furthermore, the Personal Narrative Group (1989), with its emphasis on a feminist view, writes “We maintain that personal narratives are particularly rich sources because, attentively interpreted, they illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level constraints within which those courses evolve” (p. 6). One of the constraints in Ethiopia is the struggle for a girl to get an education. This study examines the restraints put on the participants, how they interacted with these restraints, and how they overcome them.

Narrative research also gives a voice to marginalized people and amplifies the voices of others (Chase, 2013; Riessman, 2008, p. 223; Chase, 2013). Chase (2013) summarizes the research on narrative design from the last decade and addresses “the urgency of speaking, the urgency of being heard, the urgency of collective stories, and the urgency of public dialog” (p. 68). She says there is urgency for the participant to speak so they can share their story and receive some healing from being heard. Furthermore, she explains that narratives usually lead to a collective story of several people or of a specific group. These collective stories can garner a bigger audience who identify with their stories and, from this dialog, social change can come about.

In this time in history, a collective story is being heard across the world about girls' education. For example, the New York Times best seller *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women* shares the journey of women across the globe. In *Girl Rising*, a documentary film, 12 girls from developing nations share their struggle and hope to get an education. This film has been shown all over America in order to bring attention to the matter in hopes to bring about social change. There is a collective audience because women and men all over the world are impacted by the stories of the female struggle to get an education. The narratives in this study will add to this collective story of education for women.

Chase's final point is that narrative stories bring urgency to public dialog about complex issues. Most qualitative researchers hope that their stories will bring about public dialog and social change; therefore, they look for public spaces to share the narratives so that they can draw out these discussions (Chase, 2013, p. 71). I have already begun sharing the stories of the women in this study in public spaces like conferences and invited talks, but I also am looking for other ways to share these stories publicly so that others may be inspired by their voices.

Narrative research makes meaning "through the shaping or ordering of experience, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 64). Narratives not only are used as a way of passing on a cultural heritage which is very common in Ethiopia, but they are also a common genre in which to retell sensitive moments and events (Coffey, Atkinson, 1996; Riessman, 1993). Through capturing the stories of women through interviews, I identify and connect common themes these women share. By collecting their stories, I was able to see the "consequences of their actions over time" and was

able to find commonalities between the interviewees. Furthermore, I was able to identify themes in each story that participants chose to highlight.

4.1.1 The Interpretivist Approach

Within narrative design I use an interpretivist approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argue that “all research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (p. 22). In the book *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, Glesne (2011) shares several points on the interpretive approach that guided this study:

- From what you see and hear, you interpret others perspectives of some aspect of the world, contributing to the multiplicity of voices and visions and the plurality of our knowing.
- The act of listening can be, in itself, a radical action when you use your inquiry to witness the stories and lives of those whose voices are ignored or silenced.
- Your interpretations can point out some significance or meaning in the world that through your representations can inspire others to perceive, believe, or act in different ways.
- Seeking to interpret a context not your own can work to reveal you to yourself, you will more easily see your own assumptions, stereotypes and subjectivities.

(Glesne, 2011, p. 24)

Reflecting on my journey in interacting with the narratives, I can see myself in Glesne’s (2011) statements. I do interpret others’ perspectives. I have a lens that has shaped how I view

things and my bias could come across in these stories, but I will acknowledge it when I see it. As Goodson, Anikainen, Sikes, and Andrews (2016) explain:

All human knowledge and experience as expressed through verbal accounts is in essence biased. Everyone sees the world through frames of reference which are developed as a result of their possessing particular attributes and personal trajectories, or being situated in particular social, historical, geographical, political, religious (or whatever) contexts which, consequently, lead to various and differing experiences (p.77).

They go on to explain that it is important to identify one's own biases, be reflexive, and acknowledge that those biases exist.

Following up on Glesne's (2011) points, when I listened to the stories in this study, a radical action did take place. Many times, I was moved with such emotion at the hardships participants had been through and the triumphs they had forged. Additionally, some were so funny that I laughed out loud with them as they told their story. One participant began crying as she told her story. I did not know why she was crying at that point, but her tears alone made me tear up as I waited to hear why, when she talked of how amazing her brother was, she would start to cry. I later learned that he had passed away, but she did not bring that up until the end of the story and so I experienced the radical action of listening, knowing that the participant was sharing with me such profound intimate details that have touched her (and others') lives. I hope that my representation of the stories and the way I perceive them can and will inspire others. Lastly, by reading these stories I have had to reflect on my own education, my own assumptions and stereotypes, and I continue to do this as I engage with these stories. For example, I believe if I had been born in rural Ethiopia, I would not have graduated from high school. Even though I

think I have tenacity, I look at the other skills the participants possessed and realized that most likely I would not have been able to get through school without the skills they have.

4.1.2 Steps in a Narrative Study

Creswell (2002), in his chapter on Narrative Research Design, describes the steps in conducting narrative research that I have paraphrased: 1. Identify a phenomenon to explore. 2. Select participant or participants, to learn about the phenomenon. 3. Collect the participants' stories. 4. Restory the individuals' story, telling it in order from past, present, and future, adding the setting, describing their story, and analyzing their story for themes. 5. Collaborate with the participant. 6. Write the story. 7. Validate the report (2002, p. 533).

I followed these steps in this narrative study. First, identifying a phenomenon to explore, which was female success in education. Second, I purposely found women in Ethiopia who had been successful in their education endeavors and interviewed them about their personal success stories. Next, I analyzed their stories for themes and then I “re-storied” their stories in chronological order, sometimes retelling a story and sometimes rearranging a story to build in a past, as well as a present. After I drew out the themes in their stories, I contacted the participants to discuss my findings and asked if I was accurate in these findings and if they wanted me to add or take away anything. Next, I tell their stories in my results section but also include their voices as much as I can because their voices are powerful and I want them to be heard. Lastly, I focus on validity.

Researchers using narrative inquiry as a design validate their study in different ways. In fact, there is not an agreement on a “gold standard” for fact checking the evidence for a qualitative study because researchers insist on having a democratic discourse and not conforming

to any one method (Denzin, 2013, p. 539). Connelly and Clandinin (1990), top researchers in the field of narrative inquiry, explain, “Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 7). They go on to say that verisimilitude, apparancy, and transferability are ways to validate a narrative study. Similarly, Denzen and Lincoln (2005) argue that trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and confirmability are criteria for validating a narrative study. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that the idea of generalizability, mostly a quantitative approach, should be completely given up in qualitative data and replaced with the idea of transferability. I take these approaches to my dissertation and demonstrate them throughout the data analysis.

5.0 Research Design

5.1 Research Team

My on-the-ground research team consisted of Jerusalem Yibeltal Yizengaw and my mother, Alice Karnes. Jerusalem was a PhD student at Addis Ababa University at the time. We had become friends and neighbors while she was a World Bank McNamara Fellow at the University of Pittsburgh. She helped me in making contacts at the university, finding a central location for interviews, helping with the recruiting process, and serving as a cultural liaison and translator during the interviews. Her experience and perspective as a female Ethiopian PhD candidate added a deeper understanding of the cultural context and schooling experience. Jerusalem and my mother, who transcribed the interviews, were present for most of the interviews but not all because of some logistical issues. My mother at the time had lived in Ethiopia for six years and had started a non-profit to help rural school girls. Her understanding of some of the barriers school girls face as well as the cultural context and geography of the country were of a great help in providing larger contexts for understanding the participants' stories. Furthermore, her transcribing skills were excellent and she was able to understand the accent of Ethiopian English as well as some of the Amharic words that were mixed in to the conversation. She transcribed as much as she could during the interview, but the interviews also were recorded so that any information missing could be added later. Knowing that I was recording everything and knowing that my mother understood the Ethiopian accent allowed me to engage fully with the participants without worrying about capturing all of the data.

5.2 Location

I conducted 31 interviews in Addis Ababa, and four interviews in the city of Sodo, located about six hours south of Addis Ababa. I chose Addis Ababa because it is the capital of the country and I thought it would be the most convenient place to find enough participants with master's degrees. I chose Sodo because of the connections I have with Wolaita Sodo University and because I thought it would add diversity to my participant pool. I thought that the participants could be from a different ethnic group and their stories could be unique; however, I was surprised to learn that mostly the participants who were interviewed in Sodo were not from the ethnic group in that region.

Most of the hour-long interviews were conducted in a private gazebo at the Ghion Hotel in Addis Ababa and in the hotel gardens of Abebe Zeleka Hotel in Sodo. Both these locations were easy for participants to find and were secluded so that the interviews were private. There were a few interviews that took place in a coffee shop in a mall, but the atmosphere was so loud we only did that once. We always offered the participant something to drink and, more often than not, we all sipped macchiatos while doing the interviews. Interviews were conducted in English, but a few times Jerusalem had to translate when the participant was unable to communicate a concept or thought in English. Universities in Ethiopia use English as the medium of instruction.

Pseudonyms are used for each participant and any identifying information was changed. Each interviewee received 500 *Birr*, approximately 22 dollars, for participation in the study. Each interviewee read the consent form and agreed to take part in the study, according to the IRB regulations, before the interview began. I answered any questions about the consent form with each participant. IRB required a consent form because one of the questions I intended to ask was

about sexual harassment. The consent form shared that the interviews would be published, how participant identity would be concealed, benefits of participating, risks of sharing personal information, rights as a research participant, and contact information of my advisor if they had any questions or concerns. All participants agreed orally to take part in the study and none asked for their data not to be used. In fact, most participants were very excited about the study and were very happy to share their educational journeys in hopes it would help other women. The IRB approval letter is located in Appendix B.

5.3 Recruitment of Participants

My strategies to select participants included a combination of different types of methods. I used purposeful selection to find participants. Purposeful selection is a non-probability sampling technique in which “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals. ”(Maxwell, 2013, p. 97) In my case, Ethiopian women with a master’s degree from a rural area were the criteria for my purposeful selection. Maxwell (2013) explains that one must select individuals who can directly provide information to answer a study’s research questions (p. 97). I also used snowball sampling in order to gather more participants because few women in Ethiopia have obtained this educational status, and each person’s connections helped me to find more interviewees.

One participant, Makda, was a friend I had made during my time in Sodo in 2014. She was able to recruit several women she knew from the university. Ten participants came from a post my brother, who worked in Addis Ababa, placed on a Facebook group called “What’s

Happening in Addis Ababa,” which had over 104,500 members. Jerusalem also contacted people she knew would fit the criteria of the study and contacted professors as well to ask them for leads for participants. Then, many of these participants shared the study with their friends; as a result, we were able to recruit over 35 interviewees. Women continued to contact Jerusalem to be interviewed, but because of my time limit I was not able to interview more than 35 people. In this case, the snowball sampling method worked very well because the participants knew which of their friends or contacts were from rural areas and were able to refer them to me. However, since selection was not random, the universities and locations where participants are from are not equalized. Often, participants were friends with people from the same ethnic group or from the same university. Most of the participants came from the Oromia and Amhara regions. I do not know if this is because these are larger ethnic groups, if these groups are more educated than other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, or if these groups were the effect of snowball sampling. I did however feel that we did, get a diverse pool of participants with the 35 who were interviewed. See Table 8 for the attributes of the participants.

Jerusalem screened calls to determine if participants qualified for the study and helped in scheduling interviews and giving directions. To qualify for the study, each participant had to be an Ethiopian woman from a rural area and must have completed her masters’ degree in an Ethiopian university by the time of the interview. But if there was a misunderstanding and we ended up with a participant who was not from a rural area, we ended up interviewing her as well because we felt that sharing and listening was an affirmation of their value and success. Furthermore, there was some misunderstanding on what rural means, as none of the participants were from Addis Ababa and assumed that since they were not from the capital that they were rural. As we began to interview participants, we found stark differences between those who

were born in small cities as opposed to those who were born far from a city. Therefore, we decided to screen participants by asking if they had high schools in their villages. If they did, we categorized them as not rural. This clarification helped us eventually find more truly rural participants.

5.4 Data Collection Procedure

I used semi-structured interviews because open-ended questions allowed me to gather similar information from each participant yet still allowed the participants to share their educational histories. I asked them to introduce themselves and talk about their journey to get an education. Follow-up questions focused on family background and educational history, as well as lessons learned that they would pass to other girls trying to get an education. Interview questions can be seen in Appendix A.

After each day of interviews, I would take time to reflect back on each interview and write memos to myself with my thoughts about the interviewee and things that stood out to me. Throughout my process of reading the interviews, I would take time to write memos to myself and summaries of the data so that I could remember each participant. After the data was transcribed in Microsoft Word, I uploaded transcripts to NVivo 11, a qualitative data analysis software program.

5.5 Data Analysis Procedure

5.5.1 Coding

I used NVivo because it allowed me to organize my data intricately within the system while also writing memos to myself and using their coding and attribute features. I strived for systematicity and verisimilitude in my study, and NVivo helped me to stay organized and visualize my data clearly. Nodes enabled me to keep track of the number of times I was coding for a theme so that I could see patterns developing. Figure 7 shows nodes and the number of times items were coded and from how many references.

Nodes			
Name	Sources	Referen	
Distance to HS	19	22	
distance to primary school	16	17	
distance to University	9	9	
dream	5	5	
early marriage	7	8	
encouraging husband	11	14	
English	25	31	
experiencing devastation	1	1	
failure of other women	7	10	
Family education	22	26	
Father support	12	18	
financial	19	35	
friendships	16	30	
Gender office	2	3	
gender roles	2	2	
Girls education knowledg	2	3	
grateful	1	1	
house work	14	21	
injustice to women	1	1	
inspiration	5	5	
Kindergarden	1	1	
Lack of understanding fro	1	1	

Figure 7. Nodes Showing Number of Items Coded and Referenced

When I was curious about a certain pattern, I could open the code and see what specific statements I had coded. For example, in Figure 8, the theme of a supportive husband began to develop. The software allowed me to pull quotes from the interviews that I coded. NVivo also allowed me to write in attributes of the participants and sort the data into different categories, which helped me to analyze the data further.

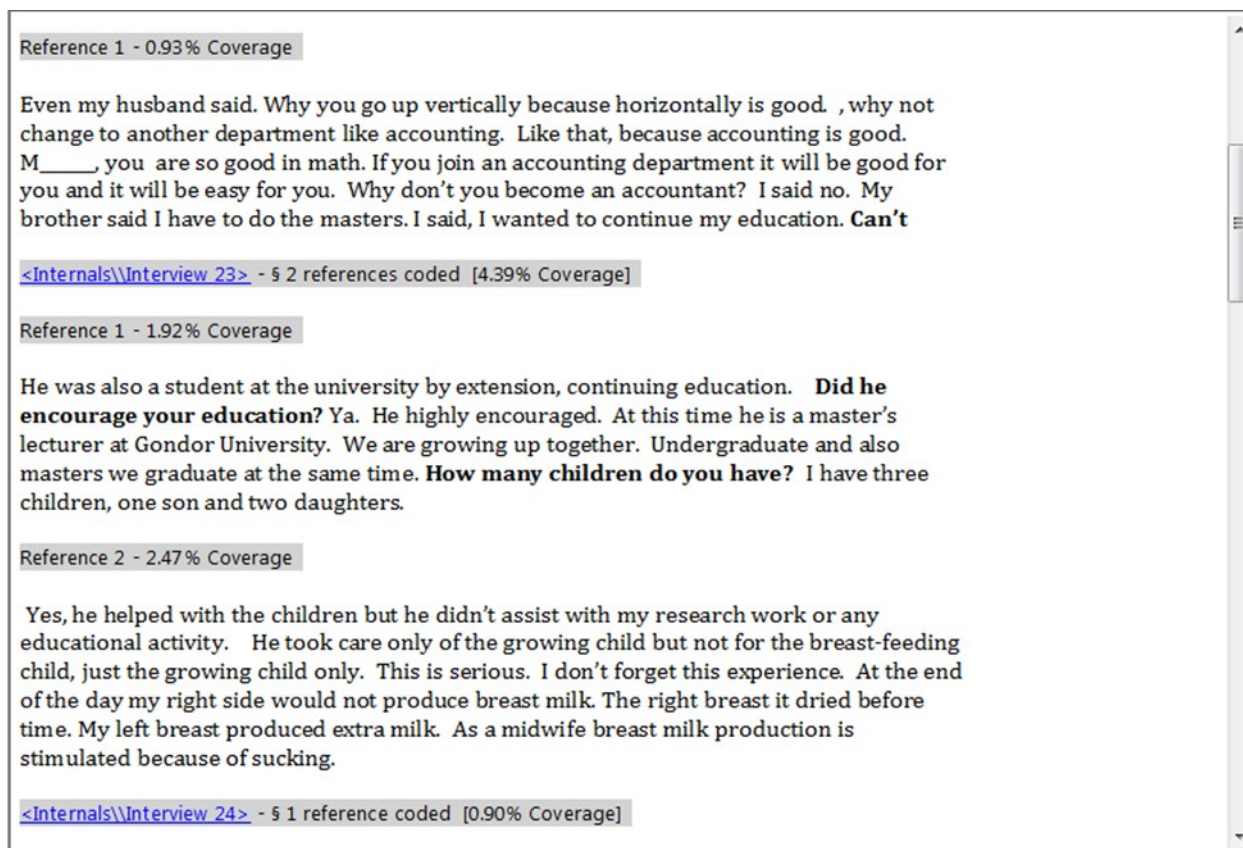


Figure 8. Inside The Node: Encouraging Husband

In narrative design, coding for themes is part of the data analysis process. I coded the data three times with different strategies each time. First, I went through each interview to gather background characteristics about participants and coded them as attributes. For example, I collected information on where they were from, their parents' education level, the universities they attended, etc. Various attribute codes can be seen in Tables 8, 9, and 10. Then I used an open coding method, also called *initial coding*. "Initial coding breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). In open coding, it is important to stay open to different theoretical possibilities. Furthermore, from a descriptive interpretive approach, qualitative data

does not use pre-existing categories but it is naturally driven by the research; is important for the researcher to be open if the assessment changes focus because of the data (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). Therefore, in this study I did not use preexisting codes from my theoretical framework but allowed the voices in the data to speak for themselves. When I coded the data, I coded anything that was interesting or patterns that I began to see. For example, I had not set out to code for challenges, but I could not ignore the number of challenges the participants went through and so I began to code every time they ran into a challenge. Being completely open to incidents that stood out to me, I developed 137 different codes. Out of these codes, some nodes were coded much more often and some only once. For example, *challenges* was coded 107 times but *gender roles* was only coded twice. In Figure 4, I captured a picture of some of the codes I used with NVivo software.

During my second round of coding, I began refining the codes to make more sense of them. Sometimes I had coded items in two different places, and I combined those codes to clean up my data. I was able to export my codes from NVivo into an Excel document and then go through each code line by line to see where I might have double coded or used a similar word to represent the same concept. I found that I was able to refine the codes down to 110 codes, though 27 of those codes only had one reference. I was not worried about codes that only had one reference, as I wanted to focus on the items that were coded more frequently, as I thought this is where the themes would develop. I went through each interview again using open coding to add to my already established categories but also to look for any new information I had missed now that I knew the data even better. With this in mind, my focus did change from looking at characteristics and strategies of these women to considering the question, “Why were they successful”?

As I was coding the data, I realized it was hard to separate the stories into different themes. Coding seemed to chop up the stories so that I could only see glimpses of groupings but not the overall picture of what was happening in each participant's life. If I focused on coding one theme, I missed another part of a participant's story. It felt like I was compartmentalizing their stories instead of looking at the complete story of the participant. Furthermore, I realized that much of what I was coding was not getting at my research question of why the participants were successful as my codes were so random and not focused. Many times in my coding I had coded items more frequently because I had asked about them in the interview and not because they were naturally coming up in the data. For example, I asked about their English in the interview because they had to go to an English-speaking university and I was curious about the struggles they faced with language and how they overcame them. But this question had little or nothing to do with why they were successful, yet it showed up in the top 11 nodes I had coded. Figure 9 shows the top 11 nodes that I coded alongside the node *support*. Looking at the top 11 codes I could see some items directly related to the more specific questions I asked, but I could also see some themes that were beginning to shine through. For example, English, religion, and recommendations for students were all questions I asked about. Yet, the codes *benefits of education*, *support*, *motivation*, *friendship*, and *smart* were themes that emerged that may relate to my overall question of what made them successful. To find this out I knew I needed a different strategy.

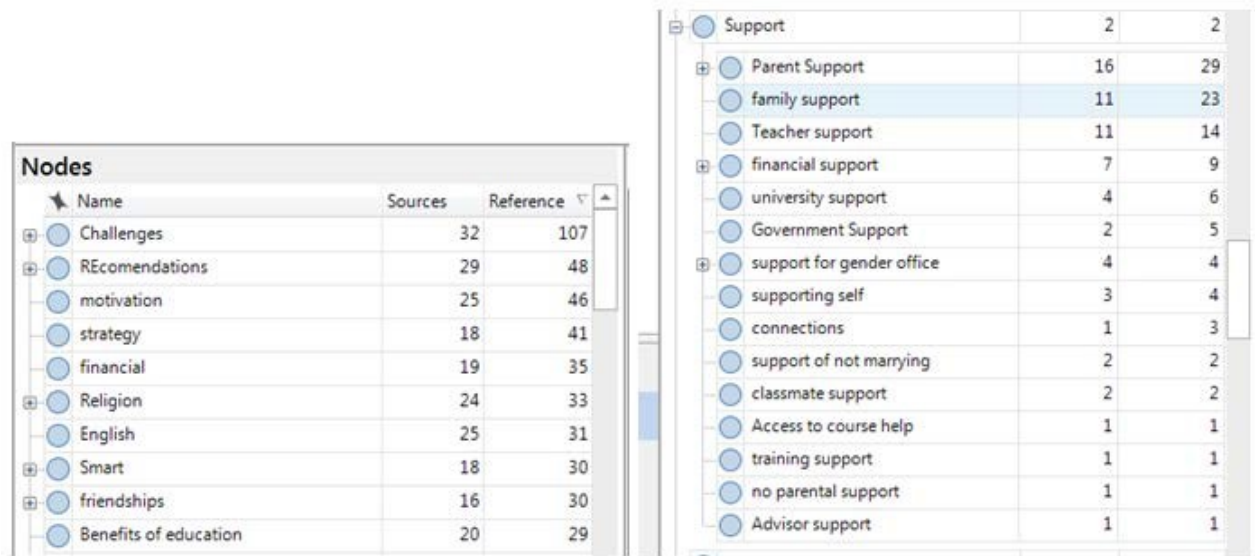


Figure 9. Most Prevalent Items Coded in NVivo

5.5.1.1 Coding the Interviews as a Whole Document

I decided to look at the overall picture of each story to see what themes would come out of each interview as a whole. What did the big picture communicate? To explore this question, in my third round of coding I focused specifically on the question “what was it that really made the participant successful?” I read each interview as a whole while asking myself this question. I then wrote in a memo what I thought was the most significant part of a participants’ success story, sometimes writing down several noteworthy things in their lives; I then coded these items. For each answer, I asked the question: If this incident, or person, or thing, did not exist, would she have graduated? What were literally the most significant things in her life that gave her the chance to succeed? These answers added up to 20 different groups. I continually refined these codes, comparing them to the other themes that were established under the first two rounds of coding and continually rereading stories and memos I had written to myself to confirm the themes that were most prevalent. For example, one of the participants was successful because

she had support from a boyfriend who helped her through school. I had to consider whether to keep that experience separate from the category of friendship or to combine the two to make one category. These were hard questions, but I needed to refine my themes as some seemed to overlap. I found that developing overall themes in participants' stories enabled me to answer my research question more accurately and explore in more depth what really made the participants successful.

5.6 Validity

In this study, I made every effort to strive for trustworthiness and credibility. The American Education Research Association (AERA) 2006 report states, "It is the researcher's responsibility to show the reader that the report can be trusted. This begins with the description of the evidence, the data, and the analysis supporting each interpretive claim" (p.11). The narratives I tell and the data analysis I have done are trustworthy and credible. First, since I myself am not Ethiopian, I made sure I had a research assistant from Ethiopia who could give cultural and language insight and depth to what the participants had to say. Furthermore, Jerusalem, my research assistant, had been through the education system in Ethiopia and could provide very personal insight into the study and the struggles of the participants. She also was quick to help translate if the participant struggled in English, which helped to maintain the authenticity of each participant's responses. I also must add that even though I was not from Ethiopia, I was born in Cameroon and have traveled extensively across the continent. Furthermore I had worked in the African Studies Program as an Academic advisor at the University of Pittsburgh for three years prior to my research in Ethiopia where I met and worked

with many African students and faculty who enriched my cultural knowledge. In addition, I have taught in higher education in the United States, Turkey, and Mexico for a total of eight years, and have had many diverse female students from around the world. Working with multiple cultures has given me a strong cultural understanding of different international contexts and also aided me in understanding the individual stories and interpreting the data.

Another aspect of trustworthiness and credibility includes the data set. The data was impeccably transcribed. When there was a question regarding what the participant had said because of background noise or strong accent, I went back to the recording and listened to it over and over again until I was sure of what the participant had said. Third, after interpreting the data and writing up the themes, I called each participant that I highlighted to confirm the themes I found. All participants agreed with these themes and showed enthusiasm at my findings. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to receive feedback from my doctoral peers on the themes from the data. They confirmed my interpretive work and gave me a fresh perspective on the multiple themes coming from the data. Furthermore, by using NVivo software I was able to visualize the data and systematically code for themes that I could trace throughout the project.

I have written my findings in such a way that they can be transferable to girls and women in similar contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1989) say that the responsibility of transferring the information to other contexts is the reader's responsibility. The researcher provides all of the necessary information that is needed on the context, but it is the reader who knows if they can transfer the information or not. "Narrative inquiry should be an invitation to the reader to analyze the results and let the results shape the reader's thinking, let the stories probe the reader to let them reflect their position about their own inquiries" (Peshkin, 1985, p. 280). The stories in this study will allow the reader to ask questions in other cultural and educational contexts and

compare and reflect with the stories written here. Furthermore, I have described the steps I have taken to collect, transcribe, and analyze the data so that others can follow these methods as well and come to similar awareness.

5.7 Limitations and Caveats

This study is an analysis of inside stories from a culture other than my own; even though I have vast cultural knowledge I humbly interpret from my lens what participants are trying to communicate while using English as a foreign language. I relied on my background as an English language teacher for over 10 years and my experience with learners who have varying levels of English. I also depended on my friendships in the country to guide me on cultural practices and university information. Not having lived in Ethiopia for a significant amount of time could have been a limitation to my analysis. Furthermore, my contact with the participants has been limited to phone calls in the two years since I collected the data. My IRB did not allow for email messages; therefore, all of the follow-up was done through phone calls without a translator. Though I think I was able to communicate my analysis to them, and they all responded heartily about the results, some participants were difficult to understand.

Another concern regarding the study is that I collected data from various time periods. I did not put a restraint on the years passed since a student graduated with a master's degree; therefore, I could have had participants who graduated in the 1990s when there were only two universities in the country, or I could have included a student who graduated in 2016 when education was booming with over 36 public universities in the country. I think this adds an interesting perspective as I will be focusing more on what the student did to overcome

educational issues regardless of which university they attended and in what time period they went. Issues could vary a great deal, and a participant who just finished her degree could have different ideas compared to someone who completed a master's degree 10 years ago and would have had more time to reflect on her education.

6.0 Results

I open this chapter with an introduction to the participants by describing their attributes. Then I share my findings based on categories I found in the data. At that point I explain how I arrived at the overall themes subsequent chapters. The attributes selected will give the reader more understanding of where each participant is coming from and how these individual attributes impact each theme. The two subsequent chapters are devoted to the findings of this research, my retelling of the themes of strategy and motivation from the participants' stories, and my critical analysis of the participants' educational journey.

6.1 Attributes of the Participants

I interviewed 35 women on their educational journeys from birth to graduate school and their current experiences in their careers. In describing variables associated with their lives, I hope not to stereotype them in any way. I refer to the list of the participants and their attributes in Tables 5, 6, and 7. I used pseudonyms for each participant. I found each pseudonym by googling popular Ethiopian female names, and I removed their university affiliations to protect the identity of the subjects. Table 5 shows the region from which each participant comes. I also marked if they were rural, their economic status, and if they had any unusual circumstances. Out of the 35 women interviewed, seven had not grown up in a rural area and had easy access to primary schools and high schools. Two of the participants began their education in a rural area but their

families moved to a city while they were still in school. Therefore, 26 participants interviewed were actually from a rural area in Ethiopia.

I found that many of the participants had unique circumstances associated with their lives, and I wanted to mention some of them. Three of the participants were blind. Twelve of the participants had lost a parent while still in their youth, and three participants had lost both parents and were orphaned. In the chart, I wrote which parent had passed away, and the age of the participant when the parent(s) passed. If the interviewee did not mention their age, I marked that they lost their parent as a child. In the interviews, we also heard stories of parents and siblings dying in their adult lives but I did not include these deaths here. Another unique circumstance that I found was that two of the participants had been kidnapped for marriage by their husbands. Two of the participants described trying to get an education while the Derg was being overthrown and their villages were near the fighting. Though many of these experiences are unique to Americans, many Ethiopians have experienced significant tragedies and trauma that can have lasting effects on their education.

6.1.1 Economic Status

I labeled participants' economic status while reading through interviews. This was challenging as I did not ask about actual income. I read interviews and looked at which participants voiced poverty more often in their interviews. If they continually talked of poverty as a burden, I classified them as low economic status. Those who did not seem to be overly burdened by poverty but still may have struggled a bit I classified as middle income. Lastly those who had no financial struggle at all and talked of their families' wealth I classified as high economic status. I admit that it was sometimes hard to differentiate between low and middle

income, especially when many rural Ethiopians are living off the land and do not have access to *birr*. Additionally, my Ethiopian friends who are professors would always joke about being poor and were making under \$300 per month, which could be significantly more than rural farmers. Table 8 addresses the economic status and other demographic variables for each participant. Thirteen were labeled low economic status, 20 were labeled middle economic status, and two were labeled high economic status. I did not collect data on how much money each family earned nor how much land or cattle they owned; my designations are solely based on how the participants described their families and their upbringing in the interviews.

SNNPR is Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region of Ethiopia*

Table 8. Attributes of the Participants

Name	Region	Rural	Economic Status	Unusual Circumstance
Annan	SNNPR	yes/no	middle	
Betelham	Amhara	yes	middle	
Betty	SNNPR	No	middle	
Beza	Amhara	yes	low	
Bitania	Amhara	no	middle	Father passed away, baby
Deborah	Oromia	No	middle	
Dina	Amhara	yes	middle	
Eden	Amhara	yes	low	blind

Table 8 (continued)

Firehewot	Oromia	yes	low	
Halima	Oromia	Yes	middle/low	
Hawi	Oromia	yes	middle	Early marriage
Hermela	Amhara	yes	middle	Blind, mother passed away, 5 years old
Hiwot	Amhara	Yes	low	
Kalkidan	SNNPR	Yes	high	Early marriage
Kidist	Amhara	No	high	
Liya	SNNPR	No	middle	
Makda	SNNPR	yes	low	orphaned, baby
Melesse	Oromia	Yes	middle	
Meron	Oromia	Yes	middle	
Milka	SNNPR	Yes	middle	War, Mother passed away, 3 years old
Nyala	SNNPR	yes	middle	
Saba	Amhara	Yes	low	Orphaned, 5th grade
Samrawit	Amhara	Yes	low	Father passed away, 11th grade
Seada	Oromia	yes	low	Blind, father passed away, child

Table 8 (continued)

Seble	Amhara	yes	middle	War
Sol	Oromia	Yes	low	Father passed away, child
Soliyana	Oromia	yes	low	
Tarik	Amhara	yes	middle	
Tinebeb	Amhara	yes/no	middle	
Winta	Tigray	no	middle	
Wongelawit	Amhara	yes	low	Father passed away, 2 years old
Yannet	Amhara	yes	low	Father passed away, 12 years old
Yeabsira	SNNPR	no	middle	
Zahera	Oromia	yes	low	
Zala	SNNPR	yes	middle	Orphaned, 7th grade

6.1.2 Parent Educational Status and Occupation

There have been many studies showing the positive correlation of parents' education to the educational success and career outcomes of their children (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009). Therefore, I wanted to know if more of the participants' parents had an educated background. Many of the parents did have some education. Six of the fathers have college degrees, and none of the mothers have degrees. Eight of the mothers have diplomas, so they had

graduated from 10th grade, and five of the fathers have diplomas. Fifteen of the mothers had no schooling, and eight of the fathers had no schooling. Four of the fathers received a priest education, meaning they studied the Orthodox religion and learned how to read and do basic mathematics. I had one participant whose father was a doctor, another whose father was a lawyer, and another whose father became a judge. Five mothers were teachers, and two fathers were teachers, but for the most part parents had small businesses or were farmers and the mothers were housewives.

6.1.3 Eleven Participants Chosen for Analysis

I wanted to highlight rural participants in this study because of the extra hardship it takes for them to get an education compared with women coming from cities who have more resources. Furthermore, because this is a narrative study focused on the stories of women, I wanted to be able to go deep into the stories of these women and be able to share large portions of their stories. However, because 35 participants is quite a large sample for this task, I decided to cut down on the number of stories I share. To do this, I had to eliminate some of the participants from the study. This was a difficult task as I did not want to be biased because some stories had truly touched my heart more than others, but I wanted to be systematic in which stories were told and why. Therefore, I decided to look at participants who would have been, from a cultural standpoint, the least likely to have been successful because of their economic status and parents' lack of education. I wanted to demonstrate that it did not matter if there was no previous education in the family or if the family had severe economic challenges; they still could be successful in their educational endeavors. In this way, their stories might inspire even more girls from economically harder backgrounds to be successful. First, I removed participants

from middle to high income status; then, I removed participants when at least one of their parents had a high school education or better. For one of the participants, Halima, I concluded that she was low *and* middle income because in her younger years she was supported by her family but in college she was not and struggled financially from lack of family support. For that reason, I decided to include her in this selection. I was left with 11 participants who were from low economic status backgrounds and had parents with little to no education. This paper will follow the stories and themes from these 11 participants; however, where helpful, I will insert examples from the 35.

I do not want to lose sight of how incredible the other participants were. I had the false belief that someone from rural Ethiopia would most likely be poor and their families uneducated. But this was not the case; many of the participants came from families that owned lots of cattle or had thriving businesses and could send their daughters to school without much financial difficulty. Some of the participants' parents were teachers and were living in the rural areas because they had been assigned that area by the government. I even had two participants whose fathers had gotten their college education in Germany during the time of the Derg and therefore had given their daughters a passion for education and knowledge about the world. Even though these participants had some advantages compared to the others, they also had real struggles and journeys to their ultimate success. For example, Milka met her father at age 7 when he finished his education and came to collect her from her grandmother, her mother having passed away when she was three years old from childbirth. Her father was assigned a rural post as a teacher and took her and a cousin by donkey on a strenuous journey to reach a school in a very remote area where he would teach. She endured a new stepmother, her father being imprisoned during the overthrow of the Derg, and the war, which interrupted her education. Yet, she finished strong

and her mother's premature death inspired her to have a career in nursing and public health. Or I could have included the incredible story of Saba, orphaned while a fifth grader and the oldest of four siblings. Her parents were highly educated and the last thing they told her before they passed away was to not neglect her education: You must at all costs focus on your education, do not stay here. And so, while raising her siblings, she also pursued her education, walking hours to school through rivers and taking days off to sell eggs in the market. Yet she survived and is thriving as a teacher today. Most of the stories I collected are rich powerful testimonies. But for the sake of systematicity and not to favor some stories over others, I will share in-depth stories and themes from the 11 participants who met the criteria outlined above.

6.1.4 Participants' Attributes

The 11 participants came from various regions in Ethiopia, and their parents varied in their careers and educational levels. Table 9 shows what region each participant is from along with attributes about their parents. Five participants came from various areas in the Amhara region, and five participants came from various areas in the Oromia region. One came from the Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region. Most of the participants came from families who farmed, though there were merchants and weavers in the group as well. Samrawit's father had the highest level of education, having completed eighth grade. Hiwot, Firewot, Zahera, and Makda's parents all had no formal education.

I was unable to confirm with Eden if her parents were educated. She did not mention it in our interview, and I was unable to follow up with her by phone. I chose to keep her with the 11 participants; because of the context she is coming from, I do not think that her parents would have more than in elementary education. She spoke of them being farmers in a very rural area,

being economically challenged, and not understanding blindness. All of the parents who were farmers did not have more than an elementary education. Therefore, I kept Eden with the 11 participants and will share her narrative.

Table 9. Region and Occupations and Schooling Levels of the 11 Participants' Parents

Name	Region	Mother Job	Father job	Mother's Level of Schooling	Father's Level of Schooling
Beza	Amhara	Housewife	Farmer	None	4 th Grade
Eden	Amhara	Farmer	Farmer	Unknown	Unknown
Firehewot	Oromia	Farmer and tea seller	Farmer	None	None
Halima	Oromia	Merchant	Merchant	4 th Grade	6 th Grade
Hiwot	Amhara	Farmer	Farmer	None	None
Makda	SNNPR*	Farmer	Farmer	None	None
Samrawit	Amhara	Thread Spinner	Trader	None	8 th Grade
Seada	Oromia	Housewife	Unknown	None	None
Soliyana	Oromia	Housewife	Disabled-received pension from government	None	6 th Grade
Yannet	Amhara	Farmer	Farmer	None	4 th Grade
Zahera	Oromia	Homemaker	Soldier, Weaver, Guard	None	6 th Grade

*SNNPR is Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region of Ethiopia

6.1.5 Majors and Careers

The participants varied by degree and career. Nine of the participants went right to undergraduate school after high school, but two of the participants went to a technical school before entering university. This happens usually because their test scores did not meet the minimal requirement to get into university. Subsequently they worked in a profession before going on to get their degree, usually becoming a non-traditional student and having to pay for their degree out of pocket. Table 10 shows the diversity of majors that the participants studied and the careers they are now pursuing. Participants were very successful in their careers, and I was able to capture a diverse range of degrees and careers.

Table 10. Degrees, Majors, and Occupations of Participants

Name	Degree	Major	Master's major	Current Job
Beza	Degree	Biology	Biomedical Science	Lecturer of Biomedical Science
Eden	Diploma	Civics Education	Gender Education	Charity Agency Worker
Firehewot	Degree	Psychology	Gender Studies	Government Office Worker
Halima	Degree	Agricultural Economics	Rural Development	NGO and Gender Consultant
Hiwot	Degree	Geography	Geography and Environmental Science	Teacher
Magda	Degree	English language & Literature	English	Lecturer of English
Samrawit	Degree	Business Education	Rural Development	NGO Worker
Seada	Degree	English	English	English Teacher

Table 10 (continued)

Soliyana	Degree	Mathematics	Mathematics	Lecturer of Mathematics
Yannet	Diploma	English	English	Lecturer of English
Zahera	Degree	Economics	Development Studies	Government Office Worker

6.2 Key Categories

I chose the most significant aspects of the participants' lives that contributed to their success overall according to the data. Then I put those significant aspects into categories and also examined the open coding I had done in the second and third rounds. Through open coding I could see that out of the categories all but two were emphasized. After rereading and scrutinizing the categories, I found 14 categories that were stressed in at least one of the interviews. Each participant had three to four categories that they emphasized in the interviews. Table 11 lists the 14 categories of reasons participants were successful and indicates the number of participants for whom I found this category to be present in their story.

Table 11. Most Prevalent Categories in Participants' Stories

Categories	Number of Participants
Drive	8
Family Support	6
Teacher Support	4
Parent Expectation	4
Determination, Will, Tenacity	4

Table 11 (continued)

Strong Friendships	3
Love for Learning, Smart	3
Access to a Blind School	2
Spirituality	1
Ability to Navigate Circumstances	1
Government Support	1
Strong Role Models	1
Financial Stability	1
Husband & Boyfriend Support	2

These categories may not be the only reasons participants were successful as multiple layers impact a person's path on a daily basis. But these categories were very prevalent and overarching in different participants' stories. If any of these themes had been missing in the participants' lives, I do not think they would have been successful. *Drive* was the most prevalent category, with eight participants showing *Drive* to complete school. *Family Support*, which included parent support, was also very important to approximately half of the participants. Teacher Support, Parent Expectation, and Determination, Will, and Tenacity were also frequently mentioned. Surprisingly, there were eight categories that were only prevalent in one of the participants' stories. These categories, however, made the difference in that individual's life and are important to highlight even though it was only focused on by one of the eleven. Also, more of the participants experienced these categories but not as the central theme in their narrative. For example, Seada shared examples of how the government gave her scholarships

and provided for her starting in primary school and going even into college. If she had not had that kind of government support, she most likely would not have had the opportunities to finish school. Other participants also shared examples of government support, but it may have not have made the difference in them graduating. This is just one example of how one of the categories made a difference in a participant's life.

Table 12 shows each participant and the categories that were dominant for each of their narratives. These categories were chosen because I found they were the central categories from their interview. Most participants had three or four categories that dominated their narratives but a few had five.

Table 12. Central Categories by Participant

Participant	Categories
Beza	Drive, Role Model, Support System, Love for Learning, Smart
Eden	Determination, Will and Tenacity, Access to Blind School, Friendships,
Firehewot	Drive, Parent Expectation, Financial Stability, Family Support,
Halima	Family Support, Parent Expectation, Teacher Support, Boyfriend Support
Hiwot	Drive, Teacher Support, Love for Learning, Smart
Makda	Drive, Determination, Will, and Tenacity, Teacher Support, Smart
Samrawit	Drive, Determination, Will, and Tenacity, Family Support, Parent Expectation
Seada	Access to Blind School, Friendships, Government Support
Soliyana	Drive, Family Support, Spirituality
Yannet	Drive, Family support, Parent Expectation
Zahera	Drive, Determination, Will, and Tenacity, Family Support, Teacher Support, Friendships

After looking at these categories I was able to refine my research question into two focused questions that helped my analysis: What are strategies participants used to persist in their education? What motivated participants to successfully complete their education? To answer these two questions, I split my findings into two chapters: Strategies for Endurance and Motivations for Envisioning a Brighter Future. Then I further analyzed the categories with advisor input and realized that they could be broken down into three separate sections: The Individual, the Interpersonal, and the Institutional. The Individual looks at participants' inner strength and what they did on their own to succeed. The Interpersonal looks at the close community surrounding them and how they influenced their education. The Institutional looks at how the institutions in their lives impacted their education. This model is loosely based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Framework for Human Development, through which he studied how children's environment impacts their psychological growth. He developed subsystems and looked at the individual person, their Microsystem, which includes people close to the child; their Mesosystem, which are the structures surrounding the family; their Exosystem, which are the larger social systems; their Macrosystem, which are the cultural values, customs, and laws; and the Chronosystem, which involves certain timings in a child's life. My framework only looks at the three innermost subsystems as I only focus on the data from the interviews.

As seen in Table 13, in each chapter there is a section on the individual and the interpersonal. The institutional is only included in one of the chapters, as in this paper the stories about institutions pertain more towards strategies of endurance than motivations for envisioning a brighter future. Each section is then divided into the sub-themes based on my analysis. Furthermore, each theme in each chapter is filled with stories from the participants' lives. I tell parts of each of the eleven participants' stories, and I also share a few examples from the 35

interviews when their story contributes largely to the theme. There are several participants who I use as examples more often than others. This is because during the interview some of the participants added more detail and context to their stories. They also may have had better English, and their interview may have lasted longer. Some interviewees talked much faster in the hour we had together and easily shared specific examples, while others talked in more generalized statements. It does not mean that those interviewees' stories are more important than others, just that they were able to elaborate on similar experiences present in others' stories.

Table 13. Outline of Chapters with Themes

Strategies for Endurance	Motivation for a Brighter Future
<p style="text-align: center;">Individual</p> <p>Enduring through Hardship Studying in the Midst of Housework Preparing in the Face of No Teacher Support Surviving a Lack of Family Support Persisting in the Midst of Harassment Thriving with Spiritual Sustenance Finding Odd Jobs to Stay in School.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Interpersonal</p> <p>Leveraging Family Support Relying on Friendships</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Institutional</p> <p>Taking Advantage of Government Support Attending Blind Schools Finding Safety in Religious Institutions</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Individual</p> <p>Escape from Poverty Dream of a Better Future Intellectual Capacity to Succeed Desire to Learn</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Interpersonal</p> <p>Families Teachers Others</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Institutional</p> <p>N/A</p>

7.0 Strategies for Endurance

I used the term tenacious in the title of my dissertation to describe successful Ethiopian women. After completing 35 interviews with women who were passionate and struggled to get an education and did not give up, it seemed that was the best term because they were so determined to get an education. When I first started coding the interviews, one code kept coming up again and again. That code was *challenge*. I had wanted to ignore their challenges and just focus on their successes because of my research question, but I could not ignore the number of challenges they went through and overcame. The code *challenge* ended up being the most coded item out of all 35 interviews, with a total of 194 times. I found that *endurance* and *tenacity* were hard to code because the term did not appear in a sentence or in a paragraph. I saw endurance throughout the interview, maybe through a long story of how a participant never gave up, or a situation that she was determined to get through. Endurance does not happen in an instant. It is a constant state of not giving up. When I read through the stories as a whole in the fourth round of coding, I began to see the patterns of participants using strategies to overcome every challenge and to endure until they finished their degree.

In this chapter, I focus on the strategies participants used to overcome in different situations. I begin with the individual strategies participants used, and here I introduce five participants: Magda, Eden, Soliyana, Zahera, and Firehewot. In the Interpersonal section, I focus on how the involvement of other individuals in their lives, like family members and friendships, encouraged them to endure. Furthermore, I discuss how they built strategies within these relationships, which helped them make it to graduation. In this section, I introduce Samrawit,

Yannet, and Halima. In the Institutional section I share how they are able to use resources that are available through different institutions to their advantage. I introduce Seada in this section.

7.1 Individual

In this section, I discuss the individual strategies students use to overcome the challenges they face on a daily basis. I have chosen to share the stories of five of the participants to show how they used various strategies to endure hard situations. I chose to focus on these five participants because they had unique challenges that required even more endurance than most participants had to go through. Magda was orphaned as a baby, Eden went blind when she was two years old, Zahera's parents were divorced and she lived in extreme poverty, Soliyana's father had leprosy and she had to move to Addis to work and to get an education far away from her parents. Firehewot had to work extra hard in her parents' tea shop to be able to attend school. Each used various strategies to complete her education. They endure hardships, study while doing housework, and prepare themselves for school even when there is no teacher support. They also survive in the school environment when their families do not support them; they continue to persist when they face harassment. They turn to God when they face trying times. When they face poverty, they find jobs so they can stay in school. They find a way to never give up on their education.

7.1.1 Enduring through Hardship

In every challenge you have to be committed. Women have many challenges in their life. They have to adapt to the challenge and they have to win the challenge.

Dina

Participants were able to endure hard times during their education and not give up. In this section, I begin by telling parts of the stories of Magda and Eden. Both of these women endured much hardship to get an education and refused to give up in difficult circumstances. Magda was an orphan and was marginalized from the beginning of her life by her family, and Eden was a blind student trying to escape poverty. I share how Magda is able to endure when she has no family support. Then I end this section by illustrating how participants continued to persist in the face of harassment and male bias. They literally use the strategy of endurance to overcome the hardships they face. Throughout the stories of Magda, Eden, and others, the theme of endurance—never giving up in the face of hardship—shines through.

Magda

Magda was the professor who inspired me to begin this work on education success. Magda's interview was the longest. We spent more than three hours chatting and discussing her educational journey. Since I already had a relationship with her, we were able to discuss freely with each other about her experiences, and I could probe her a little deeper on stories she had shared with me before. We actually sat in my parents' house in a window seat with our legs propped up and a cup of tea in our hands. The sunny view outside was of a ripe avocado tree, and we could hear laughter coming from students having a meeting a few doors down. We had

started the interview with my mom transcribing, but because we were at home, visitors kept coming and my mother left us to chat together. Magda is a friendly, opinionated, passionate, bubbly woman who wears a bright smile on her face. She knows practically everyone in Sodo and cannot go anywhere without being stopped by someone saying hello.

Magda was the ninth child and was three months old when her mother passed away and two years old when her father passed away. She was raised by her grandmother. Her sister quit school to provide for the family: “She would collect grasses for cutting and she just farmed and did every activity in the part to just feed us. It is the only source of income for us.” Magda had to take care of the animals on their farm as well as do housework in order to attend school. Most nights she was up past midnight preparing the food for the cattle and then would have to wake up early in the morning to do the chores and prepare breakfast. She talks of falling asleep in class and being late, even to the point where she would skip school because she did not want to be punished for being late. She survived by reading the exercise books of her friends and passing the exams.

She made it into secondary school and the journey to school was much further, a five-kilometer walk. She had little financial support and would get yelled at by her teachers because she did not have the right exercise books nor did she have gym shorts. She needed good shoes to make the long mountainous walk to school, but none were given to her. While she was in secondary school, a female teacher took interest in her and Magda wanted to be like her. She began to work harder in school for this teacher. Finally, after repeating a grade because she missed the test, she graduated and got into university. University was much easier for her because she did not have to do all of the housework. When she finished university, she became a

teacher and immediately started working on her master's degree because she wanted to be "satisfied." She is now a lecturer at a public university and is working on her PhD.

It is hard to summarize Magda's story in just those few paragraphs because she is a brilliant mind who experienced a lifetime of hard work during her childhood. Magda's story on tenacity can be summed up in the quote from her interview below. I asked her to give advice to other students like her:

My advice, is of course, in Ethiopia everybody may face different problems. As for me, they should not give up when they face problems and they should be strong to overcome the problems. Everything is not good to succeed but they have to be strong just to succeed in education or in work because there are problems from the environment and problems from family and problems from even our male partners. They should be strong enough to overcome such challenges and finally they have to see the bright future.

Magda outlines her story in that quote. "As for me, they should not give up." What does "not give up" really mean? No matter what hardship comes your way, stick with it and refuse to give in. She understands something so profound. Everyone will face challenges and hard challenges, but they must be strong and never give up. This is Magda's strategy for endurance, never give in. She talks of overcoming environmental, familial, and opposite sex issues. She displays how she overcomes these issues throughout her interview.

Many of the participants endured hardships to get an education, but Eden endured even more because she was blind.

Eden

Eden was a surprise to my mom, Jerusalem, and me as we saw her walk in. She had a small face and figure with huge sunglasses on that covered her eyes. She walked towards us with someone leading her and it was only then that we realized Eden was blind. Jerusalem jumped up to bring her into the gazebo. I hadn't expected to interview a blind participant, and I wondered if this would problematize the type of data I was collecting because her experiences would be so different.

She was our fifth interview of the day, and we were mentally exhausted and did not know how to respond to her interview. Her story was so tragic I could not help but shed quiet tears and hope she could not see me. She assumed that our quietness meant we were tired and apologized that she was not more interesting. I apologized profusely and tried to engage more actively. Her story, out of all of the stories, touched me most deeply because of all the abuse she had endured in her life because she was blind. I tried to keep my voice from cracking as I asked questions, not wanting to go deeper because of the depth she had already revealed.

After she left and we guided her out of the park, my mom and I turned to each other and started bawling. Both of us had listened to other sad stories from participants during the week and we had shed tears with these participants as well, but Eden had been so helpless as a blind person and had received so little help from people that her story touched both of us. It is interesting that her disability is probably the reason she succeeded and was motivated to get an education.

Eden was the middle child of eight children. She lost her sight when she was two years old. She is the only one in her family to have received a college degree. She went to a blind boarding school until sixth grade. In sixth grade, she and some of the boarders realized that the

director was taking funds from the school and using them for himself. Because they confronted the director about his corruption, he kicked them out of the school but gave them a little money to survive in the town. The six students found a room on the outskirts of town and began going to a government school for seeing students. The students suffered much while living there because they had no one to help them. They were all far from their families but were determined to get an education. After a few years, Eden ran out of money and went to stay with her aunt. From her aunt's house she found a way to go to Addis. She won a scholarship in Addis and continued her education at a public high school. She finally graduated and started in a diploma school and then went on to do her undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Eden showed endurance throughout her life in order to get an education. One of the ways she showed endurance is through the difficulties she went through as a child just because she wanted to get an education. This excerpt from the interview describes when Eden and her friends must take care of themselves because they are kicked out of the blind school. They live by themselves while going to the sighted public school.

When we live together we don't even know how to clean our home. We suffered a lot from food and leg infections. We couldn't see anything. Everything was in our body and we suffered a lot. We don't know even where to fetch the water. Sometimes we went to the river to fetch water and most of the time we laid in the river and we suffered a lot to get out of the river because we didn't see the river. To fetch the water me and my friend we laying in the river [drowning]. We suffered a lot. I don't want to forget this memory, this elementary education because I suffered a lot. When we would go to the river I have got a problem to fetch water and also when we go to river teenager boys were waiting for us inside the forest when we went to the river. They tried to harass us sexually. We shout

many times when we go there. Boys in the forest, most of the time they attempted to catch us and do something to us. Always we were shocked and afraid to go to the river. Always we are told they are waiting for us. We suffered a lot to go the river to drink and get water and wash our clothes. So, we faced any problem by ourselves. So, when we would go to school we would face cattle, ox, donkey, it was a very big problem for us. It was challenging. We suffered from animals and we suffered from the community around.

Eden did not give up on her education when going through excruciatingly difficult times. While she was in the seventh grade, she and her friends took care of each other. But because they were all blind, they had difficulty doing this. Eden was subjected to sexual assault every time she went to the river. She also struggled to do her laundry and collect water in the river because she could not see and almost drowned. She went through this hardship because she needed an education.

Eden had to change gears in eighth grade because they no longer received the living stipend. She decided to go home to her parents but wanted to continue to go to school, so her parents were able to send her to an aunt who lived in a city where she continued her education. The situation was not that good there. She only stayed for one year and studied her ninth-grade year. She did not talk about her time with her aunt in the interview but did say she failed the ninth grade. The whole time she was with her aunt she was trying to get to Addis. She knew she would have a chance for a better education there, so she wrote letters to her blind friends in Addis trying to find opportunities for scholarships in Addis. Her friends told her to come, and she finally went to Addis and got a scholarship of 80 *birr* a month to go to public school (not a blind school). She repeated her ninth-grade year in Addis.

She tried to stay in school and did not give up on her education. After she ran out of money, she went to her parents' house but did not settle in the village. She found another way to continue her education with her aunt who lived in the city yet realized quickly that it would not work out and she needed to get to Addis Ababa. She wrote letters continuously until she got a scholarship, and then Eden at age 14, blind, from a small village, went to Addis all by herself to attend school.

How did Eden have the confidence to go all alone to Addis? The same way that Magda endured hardship: she never gave up. She endured every challenge and faced them head on and refused to give up. I wonder how many letters she wrote until she got the letter with a promise of a scholarship. Would other girls in her situation have been as tenacious? It is also interesting that Eden wanted to go to school in Addis. She is not moving to Addis to find a job to support her family or herself like many Ethiopians do. She is moving there to get an education. How many people in her circumstance would be this motivated?

7.1.1.1 Surviving a Lack of Family Support

For seven of the eleven participants, family support was a key factor on why they were successful, but several of the participants did not have family support. They were allowed to go to school but not showered with encouragement like the seven participants. Magda is a key example of how she had to survive and endure hard circumstances because her family did not support her education.

I asked Magda if her grandmother encouraged her education as she allowed her to go to school. She said, “Actually she wants me to learn, but she is not actually doing anything for me. Simply she allowed me to go to school, but additionally is not giving me to study hard and not do

anything to make me successful.” Magda never gave up even when her family did not encourage her and even when she faced challenging problems. She lived her advice and did not give up.

Struggling Financially

There are a few passages where Magda talks of the hardships she faces financially because her family would not help her. The first passage I share shows that her family would not buy her what she needed for school. I asked her if her family had money or not and if they would spend it on her. She said, “Instead of just spending for me, they just prefer to spend their money on other things because they do not have enough money to cover all the things that need money so that they spend on other things than what I need.” An example of this includes the notebooks and shoes she needs for school:

Still there are many problems that I faced when I was attending my junior secondary school. The first problem is I have no means to buy, no money to buy books because they are always asking us to buy books. Again, they just forced us to buy some standardized exercise books. But my family are not willing for to buy such exercise books, they simply buy the 16-page exercise books. Whenever my teacher saw that exercise book, he was always shouting at me to change the books. I don't let you take notes with that exercise book. [It was] Cheap. It was less than the teacher is asking. It was 16 but they force us to buy at least 50-page exercise books. But they are buying only 16 [pages of paper]. So that always my teacher was challenging us. I just tell him that when I finish this one, they will buy another one.

My family may not buy shoes for me. This is an additional problem for me to walk properly because there are problems which the way is not comfortable for me to walk

with my barefoot so that they are not willing to buy me a shoe so that I was facing different problems concerning this. Actually, I just take some shoe from someone else that is not fitting with me. When I go, I may face some pain so I take it off and I just hold and I keep walking with my barefoot. So, this was another problem.

Through these statements we see that she had several needs at the school, but her family did not give her any importance, and she suffered because they would not pay for the books she needed for school and the shoes she needed to walk five kilometers every day. A key phrase she used was “my family was not willing to buy such exercise books.” She did not say that her family did not have money to buy the books; she says they were not willing. Furthermore, she discussed not having sports clothing for gym class and mentions again that her “family was not willing to buy” the clothes for her and so she had to tie her skirt to make pants while in gym class.

These instances show how she makes do without these things. She endures these hardships surviving but not thriving. She had to endure and allow this time to pass. She just tried to get by with what she had but also realized that she needed to finish school so she could have a brighter future and not rely on her family for finances. Other girls in her situation may have given up, but she was very determined and survived this mistreatment.

Being Treated as a Servant

Another hardship Magda had to survive was living with her aunt, who treated her harshly. In the next excerpt, she speaks about staying with her aunt in town. Since she was doing so well in school, her teacher asked her family for more support. They decided that she could live with

her aunt in the town so she would be closer to the school and would not have the amount of work she had on the farm:

Then when I passed to grade 10 because of her advice (the teacher), one of my father's sisters brought me to town. Then for one semester I started living with her. While I was living with her it was not better than the life I was facing with my grandmom. Early morning she would call me. I would put charcoal and different activities. She was forcing me to do different activities in the house. I would wash many clothes. I used to do different activities in the house so that in the nighttime I'm even spending more than midnight so that in the class again I'm sleeping every day.

In this paragraph we see someone who has become a servant in her aunt's house. She was doing even more housework in town at her aunt's house than she was when she was on the farm with her grandmother. She ended up failing that year of school and having to repeat the year. She moved back with her grandmother because it was too hard living with her aunt. She faced the disappointment of failing a grade and knew she needed to move back with her grandmother even though the walk was so long. When she moved back with her grandmother she said "from the beginning to the end I studied very hard." She had endured the time with her aunt but was floundering because of the harsh conditions she lived through. But Magda is a survivor. She would not let one year in anguish get her down. She needed to thrive so that she could go to college. She would walk the extra miles from her grandmother's house. She would not give up on her education even though she failed the previous year.

7.1.1.2 Persisting in the Midst of Harassment

Harassment is a major issue that women are subjected to while they are pursuing their education. I found that this was true of this study's participants as well. I coded *harassment from male teachers* 18 times in 16 different references. Three of the references regarded women who said they did not face harassment. For example, Hiwot said, "For me, it didn't happen". She also said, "My friends did not face any sexual harassment." Yet she went on to say that it is a real issue on college campuses. "Yes, I know it is one of the challenges, one of the biggest challenges that face Ethiopian women in the university and other areas also." In fact, Halima continued, "You know this harassment; this sexual harassment is becoming part of our life. You will not find anyone in Ethiopia not affected." She continued, "It is becoming very common. They don't consider it is harassment; they consider it is normal." Many of the women I interviewed poured out long testimonies of harassment from male teachers and some male students. Most of the stories pertaining to school harassment were about the university level. Furthermore, participants not only talked of harassment but of the male bias they were subjected to by being treated differently than the male students. I do not want to focus on the stories of what happened to the women, though they are atrocious and unjust, but I want to focus on how the women dealt with harassment. I continue with the stories of Magda and Eden and also share stories from Zahera and Samrawit, who will be introduced soon.

Magda

Magda showed her persistence to do well in school while she was doing her practicum for teaching during university. She had one professor in charge of her practicum. The practicum

took place in a school far from the university campus. The professor was giving poor grades to the girls who would not sleep with him. Magda avoided the situation by using her wits, saying she would come to him but never showed up. When she received a C for the practicum, she went to the Gender Office to complain. They, however, could do nothing because there was no proof that he had given her a C because she did not sleep with him. She was quite upset with this situation because she was such a good student, but she did what she could and moved on. She endured the situation for what it was but it did not keep her from graduating. She summed up the situation by saying, “I just left and finally scored good results in my university and graduated” as if to say, regardless of this annoying injustice I worked hard and graduated with high grades.

Eden

Eden worked so hard to get into the university and became a viable, successful student, but her trials continued. During college Eden was determined to plow through the obstacles to achieve success. Eden faced the stress of asking people to help her. Because she was blind, she needed extra assistance, but some people were not willing to help her unless they received money or sexual favors from her.

What was my major problem was that the sighted students would ask me for money. I needed help from them. They would ask for money if I needed to ask for help.

Sometimes they would ask me to date them. When I asked them to help me they wanted money to help. If I don't have money they asked me to have a relationship for one day or to have sex for one day.

This is a troubling situation that Eden must navigate an order to graduate unharmed. This was a great stress to her. She had to have help because she needed people to read her books out loud to her when there were no braille options. Additionally, she would need access to notes

from the board because she could not read what the teacher had written. She also needed help doing a variety of other things, yet she was consistently obstructed by classmates who would not help her out of the goodness of their hearts but wanted something inappropriate in return. She patiently endured this challenging time. She did not quit although the discouragement was palpable. Instead, she began to wisely choose friends who helped her.

Stressing Because of Male Bias

Another obstacle that confronted her was the male bias she had to endure. She was unable to raise her hand to ask questions to the professors:

I was frustrated because I'm female and that I couldn't act like my male counterpart. I was very frustrated from the sexual harassment. I couldn't ask teachers in my class because I was frustrated because the culture didn't allow me just to raise my hand and to ask any questions as a woman.

She was frustrated by these experiences and not being treated as equal to the men.

I must pause here to discuss the idea of not being able to ask questions in the classroom, because other participants said the same thing. At this point, Jerusalem jumped into the conversation and talked about her time in the university. She stated that she also could not raise her hand to contribute to the conversation and would remain quiet in the classroom. Because I had met Jerusalem in the U.S. and we had become friends, I knew she was an active, intelligent woman and very capable in the American classroom. Hearing her say that she did not raise her hand to ask questions was difficult for me to take in. From my perspective, I thought it was a cultural phenomenon in Ethiopia, but after talking with older women in America I learned it also takes place in American classrooms where teachers favor men over women. Jerusalem's words continued to haunt me during the session, and I pushed harder to learn why she would be quiet

when she had so much to contribute. She told me she did what she had to do to get a degree. She did not want to make enemies and thought that if she was active in the classroom the professor and students would treat her harshly. They might try to put her in her place, and therefore she submitted to the academic culture at the time and graduated with her doctorate. This experience shows a type of silent enduring.

Eden was able to get through these times and finish her master's degree in Gender Studies. She now works for an NGO that investigates corruption. She stayed in school and did not give up in the face of male bias.

Samrawit

Samrawit, who I introduce later in the paper, spoke about the frustration of receiving a C on an exam and confronting her professor:

I was expecting an A. So I went to his office. I told him I wanted to check my exam paper. He asked why do you want to check? I got a C and I know I did the test very well. Why did you give me a C? I know I made an A. He said no, you copied this exam. The same kind of challenge I faced. It is a tough kind of attitude problem from a university professor.

She talks of this time as a bad experience, to be accused of cheating when she studied hard for the exam. She said that same man is the head of one of the universities in Ethiopia and is seen on TV. She is always reminded of his prejudice. She did not have a single female teacher during her university time. We asked her why she stuck with the university, and she said, "Actually I like challenges." She later gave advice to girls: "Do not assume yourself to be a less achiever. You can do everything that men can do. Whatever the challenge you can pass like your male counterpart. Do not fear the challenge." It seemed like Samrawit knew herself very well. She

knew she was smart and could do just as well as the men. Even when she was set back in her grades, she embraced the challenge and continued to believe in herself and not give up.

Zahera

While Zahera, who will be introduced later in the chapter, was studying for her master's degree, her advisor was inappropriate, and she felt uncomfortable with him:

But in my master's degree, my advisor was not good. He would try to harass the females. When I got to his office, he would try to kiss me like here. He would call me every time. Why don't you have a tea or dinner with me? He would say like that. **What did you do?** I didn't call him. I didn't go to drink a tea. I will go to him if I had the paper to give him. Unless I wouldn't go to him. **Were you afraid to go when you had that paper?** Oh, I don't want to go see him. Yes. For example, I didn't give him the questions for my thesis. He didn't see the questions. I worked on them without seeing them, because I didn't want to go to his office.

Zahera's advisor continually hit on her and tried to kiss her. She felt very uncomfortable with the situation and avoided him as much as possible. She did not give him the questions for her thesis; she worked on it alone and then gave it to him. She avoided the situation, but she did not give up. She did not change advisors. She handled the situation the best way she knew how and graduated. At the end of the interview, she was asked what is different about her. She contemplated her answer and then said with her quintessential smile, "I had hope and I would never give up!" She had the essence of tenacity. She was determined never to give up. No matter the circumstance, she found a way to move around it.

Magda, Eden, Samrawit, and Zahera all faced harassment, yet they chose to persist in their education and never give up. Magda and Samrawit showed their strength by confronting the situation. Magda went to the Gender Office for help, and Samrawit confronted the actual teacher. Both of them did not receive justice. Magda was able to let it pass; even though it bothered her, she continued with schooling and graduated. Samrawit did not allow the C to represent who she is. She took the incident and embraced it as a challenge she had to face. In Eden's case, she also had to endure the situation of not being able to participate in class. She followed the culture and graduated. Furthermore, she developed strategic friendships as a strategy because of the problems she received if she asked for help. Zahera also endured the situation, avoiding her advisor as much as she could. I was captured by this idea of silent endurance. Beza, another of the 11 participants, sums up what these participants had to do. "I became quiet and I thought that I have to be tolerant." Though this tolerance goes against what I was taught as an American woman, it is what allowed them to persist. These are not ideal circumstances, but the way these participants reacted towards these issues shows how they endured these things and tried to work around them.

7.1.2 Preparing in the Face of No Teacher Support

Some of them (teachers) discriminated against the blind people and didn't want to help.

Seada

Both Magda and Eden experienced challenges with their teachers. In this section I describe how Magda was able to do well in school even when her teacher beat her for being late and unprepared. I also describe how Eden worked hard even when she had no one encouraging her to do well in school.

One of the things Magda had to endure was punishment from her teachers for being late or for falling asleep in class. Since she was working so hard during the mornings and evenings, she struggled to stay awake in class and complete her homework. Even though she skipped school to avoid beatings from her teacher, she still prepared her assignments and was ready for a test when it came:

So everyday my teacher was punishing me when he found me sleeping. This was the other challenge that I faced. And additionally, I do different house activities which are not mentioned here so I have not enough time to study and do my homework in a good way so that everyday my teacher, even though I go to school like this. I was beaten with a stick. They would put a pen between the fingers and force our finger together. **(She shows us how it is done)**. It is painful. It is a new pain and it cuts. It is painful. So if I am late, I prefer to stay out instead of entering school because the punishment is too great. I faced too many punishments there.

It is incredible that she persisted in school, seeing that she was punished when she did not do her homework or when she was late. It is a surprise that she continued to go to school, and I could see why other students might shy away from school if they were beaten. I might have been one of them. But Magda did not give up when she was beaten. She started to miss school because she felt it was better to miss school than to be beaten since she knew it would be impossible to be on time every day. But she was motivated to keep up with her schoolwork even when she missed class. She borrowed her friends' notebooks and read them before class. She showed up on the exam days and made sure she had studied from her friends' notes and her textbooks and was able to pass school in this way. She basically outsmarted the teacher by

missing days on which she would be punished but studying hard anyway out of the classroom. Then when it was test day she arrived, took the test, and passed. “I may not wait for the teacher because I can easily understand the written material. Even if I’m not attending the class always, I can read and understand and finally score good results.” Magda’s strategy for enduring the beatings was to outsmart her teacher and study in her spare time. Furthermore, she makes sure she attends class on the days that there are tests so that she can pass her grade. She understands how to get around the issue and uses her wit to avoid beatings and pass to the next grade.

Eden received very little teacher support. First, she was kicked out of the blind school, and then when she was at the sighted school in Addis her teachers did not give her priority:

There was no one encouraging us to study hard. No one encouraged us to study hard. At that time there was no special teacher. They didn’t encourage us that much, especially during the examination we were taking the examination our area was crowded with students. We were segregated from the regular students. When we took the exam, our area was crowded with students and teachers. We were segregated from the regular students. When we sit somewhere to take the examination it was crowded and we couldn’t answer the questions and our attention was diverted because we were taking the examinations sometimes outside the classroom. We took exams after the regular students were taking their regular exams. There was no encouraging person. No parents, besides me. I was studying hard and I was reading.

The fact that she had no parent support was devastating, but when she talks of her lack of teacher support it is quite phenomenal that she was able to graduate. How can someone who had so little adult support continue to succeed in school? She had to have such an inner determination that replaced her need for adult acceptance. She says, “No one was encouraging us to study

hard.” It seems, in a sense, they were ignored. When testing came, they put the blind students in the corridor where teachers and students were walking and they couldn’t focus on their test. She failed the test and had to wait to get into university using an alternative way. She said, “There was not encouraging person, no parent, besides me.” She had to push herself to succeed; no one else was going to help her. She knew she was alone and then says, “I was studying hard.” For Eden, it did not matter that she did not have an encouraging teacher or parent. She was going to study hard and succeed.

7.1.3 Studying in the Midst of Housework

I was fetching water from the river and I was also collecting fuel for baking injera. Fuel from the forest. I was fetching water by carrying it on my back.
Seble

Having to do housework before school and after school was something 21 of the participants mentioned in the interviews. Some of them shared how their parents did not let them do housework so they could focus on their studies, and others talked about the burden of doing housework every day. Housework is carrying water and gathering firewood, then making breakfast for the whole family from scratch. Many girls tired from these activities before they even reach school. Magda shared throughout the interview the amount of housework she was doing every morning. On top of housework, she was also responsible for taking care of the cattle as she was the youngest of the family and it fell on her shoulders. Furthermore, after and before doing these things, she had an excruciatingly long walk to school. I highlight these stories from her interview because girls all over the world are doing housework and taking care of cattle just like Magda. In some countries, like Kenya and Uganda, they have boarding schools, so students

are not burdened with having to do housework and study. Magda, however, did not have this opportunity, and so she used tenacity to her advantage. The theme of housework came up over and over again in the interview, and it shows how she persisted through this challenge to get an education:

Before we go to school, we have to do different things. We have to get firewood and do some activities in the kitchen. Then when my friends come and call me, I am allowed to go to school with them. We start walking to the Otona Junior Secondary School. It is around, more than five kilometers.

Magda always woke up around 5 am to start collecting firewood and making breakfast. Then in the afternoon, she looked after the cattle and in the evening was required to make the food for the cattle. She says most nights she was up till midnight preparing the food:

We roast maize for and different things for them and additionally we prepare some local things. We bring some different items to the cow and grind it, the thick one and finally we just boil it. So that we just stayed there until we finished all things for the cow. Then finally, we just wait until it gets cold and then after that we give it to the cow. Otherwise, our mom may punish us. At even nighttime she will punish us and even at nighttime she may force us to leave the house. We wait there and do this procedure and wait until it gets cold and then finally, we give to the cow. Then we finish everything we lay on the bed. In the daytime when I go to school, I just fall asleep in the classroom because I stayed up long in the night.

The reason the cows' food is so important is that cows are extremely valuable to families and comprise one of their main sources of wealth. She was required to take good care of the cow because of the value of the cow to the family.

She continued to do housework and farm work all throughout elementary and secondary school and even when she was preparing for the college entrance exams during preparatory school. She found time to study even in the midst of all of the work she was doing:

I was doing [farm work] because I am the last in the family. Always the last member of the family or child will keep the cattle in our culture. Since I am the last, I was keeping the cattle even while I was learning in the preparatory. So that I just take books with me while I was keeping the cattle so that I just study. It was difficult for me to keep the books when the rain comes because it is relatively far to go to home immediately. So, I keep the books in my bag, inside the clothes and I just keep the cattle, even there is rain.

Magda showed her work ethic by bringing her books with her while she watched over the cattle. When she got even further along in school and had to prepare to take the entrance exams, her study time increased even though she still had many tasks to do each day.

As soon as I entered preparatory my intention was to join the university. So that of course I know at the same time the competition is high because the same exam is prepared for entire Ethiopian students at grade 12. So that competition is high so unless I perform good in that program it is difficult for me to join the university. So that even if I am facing many ups and down through that challenge I know I should study hard then while I was keeping the cattle and doing something in the kitchen I just keeping books with me and I study. Even I just take some short notes when I walk to school. I just see them and memorize. [...] Additionally, I was entering the library in my break time at school. I was not playing outside in my break time rather I entered into the library and see some model exams that will prepare me for entrance into the university. So, I see them and there are

many books that are kept in the school library that have the answer and I see those things and I do the exercise and the exam and finally I check the answer and see how much I scored on that exam. So that finally after two years in my preparatory I took the entrance exam.

She knew she was at a disadvantage because she did not have many resources and time to study, so she made up for that time by bringing her books with her while she kept the cattle. She also skipped her break times to go to the library to study.

Magda shows that one of her strategies was studying for school while doing tasks at home. She did not waste any time and used any extra minute to prepare for the exam. She knew she would be competing with students from all over Ethiopia who were rich and had tutors and did not have to do housework. Yet she did not give up hope thinking she was behind them but used her time wisely to study, even in hard situations. The story of her tenacity only begins with these stories, as for many rural girls this is also their story, yet these are not the only challenges she perseveres through.

7.1.4 Thriving with Spiritual Sustenance

I have to pray. Sometimes every challenge that I faced most of the time, rather than depending on people, I would rather choose to pray to God.

Deborah

Spirituality was one of the strategies some of the participants credited to helping them finish their education. Many of the participants gave credit to God throughout the interview thanking him for getting them this far in life. Specifically, 20 out of the 35 interviewees

mentioned the word *God* during the interview. Ethiopia has a strong reputation for their religious heritage and this finding confirms the spirituality of many of the participants. Figure 10 shows the NVivo word query when I searched “GOD” to see how participants talked about God in the interview. One thing I found interesting was the use of *help*. In the figure it shows participants saying God helped at least four times. The diagram also shows how they thanked God and how they believed God had a purpose for them.

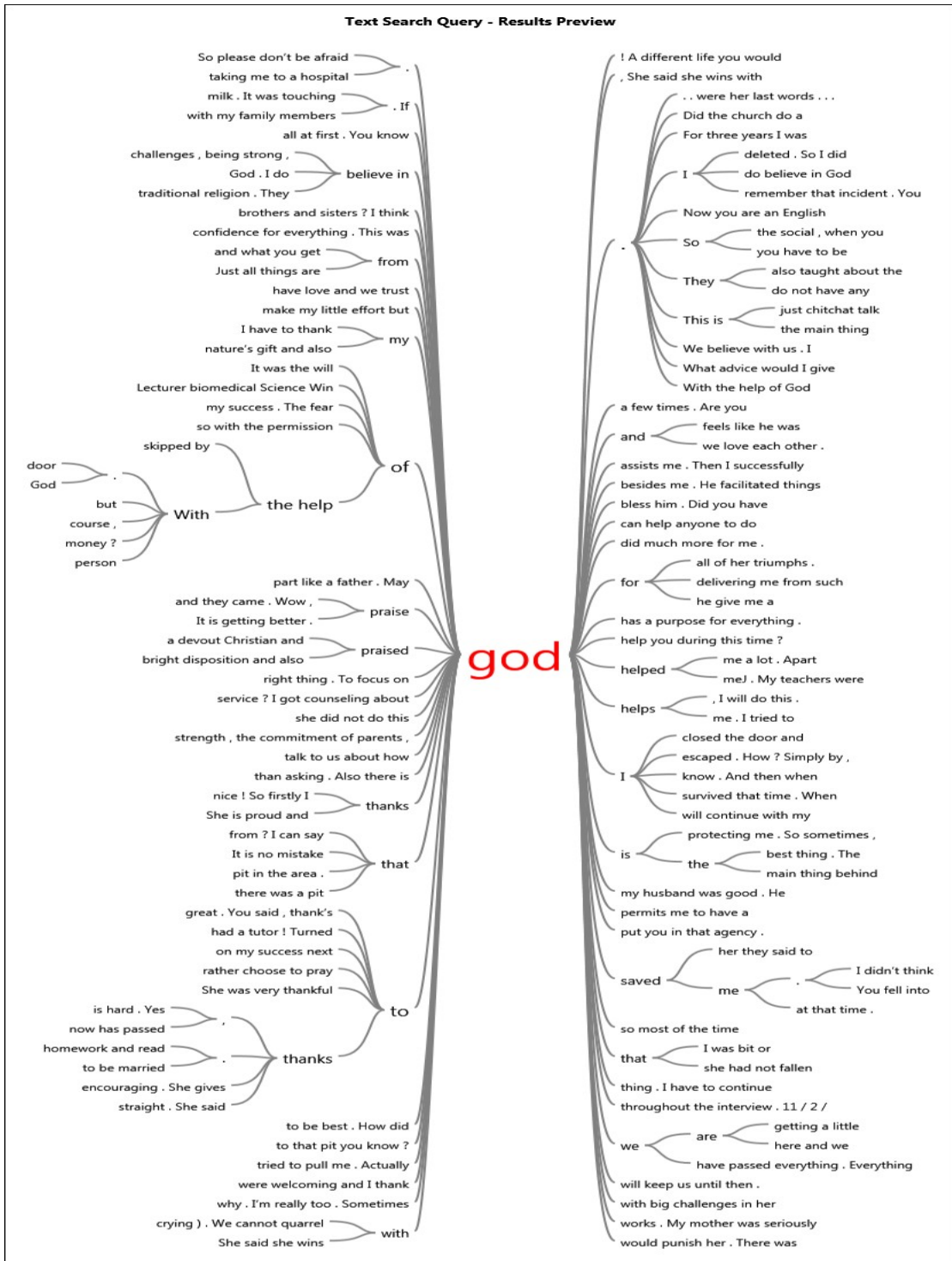


Figure 10. How Participants Refer to God¹⁵

¹⁵ God is meant to be capitalized but NVivo did not allow for that function.

Other participants also emphasized their faith in the interviews but were not as explicit as Soliyana, who said that it was one of the most important contributors to her success. Out of the 35 interviewees, three focused on spirituality during the interview. Of the 11, spirituality is discussed in most of the interviews at some point in the conversation.

Soliyana

We met Soliyana at the hotel in Sodo. The café had filled up fast, and we had a hard time hearing her so we moved outside. She was kind and eager to tell her story. As we sat together and started the conversation over again, we realized that we were going to need a translator, or we were not going to get her story right. She was reluctant to have a translator and a little embarrassed about it, but we would not have been able to understand her story without one. She kept telling us that she wanted to tell her story. It was very important to her that her story was heard, and we wanted to make that happen. Therefore, we switched locations again and found a translator. She kept emphasizing that she had many challenges and had to share her story. Her story was powerful, but there were many details missing because the translator was not perfect in English either. But the basics of her story are intact and because she wanted so much for her story to be heard and because she fits into the category, I feel it is very important to share what she shared with us.

Soliyana was born to parents of two different ethnic groups in the Oromo region. She grew up with four brothers and sisters who all completed college degrees. Her father was passionate about her education and encouraged all of his family to go far with their education. He had a sixth-grade education and had been a teacher for part of his career. In fact, her life was marked by the fact that her father wanted her to get an education, and family decisions were made based upon this fact. Her story could be listed with parent support just as easily as the

category of spirituality. Her father contracted leprosy when he was 45 years old and became a pensioner, which meant he received a small stipend from the government but did not work. Her mother was a housewife. This time in the family's life was very hard because they sank deeper into poverty. Soliyana, like others, had to work very hard and go to school. When she was in eighth grade her father decided to send Soliyana and her sister to Addis to get an education. The high school near their home had no electricity, few resources, and there were malaria mosquitos in that region. Her father thought it would be better if they went to Addis even though he could not come with them. Soliyana took two years off of school to work and provide for her sister so that her sister could complete her education. Her sister was a junior in high school at the time. Soliyana worked as a construction aide, carrying stones and bricks to construction sites. She also worked as a maid where she was solicited for sex but refused. Her brother also moved to Addis and the three siblings worked and went to school. Her parents could not help them financially at all, and the children even sent money to their parents while they were studying and working. Much of her story did not focus on academics but on the struggles outside of the academy to get through school. She did talk about refusing a professor's advances and receiving a poor grade because she would not meet a professor at a hotel. She burned with fury at this situation but felt because she was so poor no one would listen to her. She referred to her poverty several times in the interview, saying that no one would listen to someone so poor. Throughout the interview, she referred to her spirituality and thanked God for his provision, showing that her faith was very strong and helped her get through many tough times while she was in school.

Soliyana began and ended her interview referring to her faith. We asked her about how much school her siblings received. "All have college education with degree. Yes, because of Jesus, because of Jesus, not by my strength." When I did a word query to see if other

participants mentioned Jesus, I found that Soliyana was the only participant who cited him. I find it interesting that she repeated “because of Jesus.” She wanted to emphasize her point that she believes Jesus is the reason that all of her siblings have been successful.

She continued to emphasize her trust in God when we asked her about moving to Addis. **“Did your father encourage you to move to Addis to get an education?”** “Yes, we were very poor. We have no money, but we have love and we trust God and we love each other.” Here, she emphasizes the love in her family and the trust they had in God and in each other. It is phenomenal that her father was sending his two girls, without any adult supervision, away to Addis, which was over 200 kilometers from the family. He did not know the outcome but knew his daughters needed to get an education. Her faith helped her to move far from her parents. She had to trust in her father’s decision and trust in God as she had no one to rely on in Addis.

When we asked her about how she was able to be successful in the face of many financial and family struggles, she said that it was her ambition. When we asked her about where she got her ambition she said, “We have no TV at the time, but I saw my neighbor and I was looking at that and somebody graduated with a gown and I saw I should be like that. Also, I was strong in prayer.” She, like other participants, got her ambition from seeing someone else graduate, and this inspired her. She then said, “Also I was strong in prayer.” She puts this on the same footing as seeing someone graduate. Her ambition came from a strong sense of spirituality rooted in prayer.

She also emphasized that her life in university was quite simple in that, “When I was in the university, I would take my class. I studied, going to church, and working.” She did not have time for anything else. The things that were a priority in her life were going to university, church, and working. This statement again emphasized her commitment to her faith. She also ended up

marrying a fellow student who attended her church, stressing again the importance of faith in her life.

At the very end of the interview, when we asked her if there was anything else she would like to add, she said, “For me, my point is the Lord is my foundation. I believe he will do more and more things. Amen!” She started with talking about God in the beginning of the interview, and she ended by emphasizing her faith.

Soliana talked throughout the interview about her faith in God and how it helped her to survive in the educational setting and beyond. Even though she had multiple factors working in her favor, like a supportive father and being educated in a big city, she also emphasized her spirituality in her success. She gave the credit to God several times throughout the interview; therefore, because of the importance of faith in her life I added this as one of the factors that helped her succeed in her education. Her faith was her strategy to succeed. Soliana is currently living in Germany while her husband is studying at the university there.

7.1.4.1 Interpreting Their Faith

Seada, whose story is introduced in the Institutional section, referred to God 10 times in the interview. She began sharing how God delivered her from a jealous friend who wanted to hurt her because she was smart. “When I entered this problem faced to me, I skipped by the help of God.” She later referred to God again when talking about the problems her family faced. “With the help of God we have passed everything.” Furthermore, she talked of God again when sharing about getting some financial support from her family after her parents went through a divorce. “With the help of God we are getting a little money from our families.” She also lost a sister that was very close to her, and she said simply, “we cannot quarrel with God”. Finally, she referred to her present situation by thanking God that she was finally happy and through the hard

struggles. “Yes, thanks to God we are here, and we are very happy. When I remember that it was bad for us to pass that step. At this time, I am happy”. She clearly has leaned on her faith throughout her lifetime, and her faith helps her get through trying times.

One miraculous faith story I heard was from Hermela, one of the 35 interviewees. Hermela was blind and one day there was no one to walk her to school, but she wanted to go to school so badly that she decided to walk by herself even though she had never walked alone to school before. While she was on her way and determined, a cow bit her very badly. The community came out to help her when they heard her, and then they saw that she was just a foot away from a deep pit that could have killed her if she had fallen into it. The cow had actually saved her from falling. The community rejoiced with her that God had saved her from the pit. She declared three times after telling this story that God saved her that day. Needless to say, her grandmother was so upset that she called a cousin to live with them so that Hermela would always have someone to walk her to school.

Other participants cited their faith as a strategy for endurance as well as showing their faith in the supernatural by thanking him or referring to him in their times of trouble. Eden referred to God in her interview at least four times. She said, “Also there is God besides me. He facilitated things to be best. I make my little effort, but God did much more for me.” Soliyana also thanked God when talking of her accomplishments and how her mother was proud of her; “she is proud and thanks God.” Yannet’s mother obeyed her late husband’s wishes for Yannet to get an education because she feared God would punish her if she did not. When I called Beza to follow up on her interview, the last words she said to me on the phone were that she wins with God, demonstrating her strong belief that her faith in God helped her overcome her educational

struggles. Zala, who came from a family of priests, when asked how her faith played a part in her success spoke of how holy water gave her the ability to be a strong student:

Even when I was treating people in the clinic together with scientific treatment, we can use holy water. Just all things are from God. We believe with us. I encouraged always. Also, even me I don't take any medicines still now. If I feel any illness or any stress I go to church and take the holy water and I feel better and cured. Together with scientific medicine we can use this one. I prefer this and encourage people.

Did that help you through your studies? Yes.

She used the holy water to help her with her stress and says that taking the holy water helped her through her studies. These are just a few examples of how students talked about their faith as strategies to help them while managing their educational endeavors.

7.1.5 Finding Odd Jobs to Stay in School

*I make an alcohol drink called saragy to sell financially.
Hawi*

One of the struggles almost all of the participants faced was how they would pay for school. Since they did not have a high school in their village, they would have to rent a room in another town. Finances came up often in the interviews, and I talk about it in different ways in several different sections of the dissertation. For some participants, parents were able to work extra hard to help provide for them, while others were able to find scholarships. Some participants had to find ways to earn money so they could go to school. Finding jobs to help provide finances for school was one of the strategies participants used to complete their

education. These jobs ensured they had a little cash to help with their rental house and school expenses. One of the things that is hard to come by when living in the rural area is *birr* because people are living off the land and doing more trading with each other. How did participants get money to travel to school, rent an apartment, and pay for books and notebooks when money was tight and parents may have had other priorities? It is quite a hardship, but some of the participants in this study have shown that those who are able to creatively figure out a way to make some extra money managed to complete school.

Participants found different ways to make money to attend school. Zahera, Firehewot, Samrawit, Soliyana, and Magda, and worked very hard with their families from primary school to high school, and then in college and graduate school found ways to provide for themselves. For most of Zahera's life, she was on her own to provide for her education.

Zahera

Zahera wowed me. I do not think I have ever met someone with such tenacity. I am excited to share her story as I think it will inspire many girls wanting to get an education. Zahera was excited and bubbly and had this raspy voice that reminded me of my sister. (We later learned that her vocal cords had been damaged by bronchitis while she was in college). We instantly connected, and she shared her journey for an education with smiles and laughs. She informed us that the teachers nicknamed her "the laughing girl." She was very lighthearted and had a spunk that both my mom and I talked about after. I learned that through her survival skills, she had climbed out of poverty.

Zahera began her story when her education was interrupted in fifth grade by her parents' divorce. She was sent to live with her grandmother, who had very little means to provide for her. Her father had been a soldier for the Derg regime and now was unemployed, and her mother had

no formal education and had been a housewife. At that time, Zahera could have dropped out of school as her grandmother was unable to support her, but instead she began to sell roasted barley and simple breads so that she could attend school. All throughout her high school years, she found jobs to support her education. She worked more jobs than any other participant interviewed as she had no monetary resources. I asked if her siblings had graduated from college as well, and her response was that they could not face the challenges. “I tried to learn them, but they were not capable of facing that challenge of education. They didn’t want the challenge.” This quote ties in with Magda’s quote about never giving up in the face of challenges. Zahera echoes that cry to be strong in the face of challenges.

Zahera shows her determination to succeed by taking on hard labor-intensive jobs. She works these jobs in her bare feet! She did not have a pair of shoes until her 12th grade year of school. This is how she finds creative solutions to her poverty:

After 5th grade I tried to help myself by financing my education. I was selling colo, roasted barley, breads, simple breads. I also entered when I was grade 7, I joined someone’s home as a maid. I tried that but I couldn’t do that. I couldn’t continue. I went back to my grandmother. After that I went back to selling the colo and breads and also doing the construction aid. **The cement?** Ya, the bricks and the cement. Also, I was carrying water. Before going to school, I would collect up to 30 to 35 pots of water. One pot was 25 cents. One pot is 20 to 30 liters. I was carrying that. For one day I carried 30 pots for construction purposes. I passed very challenging time. It was very challenging to continue but I tried my best. I was hoping to graduate and have money to support my family. That was my courage to do these things. From 6th grade up to 10th grade, I was doing this.

Zahera had no financial means to support herself, as her family did not have jobs. She did not let this affect her education. She started working right away and when something did not work well, like working as a maid in seventh grade, she would find a different job. She carried 30 pots of water a day that were 20 to 30 liters each so that the cement would stay wet for the construction workers. She did this every day through tenth grade so that she could get an education and support her family.

Zahera continued to show her determination to succeed by making enough money to be able to contribute to a rental house. After 10th grade, she joined a preparatory school that was 10 kilometers from her town. She worked as a maid that summer so she would have enough money to pay for rent as she would no longer be able to walk every day to school. She shared a rented house with three girls. She would pay her rent for the whole semester from the job she had as a maid. But did not have enough money left over for food for the semester, and therefore she had to think of other strategies to survive, which I talk about in the Friendship section. During her master's degree, she was working an office job and could easily pay for her expenses.

Firehewot

We interviewed Firehewot in a noisy café in a shopping mall in the heart of Bole, the largest shopping district in the city. Jerusalem had been concerned that the guards might question us because we were interviewing so many people at the hotel, which was government-run, so we left our cozy gazebo and ended up in a centrally located café where the sounds of TV soccer, scraping chairs, the clatter of silverware and cups along with the incessant chatter of the customers bounced across the room. Firehewot had a polite and confident demeanor. The previous interviewee had been an hour late and placed our next interview in a time constraint. I felt the pressure to hear her story quickly. Luckily, she lived close to where we were heading,

and we were able to give her a ride home. We were able to be freer in the car without all the loud noise and she talked of her job.

Firehewot was born to farmers and had five brothers and four sisters. Despite her parents' illiteracy, and her mother's persistent nagging for the daughters to marry early, the father encouraged his children's education. All of her siblings completed university except for one sister who was kidnapped and forced into an early marriage.

Her parents owned a small teashop and made Firehewot work at the teashop to earn money for school:

In my school attendance I suffered a lot. For example, financially because my family expected me to pay school fees. Even because they are farmers, I am expected to pay school fees. At that time from Monday Friday I would attend my schooling but on the Sundays and Saturdays, we have a small teahouse and I make some bread and sell that for my schooling. For my schooling, from 1-8th grade I was in the rural part in this way. . . . I expected to carry water early in the morning and I was expected to sell tea even until the time to go to school every day. During this time, I faced and I was late for school. I could not arrive on time. That was my biggest problem during primary school. The second problem was financial, I tell you.

Firehewot stayed quite busy working at her parents' teahouse and attending school as one of her major problems was finding the finances she needed. She finished her primary school, but the high school was 18 kilometers away from her family, so she had to rent a room in the city and then come home on the weekends to work at the teashop so she could pay for her schooling and the house.

Firehewot grew up working for her parents to contribute to the family income and pay for her schooling. Her parents expected her to pay for her own schooling, and she did this by working hard for them in the tea shop and carrying water for them before school. Even when she moved to a different town, she was still expected to work for them on the weekends and pay for her rental space. This was her strategy to complete her education. She had to work for her parents so she could go to school.

Other participants

Several other participants also worked odd jobs to stay in school. Soliyana worked for her parents in various jobs but also did construction work, similar to Zahera. She says, “We were carrying stones and big hard work” of her time as a construction aid. Then she moved to Addis Ababa to work and provide for her sister while she was in school. She became a maid during that time, and her brother worked in carpentry and as a construction aide. Saba, another of the 35 participants, whose parents had passed away, made money by collecting eggs from the neighbors and selling them at market for them.

Participants who worked during their elementary and high school years worked very hard, but it was something they had to do to finish school. Having a job to bring in finances was their strategy to pay for school. If they had decided that the work was too hard, they might have not completed their education, but because they were so motivated, they endured hard jobs and were successful.

7.1.5.1 Funding Graduate School

For many of the participants graduate school was not free, and they had to find ways to provide for their studies. Some students received scholarships for their master’s degrees, which

enabled them to get their degrees, but others had to work very hard to be able to afford their master's degrees.

Firehewot discussed using her savings and current salary to pay for her master's degree. She tried to get her workplace to sponsor her master's degree, but they refused, so she used her savings and her money from work to pay for her master's degree. She also faced the pressures of working long hours and going to school and eventually, when her work sent her out of town during her final exams, she chose taking her exams over her work and was fired. She then used the rest of her savings to finish graduate school. Once she graduated, however, she got a good job with the government and is currently able to work on gender issues in her workplace.

Samrawit found a part-time job tutoring children and doing data collection during her undergraduate years. She also taught college students while doing her master's degree.

Magda discussed getting a loan from her work as a teacher to pay for her master's degree, so each month her workplace took part of her salary to pay for the loan. She went to school during the summer months and then took on an extra job in the fall and spring by tutoring English lessons in order to pay for the following year's cost of her master's degree.

Hiwot also used her salary to do her master's degree, but she took out a loan at first to pay for the expense and then had to pay back the loan in monthly installments. Her loan payment every month was 1000 *birr* and her monthly salary was 2000 *birr*, so she struggled to pay back that loan, but she was able to pay for her master's degree.

These participants all worked incredibly hard to find the finances that helped them with their schooling. Their ability to find jobs, earn income, and work hard helped them accomplish their dreams. They were able to take control of their own destiny by earning income and paying for school. In some situations, students had to do so much housework that they would not even

have the opportunity to take on extra jobs. In Zahera's case, her family was divided because of the divorce and for some reason she was allowed to work outside the family home. For participants to do this, parents would also have to be on board. The master's degree was also challenging, but by this time participants had decent jobs because they had already finished their bachelor's degrees and were able to contribute more towards their education. I begin the next section by talking about finances but this time through the provision of parent support.

7.2 Interpersonal

In this section I discuss how participants were able to leverage family support to stay in school. Furthermore, I discuss how parents work extra hard to help support their daughters' education. These are key strategies families use to help their children be successful. Then I discuss the power of having strong friendships and how they aid the participants in many different ways. I chose three participants in particular to discuss in this section because their stories demonstrated the power of strong and loving mothers who put their daughters' education first. In the friendship section, I continue to interweave stories from participants I introduced earlier.

7.2.1 Leveraging Family Support

At nursing school, my grandmother would send me money, 50 or 100 birr, per two months, or three months or four months. When she has money she will send me.

Seble

Family is very important to participants. One of the strategies several participants tapped into was the support of their parents. Parents supported their children emotionally and financially. It is expected that parents provide for their children’s education, but with these cases the parents were extremely poor yet worked hard to provide extra money for their daughters to go to school, even when they themselves had no education.

Parent and family support is prevalent in the data I collected. In my first and third rounds of coding, I coded Parent Support 55 times and Family Support an additional 23 times. These themes arose through reading the interviews and letting the interviewees speak to me. They were not preexisting codes. Yet, support from parents and family came up often. In my fourth round of coding, when I was asking the question, “What was it about this participant that helped her to be successful”? I found that 20 of the participants were most likely successful in their education because of their parents. Table 14 shares a few statements I coded from multiple participants who speak to the strength they had in their families and declare the power of their parents’ influence.

Table 14. Participants’ Voices on Parent Support

Participant	Quote demonstrating parent support
Melesse	They are the key for my success. Especially my father is very devoted on our education. They want us to devote all of our time on education. Both of them are very supportive but especially my father he cared for my success. If we have any questions regarding any material, or anything concerning our education, they are willing to do anything.
Liya	My father said if you finish your bachelor’s degree and you get married after that I will pay you 5000 <i>birr</i> . So I was very motivated to postpone the marriage.
Yeabsira	My father is strongly forbids me marrying. He told me for the future you are taking to a degree and masters. Don’t limit for your idea. This is told me. My father is very strong like that. He wants to get us like a man.

Table 14 (continued)

Meron	I have parents who supported my education and believed in me so I didn't have much work to do at home. My father would tell my mother she has to be kept only at her studies. So my mom did all the work at home.
Seble	My mom is clever. She suffered so that her children would be successful.
Bitania	I think it was my mother and my father. They believed in education. My success comes from education. She doesn't want to get more money by trade or another source. Even she says people will respect you if you get your money from education. She pushed me to study and to get an education. That's my family.

These quotes are powerful and point to the strong stance participants' parents took on education. Many of the parents made sure their daughters' marriages were postponed so that they could focus on their education. Other parents made sure their daughters did not do housework so they would have time to do their school work and study and, of course, many of the parents provided financially for their daughters as well as gave them emotional support. One participant cried as she told us that her father died because of a struggle she had with a professor who wanted to fail her unless she slept with him. The father did all that he could with his influence to change the situation but was unable to get the professor to change his mind and literally became sick to death for his daughter. This is the love and support poured out by many of these participants' fathers and mothers.

7.2.1.1 Financing Education

Financial support from families is an important factor in getting an education. Education is expensive even when tuition is free, as we saw in Magda's story and her struggles to get

notebooks, pens, and even athletic clothing. Often children in poverty are not able to get an education because their families cannot afford it. Yet, these 11 interviewees mentioned their poverty throughout their interviews and were still able to manage the financial burden. The difference for some of them was the financial sacrifices their parents made. If families did not believe in education, they probably would not put their money towards educating their children. In these instances, parents and family members worked extra hard to provide for these participants and are shining examples of how to support girls' education.

In this section, I introduce Yannet, Samrawit, and Halima, who embody what it means to have financial support from loved ones. Samrawit and Yannet's mothers are widows, which forced them to work hard to provide for their families and support their children's education. We will see from these women's stories how important financial support is for students to be successful and how much parents must sacrifice to further their children's education. Furthermore, we will look at Halima, who did not have the support of her parents during college and had to rely on a boyfriend for the financial and moral support she needed during that time.

Samrawit

Samrawit was the first person we interviewed and was a good friend of Jerusalem's. It was easy to begin the interview since they were teasing each other about their college days.

Samrawit had grown up in the rural Amhara region; her father died when she was in 11th grade. Her father had been a businessman, and her mother stayed at home tending the household. After the death of Samrawit's father, her mother had to begin a business trade in order to cover the household expenditures. During this time, Samrawit and her sisters helped her mother to sell some things. These times were very difficult for Samrawit because of the pressure of having to do well in school to make it into college and to help her mother and family with the business.

Samrawit also talked of her mother's financial support as she also provided as much as she could for Samrawit. But Samrawit also worked with her mother to lessen the burden. Her mother did some petty trading through spinning thread, and Samrawit joined her in this business. She explained, "I tried to help my mom to grow and to help to cover the household expenditures and to generate her income and to help with the household chores." Concerning household expenses, she also said she worked with her mom and saved that money for school.

In college, Samrawit took on additional jobs because she did not want to burden her mother with additional costs. She said:

I helped myself a lot. No one except my mother supported me financially, especially. My background is from a poor family. No one would support me financially. I strived to manage that. When I joined the university for the first time I just worked together with my mom and we saved the money. When you join the university there are lots of expenses to cover the university costs, so I collected the money with that trade and I covered that cost.

Samrawit's mom helped her financially but she also helped herself by taking on jobs while she was at university.

Yannet

Yannet was the first interview we did in Sodo without help from Jerusalem. I had arranged for a translator, but she did not show up for the interview and so we began the interview without her and were able to continue because Yannet's English was adequate for the task.

We sat in a café at Abebe Zeleka hotel. It was raining, and one side of the restaurant was completely open to the rain. We all leaned into each other as the rain poured down and as the

clank of dishes and people coming and going sounded in the background. We connected with Yannet immediately as we were very close to each other in proximity so we could hear her above the rain and because of her sweet demeanor and smile. We learned that Yannet's father had passed away and the financial burden to take care of Yannet and her siblings fell on her mother.

Yannet's financial challenges started when her family began stripping her father's land from them. She talked of her mother being "restless" because of the financial burden on her and because of her commitment to their education. "She [my mother] was restless really, I feel when I think about her interest to teach us. Always she was respecting the responsibility that my father gave her." Yannet began secondary school in another town, first living with a male relative because she had no other options, and then moving into a room with three other female students. Her mother sold *teff*, the Ethiopian grain used to make *injera*, the bread staple of the country, and then gave Yannet the *birr* to cover her expenses. She shared the struggle of not having much money:

Look, in order not to pay two or three *birr* we were walking half the road on foot in order to pay one *birr*. At that time, the house rent was 16 *birr* for example. But that was very difficult and challenging to get, because at that time they sold the *teff* very cheap. Everything was cheap. Even the farmers expectation...if you asked them money they are not voluntary, but if you ask them *teff* or whatever, no problem. They will give more than you expect. But what is challenging for them? Money is very challenging for them. How to get it was very hard for them. . . . Anyways, since I would ask her very very smoothly. Mother, I have this type of things. I will buy these things. I will buy these things, I would tell her first. Then, even though she was not interested, but in order not to

miss my education, she was giving me like selling the *teff* or the grain that she has. Even though it was challenging, but she will give me.

Yannet went on to describe how her mother provided for her including getting her first pair of shoes in eighth grade. Her mother also sold Areki, the local alcoholic beverage, so that she could provide decent clothing and increase her self-esteem. “So really even though she [mother] has different [financial] challenges and problems but she wants to feel my psychology, not to have an inferior complex with the others so she was trying her best.”

Her mother showed a great financial commitment towards her daughter. She struggled to provide for her family but took on additional businesses like making the local alcohol to support her daughter. At the time, *birr* was very hard to get, yet her mother did anything she could to support Yannet. Her mother even cared about the clothes she wore, wanting them to be good clothes. So essentially, whatever Yannet asked of her mother, she would provide. Because her mother believed in Yannet’s education, she used her resources to pay for that education. Even though their family went through economic hardship, her mother did everything she could to give her daughter what she needed to be successful in school.

Through her mother’s support, Yannet received her diploma in education and became a teacher. Then, after becoming a teacher, she was able to begin her university degree during the summer months. She was not able to afford it without her mother’s help since she was getting a college degree the non-traditional way; she had to pay for it. Thus, even when Yannet had a job and became a teacher, her mother continued to support her through her college degree.

Samrawit and Yannet both had supportive parents and they tried their best to provide for them.

Halima

Halima was very enthusiastic and came across as happy and passionate. Sometimes she would speak so quickly my mom would have to ask her to slow down so she could type everything she was saying. She was working for an NGO that partners with USAID; therefore, she was very accustomed to interacting with Americans and her English was excellent. She wore a hijab and was from a part of Ethiopia that borders with Kenya. Half her family lives in Kenya, and the other half live in Ethiopia. Her father has a small business from which he imports things from Kenya. Her father is Muslim, and her mother is Christian; as a teenager she had decided to embrace her Muslim roots. Her parents divorced when she was young, but she lived with her mother, who was passionate about her education. When Halima was in 10th grade, her mother became sick and eventually passed away. Her father supported her education but had many children to take care of; when Halima got into college, her family did not understand the need for financial support as college tuition and room and board is free. Therefore, she used a strategy to get that support by falling for a man who helped to support her financially. She is the only female from her community who has received a college education.

I bring up Halima's story in this section on Leveraging Family Support because she tried to get support from her family. But at that time her family could not see the importance of education. Her community, which is different from the other participants, believed that it was a waste of resources to educate a girl:

Most of the people do not want to send their girls to school in my community because they consider investing in girls is investing in the husband's family. That is their perception. Girls are going out, so they don't want to spend their money there.

Since her community could not understand the importance of educating Halima and her mother was too sick to help her, she looked for other ways to gain the moral and financial support she needed:

When I was in university there was not much support from the family. You can't even understand why they are not supporting me. They thought the government was doing everything. They thought the food was there; the shelter was there. Everything is in the university, so they considered that there was no need. The distance is very far . . . about 665 km from Addis. . . . The families when I write them and I tried to send a letter, by the way mom was sick and my father has many children by my stepmother, so he didn't provide for me at the university. From my point of view, it [having a boyfriend] was positive for me because as I already told you the families were not supporting me. My mom used to support me, and I could tell her my problems. But now I was living with my stepmother. They did not encourage me to go to university. Do you know what they said when I passed my school? They said, "Are you going to study for four years again?" Imagine. They don't understand the importance of sending me to school. My grandma, who was living in Kenya at the time, she said are you going to study for four additional years? You know that is how they think about education. Education means nothing for them.

Halima proceeded with her university education despite her community's lack of support. In Ethiopia, getting into university is very competitive. One has to have very high-test scores. When someone gets into university, there is so much excitement. Families and communities celebrate them even if they were not excited about education in the past; they become very proud of their children because getting into university is such a big accomplishment. The fact that her

family did not understand why she would want to continue her education explains why there was no support for her in college. She truly was on her own, especially with her mother being sick:

I faced a challenge when I entered the university. That was the time that I was introduced to my ex. He used to support me there when I was at the university. He supported me. . . After I became his girlfriend, he started to support me.

Halima realized that she needed the extra support to help her through college and became the girlfriend of a guy she liked. She believed that having that extra support really helped her. This decision contradicts other students I interviewed, including Samrawit, who stayed away from boys, being told they would be a distraction to her education. In this case, because Halima did not have family to depend on, she deepened her relationship with a man and was able to get financial and emotional support while in college.

Not only did Halima struggle financially for support but she also struggled mentally because she was the only female in her major of Agricultural Economics. That meant that she had to be prepared every day for class because, since she was the only female, the teacher would constantly call on her for questioning. She said her teachers would ask a male student a question and then turn and ask her a question to balance out the classroom. (This was different from Eden and Jerusalem's experience with being called on in class) Because of her mother's sickness, she could no longer confide in her. She turned to her boyfriend for her much-needed emotional support.

I asked if having a boyfriend helped or hindered her, and she said it helped her because she probably would not have made it without his support. She said that it was a positive

experience. She married a year after she graduated and, in marriage, he became controlling and abusive and she had to divorce him.

I share Halima's experience to show how important it is to have the support of loved ones. She needed the financial and emotional support that her boyfriend provided and that her mother was no longer able to provide.

Other Participants

Other participants' families struggled to provide for them as well, but they found ways to help each other and found the funding they needed for school. Soliyana, introduced in the section Thriving with Spiritual Sustenance, worked very hard. Starting in primary school, she helped her parents by selling vegetables at market. "In the market we were making business, selling onions, tomatoes, and also in the other time we digging in the farm." She explained that when the school day would shift to morning she would work in the afternoon, and when the school day shifted to the afternoon she would work in the morning. She also did crochet with her parents.

The parents of Dina, one of the 35 participants, had a creative way of helping their daughter with finances. Her parents gave her one hen to take care of to provide for her education. She would protect the hen and then when the hen had chicks, she would sell them. Eventually she had enough chickens to sell to buy a sheep. Her parents kept the sheep and sold it for her. From this money she was able to pay for her education. It is not easy to protect hens from wild animals that are hungry. She showed her ability to be responsible in protecting these hens

One of the interesting findings in this paper was how brothers and sisters provided for each other so that they could attend school. Beza, who is introduced later, had parents who were unable to support her financially and so she turned to her sister for support. "My parents had so

many children they could not encourage me so much.” She actually leaned on her sister who had dropped out of school in 10th grade to work in Dubai. Her sister supported her education throughout her time by sending money back home to her.

Zala, one of the 35 original interviewees, also leaned on a sibling. Her parents died when she was in seventh grade and her brother, who was in 12th grade at the time, moved to Addis to find a job and support all of his brothers and sisters. He was able to find a job in a printing press and sent money to pay for his siblings’ rent. All of her four siblings graduated from college except the oldest brother who sacrificed for all of them. In fact, this is a common story throughout the interviews. Siblings help each other financially to get through school, and the participants in this study also helped their siblings through school when they found jobs.

Family support is incredibly important for each student. The moral and financial support families can provide make the difference in whether a student can attend school or not. Students who come from very poor backgrounds help support their own education by working with their parents. Some parents are able to give their children jobs that help them provide for their own education, like taking care of chickens and then selling them. Furthermore, siblings play an important role in providing for their sisters’ education when possible. If families are unable to provide financial support, lessening the burden of housework so that students can work in their free time can also aid them in providing for their own education.

7.2.2 Relying on Friendships

We have a group of about 7 friends, behind this building there is a café and we sit like this and we study and we share our notes. That is the method we used.

Bitania

Strong friendships constitute another strategy for endurance that was crucial to the success of many of the students, particularly if they did not have the family support that other students had or if they struggled financially and could not provide all of the resources they needed for school. I coded *friendship* 30 times out of the 35 interviews. In my final round of coding, I found that three out of the 11 participants would not have been as successful if they had not had the strong friendships that helped them on their journey. Participants' friendships were particularly helpful when they had the long treacherous walk to school or had to share a room in a city away from home, or during their college days when they needed a little extra moral and financial support. Eden, Zahera, and Seada were participants who stressed friendships in their interviews, but others also showed how strong friendships were important to them.

7.2.2.1 Helping Each Other

Throughout participants' lives there were crucial times when friendships played an important role and participants needed the help of their friends to get them through difficult times. Seada, whose story I tell in the Taking Advantage of Government Support section, described her strong friendships and how they helped each other through tough personal times as well as challenging academic times:

Sometimes our friends we help each other. If I need some writing things, they help me. But, the Derg helped us a lot. But we helped each other. That was one solution for us. If one person gets a problem the others helped. Therefore, we solved our problems. I can't get *birr* from my family; my mother has no money, so we help each other. We still meet each other with our friends. We have passed many challenges at this time. We all are in a good position.

In this reflection, she showed that she was also active in helping her friends. She was part of a strong core of friendships that got each other through tough times. She also reiterates in a different part of the interview about how she became friends with the other blind students in the dorm and how they helped each other. “In the dorm I was with them. In our difficulties we help each other. Some of them had good families and we helped each other in money and materials, etc.” They were in it together.

Being blind may have intensified the need for help and dependency in a mostly sighted school, and she shows how they helped each other in these statements. She is still friends to this day with them because they went through so many challenges together and overcame those challenges.

As noted above, one of the reasons she needed this extra help from friends was because she did not have the same advantage in the classroom as sighted students did, and because of her blindness she sometimes needed her friends to assist her with class notes. She talked of discrimination and of having to rely on good friends:

Everybody is not positive to help blind students. Sometimes I feel very bad things. Because I take one of my friends and asked to help me in my education and to read to me because everybody is not positive to help people like me. In the classrooms I take one of my friends and I tell them to help me.

She relied on her friends so much during her university years that she would even take a friend into the classroom with her so that she would have that extra support to learn.

Relying on friendship was so important to many of these participants, but not all participants had strong friendships, which could be detrimental to their studies. Betelham, one of the 35 participants, talked about the difficulty of not having friends in an all-male environment.

I have the other challenge is in a math. Actually, in my department all of them are males. No females. All of them are males. When they study they are doing it together. When the lecturer gives us a worksheet because they are in the same building and room and they will call each other and do together. The problem is I didn't have a friend. It was a problem for me. I was struggling by myself. Even to do one question it was long.

Betelham watched as the men in her class had the advantage of friendship and she was left out because she was a female. She says her problem was "I didn't have a friend." She knew that without a friend she was at a disadvantage in her class and to do just one math problem she had to struggle for it. Friendships were so critical, not only in the academic setting but also when students went home at night, as many of the students were not living with their parents once they began their high school careers. Eden, who was also blind, shared about having to rely on good friendships throughout her career and also talked of her experiences living with friends.

7.2.2.2 Living with Friends

Eden

Eden moved to Addis to study. In her story, she relied on friendships as if they were family enduring much together. During middle school she lived with a group of students in the rural area, and they did everything together without any parent support. She also talked of her friends at the blind school who would sneak them food, sanitary napkins, and soap. When she

lived with her aunt, she used her friendships to find opportunities for scholarships in Addis. She talked of communicating with her friends in Debra Markos and in Addis Ababa, which eventually gave her the courage to leave her aunt and travel to Addis alone to meet her friends.

In Addis, she lived with her friends in a rented room and they took care of one another:

We lived in a rent house by sharing with our friends. At that time 100 *birr* was one room. We paid by sharing together. There were five people that shared one room . . . We also cooked by ourselves.

If Eden was not able to share a rent house with her friends, she might have had a very hard time finding anywhere safe that she could stay for a low price. These friendships were so important to her schooling because they enabled her to get an education with very little expenditure on rent and food because they shared their expenses and survived. She says they would all walk to school together. Her friends were her family; they were her inner circle, and she needed them and they needed her to be successful. This is clear throughout her story. Zahera also lived with friends and received some financial help from them as well.

7.2.2.3 Giving Charitably

Zahera

Zahera also relied heavily on her friendships to help her finish school. Like Eden, she also rented an apartment with friends during high school.

I rented a house with my friends. I will eat what they eat. But I will contribute 10 *birr* for the rent. We were three. The rent was 30 *birr* per month. I will pay 10 *birr*. I will eat what they eat. They allowed me to eat with them.

Zahera worked during the summer months and saved up all of her money to help rent a house. She gave her rent money at the beginning of school and had nothing left over for food. So her friends would provide food for her. Being able to share a room with friends enabled her to go to school, and their generosity helped sustain her and made it possible for her to continue to stay at the rent house even when she was paying less than her friends. That did not mean there were no challenges:

Sometimes, we need fight sometimes. The reason of the fight was the finance challenge. I didn't have the finance to support them. You always depend on us, they would say or something like that. I would be silent. I can't say anything and pass the challenge.

I think this phrase shows the difficulty Zahera encountered yet endured. She could not provide any more money to her roommates and she had to rely on them for food. She was a humble worker trying to go to school yet enduring hard times. When her roommates got angry that she couldn't help more, she stayed silent. She had nothing to say because she was the source of their anger and she could not fix it. The fighting, however, did not keep her from finishing school. She endured this time knowing that the time would pass, and she would one day graduate and be successful.

She also had good friends who encouraged her dream and helped her. She talked of a promise made between her and her friend. They pledged not to have boyfriends so they could focus on their academic endeavors. She was faithful to that promise and abstained from having

boyfriends throughout her college career. Furthermore, she also talked of having strong friends in college from whom she could borrow clothes and shoes because she had not brought many clothes with her. She also borrowed money to make copies and borrowed notes from her friends. She survived in some ways due to her generous and kind friends in the face of her poverty.

7.2.2.4 Walking to School

Another way friendship played an important role in students' lives was making the walk to school safer. Several of the interviewees talked about this walk to school and the importance of walking with friends. Zala, one of the 35 original participants, shared how dangerous walking alone can be:

From the beginning our school distance from our village is the one factor for violence. Because when you go to single, only you in that area, they can affect you. You have to be ready with your friends to go to school. **So, to protect yourself you walked with other students to school?** So, I walked with other students to school.

She basically says that the one danger of going to school is the distance from the village to the school and the increased danger of violence when walking alone. Soliyana experienced an attempted kidnapping while she was walking to school. Luckily, she was able to yell and the villagers came out and saved her, but this just shows that the walk to school can be very dangerous to children and friendships help make the journey safer.

Beza and Magda talked about walking to school with friends. These walks to school in a group provided safety from animals and harassment from people, gave them opportunities to practice what they were learning in school, and they provided comradery and fun on what could

be a very boring and hazardous journey. Beza described her walk to school through the interpreter (Jerusalem):

When she go to school there is no forest on the way to school. It was very open. She went to school with her friends so she didn't face any type of harassment, animals or any danger. Up to 10 students I walked with. Most of the time we were enjoying ourselves, because we were asking and responding what we learned in the school. There was questioning and answering and we were playing a group of friends. We enjoyed traveling these three hours.

It is quite extraordinary that Beza said she enjoyed the three-hour walks. That is a long time for a child to enjoy walking. But it shows how these friendships were very valuable.

Magda also shared how her journey to school would begin with her friends arriving at her house: "Our friends come and call me and just to take me with them and we go together to that school." She says that her grandmother would allow her to go to school when her friends came calling. I wonder if her friends had not come if she would still have been able to go to school as the walk to school provided a normalcy to her day and showed her community that other girls were going to school. Furthermore, those long walks to school could have been a hindrance to going to school had they not had friendships, making the journey more enjoyable.

Magda also shared how the walk to school provided a time to prepare for the entrance exams to the university:

Even now I used to walk with the students who were performing good in their education and we ask questions of each other and we just give answers and we memorize and we walk together always so that it helps us just to prepare for the exam.

Magda used her walk to school to study with other students, making use of the time it took to walk and deepening her intellectual abilities. These walks prepared students for their day in the classroom, though sometimes these walks were full of hazards.

The walk to school could be very dangerous but walking in numbers made the journey safer for everyone. I asked Magda about bad men and hyenas:

Actually there are but my grand mom always advises me to keep silent whenever someone says something. Just walk your way. Don't give response to everybody. I obeyed her advice and I just keep walking fastly whenever I see something. When I see something I don't want to just stand. Just I walk. Always we just hold each other and go together. So that there is, even if there are people since we are going together we are not giving or inviting space for them, there is not resulting in danger on us. So that when we come back, as soon as we get out from the class we start running to our home. We are trying our best to come on time so that we are not staying out . . . so that we didn't face any problem concerning hyena and other things.

Magda says here that they would "hold each other" and that they would not leave any space for someone to come. These friendships protected each other from harm when the walk to school could be dangerous. She also used "we" in this quote, showing that she was together with her classmates when she went to and from school. They were a unit of togetherness.

7.2.2.5 Choosing Friends Wisely

Several of the interviewees mentioned the importance of making friendships that would help them in school rather than hinder their success. Just as Magda chose to walk to school with

peers who were good students, other participants also chose friends based on their academic and social records. For example, Zala talked about how she purposefully selected her friends:

In the nursing and higher education I selected my friends who had similar behavior to me, I selected that friends, even male or female. My criteria is the Christians and those clever students. Because of that, I didn't get...those lazy students, just to get helping, they approach in different ways.

Tinebeb, one of the 35 interviewees, made it very clear that she selected her friends. In a conversation about the "Christmas flood," which she defined as a "large number of fresh students go back to their home . . . due to poor academics," I asked her why she was different from them. She said, "I was very focused on my academics, and I selected my friends from the rural areas. I selected my friends who focused on their academics." Later I asked if she wanted to have a boyfriend, and she said, "No, no no. In the four years of university I had no boyfriend. I had limited contact with the male students. My girlfriends around me also had no idea about the boyfriends. I personally selected my friends." She made it very clear that the reason she was not like the other students was because she chose friends who were strong in academics and were not even interested in male students, which kept her focused on her academics.

Melesse, another one of the 35, shared how at first she started to fall into peer pressure when she arrived at the university, but then she changed her friends and that made all the difference:

While I was an undergraduate student, my friends would ask me to go out to spend some time with them and come back to the dorm. At first you don't have any option. You just know these friends. Finally, I realized that it was not a good thing to spend your time with these friends and such things. Finally, I revised, and I started to pick friends. I

picked one friend and starting from second year to fifth year we were friends and with a girlfriend from law school. I picked her and other clever students in the class. I started to spend my time with them.

She later said she received training from the university, which also taught picking friendships that helped one be successful was important.

This message of choosing one's friends is important because it is something each student has control over. If they want to be successful, they can choose friends who are also academically focused, and this action can be of great help to them. This is one of the strategies participants used in their quest to get an education.

Many of the participants had strong friendships that deepened their experiences revolving around school. These particular participants (Seada, Eden, and Zahara) brought up their friends' influence so much in the interview that it was evident they were contributors to their success. References were made to friendships in every interview. I asked Hiwot if she was scared when she moved into a room far from home to start high school. Her response was, "I lived with other friends." As if to say, no, I wasn't afraid, I had friends and we were in this together. Participants relied on friendships through receiving help from them and living with them during high school to make school more economically feasible and safer. They also used friendships to share what they had with each other. Furthermore, friendships were important on the walk to school for companionship, learning, and safety. Finally, students could choose friendships wisely to aid them in their studies. Having these strong friendships is one of the strategies participants relied on to complete their journey to get an education.

7.3 Institutional

In this section I look at the different opportunities institutions gave to participants and how the participants used these institutions as resources. The institutions brought up by participants were the government, blind schools, and the church. I introduce Seada in this section because she was one of the participants who stood out in finding resources available to her and using those resources to her advantage to help her complete not only primary school but high school and college as well.

7.3.1 Taking Advantage of Government Support

They asked if any students had a problem so they registered our name and supported us. They came into the dorm and talked to us. I had a letter from my Kebele to say I was poor. They did not give us money just supplies.

Saba

Government is far reaching in education, for if the government did not support the school system there would be very few schools. Furthermore, the government has mandated many different laws to help with girls' education, including having strong affirmative action policies which are discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation. They also have contributed to various projects, including providing oil to families if they allow their girls to go to school, as Halima explained in her story. Their efforts are ongoing, and their continued support of higher education is evident in the number of universities they continue to build and the recruitment of experienced professors to teach at the university level.

This section, however, does not foreground government policies but focuses on how participants used government support as a strategy to stay in school. Government support was

evident in many of the participants' stories, especially when it came to students needing a little extra money to get by while they were in university as many times the government handed out stipends to students who were of lower economic status. One participant in particular (Seada) talked of how incredibly supportive the government was of her and her family. Since the participants varied in age and their years at university, government support activities were different depending on the year the participant went to college. Participants, when able, used government support as a financial strategy to help them through school.

Seada

I met Seada in Addis at the hotel where we were doing the interviews. She wore a pair of tinted glasses and walked with a cane. She had a reserved disposition, and I quickly realized that she was severely sight impaired as she was telling her story. What I remember most about her story was how she talked of her sister. Her sister had been blind as well and they did everything together from the time they were children, but after all of their hardships were over and they had jobs and could enjoy their lives, her sister passed away, leaving Seada incredibly alone. We all cried. She no longer had her best friend and compatriot, the one who had been such an integral part of her struggle for success.

Seada's story encompasses the theme of endurance. She relied heavily on her friends for support and she received government stipends that enabled her to complete her education. On top of that she went to a private blind school for her primary education, which gave her a strong foundation to be able to read and write braille.

Seada's story in particular is interesting because she was educated during the time of the Derg, and this socialist regime aided her family immensely. She praised the Derg in her interview because of the tremendous support they gave her family. She is the only person I

labeled as successful because of government support, and that is because she was given government support from the very beginning of her education. If it were not for this support, she very well may have ended up in the rural area without an education.

One of the first things she makes clear is how much the government helped her and her sister. She even says below that it would be difficult for her to finish her education without the help of the government:

The government helped us, it's not by family. The government helped us to finish our education. The government was giving us a stipend. . . . When we were learning in the high school, they were giving us a stipend to my mom. But after coming to the university the government was giving the money to ourselves, to us a stipend. Therefore, we learned by that money and not by family help. If there was no government, I think it would be difficult for us to finish our education. They know that our mother is very, very poor. They know that. She cannot manage four children. We were four at that time. She told to the Woreda (during the Derg system). They know this problem and they give a stipend to our mother, especially for both of us for me and my sister because we have the sight problem. That was the system. At that time, it was 50 *birr* per child, so 100 *birr* for both of us. It was 100 per month. In the university it was 80 *birr*.

The government supported Seada's mother so the girls could go to school. I asked Seada if her mother got money for the other children as well, and she said no. The government only gave this type of help because the two girls had a disability. Even this money was not very much, but it helped to sustain her family and allowed for Seada to go to school. Seada also went on to talk about how the government provided braille paper for her so that she could do her work and take notes in class. "I can't pay for the paper, but the government supplied us the paper." The

government supplied the paper in college, but she had to use the regular paper in high school, which she said was difficult, but she had no other choice.

Seada received help from the government during her college years as well. She received braille paper as previously mentioned, a monthly stipend, and housing. I asked if the stipend covered everything she needed, and she said her friends would help “but the Derg helped us a lot.” She was very dependent on the Derg, the former socialist government, for help and she shared her gratitude for the government support throughout her interview.

Later when Seada was ready to pursue a master’s degree, the government was there again to give her a scholarship. She said it was difficult for her to “learn by paying for the university,” and so she asked for a scholarship for her master’s degree.

I did a scholarship from the government to do my MA. I applied to [the university] and then I told that I am a government student and cannot afford anything, therefore, but I want a MA degree. They allowed for girls, especially disabled students they gave a chance and I got the chance to learn.

Here we see that she had confidence in the government. She told them that she could not afford further study, and they gave her a scholarship. In the interview she said, “I asked them and they gave me a chance.” She knew to take a chance on the government because they had helped her through high school by giving a stipend to her mother, and they had helped her in college by providing for all of her needs and giving an additional stipend. For her master’s she knew they would help her again, which they did.

It is truly a beautiful thing to see that Seada’s education was provided for by the government. It appears they may have been more inclined to help her due to her disability. She

was able to begin her education because of the scholarships and opportunities from the government. She currently teaches at a preparatory school.

Other Participants

Though Seada was the only interviewee who focused on government support, others also mentioned receiving government support. Yannet shared how the government paid for the second year of her master's degree by providing "food, dorm, and education, everything was sponsored." This sponsorship gave her the financial resources to use her own money to help put her brother through private education. Zahera was also sponsored for her master's degree and related that funding her master's was not challenging because everything was paid for by the government.

Hiwot talked of receiving a stipend from the government just like Seada did. She says the stipend "was enough for me because I ate food and drank tea at the campus. The 50 *birr* helped me to buy copies, pens, books, and pencils and the like." Jerusalem clarified that students who are from very poor homes receive a stipend from the university and currently (in 2016) it is about 500 *birr* per month. She says the money comes from different organizations but is given out by the university.

7.3.1.1 Tapping into the Gender Office

Another way students are sponsored by the government is through the gender office on campus. For example, Eden said that she got a sponsorship from the gender office for her master's degree and did not have to work. Samrawit also talked of getting help from the Gender Office her freshman year of college. They had a partnership with the Rotary Club, and the Gender Office would select the neediest students to receive a scholarship of 50 *birr* per month to

help them by soap and sanitary pads. Samrawit related that 50 *birr* was a lot at that time. Beza said that she got soap, sanitary napkins, and some financial help from the gender office, and Zahera talked of getting help from the gender office when she got sick with bronchitis:

Yes, I was sick. My sound, my voice was not this. It changed due to bronchitis. This was not my original voice. The gender office was helping me to get a treatment from . . . hospital for free. Actually, there was no change. My voice changed. Also, even if there is cold or dust, it will stop. Until now they were helping me to get the treatment free.

So the gender office even provided for the students who had medical issues, and Zahera benefited from this endeavor.

Jerusalem added some context about the Gender Office because I was confused that not all the students received money from the office. She explained, “The difference is if you come from a good family and your friends couldn’t give the information about you. The gender office did not give support.” Then she says about herself that “I didn’t even ask. I had my own money for soap and things like that.” The Gender Office was on campus to serve the most vulnerable and poor students.

I learned that three of the participants working on university campuses are on the committee for their gender office. Melesse served as the director of the Gender Office on her campus for two years. She discussed the role of the Gender Office for students:

In that position I worked with women students. Our focus was the different woman students from the rural areas who are victims of many different economic and social problems. Our main concern was to solve their problems. I just worked there as the gender office director and giving life skill training, assertiveness training, health training. There are too many women students from rural areas. They are victims of peer pressure.

In order to solve those things, we gave them different training and also we trained them on different health issues and how to be effective in the academic performance and different life skills, assertiveness training and different training.

The gender office does a lot of good for students coming from poorer backgrounds. I did, however, have several students say they did not get support from the Gender Office. According to Jerusalem, this may have been because they did not have people to vouch for their poverty or they were not poor enough to qualify for the help even though they themselves were suffering.

Seada, Beza, Samrawit, Hiwot, Yannet, Eden and Zahera all used government support as a strategy to help them with scholarships, stipends, and female support. These 11 participants may have used government support as a strategy more than a typical city student because they were from the rural area and were poorer than city students. Seada had strong support from the government, but she also was able to go to a private blind school that gave her room and board in primary school and taught her braille.

7.3.2 Attending Blind Schools

I stood second and first from our class in the blind school. The teachers loved me very very much. I became encouraged by their happiness and by their love for me.

Hermela

The first summer I taught at Wolaita Sodo University in the English department there was an instructor who was blind. His English was incredible, and he seemed to be respected by his peers and students. He made an impression on me because in America I had never seen a blind professor. I had wondered why his English was so much better than his peers, almost native-like,

but I did not find out the reason until I interviewed Seada, Hermela and Eden. Then I learned about the excellent blind schools in Ethiopia.

I interviewed three participants who were blind. I did not know that they were blind until they arrived at the interview. Seada and Eden were two of the 11 interviewees that I have focused on in previous chapters. If it were not for the exposure and support of blind schools, Seada and Eden would not have obtained an education. Both attended blind schools up until the sixth grade. After sixth grade, they entered into the regular public school. Both of the blind schools they attended were private schools funded by organizations, one of them being the Catholic Church. These were boarding schools and provided a way for participants to receive a free education, room and board, and opportunities to learn braille and other subjects.

Seada and Eden both say they would never have graduated had it not been for the opportunity to go to a blind school. Seada says she would have been a maid in her village had it not been for this opportunity:

What would have happened if I hadn't had the boarding school? I was telling Jerri that thing. If there had been no chance I would have been a house servant, like that. I was thinking that. If there was no boarding school and no government help, I would be a servant girl.

Seada makes a strong statement here, explaining that if it was not for the blind school she would still be in her village working as a servant. She knew the importance of this school to her education. Eden also agreed with Seada that women just like her are servants because they were unable to go to a blind school. "There are still a lot of women in the rural areas like me. They are serving in different houses by washing clothes and cleaning homes." Eden knows that if she

had not had the opportunity to go to a blind school, she would be like them. She says, “When you become blind the problem becomes devil.” They suffered a lot because of their blindness, but the schools offered a hope that they would be able to contribute to society.

7.3.2.1 Benefiting Blind Students

Blind schools provide incredible academic opportunities that seeing schools do not, such as providing braille instruction so that students can learn to read and write. Eden emphasized this ability often in the interview. Blind schools not only taught these skills but also gave the students exposure to foreign teachers, which helped their English.

Boarding schools had the ability to hire foreign teachers and volunteers who spoke in English. Seada mentions that in her boarding school the teachers were foreigners who only spoke English, so her instruction was in English. Her ability to learn English from native speakers gave her an advantage over her seeing peers in preparatory school and university as the college entrance exams are given in English. She described the school:

It was a Catholic church and they take children that have a problem with their family and they simply help with their education, etc. It was like this. There were white people; two white people were there in the school. They were helping us in our education. They were managing the school.

Later she described her English learning:

English was very good. We learned from foreigners, so they were teaching us English and French a lot. In the high school we simply learn as normal students. Up till now, we are trying to communicate using English. It was the best for the boarding school. It [English] helped me so much with my education. I tried a lot with English. Every subject was in English and my department was English, and it helped me.

Learning English from native speakers gave Seada an advantage in the classroom, especially since high school tests are given in English. Knowing English that well also inspired Seada to become an English teacher, and that is what she studied in college and in her master's degree.

Both Eden and Seada give credit to their blind boarding schools for helping them get an education. Eden was so passionate about her education at a boarding school that, as she finished the interview, she began talking very fervently and politically about the role of blind schools in Ethiopia:

In my generation there were the boarding school that contributed a lot to me to handle the braille. I'm very good in braille. The current generation does not have these boarding schools because it is closed everywhere. The government currently is saying that it has to be stopped The government should work on the students' braille. They [the current generation] couldn't read or write the braille. The government should pay attention to this issue The government wants to close the boarding schools and the government thinks that those blind students should join the sighted school. The education system should be inclusive education [She is talking about what the government thinks not her opinion]. That is the new system. . . . The education has to be inclusive and not for the blind students. This is the new system. The government should reopen those schools and make access to those students in the rural areas that are suffering.

Eden was very concerned that the government was closing down blind schools and forcing blind students to learn with sighted students because of an inclusive education agenda. My mother assured her that the blind school in Sodo was still open and running. Her passion to

see blind schools reopen and blind students taught braille demonstrated the impact the blind school made on her education. She was very frantic when discuss the status of blind schools and was hoping we could do something about the situation. My mother encouraged her to lobby for blind students as she had a powerful story to tell about how learning braille had helped her. I did find out this year that blind schools are continually being established, and I think Eden must be very happy to hear of this news.

This interview took place in 2016, and in 2019 the government is opening blind schools. The first lady has made opening schools for disabled people her passion and is planning on constructing boarding schools for the blind and disabled. A state of the art boarding school is being built in Addis Ababa, and the foundation stone was laid in May 2019 (“Ethiopia first lady champions school for visually impaired in Addis | Africanews,” 2019).

Eden and Seada both agreed that they would not have been successful without being able to study at the boarding school. They both left their villages to stay in a school for the blind and were able to learn to read and write in braille. This education changed their lives and put them on the path to success. Therefore, a blind school was a tremendous asset to both of their journeys.

7.3.3 Finding Support in Religious Institutions

There were church people that try to help you because they know it is far and they're afraid for us. They tell us not to be afraid and a lot of things.

Betelham

As students showed their spirituality during interviews by referring to how God helped them, some participants also talked about support from the church. I asked with intentionality

about the role of religious groups in the interview because I was looking to see what kind of support systems they had while they were at university. For the most part, the conversations about religious affiliations did not come out naturally in the interview but from a question I asked. It did not seem to matter whether students were Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant; the ones who were active in church received more than just a sermon. They received mental, spiritual, and financial support. On top of the support the church gave, participants also seemed to use their religiosity as protection against sexual harassment or unwanted attention. Some participants found comfort in their religious institution when they came to university. They used their affiliation with the church as a strategy to help them in their education endeavors. Some students felt they were more protected from men if they were religious, and others felt like they received advice and support from the church.

7.3.3.1 Protecting Students

One of the interesting things I learned was that participants believed that if they were religious, they would not be bothered by men because they were holy and therefore men would not try to hurt them. For example, Zahera said, “When you are a church woman the boys didn’t come to you strongly. They will fear the girls. She is spiritual. She is not like that. They will fear the girls who go to church.” Yannet, when asked what she does in the face of harassment from male students, talked of how she was able to face them:

Because I was religious and I go to church. By the way this helped us, especially for girls, it is known that when people are going to the religious places they will, what can I say, you know that, what can I say, I have no word, you will get a success, you will get those type of things, you will be special.”

Yannet's view was that she was successful in the face of harassment because she went to a "religious place," and she related this to protection from harassment.

I asked Nyala if she ever faced sexual harassment; she responded saying, "My contact was always in church and in the school." I found it interesting that when asked that question, she responded by confirming what other participants said about sexual harassment – that if they went to church they did not face harassment.

One reason participants may have been more protected could be because they were not going to clubs and were not drinking alcohol because of their religious beliefs. I asked Yeabsira if she partied and went to clubs. Her response was very strong:

"No No, I never go!! Because of our religion it is stricter to do that. We don't do dancing, or drinking. We go together with church. We worship. Then we study. Still now, I never go to these places.

Annan, when asked a similar question about dancing, responded the same way: "My religion does not allow me to have activities like that." They confirmed what other participants said; they went to church and they studied and they think that is what kept them out of trouble. They were focused students who studied hard and went to church in their free time.

7.3.3.2 Supporting Students

Other participants talked of going to church to receive advice, encouragement, or financial help. For example, Firehewot explained that the church supported her education.

They gave me blankets, clothing and supported me financially, because at that time they supported girl's education, the Catholic mission. . . They gave me. Financially I didn't suffer any problem in the university after I joined ['the church'] they helped me. Because they are helping me monthly.

Yannet explained that the church encouraged her to work hard on her education and to “be sharp with a knife with your education and also with your religious aspects.” Hiwot said her church “taught me about the environment conditions of [college] and how to pass the challenges.” They encouraged her to “be strong, be confident. Be strong. They didn’t ignore any unnecessary things and the like.”

Melesse explained how the churches supported student fellowships on campus, and these encouraged students in their education:

There were different associations in that church. We called it student fellowship. In that fellowship there were different methods to help the students, academic groups, senior students could help the junior students to study, by showing the ways, how to manage and pass through the different challenges of the universities. This was student led and also Protestant church leaders and also pastors they helped us. The club was established by students based on the support of those churches.

For those students whose spirituality was important to them, they received much support from the church whether it was from friends or pastors or priests. The church was there to support them mentally, spiritually, and financially during their time at the university. The church also played a role for some of the students who were blind during their primary school years by providing blind schools.

Halima was the only Muslim participant I interviewed. She said she had access to religious books and she would pray with other Muslims during Ramadan at university, but she did not have any educational support. This surprised Jerusalem because at her university there was a lot of academic support for Muslim students. She thought the lack of support may be due

to the timing that Halima was in school. It would have been right after the Derg had fallen, and there were not many women in school at that time.

7.4 Strategic Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the overall strategies participants used to overcome challenges and endured to complete their education. In the Individual section, I shared how participants used endurance to overcome hardship whether it was surviving through a lack of family support or persisting in the midst of harassment. Participants were able to find a way to get through their hardship and not give up. Then I shared the strategy of being prepared academically even if the student did not have support from family or teachers. Next, I discussed how participants studied even through the burden of housework. They still took every opportunity they had to find time to study. Later I talked about how participants tapped into a higher power that encourage them to succeed. Finally, I shared how students took on extra jobs to be able to pay for school. These were all strategies students used on their own to be successful.

In the Interpersonal section I focused on how families also strategized to help participants, whether it was alleviating some of the housework or sitting with them as they studied, they were incredibly supportive of the participants. Then I talked about how parents took on extra jobs and worked harder so that they could provide education for their daughters. These were all strategies families used to get their daughters through school. Lastly, I discussed how friendships were a key strategy to overcoming some of the challenges in daily life. Friends helped each other with daily needs and academic tasks, lived with each other, and gave to each

other. Friendships were also a key way to staying safe on the walk to school and provided camaraderie and study partners. Lastly, I talked about the strategy of choosing friends wisely as several of the participants shared how they made friends who were more focused academically, and these friendships helped them to be successful.

In the Institutional section I discussed how Seada and other participants were able to find government resources to help them financially. Furthermore, I talked about how participants were able to gain access to blind schools, which helped them further their education. Lastly, I shared how participants were able to use resources at the church to benefit their education as well as use the church as a strategy to keep them safe while they were in college. These participants were clever in the strategies they used to succeed. In this chapter we have seen how much participants endured to go to school, but what motivated them to have this kind of endurance? In the next chapter we look at the motivations behind that inspired the participants to never give up on their education.

8.0 Motivations for Envisioning a Brighter Future

In this chapter I look at the motivation, the driving force, of the participants. All 11 of the participants were motivated to complete their education, but eight of the 11 participants claim that their success was because of their incredible motivation to succeed. Additionally, I coded *motivation* throughout all the interviews a total of 71 times. There are many different factors that motivated participants, whether it was from a dream they had of being successful, a parent they wanted to please, or their desperation to get out of poverty. In Table 15, I highlight just a few quotes that I coded as *motivation*. These quotes give additional voices as to why participants were inspired.

Table 15. Motivating factors from participants

Zala	When I came to Addis and saw these higher-level women this was my vision. After I had completed, I had to work on prevention of disease and I will be a health person. This was my goal
Wongelawit	I want to become somebody that people talk about.
Hermela	I have a huge ambition. I saw my neighbor and I was looking at that and somebody graduated with a gown and I saw I should be like that.
Saba	My problem is the big reason for me to be strong. No parent and no source of financial care and finance. The problem is my source of my vision.
Seada	No I don't give up. I study hard. I have these struggles but if I drop out of the educational system there is nothing for me.

Table 15 (continued)

Betelham	When I see her when I back she is really tired and she was crying and she would say, “Betelham, look at me. If I was educated, I would not be like this.” You have to keep your education. Always she would say, “Don’t sleep, you have to study.”
Hawi	At the beginning [of marriage] in the rural area that husband beats their wives. The rural area the women and the children become even like a little girl after a year. After one year she looks very older. They didn’t wear very good clothes and their physical appearance. They changed immediately. So I hate that. Whatever I should to finish my education to have a better life then those women.
Beza	In my rural area I saw that women were burdened with a lot of worries. I saw the women were challenged with different types of problems and I saw them and I wanted to be a lawyer to support the women. I saw the challenges of the women and I became sad and I wanted to be a lawyer.

As these statements show, participants had several different driving forces that kept them looking towards a brighter future. In this chapter, I delve into the most prevalent themes that revealed the underlying motivations of obtaining an education. I begin with the Individual motivations’ participants had by continuing the stories of Eden, Magda, and Zahara. Then in the Interpersonal section I share the motivations that lay in the family dynamics and continue the stories of Samrawit and Yannet, with examples from Zahara. Next, I introduce Hiwot, who shares how teachers played a huge motivational role in her life. Lastly, I discuss how other people had significant motivational roles in participants’ lives, whether it was an inspirational

sister, or famous Ethiopian woman, participants found someone who kindled a spark in them to complete their education. I introduce the last participant of the 11, Beza, and share how strong role models motivated her to succeed.

8.1 Individual

In this section I share factors that motivated participants within themselves. First I share how participants wanted to escape from poverty to have a better future. Then I share how participants had a vision for their future. I continue to tell the stories of Magda, Zahera, and Eden, all who shared an intense motivation for their education throughout the interview. Zahera saw herself as a manager, Magda saw herself with a bright future, and Eden knew education was her only hope. Furthermore, these three participants were united in that their parents were not involved in their education and so their passion for education did not come from extrinsic forces but intrinsic desires. They were alone in some sense, and their desire had to come from within to focus on their education. Other participants had motivation as well, but much of their motivation stemmed from their parents, which will be addressed in the next section.

8.1.1 Escape from Poverty

My problem is the big reason for me to be strong. No parent and no source of financial care and finance. The problem is my source of my vision.

Saba

One of the reasons participants were motivated to succeed was because of their desire to leave the rural area and escape from poverty. Eden explained that there was nothing for her in

her village. “My family were farmers. My birthplace is such a rural area. There is no awareness about blind. It is troublesome area. Economically they cannot help me.” From a young age she realized that there was nothing for her in her village. Her family could not help her. Furthermore, she realized that if she went back to her village the only jobs that would be available would be serving others by cleaning their homes or washing their clothes. She said, “When you become blind the problem becomes devil. There are still a lot of women in the rural areas like me. They are serving in different houses by washing clothes and cleaning homes. I’ve heard about them.” She recognized there is nothing desirable for her in her village and the only way for her to make it is to get an education. This knowledge that there was nothing for her motivated her, and she went through hardship to obtain a chance at a career.

Other Participants

Other participants also conveyed that they wanted to get out of poverty and make something of their lives. One of the most disturbing quotes from a participant (Hawi) concerned what happened in the rural area when a woman would get married:

At the beginning in the rural area that husband beats their wives. The rural area the women and the children become even like a little girl after a year. After one year she looks very older. They didn’t wear very good clothes and their physical appearance they changed immediately. So I hate that.

Hawi knew she did not want to be that woman who was beaten and turned into a child. Her sister had been raised with her uncle in the city and had married a man in the city. She saw her life and wanted that kind of life. She even loved her sister’s clothing. Seeing the poverty and seeing how her sister lived motivated her to want to escape from poverty and get an education.

Betelham worked hard as a child to help her parents and she saw the life she would have if she stayed in the rural area. She said, “A lot of work here. Have you seen?” She had already learned to plow the land and harvest the cereal they planted. But she did not want that life as she saw how tired her mother was from working so hard. “When I see her when I back she is really tired and she was crying and she would say, Betelham look at me. If I was educated, I would not be like this.” Living in the rural area and seeing the struggle her parents had with poverty was enough for her to gain an inner motivation to study hard and escape that life style.

Saba, who was orphaned in fifth grade, recounted the story of her parents’ death. They died from a sickness in the same year. They begged her to get an education so that she could get out of the rural area and make something of herself. Their voices were the driving force for her to not only educate herself but her four brothers and sisters as well. They all have college degrees now. Soliyana, who I introduce later, was in a similar situation. Her father had leprosy and there was nothing for her in her village. She had to go to Addis to get an education. She and her family could not see any other way for her to escape the poverty which they were dealt. Some participants also talked of seeing how hard their mothers worked and they did not want that life. These were all motivating factors for them to escape from poverty.

8.1.2 Dream of a Better Future

Actually, when I saw them [my family] I did not want to be like them but I wanted to be an educated businessperson to run a business not in a traditional way but in a modern way.
Kidist

When Magda gets into the university, she continued to be motivated by her vision to be successful. She was talking about financial challenges at the university. She did not have good

clothes or shoes like the other students coming from advantaged backgrounds. In fact, she says she was wearing clothing and shoes that were what the local farmers would wear. I asked her if she felt ashamed wearing local clothes and not dressing like the other students. Her response showed that her vision was so clear: “Actually I was not thinking such minor things. I’m only thinking my future. I feel as I know I face a bright future so that I was not ashamed.”

Magda knew where she was going, and her vision motivated her to such a degree that she did not care what life was like at that time because she knew she would be living a better life. She continued to follow her vision even when deciding to do a master’s degree. “In the very beginning, as soon as I finished my degree, my intention was to get my masters. Because I wanted to upgrade my class level because I saw people who were satisfied in their work were holding a master’s degree.” She observed that people who were satisfied in their work were holding a master’s degree, and she decided to upgrade her education.

At the end of her interview, her advice to girls working on their education pertained to having a vision as well:

Ya, vison, ya, because when they see some dark in front of them for the time being they should not give up. When they pass that dark they may see some vision. They should see farther things which they face, good things after they succeed. They should see what they will face when they manage all those challenges.

In this quote, she is saying that vision can get one through dark times. When there are challenges, look to one’s future vision. This is another strategy that she used to get through her challenging times.

I asked Zahera why she was different from other girls her age. She said, “I had hope and I would never give up.” When pressed further why she had this hope and others did not, she

focused on her personal desires and her vision as a young girl seeing herself in the role of a manager:

When I was little, I wish I had to be a manager, like sitting in a chair, a round chair and giving orders. So, I don't know what is the reason but I was hoping that. So, my friends would say, why don't you drop out of your education and go an Arab country and work as a maid. I don't want that. I don't know the reason, but from my little age I don't want a kitchen work, like an Ethiopian kitchen work like dealing with the foods, like breads, like the Araki. My grandmother was working in the Araki, local alcohol. I didn't want to make that. My hope, my feeling was to be a manager. Not to be in a kitchen.

In this statement I see two things. One, a vision, and the other a desire not to do work she does not like. Both of these things drive her to succeed and finish her education whatever the cost. Zahera had a goal. It was and is to be a manager. She did not want the life that she saw in her village. She wanted something else, and this vision helped her to never give up. We asked if she was a manager yet, and she said she "hopes to be a manager" after she does a PhD because she wants to continue her education as well.

Zahera's strong motivation for an education came from the desire to support her family, the idea that education would lead to success, the vision she had of her future and dislike of the opportunities she would have if she did not get an education. Why she had such strong feelings and others do not, she says is because "she had hope and would never give up." Zahera now works as an Economic Development officer in Addis Ababa.

Education Will Make Her Successful

Zahera had a belief that education would make her successful. This may have come from her experience working for a teacher as a maid. We asked her how she knew that education would lead to success:

Because I would see people learned having a job, having money. In my district there are schools and offices and they have workers in my district and I see them. Actually, I also joined as a maid in a teacher's home. She had money. She would order things. She had the money. So, I wanted to be like her. I wanted to have money and I wanted to be successful.

Seeing people who were educated have jobs gave her a realization that education would make her successful as well. Being exposed to working for a teacher also seemed to make a great impression on her. Another reason she was very focused on education was her belief of what education meant in her society.

Education Will Increase Her Value

We asked Zahera what her recommendations were for girls to finish their education. She focused on how the society would see the woman if she did not have an education:

Because, especially in Ethiopia, any woman who is not educated her value is very low. They have to increase their value by educating and they have to face any challenge. They have to increase their value. Otherwise, a woman not educated in Ethiopia, her life will be a very challenged. They have to face any challenge. They have to.

From this statement we see that Zahera believes education creates value for the woman, and the only way to increase her value is to be educated. Therefore, quite passionately, she says

women must face the challenges in front of them and get an education. This is one more reason she believes that education points to success and is a key into her psyche on why she fought so hard to accomplish this task. She wanted to have that extra value.

Through these statements, we see that Zahera knew education would make her successful, and this fed her inward motivation to succeed. She perceived that education helped the people in her town, but even more important is her deep belief that if a woman is educated she will add greater intrinsic value in her life.

8.1.3 Intellectual Capacity to Succeed

So firstly I thanks God for he give me a brilliant mind.

Hermela

As I was interviewing these participants, I realized that I was sitting in front of incredibly brilliant women. They not only had the drive and passion to learn but they also possessed the ability to pass difficult tests and score good marks all while having struggles at home. Furthermore, they enjoyed learning and pursued graduate school because of the desire to learn more. I reflected on their intelligence and accomplishments while I interviewed them and found that I was intimidated. I couldn't help but wonder that if I had been born in Ethiopia in a rural family, could I have passed the national exams in a third language like they managed to do? I may very well have failed the exam and never achieved my dreams of higher education.

One of the factors that may have contributed to participant motivation was their capacity to do well in school. During the interviews I did not ask about their academic intelligence, but it would come up through talking about school and test scores. Some of the participants admitted that they were top scorers in their classes. It is hard to say why they were top scorers. Did they

have better teachers? Or were they naturally smart test takers? Did they study harder than other students? They were in the rural area and did not have the same advantages as city girls. Their English would have been poor as they did not have teachers from the city, which many of them confirmed, yet they scored high on the exams and continued their education. Furthermore, for many of them, teachers took a special interest in them because they saw their brilliant minds or their work ethic, which helped them even further in their educational endeavors. I coded *smart* 36 times in 22 of the interviews. I also found in my fourth round of coding that intelligence came up as one of the reasons participants were successful in two of the women, yet this trait is seen in many others.

Magda

Magda showed over and over again her ability to do well in school. It started when she was in primary school and was skipping classes because she was late. She says:

Before the exam I take my friend's book and read it. After that, the good thing from my behavior is that I can easily read written things. This is a good thing. I may not wait for the teacher because I can easily understand the written material. Even if I'm not attending the class always, I can read and understand and finally score good results.

Magda shows through this example that even when she did not attend class she did well because she was able to grasp the concepts just by reading her friends' notes and books. She explains later that with the encouragement of her favorite teacher, she scored 97 out of 100 on a class test. She says. "I was the second person to score such good results in the entire class." Because of these good results, the teacher spoke with her family, as explained in the Teacher Support section of this paper. She also revealed how smart she was when she took the college

entrance exams. When it was time for the national exam to get into college, Magda was late for school. It was a disappointing day for her:

It was our first exam and I walked long. There was many problems in my way at that time, rain, different storms. Every problem is there so that I came through that. I arrived lately. When I entered the students have already started the exam so that I was not allowed.

The long journey to school and the work she had to do at home caused her to miss the first exam for college. This was the first exam of a total of seven. Magda, however, had studied hard for all seven of the exams and in the next days scored above average on all of the other exams so that she still got into university. Some students in her situation may have given up after missing the first exam but not Magda; she stayed motivated because she knew she had the intellect to do it.

Magda was also coaxed into doing her master's degree right out of college by her professors. She had to take another entrance exam for a place in graduate school. She explains what happened:

So that finally I went there and took the entrance exam even if I am not ready and to manage with the fee. I just took. There were many people, we were around 300 at the university. Out of this they want to manage only 50 students out of 300. Then I was the only lady to pass that entrance exam but I was not ready to start the class because I'm not ready financially. So that when I score such results in my entrance the professors in the university encouraged me not to wait for the coming year.

She did so well on a test she was not even prepared to take. She did not see herself ready to begin the master's program because she did not have enough money to attend the university. She had planned to teach for a while and then come back and start the master's degree, but her test score was so high that the professors encouraged her to stay and do the master's degree. They were so enthusiastic about her scores that her professors, advisors, and the department head said, "You can delay your payment and we can write a letter to different concerns in the university. You have to just start." So, because of her high test scores and encouragement from faculty, she began her master's degree.

She also spoke of her creativity for her final project, in which she critiqued Ethiopian textbooks' display of gender roles:

When I was presenting my research, it was very funny. I brought everything in a very interesting manner. When I presented my examiner from the University, my advisor and my chairperson were laughing because I was highly criticizing the aspect that everybody didn't see in the book. Finally, I scored a good result and got an excellent in my research. She received an "excellent" mark for her research, showing again that she was quite a good student.

Other Participants

Some of the participants openly shared that they were clever. Samrawit says, "I was a very clever student in school, so my mom expected me to pass for a degree." She also said of her test scores that even though there was affirmative action, her test scores were higher than what was needed for affirmative action. Seada openly shared that her English was "very good" but says it was because she had good teachers. But then she talked of her jealous 'friend' encouraging a boy to harass her because she was doing so well in her high school classes. We

asked her if she thought her friend was jealous of her. It seemed to us that the actions were quite harsh. This was her response:

Of course I was very good in my education. In grade eight I was ranked first. From the whole class, from the whole school I took first rank. She was very jealous. In the high school I was a very good student. To pass these problems I simply studied my education only.

Seada was at a sight school even though she was blind. So, when she spoke about being a good student in high school she is talking about being a good student despite her disability in the midst of people who did not have that disability.

Other participants also shared their test scores and ease of academics. Yannet spoke of her secondary education, saying that she was not beautiful then, but no one cared because she was famous in the school because she was so smart. "If you are famous within the school, and really I was famous in the school because of my work, I was a good student relative to the other female students." She also says that she graduated with "good result." Zahera said of her entrance exam in the school, "Yes, for that year, there was only one female who scored higher than me," showing that she had excellent test taking ability. Beza also shared how she was in the minority of females who passed the exam to go on to preparatory school and then college:

When she took the national exam, they passed only 18 students from this school at grade 10. From 250 only 18 passed. At that time, from the 18 students, seven were women. They passed to grade 11. In grade 12 there were 180 students. They passed only 120 to university level, from that 32 were women.

We said to Hiwot, because her English was so good, that she must have been clever in school. She replied, “In the lower grade I was a very good student.” Jerusalem asked her what her college entrance exam test score was and when she told us what it was, Jerusalem said, “This is a very good result.” Halima told us that she was “very strong in school,” which is the reason her teachers supported her, and her parents let her go far away to school when it was not culturally appropriate in her area. She talks of being the only female in the Agricultural Economics Department, yet she says she would “read and do my best” so she would be ready to compete in class. Soliyana says that “mathematics it is not difficult for me” when asked about how she overcame academic challenges. In fact, when it came to academics, rarely did participants talk about them as challenges.

Academics Are Easy

Most participants talked more of the cultural struggles or financial challenges when going to college; seldom did someone mention a struggle with academics, and in fact it was the opposite. For example, Zahera was talking about all of the financial challenges and how she got around them, and so we asked her straight out if she had any academic challenges in university. She said, “Academics? No, it was not challenging for me.” Later we asked her again about her master’s degree, and she said, “no struggles academically,” demonstrating her natural ability when it came to academics. Magda said of college, “It was a very nice time for me just to study,” showing her enjoyment to finally be able to concentrate on her academics and not all of the housework that she had to do when at home.

These statements demonstrate that these participants were very strong students and were top of their class in terms of their test scores. This section discussed how participants were

academically intelligent starting in primary school and continuing into their master's degrees. But participants were not only excellent students; they also had a love for learning.

8.1.4 Desire to Learn

I am interested to learn every day and even now. I want to always be learning.

Seble

Another item that came through the interviews was a love for learning that had captured many of the participants' hearts. They inwardly enjoyed learning new things and gaining knowledge. In this section, I discuss how participants demonstrated their love for learning.

Eden

During her interview, Eden talked of her love for learning in a variety of ways. She had a thirst for knowledge that the rural village life could not quench. First, she chose to live next to the library, which had many braille books. The library was actually closer to her house than her high school, making her daily commute long and challenging. However, she talked of her time in high school while she was in Addis Ababa as being "wonderful" because of living near the library where she could access the braille books whenever she needed to. She said, "It was so good," showing how much she appreciated being able to read in the library and gain the information she wanted.

She chose to study gender during her master's program, which was a new degree choice at that time, because she wanted to know her rights and understand why she had suffered for being a female. Instead of just internalizing these issues, like not being able to raise her hand, she

literally wanted to study them and find out what the root of the issue was. She indicated that she truly had a passion to learn and understand.

I want to study gender because I want to have the knowledge about how can I raise issues about my rights and how can I protect myself from different types of issues. It was new at this time, and I love new things and I joined gender studies.

She wanted to gain the knowledge from gender studies so that she would know her rights. She had a desire for this knowledge. Eden concluded this part of the conversation by saying that she “love(d) new things,” indicating her desire for learning and gaining new knowledge.

Through her words I see a woman who is very intelligent and highly motivated. She is someone who loves to learn and, if she had stayed in her village, would have been stifled by people who did not understand her and by jobs that were menial and did not help her to grow. Her thirst for knowledge, her desire to escape her village, and her aspiration for a career motivated her to succeed. She currently works for an NGO and handles all of the grievance issues regarding corruption. She would still like to get a job working on gender issues and continue studying.

Participants were not only academically smart, many of them also spoke of their love for learning. Beza, when asked why she was successful, replied, “I read a lot. I asked questions frequently when I did not understand.” Soliyana talked of doing housework and then working by kerosene lamp to do her schoolwork. She explained, “I was happy, and it was very interesting for learning. It is so easy.” She admits here that doing her schoolwork added to her happiness. She was very interested in learning. She then made another statement that illustrates her intelligence. She says, “It is so easy.” She took delight in her schoolwork and it came easily to her. She also said during the interview, “I liked to learn. I like my education.” When we asked her about

mathematics, she said, “Yes, I love it,” showing that she truly enjoyed her learning experiences. Yannet also shared her love of learning. When asked why she liked preparatory school, she responded, “Two purposes, for a better chance and I’m really interested in learning.”

Desire to Obtain a Master’s Degree

Participants explained their love for learning as one of the reasons they wanted to get a master’s degree. They had an intrinsic interest in learning the material. Yannet talked of why she did her master’s degree, which she paid for with her own earnings. “I was interested to learn and change.” Firehewot echoed what Yannet shared about why she began her master’s degree:

I want to learn. Actually, my masters is in gender studies. I’m interested in the course because there are so many problems that the female students are facing in organizations and even in educational settings. So I want to focus on that area.

Firewot’s passion brought her to study gender because she was interested in it, not to gain her more money or a different job. She had a desire to learn about the problems women face so that she could make a difference in her work place. She also took the concepts she learned and applied them at her job. She currently works on gender issues in her workplace. “We are giving educational changes for our female students and we also plan projects for education, and training and other benefits.” Participants not only showed that they were good in school but that they really enjoyed learning and even applied what they learned to their job contexts.

8.2 Interpersonal

In this section I dive into the motivational factors that surrounded participants through the relationships they experienced. First, I share how their families, especially their parents, believed in their success and how that inspired them onward. Then I share how participants have a deep motivation to help their families get out of poverty. They want to provide for their parents, which spurs them on towards their education. Then I share how teachers played such an important role in several of the participants' lives by encouraging them through various means to succeed. Lastly, I discuss how different individuals, some in their inner circles and others whom they had never met, inspired participants to succeed some being in their inner circle.

8.2.1 Families

Now also my father called us and said when do you start your PhD? He encouraged our education to become a doctor, a model for others. Even today, making them happy on our success is the main thing.

Melesse

8.2.1.1 Believers

Parents or a parent, depending on the situation, were believers in their daughters' education, and this belief in their daughters gave them motivation for their success. Parents had an expectation that their daughters would do well in school and go to college. This finding is interesting since none of these parents had much education and were living in a rural area where most likely they did not see many people with an education; however, they were very focused on

their daughters' education. This expectation was one of the primary motivations of these participants as their parents encouraged them all the time to study and expected them to do well. Seven of the interviewees had slices of this theme layered throughout their interviews, yet Samrawit, Yannet, and Halima's interviews showed this theme to be even more pronounced.

Samrawit

Samrawit's mother showed immense support and expectation for her daughter to get an education. When we asked Samrawit about support during this time, we get a glimpse into the spirit of her mother:

My mom only. She just built my morale. I loved my dad very much. My morale plus she gave us more time to study. Even she spent the night with us. At the daytime we are spending time in the market so we can trade more. She supports us and she spends the night up to 12:00. She just sit with us. She doesn't have any education but please read. This is your critical time, I don't want you to have a life like this. She encouraged us all the time. She didn't want to see us have her life. My mom means a lot to me. She was a brave one.

In this paragraph, Samrawit talked about the support her mother gave her. Her mother, who had no education, stayed with Samrawit late into the night while she completed her homework because it was important to support her daughter. Her mother, who could not read, told her to read and knew that this time was critical for her daughter to be able to pass to the next level, which motivated Samrawit to study. Later Samrawit gave us a glimpse into her mother's psyche and why she wanted her daughter to be educated:

Actually her [mother] background also helped us because she had married like a teenager, like 17 years old. My brother and I are 7 years apart. The teenage life and having a child was very challenging for her. She just live with her husband's income at that time. Her grandparents and other family members do not send her to school. She was dissatisfied with that life and she did not want to see that happen to her children. She just was always with us to motivate and giving us morale. You can win and you can do this. Why would you want this kind of life? She was dissatisfied with that life and she didn't want to see that happen to her children. She said, "You can achieve better than this." She discouraged us from having a boyfriend. I was a very clever student in school, so my mom expected me to pass for a degree.

Through her mother's past comes expectation for her daughter. Her mother did not want her daughter to have the same life she had, so she expects her daughter to do better. There is an expectation when she told her daughter that she can get an education and even expected her daughter not to have a boyfriend because she wanted her to focus on her education. Her mother had been unhappy with her life, first upset that she was not allowed to go to school, and then because her husband, who was her provider, was taken from her in death and she had to provide for the whole family. This hardship she did not wish on her daughters, which pushed her to motivate her daughters to get an education.

Furthermore, her mother also realized that her daughter is clever, which increased her expectations and hopes that she would do well. I have found that most of the interviewees are encouraged in their education because they have some gift for school. This seems to be the case for Samrawit, and her mother was very aware of it. Samrawit did not mention teachers in her interview, so it is not clear how her mother realized that her daughter was very clever, but she

somehow had this information and her hope was even greater that her daughter would do well. Therefore, she focused with high expectation on her daughter's educational journey, even instructing her on the importance of forgoing boyfriends until after completion of school.

In the next narrative, I talk about Yannet, who like Samrawit also lost her father but when she was 12 years old. Yannet's mother's motivation is different from Samrawit's mother in that her motivation is based on her late husband's dream to see her daughters educated. She feels it is her responsibility to fulfill her husband's desires even though she originally had not supported her daughters' education. Samrawit's mother, on the other hand, had always bought into the concept of education and had encouraged and believed that her daughters would do well.

Yannet

Yannet's mother was passionate about seeing her daughters married at a young age and continually pestered her husband to marry off their oldest 14-year-old daughter. Her father, fearing his wife would divorce him if he did not allow her to marry off their daughter, agreed, but only on the condition that she would let the rest of the children get an education before marriage. Her mother agreed. Sadly, her father died when she was 12 years old, but her father's dying words to her mother were a reminder to educate their children:

After he died, she think as she is responsible. My father warned her that if she did not do this [give their daughters an education] God would punish her. He was warning her before his death, he was just thinking about his death and he was telling her about the problem of marriage especially for me because he likes very much me and he wants to see my final result in education. He expected this. I was active at that time and I would be successful with education. After his death, she thinks she is responsible and will not allow her [me] to marry. Her friends ask her and she says no. Her father gave me this

responsibility so I will not do that. All of us were students at that time because there was this type of warning. Even though there was financial problem, she was working very hard.

We are introduced to a passionate father who believed in his daughters and wanted them to get an education. He was afraid his wife would divorce him if he did not allow his oldest daughter to marry at a young age, so to be married but then made the commitment that the rest of his children would not marry early and would have an education. He had an expectation that his family would be educated and that nothing would stand in the way of that education. He even went so far to tell his wife on his deathbed that if she does not fulfill his wishes, God will punish her. His wife took that statement to heart and for the rest of her life focused on providing and encouraging her children's education, even though that was not her original interest nor did she herself have an education:

Really, I didn't forget once upon a time, I was doing my homework, since I helped her [mom] also by the way. I helped her at that time, I was a very committed to my education and also I was committed to help her in my free time. And what I didn't forget is that she sits with me to encourage me to do my homework. If she sleeps, I will sleep, because I will be tired because of the exam. As I told you my mother was not responsible during the days of my father, but after he. . . [died] that she was very responsible. Even different people tell her why don't you make them to marry. Why don't you get other people who can help you? These ideas were suggested to her. But she would not volunteer, her father told me that. I will not miss, I would not like to miss my husband's responsibility. She was very responsible, really, after my father's death. But before that she was not.

Her mother fulfilled her husband's vision and made sure that Yannet had everything she needed to complete her education. We also see the love of her mother, who like Samrawit's mother, also sat with her while she did her homework and encouraged her daughter to do well. Her mother also fought off the gossip from neighbors to have her daughter married and stuck to the father's vision of his daughter going to school. It is evident that her mother, though motivated by her husband, expected that her daughter would do well. She believed what her husband believed about her daughter that Yannet would excel in school. This is evidenced by the fact that she spent time and energy and money on her daughter's education.

Yannet also talked about her own motivation to do well in school because of her father's influence. She spoke about her internal drive, which told her she would be successful one day. She said she is sure that her drive was put there by her father because of all of the encouragement she received from him. "And really my father, even my father, before he was appreciating me. You are clever; you will be a good woman for the future. I expect your success." She was so internally motivated that she would even play with her exercise books and never missed a class.

Yannet embraced her father's vision of getting an education. Even though he died when she was only in sixth grade, the motivation that he had instilled within her remained for her entire lifetime. She believed that it was his expectation and belief in her that motivated her to finish her education.

Halima

Halima grew up with her mother, as her parents divorced when she was one year old. Due to a poor school system, her mother was only able to finish fourth grade. Frustration at her own lack of an education fueled her passion to push her daughter. Halima was not affected by her

community's belief on education because her mother made sure that Halima went to school. From the time Halima started in school, she was aware that her mother had been a good student because her teachers told her that her mother was an excellent student in school and she was like her mother. Halima talked of feeling happy during this time and that her mother's parents supported her as well. Her mother was able to support her financially by having a small cafeteria that sold *tej*, homemade honey wine. Halima was doing extremely well in school, which motivated her father to support her as well. In this way she was protected from the town's people's views on education. She told us, laughing about the village people and her father, "They always asked my father about marriage. They would say why you send this girl to school? My father would say that she is my boy." He continued to support her in high school. She said that both her mother and father paid for her bus ride to the high school where she rented a house. Sadly, her mother grew sick and eventually passed away. When Halima made it to college, she did not have the support she once had. Her mother was sick, and her father had many children he had to take care of.

Both of Halima's parents supported her education in primary and secondary school and expected her to do well. First, her mother had high expectations for her daughter because she had been a good student as a child and also wished she had been able to continue, like Samrawit's mother. Her mother's dream was for Halima to get an education; Halima even heard that her mother was a good student when she was in school, which helped to motivate her to do well in school. Eventually, the news that Halima was a good student got around the town, and her father begins to expect that Halima would do well, even treating Halima like a boy child. Halima knew that she was getting special treatment, and there was an outer expectation that she would do well, which motivated her to be a better student. Halima felt extra special knowing that her father

cared for her as if she was a boy. This extra care brought more inward pressure for her to excel, which she did, eventually becoming the first woman to get a college education from her village.

Throughout this section, I have shown how the parents of Yannet, Samrawit, and Halima expected their daughters to excel in school and to get into college. This expectation motivated their children to do well because they knew their parents believed in them. Another way that participants were motivated was by the desire to take care of their families and bring them out of poverty.

8.2.1.2 Providers

Throughout most of the interviews, the theme of wanting to provide for families to release the burden of poverty was very evident. I tagged this theme 29 times in NVivo as *Benefits to Education*. Many participants talked of supporting their families when they were finished with school and had a job. Since many of the women I interviewed were raised in poverty, they had a goal of getting their families out of poverty, and this goal motivated them to do well in school. Furthermore, they saw the sacrifice that their parents had made to give them an education, and they were motivated to do well in school because of this sacrifice. This was certainly the case with Zahera, Samrawit, and Yannet. Samrawit even chose her major based on the fact that she would be able to be employed after graduation and help her mother.

Samrawit

Samrawit's test scores for university were quite high and she could have joined any major in the humanities department, including becoming a lawyer, but she decided to join education because the government would give graduates a teaching post upon graduation. She was afraid if she joined another department she wouldn't find a job, and she had her heart set on providing for

her family. While Samrawit was at university, she faced problems with her finances and made the decision to work. She talked about wanting to travel to see her mother but knew she was unable because she had to use all of her funds towards school. She also used the opportunity to work to send support home to her mother. We can see that the two had a very close relationship and cared for one another deeply. Her choosing to work over visiting her mother shows that Samrawit valued her education so much that she knew it was better to stay at school and work rather than go back to the village to visit her mother. She also knew that her mother would agree with her decision:

I wanted to see my mom in frequent times, but I needed to work during my break time. You can earn income during this time otherwise you will face a shortage of finance. Instead of visiting my mom I had to go and work to have money and even send money back to my mom. It was the opportunity that I faced.

After she graduated from college she began working as a lecturer and was sending money home. Her friends encouraged her to take the exam to get a master's degree. She at first did not want to do this because she wanted to work for three years in order to send money home to her mother, but the tuition was cheaper that semester and her friend gave her money to take the enrollment exam. She agreed and took the exam. She passed and was accepted into a master's degree program. She decided it was a good opportunity to continue her education at that time but did not want her mother to know about it.

Anyways, I did not tell my mother that I was starting my master's program because she would have told me not to send her money. She have such a kind of expenses. She is telling such thing to me. I got a lot of money from part time work. The college is giving us a normal salary with the 15 credit hours. If you give a teaching program more than that

hour you will get a part time fee. It helped me a lot. So 27 credit hours I covered in my master's program.

In this instance, it appears the tables have turned, and she was now taking care of her mother. She had graduated from college and did not want her mom to know that she had started her master's degree because she wants to help her mother financially. She ends up teaching 27 credit hours, which is nine classes with about 55 students in each class. She was also taking 14 credit hours. She says of her master's degree, "You have to study. The field . . . is new for me. I have to compete with the students who have a good background in this field. Otherwise you will fail. I have to read at night. Such a time as this I have passed."

When she started talking about how many classes she taught while doing her master's degree, I almost fell out of my seat! I taught two classes while doing my master's and it kept me very busy. I can see that she was so incredibly dedicated to helping her family, which motivated her to do well in school and to take on extra jobs. In Samrawit's case, her mother's expectation inspired her to succeed, but then seeing her mother's desperation after losing her father continually motivated her to be successful so that she could provide for her mother. This motivation shows her tenacity to finish her master's degree and provide for her family financially. She continued to speak about her motivation:

Actually, I like challenges. They make you very strong. I have always had a dream to win poverty from my household. I have to strive for this and give a better life for my sisters and my family. That was my dream and my goal. It motivates me always to win and achieve better. Now I am happy with my status because I can help my friends and my family and my relatives. Everything. She [my mom] is proud and thanks God.

Her dream was to take her family out of poverty and give them a better life, and this motivation propelled her forward into the woman she is today. Samrawit is very successful now working in an NGO in Addis Ababa. She fulfilled her dream of being able to help her mother and care for her family and friends.

Yannet

Yannet, like Samrawit, ended up sending money to her mom after she graduated, but her motivation in school stemmed from wanting to do well because her mother was working hard to provide for her. There was a time in Yannet's interview where she talked of how upset she would get if she was going to fail a subject because of her mother's sacrifice:

What I felt, when I was a high school student, if I had an X [F] within my high school mark I was really crying. That reason was since my mother was doing different things and since she was doing different challenges for me how could this happen. So an X means when you arrive for the answer it is given and it is incorrect. I was really crying [since] she was working for me.

Yannet showed that her internal motivation to succeed was coming from her mother because of how much her mother supported and sacrificed for her. This was one of the benefits to having a supportive family. Once she graduated, she began helping her mother and supporting her younger siblings' college and diploma education. She eventually got married and did her master's degree. But by the time she did her master's degree, she did not need the financial support of her mother. She is now a university lecturer, and her mother is raising her youngest sibling.

Participants were motivated to get an education to please their parents, and they also wanted to provide financially for their parents when they graduated. The interviewees saw the

suffering and love poured out by their parents and wanted to bring their parents out of poverty. For several of the interviewees, this was their motivation; they needed to get their education and overcome any obstacle that was in the way so they could help their parents.

Zahera

Zahera believed that if she got an education, she could help her family move out of poverty. This stemmed from the surroundings she grew up in. She came from a family who did not help her financially. Her father was jobless while she was growing up, and her mother had never worked outside the home. She did not dwell on her intense poverty experience, but she casually mentioned that she did not own a pair of shoes until her senior year in high school. She also had to support herself financially to go to school. Her father wanted to help her but had no means to support her. She was on her own. Yet because of her experience with her family she wanted to support them. “I was hoping to graduate and have money to support my family.” Her dream of supporting her mother eventually came true. She talked of supporting her mother in the interview and how she never received financial support from her but now she gives her mother financial support.

Samrawit, Yannet, and Zahera all shared how they supported their parents after graduation. Their families believed in them and they responded by wanting to pull their families out of poverty. The one exception is Halima, whose family believed in her, but she did not mention supporting her family after she graduated. She did, however, mention that she supports a few students from her community to go to school. These participants show how their motivation to be successful truly did envision a brighter future, especially for their families. In the next section I show how teachers played a motivational role in participants’ lives.

8.2.2 Teachers

*But at that time, it was a very difficult situation but as I told you my teachers encouraged me because of my good result. Even if the road was inaccessible for me, my teachers advise me to make strong.
Hermela*

Teachers play an important motivational and supportive role in students' lives. Out of the 35 interviews, I found that six students most likely would not have succeeded had it not been for the help and support of their teachers. Out of the 11 participants, four showed very clearly how important the support of their teachers was, especially for those who did not have parental support. Teachers motivated students in various ways. Some helped students financially, others advocated on behalf of the participant, most encouraged, and many were role models leading the way for students to follow in their footsteps. Their support was especially motivating to Hiwot, Zahera, Magda, and Halima.

Hiwot

Hiwot has a round smile with big teeth grinning through. She dressed conservatively as if she was still living in the rural area with a long skirt and sweater over her knit top. She was shyer than other participants and did not release her story easily.

Hiwot was the daughter of farmers and has five sisters and three brothers. Her parents were both illiterate and only her two youngest siblings completed the 10th grade. The other siblings had very little education and were working as farmers. Hiwot focused the interview on her teachers' influence in her life and also talked about the lack of finances that influenced her struggle to get an education.

She started sharing her journey to get an education with her walks to school. Her elementary school was nearby, and she only had to walk 40 minutes to school. We asked her why she was successful in her education when many of her siblings were not. She told us that the government enforced education up to sixth grade and so it was mandatory that she went, but she then turned to the impact and influence her teachers had on her.

My teachers were telling me the importance of the education. If you are educated you get something or your life will be OK in the future. . . After that my teachers played a great role in my life. Both my female and male teacher played a huge part in my life. Due to this my teachers are the role models of my life.

From this quote, Hiwot talked of how her teachers motivated her to succeed by encouraging her education so that she could have a brighter future. Hiwot not only had one inspiring teacher but several and, as she says, they played a huge part in her life.

In middle school her walk to school increased to one hour. But the high school was 12 hours. At this time her parents asked if Hiwot was ready to get married, but she was adamant that she wanted an education. Hiwot explained, “My parents are farmers. My parents did not have any idea about education and the importance of education, because they are illiterate. My parents ignored me.” But her teachers stepped in and advised her during this critical juncture. “With the help of my teachers I was able to finish my education. My teachers advised me to continue my education and to finish my education and to be strong and have confidence.” After the marriage talk with her parents, her teachers decided to fund a rental room in the town for one year. This was a huge intervention for Hiwot, making it possible for her to go to high school. At this point, her parents supported her decision and also helped out financially as well as her siblings and uncles so that she could follow her dream and complete high school.

At the end of her interview she gave recommendations for future students and added a part about teachers:

By studying different materials and watching TV. Take friend's advice and don't ignore other things. They need to only focus on their studies. They should ignore boys and other fun also, any unnecessary things. They focus only on their education. Be confident, study hard and ask their teachers and their friends and the like.

She adds to "ask their teachers," indicating her fondness towards teachers and the advice they can give. She followed in the footsteps of her teachers and became a high school teacher. She began supporting her parents and then, three years later, she continued with her master's degree while she was teaching. She self-sponsored her master's degree in geography and struggled to pay for the taxi each way to the university. She was able to conquer those challenges, however, and graduate. She said, "I was happy," when she completed her master's degree. She got married in 2016 to an electrical engineer who is supportive of her education, and she continues to teach at a public preparatory school in Addis Ababa.

Hiwot's story demonstrates the power of teachers in a student's life. Without the support of her teachers, Hiwot might have been married before she was able to complete her school and would never have been able to dream of supporting her parents through her career. Hiwot had to show to her parents that she was serious about getting an education even though they just could not comprehend why she would even want an education. Her teachers stepped in at this point, making it possible for her to go to the city. Without this support she might have been married before she even had the opportunity to study in high school. But what is amazing here is that because of her strength and her teacher's support, her parents finally understood how important

this opportunity was for her and the whole family began to chip in to help, along with her siblings.

Her teachers supported her by giving to her financially, being advocates, providing encouragement, and serving as role models she could follow. Other participants also were impacted significantly by their teachers on their educational journeys and would not have been successful without them.

8.2.2.1 Financial Helpers

Just as Hiwot's primary teachers supported her education financially for one year to get her out of the town and into high school, Zahera's teachers also contributed financially. Zahera is the participant who would work in Addis all summer just to save up money to rent a room with her friends so that she could go to high school. She got very little financial support from her family, but she said, "My teachers from the lower grades would support me. They would send me 10 or 20 *birr*, for students who get there." She then talked of her Amharic teacher:

She was supporting me. She was very kind and strong. When she would come to the class she would call me out and she will give me soaps and hair oils and say, be strong. I will help you. She was a great woman for me.

It even sounds like her primary school teachers were supporting more than just her at this time; when she says, "students who get there," she may mean students who also made it to high school. Her Amharic teacher was also special, encouraging her and giving her soap and hair oil. This little money and support sustained her while at high school, and she may have been able to go on to college because she had that extra support in high school from her teachers. We often do not realize how even a little caring, a small hand-up, could impact someone.

8.2.2.2 Advocates

Teachers also act as advocates for their students. In Hiwot's case, the teacher was able to advocate with her parents that she be allowed to go to high school and not get married. With this encouragement from her teacher, she gained that extra needed strength to move counter to her family's culture and enter high school. Magda also had an incredible teacher as an advocate who persuaded her family to keep her in school and allow her to move in with her aunt, who lived closer to the school. Halima also had teachers advocating for her to go to university, which was one of the reasons that her father kept her in school. "My teachers were supporting me even as an elementary student and they supported me and encouraged me to join a university. Otherwise the area is very far from here, nearer to Kenya than Ethiopia." As Halima said, if her teachers had not encouraged her to attend university she may have not have gone, as it was very far from her home and was not part of her community culture to go to college.

8.2.2.3 Encouragers

In Hiwot's story, her teachers encouraged her and inspired her to have a different life. We asked her about not wanting to be a farmer like her family, and she referred to her teachers who encouraged her. She spoke about why she did not stay a farmer: "It was my teachers." She went on to say, "My teachers were telling me the importance of the education. If you are educated, you get something or your life will be OK in the future." Their encouragement gave her a different vision for her life.

Halima and Magda's teachers also encouraged them. Halima's teachers told her how active her mother had been in school when she was a little girl to encourage her to be a good student as well. Magda's encouraging teacher could be the reason she was successful in her education:

Finally, in this school, the good thing is that one of our teachers, a chemistry teacher who is now working in the Federal Woman's Affairs now, she was my chemistry teacher there, she encouraged us and advised us. She follows up with us. Because of that we were strong because of her support we were strong. Whenever we see her, we are encouraged. We want to be like her. She was our model. We were highly encouraged and we were spending much time in study. Even if we have no time, we want to spend time studying. We want to be like her. So that, especially, because of her good thing in grade nine, I scored 97 out of 100. I was the second person to score such good results in the entire class. Then she just gave me a reward and encouraged me. She tried to meet some of my relatives and she called them to just support me.

Magda's teacher took an interest in her and other students and encouraged them so much that Magda scored very high on her school test and attributed it to her teacher. "Whenever we see her we are encouraged and we were spending much time in study." I like how Magda said "Finally" at the beginning of this statement She had such a difficult time with her family, but "finally" something good happened. A teacher who believed in her and encouraged her showed up in her life and it "finally" made all of the difference. At that time, Magda was walking so far to school and did not have the support of her family, yet because of this teacher Magda scored high on her test and was encouraged to advance. Magda's words show how much she looked up to her teacher and received encouragement from her. Her teacher may have been the reason she stayed in school.

8.2.2.4 Role Models

Hiwot, after sharing all that her teachers had done for her, said, “Due to this my teachers are the role models of my life.” She knew that they had inspired her and she wanted to be like them. Many of the participants chose teachers as their earliest role models; this may have been because living in a rural area they would not have been exposed to professional people. Additionally, the teachers took an interest in them and actively encouraged their education. Seada talked of her wonderful teachers and how they were role models to her:

Our teachers in the boarding school. They were role models for me. I was thinking to be like them. To be a teacher like my teachers. I remember one teacher named Lucas. He was a very, very good teacher. He treats us and his students. I need to be like him when I grow up. I was thinking that as a child. In the university there was one good teacher. I was thinking to be like him and to be a teacher. My role models were teachers.

It is interesting that Seada’s role models are male teachers. She does not mention having a female teacher as a role model. This could be because she did not have a female teacher, or the male teachers were kind to her, and she wanted to be like them. Hiwot also talked of her male and female teachers as role models: “Both my female and male teacher played a huge part in my life.”

Zahera worked for a teacher and was able to see the life of an educated, employed woman, which inspired her to want to be successful.

Actually, I also joined as a maid in a teacher’s home. She had money; she would order things. She had the money. So, I wanted to be like her. I wanted to have money and I wanted to be successful.

Magda's teacher was also her role model; she motivated her to care about her studies and strive for an education. Through seeing the teacher's example, she now had a role model of an educated woman whom she wanted to emulate. Furthermore, she had found someone who encouraged her and could see her untapped potential. This teacher led Magda to push harder to complete her education. Under the guidance of this teacher, she excelled in school and was the second person to score such a high-test result in her grade. Her teacher became her role model, and she desired to be like her and to please her. Her teacher inspired a vision that led her on a path to dream of a better life.

Firehewot explained that her teacher was the most successful role model. When I asked her why, she said, "Because she was very active and she was lecturing in high school and attending to her education. She was a good role model. I wish to be like her at that time." Yannet also admired her mathematics teacher and said that, "She was clever, and I liked her very much." She went on to say that she contributed a lot to her work and that her teacher liked her. These participants were inspired by their teachers and saw competent hard-working educated people who cared for them.

All of the participants were impacted by their teachers in some way, but Hiwot, Zahera, Magda, and Halima would not have gone as far as they did without the support of their teachers. Teachers can support their students in a variety of creative ways. Some teachers combine their support to help particularly strong students advance; other teachers become advocates on behalf of their students, explaining to their families the importance of education for their clever daughters. Additionally, teachers play such an integral role in encouraging their students to do well in school. We also know that teachers play a part as role models and mentors in students'

lives. We cannot underestimate the important role that teachers play in a child's life. For these four students and others, their teachers' influence had a great impact on their future success.

8.2.3 Others

You know, more than instructors I was inspired by some ladies. They were not necessarily instructors but successful ladies in our country.

Melesse

Participants had many different motivating factors in their lives that contributed to their success. One of these factors was people who had gone before them and accomplished something as women. They looked to them for inspiration. Though I talked of teachers as role models in the last section, there are also all kinds of people who influenced students to achieve. In this section I touch on some of the roles people had that shaped our participants' motivation for their studies.

Role models take on many different shapes and forms but uniquely contribute to a participant's life in life-changing ways. Some participants experienced teachers as role models; others set their sights on a famous person who accomplished much in their lifetime. Others chose family members they looked up to. Some role models are part of a participant's inner circle and help them make wise decisions; others are people they see from a distance but want to emulate. Out of the 11 participants, I coded seven as having role models and one participant, Beza, as being successful because she had a role model in her life. I took each participant very seriously, and if only one participant succeeded because of a particular reason, including the type of role model, I wanted to highlight that reason. Furthermore, we can see how role models interacted with participants to make a difference in their lives and learn from their examples.

In this section I begin with a reflection on role models from participants' interviews. Then I tell the story of Beza, whose sister made an incredible impact on her life, after which I share examples of other role models in participants' lives.

8.2.3.1 Influencers

My Reflection on Interviews

As we chatted with participants and talked about role models, a woman's name kept coming up, Genet Zowdie. She was Jerusalem's role model, and Jerusalem loved asking participants if she was theirs as well. One of the participants from the 35, Zala, had presented a paper she wrote on girls' education in high school to Genet Zowdie, which started the conversation about her. Jerusalem jumped in and explained that Genet Zowdie had actually visited her dorm room and sat on her bed. They began to excitedly chat with each other, and Jerusalem explained about what Genet Zowdie had done for women:

She is my role model, by the way. She was the first lady to go the Addis Ababa University and she empowered the women to get an education. She is the first lady to be the Minister of Education. When I came to Bahir Dar University, she came to my bed and sat on my bed and spoke to us. Dr. Genet is a role model for all women in Ethiopia. She stood for the rights of women. She is a very amazing woman. If you talk to every Ethiopian woman, why did you come to be successful, her contribution may be in the background. She is a very strong lady and the first woman to join a university in Ethiopia. Even though she is the Indian ambassador she still stands for the women of Ethiopia, Africa and the world. She inspires Ethiopian women. You can get an education. You can get a master's degree. You can get a PhD degree. She is a very strong woman. She is always worried about the women's rights. She is a role model for everyone. She ordered

the government to give a quota. Ladies, please stand for your rights. You have a 5 percent quota everywhere. She played a critical role for the mobilization to all Ethiopian women. We sat in awe as Jerusalem explained Genet Zowdie, her role model, to us. Who was this woman? How could we learn more about her? Soon we discovered that she was the role model for three of the 35 participants.

In a subsequent interview Jerusalem quizzed Hiwot on Zowdie's education policies, so I learned more about Genet Zowdie and her contributions to Ethiopian women. Some of her policies, like affirmative action for women and a policy to start teaching English in ninth grade instead of third grade, were highly controversial. They spoke of her impact on their education. After she was the Minister of Education, she became the ambassador to India. Jerusalem continued to talk of how Zowdie was married but now divorced. The words she used to describe her were powerful. "Her husband divorced her because she is outstanding. She was married but now she outshines!"

I learned so much about the women who had inspired these participants during this time and about policies that had impacted female students. The participants seemed so excited to be sharing their educational journey with an outsider, hoping their stories could also influence education policy in their country. Yet I was just a learner, a student, soaking up everything these women shared about their culture, their inspirations, their stories, and their absolute uniqueness as individuals. Always listening, listening through my American lens, straining to understand their English and their stories through their Ethiopian point of view. My brain would ache after these sessions, grappling with their context, their unique human spirit wrapped up in the colorful Ethiopian culture. We discovered our unity as women, as Jerusalem cheerfully interrupted a conversation to explain the context or an unusual connection to the story. As we sipped the

delicious Ethiopian macchiato under a gazebo at the hotel, I sat spellbound as the women revealed their lives, their hardships, their passions, and the people who had inspired them.

Beza

Beza was the second participant I interviewed. We were fresh and excited to hear her story, but she had a hard time speaking in English, so Jerusalem translated most of the interview. I found myself frustrated that I did not speak the language because it became evident that the interview might remain superficial. We were able to understand the outline of her story but were unable to hear about the many details that come with such a special journey. Therefore, when analyzing this interview, I looked at what she focused on and one of those things was the role model she had.

Beza had six sisters and one brother and was the daughter of a hard-working farmer and housewife. She, like others I have written about, had a long walk to school. In her case it was longer than usual, approximately three hours to the school and three hours back home. Because of this extensive walk, she ended up staying with relatives near the school and coming home on the weekends.

Of the 250 students in her high school, only 18 students passed to preparatory school, and she was one of only seven young women to pass into preparatory school. She saw the women in the rural areas over-burdened with so many issues, which instilled a desire in her to become a lawyer to help the women in her area. She held on to that dream, allowing it to propel her forward into the unknown college years.

Her sister led the way for her education. She said her older sister was her role model as she had defied her parents' will to get married and went on to study instead. She became a teacher, and her life inspired Beza to follow her dreams in school. Because she was the third

child of a big family, the parents did not have the resources to support her education, but because she had seen her older sister succeed, she was able to follow in her footsteps.

As her older sister led the way, her sister just above her age finished the 10th grade and left for Dubai to work. This working sister sent money to help her with her education, and she was able to graduate. Once she got into university, her parents were very pleased and supported her. In university she discovered another role model/mentor in one of her teachers. She says that the teacher “helped” her and “advised” her. She also talked about senior students who mentored the freshman students. Furthermore, she talked about friends from her church mentoring her when she was in a rough situation with a male friend. The male friend was pressuring her, and she was unable to focus on her studies. “I got advice from the church and I became safe.” Beza ended up getting a degree in biology and had just completed her master’s in biomedicine at the time of the interview. She said she ended up choosing a different career because to be a successful lawyer one has to have excellent English. Throughout her interview, even though we were unable to go deep into her story, she spoke of role models and mentors who helped guide her throughout her educational career. She ended the interview talking again about role models: “We need to have many role models, representatives to see them and continue to see and continue our dreams.” Role models helped Beza realize her goals and complete her education.

I asked a question about role models to many of the interviewees, and seven of the participants shared thoughts about their role models. Surprisingly, or not so surprisingly, most of the participants talked of teachers as their role models except for Beza, who saw her sister in that position, and Eden, who admired a famous journalist.

Besides teachers, participants had various role models. For Jerusalem it was Genet Zowdie, whom I referred to earlier, but for some participants like Beza it was a family member.

Out of the 11 participants, the only one who did not mention her teachers was Eden; she talked of a famous journalist:

When I was a child my role model was the famous journalist, Birtiquan Hargeweien. Currently she is living in America. She was my role model. My dream from early was to be a journalist like her. Always I tried to show for my friends by reading just like her. I heard her and she was a very excellent journalist.

Eden explained that this role model kept her dream alive. She dreamed to be like this journalist, and who knows what kind of impact that dream had on her perception of education daily. We know that she was extremely driven because of her circumstances, but she was also inspired by this woman.

Several participants from the 35 initial participants mentioned various famous women in Ethiopia as their role models. Melesse shared that Eleni Gabre-Madhin a famous economist, was her role model. Gabre-Madhin was the driving force for developing the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange. She read about her and got to see her in person to hear about her experiences. Hawi talked of Professor Gutay, a social anthropologist from Addis Ababa University, as being her role model. Even though she did not have her for class or know her personally, she was from the same region of the country and was also from a rural area. Hawi loved hearing about her and observing her as a strong woman. She said, “I wished to better and be like them.” She was an inspiration to her. Deborah echoed sentiments of many of the women:

My role model is most of the time, strong women. Every strong women are a role model for me. When I see them, oh, I appreciate them. They could be a role model for me. Every strong woman. I didn't select now. But, when I see them I am motivated more. It

may be in high school, college, a work place, or on the television. When I see strong women I am motivated so much.

For Deborah, any woman who exhibited the characteristic of a strong woman inspired her to be a better woman. Just being a strong woman can inspire other women to be strong.

Other popular role models were family members. Beza showed that if she had not had her sister as a role model to go before her and prepare the way, she most likely would not have been successful. Having the opportunity to watch her sister made all the difference in her life. Two other participants from the 35 whose family members made a deep impact on them were Hawi and Dina. Hawi's sister had married and moved to the city. Hawi loved seeing the clothing she wore and the life she had in the city and knew she needed to get an education so that she could live in the city and have a good life. Dina watched her cousin graduate from college and was inspired by this accomplishment. When asked what was different about her cousin she replied:

She became mature. She was well educated. She knows about many things. She worked. She changed her family also. Financially, she changed herself totally. I saw her when she became educated. She worked so many things for the people. I saw her. She was a medical doctor. She helped the people.

Dina was greatly inspired by her cousin and all that she did for her community and the way she carried herself. Family members can have a very positive influence on their relatives just finishing their education.

It is incredible to think about all of the people who influence students each day. Whether it is a sibling who leads the way, a famous person one looks up to, or the teacher who works so hard for so little pay, each is influencing students and inspiring children to have a brighter future.

8.3 Strategic Conclusions

In this chapter we learned what motivated participants towards a brighter future. In the Individual section they had a deep desire to escape from the poverty lifestyle they had been living. Second, they dreamed of a better future, knowing that education would make them successful. Next, their intellectual capacity to succeed motivated them to continue learning, and their love for education and learning added to their desire to be educated.

In the Interpersonal section I found that participants were highly motivated because of the belief and expectation the parents had for them to succeed. Furthermore, they wanted to be able to provide for their families and bring them out of poverty. I also learned that teachers had a very important role in many of the participants' lives, encouraging them to succeed, helping financially, advocating for them, and being role models for them. Finally, some participants were inspired by women in their country who had been very successful leaders and advocates for women. They were also inspired by siblings who went before them and received an education or encouraged them in their education. These motivating factors kept participants focused on their education and excited for their future.

9.0 Discussion

Now I return to theory on higher education persistence and apply it to my findings. Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Departure from Institutions of Higher Education was meant to analyze the decisions on why students persisted in school or dropped out. Weidman's (1989) Socialization Conceptual Approach added to this theory by showing the social aspects that are important to this decision. Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework takes into account the strength minority students have in the school system. I began with these frameworks because they were so well known and added to my knowledge on why students persisted. I was not sure if these frameworks would work in the Ethiopian context, nor was my research focused on proving these frameworks as I was more focused on letting the stories speak for themselves. In this section, I reflect on the framework after analyzing my research and compare my findings with their models.

Tinto's (1993) Longitudinal Model of Departure from Institutions of Higher Education includes seven parts showing all of the different aspects that influence students to stay in school or to leave school: Pre-Entry Attributes, Goals & Commitments, Institutional Experiences, Personal/Normative Integration, Goals and Commitments, and Outcome. Tinto looks at the students' responses to these factors and can predict if a student will stay in school or not. Weidman (1989) added to this framework by showing the influence of non-college reference groups and parental socialization and their impacts on how students socialize in the college environment, which in turn reflects persistence. Additionally, I looked at Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Framework, which includes Aspirational capital, Linguistic capital, Familial capital, Social capital, Resistant capital, and Navigational capital and how these

resources impact graduation rates. I have divided this chapter based on Tinto's (1993) framework and have included Weidman (1989) and Yosso's (2005) work within Tinto's framework. I then discuss how my work supports some of the points of these frameworks however I show overall that these frameworks do not work in the Ethiopian context.

9.1 Pre-Entry Attributes

Tinto (1993) begins with Pre-entry attributes discussing family background, skills and abilities and prior schooling. Yosso (2005) also discusses Familial capital which nurtures community and cultural intuition.

9.1.1 Family Background and Familial Capital

I found that family background made a huge difference to seven of the participants and this is one of the primary reasons they were successful. I show these examples through Samrawit and Yannet, who talked of their nurturing mothers who stayed up with them while they did their homework. However, not all had strong family backgrounds; four of the participants did not have families who supported them, yet they allowed them to go to school and to find jobs to help support them. For example, Magda's grandmother who raised her was not educated and only *allowed* Magda to go to school but did not *encourage* it. Additionally, Zahera did not have a supportive family either and had to do everything on her own. Eden had not even seen her parents since seventh grade.

In contrast to Tinto's theory none of the participants had parents who were educated past eighth grade, and most had little to no education. Tinto argues that an educated parent is part of having a strong family background. But in Ethiopia, it is rare to find both parents educated; therefore, this perspective does not fit the context in rural Ethiopia as parents supported and sat with their children regardless of their education level, as I pointed out in the section on Families. Therefore, I find that family support was very important to rural students however if a student has enough drive and opportunity they will succeed regardless of family background.

9.1.2 Skills and Ability and Linguistic Capital

Another of Tinto's (1993) pre-entry attributes is skills and ability. All of my participants showed that they were skilled and had academic ability. They did well on tests and were picked out as top students by their teachers.

Yosso (2005) discusses Linguistic capital as an asset for minority students. All of the participants spoke at least two languages. Many of them talked of the struggle to adjust to English at university and said their English was much poorer than other students. They did, however, have the study skills to brush up on their English, and they talked about some of the strategies they would use to do this. Seada's English was very good because she had been taught by foreigners in the blind school. Having this Linguistic ability that was given to her by a good school was a benefit to her education, but others struggled to do well in English. There were a few interviews that we would not have been able to do without a translator present because they had not mastered English even though they would have had to use it in the college classroom.

I find that I cannot conclusively comment on Linguistic ability as I did not test their language ability, yet I know that most struggled with it. However, I can say that all of these

students had to pass a test in English to be admitted into college. Rural students are usually at a disadvantage because they do not have access to the tutors and resources they would if they were living in Addis Ababa, yet they passed the test, which indicates they may have excellent Linguistic ability but because of the way they shared about the struggle of learning English at the university they may not have had Linguistic capital, especially on entering into the university. Yet they were still successful.

Instead of Linguistic capital, participants had the skill to know how to study well. They studied to pass the test to make it into university, and they studied English when they arrived at university. These were very talented young women, and though they may not have had Linguistic capital, they had study skills that made up for it.

9.1.3 Navigational Capital

Another pre-entry attribute in the form of a skill that some participants had was the ability to navigate their circumstances. Navigational capital refers to “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (Yosso, 2009, p.80). Participants had the ability to navigate through difficult situations. Firehewot is a perfect example. She did this in the city while she was going to high school. She realized the situation where she lived was not healthy for her, and she took the initiative to apply for a spot at the dormitory that a non-profit ran. Her friends did not apply, but she did. She took that initiative to look at alternative places. There she felt safe and was able to get out of the situation she was in. She also showed her ability to navigate her transportation challenges when she discovered there were no taxis that went to her distant school. She had to beg rides and hitch hike to school.

Other people may have not taken that initiative, but she did what she had to do to get to school. She also navigated the challenges of her job while doing her master's degree and eventually realized she could not do both, so she decided to stay in school. She also tried to navigate alternatives for paying for university. She tried twice to get her workplace to pay for her but they did not give her any money, so she used her savings to begin to pay for her school. But she attempted to use her navigational skills to get money for her master's degree. This skill is not unique to Firehewot. Other participants also demonstrated Navigational capital.

Participants showed their navigational ability in different ways. Beza realized that her professors were all men and more traditional, so she followed the custom of not speaking up in class because she wanted to be on good terms with her professors. She says, "I became quiet and I thought that I have to be tolerant." She knew, even though she was brilliant, that she needed to be quiet and not draw attention to herself so that she would be looked at in a positive manner from her professors. Eden is another participant who navigated her circumstances well. She learned what benefits there were for blind students and took advantage of these benefits. When she was living with her aunt, she was consistently seeking any assistance that might get her aid in Addis Ababa. Then once in Addis, she was able to collect a small stipend to go to school. She was also able to navigate her way into university after not passing the exam. She taught first and then was accepted into the summer program. She found a scholarship that would pay for her master's degree through the gender office. She was very good at navigating the red tape. Just like Beza, she was frustrated with the cultural practice of the women's place in the university, but she tolerated it so that she could graduate. Participants were incredibly good at navigating their circumstances, and all the participants had some skill in Navigational capital.

9.1.4 Prior Schooling

Tinto (1993) discusses the impact of prior schooling on students. Metzner and Bean (1985) contribute to his discussion by finding that grade point average, school performance, and psychological barriers impact student outcomes. Tinto also discusses the impact of the school experience before college. Participants in this dissertation did say that they had higher grades and scored well on tests; however, students did not report their grade point average.

It is hard to say if participants went to excellent schools as I did not rate their elementary and high schools. But we know they passed the exam to get into college. We also know that many of them had excellent teachers who believed in them and supported them. For some students, these teachers made all of the difference to their persistence in school. Furthermore, some students like Seada went to a very good primary school and outperformed her peers in high school because her English was so much better. In her case, schooling made a big difference to her future. Eden also learned braille, which enabled her to continue her education. If she had not gone to the blind school, she would not have learned this important skill. If Seada and Eden did not have access to a blind school, they would not have been successful. Therefore, my study supports Tinto's (1993) claim that prior schooling is important to persistence.

Most of the participants had significant psychological barriers that they had to overcome. For example, Eden was molested over and over again when she was living in the rural area during her sixth-grade year. Magda was orphaned and her family put up major barriers to keep her from succeeding, and when she went to school she was punished in a cruel way by her teacher. Zahera dealt with her parents' divorce, and all of the participants struggled with poverty. Yet they overcame. Therefore, Metzner and Bean's (1985) assertion about

psychological barriers having an impact on persistence is false in these cases, based on the students who had grave psychological barriers yet still graduated from university.

9.2 Goal Commitments

Intentions, goals, institutional commitment, and external commitments are another clue into whether students will persist or drop out of college according to Tinto (1993) and Weidman (1989). Tinto discusses the commitments students have before they go to the university and after they have experienced the university. He considers whether goals are still the same or if they changed based on students' time in the university and how well they integrated into the university system. He first examines the intentions of the students and then the goals and commitments of the student when they are entering university; then he looks again at their goals and commitments when they should be integrated into the campus culture and sees if these goals changed and also what external commitments students have that impact their decision to stay or go as well. I have also added to this section Aspirational capital, as aspirations are similar to overall goals.

9.2.1 Intentions

One of the items Tinto (1993) examines is the intentions students have for going to university. Participants in this dissertation showed their intentions for completing school. One of the intentions some of the participants had involved taking care of their families. They wanted to complete their degrees so they would be able to help their families. Other participants had the

dream of getting out of poverty. Magda is one example. Once she passed the exam to get into preparatory school, she had one intention in mind, and that was to graduate from university. From that point on, her intention did not change. Even when she arrived at university and had a challenge with one of her professors, she did not waver in her intention to get a degree and took a lower grade but did not argue with the professor so that she could graduate. Halima also showed her intention to go to college. It started with the motivation from her teacher, but she kept her intention all the way through university even when there were barriers to her finishing. She continued to keep her intention to graduate. I am also reminded of the story of Zahera who went to school until her senior year without shoes. She did not care about that, all she cared about was that she was getting an education. All of the participants had strong intentions to graduate before university and after university began.

9.2.2 Goals and Institutional Commitment

Tinto (1993) cites goals and commitments to talk of how committed students are to their major and to the particular university a student attends. In this case students were not committed to their university or their major but were committed to getting a degree as none of them were able to choose their university and had limited say on their major. However, not one participant transferred to another university. Once they were at the university, they were committed. They showed complete commitment to finishing because they had such strong goals.

To demonstrate this commitment, I am drawn to the story of Meron, one of the 35 participants. She got into a university that was a three-day bus journey from her home town, and the people in this city were very hostile to people outside their religious and ethnic group. Her family discussed what they could do because of the bad reputation of this area for women. They

discussed sending her to a private school even though it would be expensive, but private school to her was seen as a second choice for those who did not get high test scores. She was second in her whole school for test scores, so she wanted to go to a more prestigious government-run university. She arrived at the university and faced some violence when she went on the street. She also learned when she arrived that the university was not completely built. There were no classrooms for the law school she was attending, and the dormitories were very rough. Yet, she did not give up. She cried for a few days and then began to see what needed to be done. The next year she was helping the new students to get acquainted with the university. Her goal to become a lawyer trumped all other university issues. Therefore, Tinto's theory is slightly true for these participants as their commitment to their education was strong that they progressed through the university environment even when it was difficult. However, their commitment to the university or major did not factor in to this equation it was truly their commitment to getting a degree.

9.2.3 Aspirational Capital

Yosso (2005) discusses Aspirational capital, as the ability "to hold on to hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality" (p. 77). The definition of Aspirational capital could fit every single participant. They were able to hold on to hope in the face of much inequality within the university system. These participants had incredible aspirations even when their poverty could have kept them down; they did not let that be a factor to their success. They went after their dreams. I think of Eden, as she was kicked out of the boarding school, blind, in a rural area, suffering, yet she had hope that she would finish school. She stayed with her aunt, and her dream continued. She went to Addis, and even though she was not treated with the same respect as the seeing students, she strived to study. When she

did not get into university, she waited until she had her chance and then took it. She was full of Aspirational capital. Samrawit is another example. Her family was full of aspirations for her life, and she aspired to get her family out of poverty.

9.2.4 External Commitments

External commitments are commitments students have outside of the university that can affect their motivation to stay in the university. Weidman (1989) talks about the pressures from home that can have an influence on the participants' lives at school. He also discusses non-college reference groups that students are committed to outside of the university.

Most of my participants had strong external commitments to their families. They were motivated to succeed because they wanted to help their families get out of poverty. Samrawit is a great example of having a strong external commitment to her mother. She wanted to be able to provide for her mother, so she chose a major that would allow her to work right after college. Then while she was doing her master's degree, she began to work as an instructor. She worked hard in the university and outside the university to provide for her mother, so her commitment was providing for her mother, and she was driven to go to the university because she wanted to help her mother.

I am reminded of one story that contradicts this pattern. Hawi, one of the 35 original participants, was a mother and had to leave her children with their grandparents far away from her. She talked of the heartbreak of this situation. She was incredibly sad while she was in the university because she was separated from her children. She told the story of when her child broke his hand and she was not there to comfort him. This experience was excruciatingly painful to her, yet she integrated into the school system and persisted, even when her husband took on a

second wife as she was separated from him. According to Weidman (1989) and Tinto (1993), her experience might have meant that she would have a harder time integrating into the school system because of the outside pressure, which could be true yet she did not drop out she persisted.

Weidman's (1989) theory on non-college reference groups was spot on especially with students who were involved in church outside of the university. Participants had external commitments towards the church and were quite involved in participating in church activities. These activities usually reinforced their goals of finishing school. The church had significant impact on several of the participants' lives and their persistence in school. For example, Hiwot said her church "taught me about the environment conditions of [college] and how to pass the challenges." They encouraged her to "be strong, be confident. Be strong. They didn't ignore any unnecessary things and the like." Other participants had similar experiences and found solace in talking with pastors and other students who went to the university. Solyana shared how her life was school, work, and church, those were her commitments and even though work and church were outside of the university they were positive influences on her education.

Therefore, I find that overall pressures from outside the university did not affect students negatively but even encouraged them to finish their degrees so that they could help their families—they were going to overcome any negative circumstance that came their way. As for non-college reference groups, it seemed students found the right groups outside the university to be involved with and they actually had positive influences from their experience in church. In the case of these participants, their outside influences had a positive impact on their education. This finding shows that participants cared who was involved in their lives and they were successful because they cared about having positive influences around them.

9.3 Institutional Experiences

Institutional experiences, according to Tinto (1993), influence the departure decision of students. Tinto discusses the informal and formal academic system as well as the formal and informal extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. I also include Yosso's (2005) Social capital and Resistant capital in this section and I end with Verter's (2003) Spiritual Capital as these all have to do with influences during the university experience.

9.3.1 Academic Performance and Faculty/Staff Interactions

For many of the participants, some of their faculty and staff interactions were toxic. Some did not have a single female professor and others faced some type of harassment from their professors. Yet they integrated into the system. I am reminded of Zahara, who did not even talk to her advisor about her thesis topic because she was so afraid of him. She only went to see him when she absolutely had to. Or Magda, whose professor gave her a poor grade because she would not sleep with him. Some participants were also subject to a hostile classroom environment, as Eden, who spoke of not even being able to raise her hand because women were not welcome to do so. Therefore, in the case of these participants, the formal and informal academic environment did not matter. They were going to persist in hostile circumstances no matter what.

9.3.2 Resistant Capital

Another one of Yosso's (2005) capitals was Resistant capital, or "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80) I did not see Resistant capital in most of the participants. Participants actually conformed to the hostile university culture so that they could survive and integrate. But participants like Hiwot and Magda show that they had this capital. Hiwot showed Resistant capital when she refused to get married in high school and moved to another city to complete her school. The teachers supported her decision, but she had to resist her parents at first. Magda also showed Resistant capital. She refused to subject herself to beatings from the teacher if she was late so she would skip school. She found a way to still get good grades but avoid punishment. At the university she resisted sleeping with her professor and got the Gender Office involved to back her up. Therefore, some participants showed this capital more often than others. In a sense, they were all resisting the social norms of their communities by getting a college education and therefore did show Resistant capital.

9.3.3 Extra-Curricular Activities

Extra-curricular activities are ways students can connect to university life according to Tinto (1993). I asked participants a question related to this because of this finding. I found that of the 19 who answered this question, 16 were involved in clubs and three were only focused on their academics. Some participants were very involved in extra-curricular activities, even taking on leadership roles. Samrawit was on the student council. Beza was part of the HIV club, Seada was a member of the gender club, and Magda joined the Reading Club. Some were not in clubs but were very involved in their churches which were outside the university. For example, Eden,

when asked about clubs, said she wasn't involved in a club but did attend church regularly. Others like Zahera also mentioned their involvement in church. Therefore, some of these participants were involved in various activities outside the normal academic curriculum, which supports Tinto's theory of involvement.

9.3.4 Peer Group Interactions

Another part of institutional life includes experiences students have with their peers. In my study, participants had strong friendships, and this aided their time in university. For example, Zahera talked of borrowing clothes and relying on her friends for financial help. Seada also had strong friendships that helped her overcome some of the struggles of being blind. However, Eden had strong friendships with her blind peers but really struggled with hostility from peers on the university campus. She could not trust just anyone to help her, and this was a constant struggle for her. But I would say for the most part that participants had strong friendships with their peers that helped strengthen their ties to the university; therefore, I confirm Tinto's finding in this area.

9.3.5 Social Capital

Social capital is referred to as "networks of people and community resources" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Eden demonstrated Social capital to get to Addis and then later used it again to get a scholarship for graduate school. She understood how to find community resources and how to navigate her friendships to find opportunities that suited her. Zahera also used her strong Social capital skills to make friends with the teachers and gain their financial support as well as to find

jobs to help provide for her while she was in school. She also made such strong friendships at the university that she was able to wear her friends' clothes and get them to pay for notebooks and things she needed. Most of the participants demonstrated this skill through the stories they told of strong friendships and networks across campus.

9.3.6 Spiritual Capital

Spiritual capital was another capital that some of the participants had. I hypothesized that spiritual capital, according to Verter (2003), may be one factor that helped participants obtain advanced education. I still argue that for some it was a great benefit as they relied on a higher power to get through hard circumstances. I am reminded of Betelham, who talked of crying out to her heavenly father at the empty church after an attempted rape. She used her faith to help her get through a very difficult time. Furthermore, some participants also attended church, which gave them another social network to lean on as well as resources to help their journey. This was not the case for all of the participants, but for some it was a great advantage.

9.4 Personal Normative Integration

Tinto (1993) uses Personal Normal Integration to describe how well students acclimate to their environments academically and socially. He believes if they are able to do so the more likely they will be able to succeed.

9.4.1 Academic and Social Integration

All of the participants integrated academically and socially into the university system. They all were able to pass their exams and graduate. In fact, many of them thought college was easy. Furthermore, they integrated into the social system by making friends and following social norms on campus. These participants were survivors. They had the endurance to face challenges head on, and they had the motivation to finish school no matter what came their way. Zahera and Eden are examples of how they integrated into the college system. Zahera, hung out with city girls even though she was from a rural area, and Eden followed the cultural rules of not raising her hand in the classroom in order to integrate into the male space. Many of the participants, as discussed previously, joined clubs and became more integrated to campus life that way. For example, Magda's book club had a goal of getting more university students to read, so she became very integrated in the university itself strengthening their library and motivating people to read more.

9.5 Concluding Thoughts

After examining this framework in comparison to the qualitative stories I have produced, I do not think I can accurately apply Tinto's (1993) framework to the rural Ethiopian context. Tinto's main points are accurate, but the details of each point are incredibly different. Weidman's (1989) framework on socialization mostly applied as students used their strong social networks outside of the university to succeed as evidenced by their strong families and their

support from church groups. Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model was the most accurate of models to use in this context as it was already written for minority students.

Tinto's (1993) Pre-Entry Attributes applied in some contexts but not as much in others. For example, seven of the 11 participants had strong families who encouraged their education however, their parents had little to no schooling. Furthermore, participants came from very poor backgrounds and did not even have the means to go to school, and the high schools were located in a different city, making it very difficult for students to even go to school. Some participants' families did not even encourage their daughters to go to school. In fact, the only strong trait that participants had as a Pre-Entry attribute were Skills and Abilities – which was enough for them. If Tinto's (1993) Pre-Entry Attributes were to be applied as is to the Ethiopian context, one would expect the students to fail because they would not have the strong Pre-Entry Attributes which is the first layer in determining if a student will persist.

The one aspect in Tinto's (1993) model that did relate to the Ethiopian context of persistence was Goals and Commitments, which were driving factors for each participant. They had a dream, vision, or goal, and they were committed to their future path. Their dream started in primary school and continued through their master's degrees, and many of them are still dreaming for what is next. Participants were committed to their education but not the university or major they were in. They just wanted to get a good education so that they could have the opportunity to have a better job and provide for their families. Therefore, Goals and Commitments were important but the details were not necessarily the same.

Weidman (1989) also discusses external commitments and the influence non-college reference groups can have on individuals. I found that students were motivated for the most part positively by their families especially because they had the goal of getting their family out of

poverty. Participants also made good decisions in the friendships they developed inside and outside of the university campus. This was evidenced by their commitment to church and the church's commitment to help them through college. Therefore, Weidman's (1989) Socialization model did come across as working well in the Ethiopian context.

Part of Tinto's (1993) model that does not accurately portray reasons for persistence in the Ethiopian rural context is based on the participants "Institutional Experiences," specifically the academic system. Tinto's (1993) theory places a huge emphasis on the university itself and connecting to the university system. However according to participants, the university was a place where their female voices were not welcome and where they had to guard against harassment from professors and male students. Furthermore, these students had to struggle much harder than city students to be competent in English. So, in a way, these participants' stories are opposite to the narrative that Tinto (1993) portrays with Institutional Commitments. Tinto (1993) wants everything to be positive at the university level so that students will prosper yet in these circumstances the environment was hostile, yet they prospered.

The last part of Tinto's (1993) model is about Academic and Social Integration. Students did acclimate to their environment and were able to integrate into the university system. Therefore, this aspect of Tinto's (1993) model was accurate to the Ethiopian context as participants did integrate into the Academic system as evidenced by passing their classes. They were also able to integrate socially and had strong friendships at the university.

After closely looking at Tinto's (1993) model I found that I was not able to apply his complete model to the Ethiopian context however there were parts of his model that were accurate. Especially when looking at Goals and Commitments and Academic and Social Integration. Participants had goals and kept their commitment to their education regardless of

their Pre-Entry Attributes or Institutional Experiences. They were highly motivated and their motivation is what helped them integrate into the university system and even make friends.

I found that Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework worked in the Ethiopian context well. Participants did have many of the capitals that Yosso (2005) discusses including Familial capital, Aspirational capital, Social capital, and Navigational capital. It was hard to tell if students had Linguistic capital and Resistant capital was the only capital not seen in most of the participants, and this could be because culturally Ethiopians respect people in authority and do not wish to clash with their views. Participants also demonstrated Spiritual Capital. If I could add another capital that participants possessed, it would be Study Capital. Students knew how to study and when to study. They took advantage of studying whenever they could. If more students had this ability, they may be able to do better in school.

10.0 Recommendations

I began this dissertation with the research question, what are the characteristics and strategies of rural participants who receive a master's degree? I then looked at the overall reasons why participants were successful, and I found that they contained the ability to endure in very hard circumstances and used strategies to get around difficult experiences. Furthermore, I found that they were extremely motivated, and this motivation kept them focused on their education. I dedicated two chapters to looking at strategies that caused them to endure as well as reasons that caused them to stay motivated.

This section is a little different than most recommendation sections. I wanted to be able to address individual stakeholders as if they were reading this paper because it is important that qualitative research not only talk to academics but to the individuals who could be influenced the most by this research. Therefore, I write recommendations to the student, to the families of female students, to teachers, and to institutions. I then conclude with my thoughts about narrative methodology and the research process giving my recommendations to fellow researchers.

10.1 To the Female Student

After interviewing 35 women and listening to their interviews over and over again, two phrases stay with me for the girl who has a dream: “BE STRONG” and “OVERCOME EVERY CHALLENGE YOU FACE”. Whenever I would ask participants what advice they would have for a current student, many would say “be strong to overcome every challenge.”

These participants showed the strategies they used to be strong. Furthermore, they stayed motivated and remembered the reason why they were getting an education, whether to escape poverty, support their family, or dream of a prestigious job. Here are practical steps they took to become the women they are. I hope it encourages readers on their journeys as well.

1. If you find yourself overwhelmed with housework, try to fit studying in while you work, or while you even walk to school. Take 30 minutes here or there and just study. Use your time wisely.
2. If you have to skip class, make sure you talk to your friends to get the notes and try to learn what you missed. Make sure to not miss test days and prepare as much as you can for those tests.
3. When you are frustrated and face barriers, do not hesitate to draw on your religious beliefs for guidance and support.
4. If money gets in the way of you attending school, look for ways to make some extra money through a job or helping your neighbor at market. Look to see if the government or an organization has any opportunities for scholarships.
5. Always have curiosity about the world and find fulfillment in learning.
6. Find a way to stay motivated whether through a dream you have or a person you want to be like. Think of yourself positively in the future.
7. Rely on family support when it is available and help each other.
8. If you don't have family support, find others to encourage you: teachers, pastors, role models or friends.
9. Make wise choices when it comes to friends and share your burdens together.
10. Endure and never give up

10.2 To the Families

Family can be incredible support systems to participants. You absolutely make a difference in the life of a student. Here are a few things you can do to show your support for your student relative.

1. You can show support by spending time and encouraging your relative while they do their homework, even though you may not have an education. Just your moral support encourages them.
2. If at all possible, find ways to cut down on household chores so that students can focus on their studies and not be so tired when they arrive at school.
3. You can make financial sacrifices for your student relative so that they can get the education they need--even by taking on a small business for a while to help with a little money for extra expenses.
4. If you are an older sibling, you can be an example for your sister to follow in your footsteps
5. You can postpone marriage of your student relative until after graduation with a bachelor's degree.
6. Remember, many students after they graduate come back and help their families

10.3 To the Teachers

If there is one profound thing I found in this study, it would be that a teacher can make all of the difference for a student. If Magda and Zahera had not had teachers that encouraged them and supported them, where would they be today?

1. As a teacher, you have the power to encourage each student and push them towards a brighter future.
2. Students look up to you and see you as a role model, so be an example to them because they are watching you.
3. You can be an advocate for their education.
4. You can also help them financially if they need a little help to get to high school.
5. You can be incredibly powerful in each student's life and have the ability to make an unbelievable impact in the education and future of each child you touch.

10.4 To the Institution

Institutions have such an incredible opportunity to help students in their education endeavors. Based on the examples of participants there are a few things organizations can do to encourage students in their education.

10.4.1 The Government

The government does a good job of providing opportunities for students at the college level; however, they could improve on helping students in high school as well. Hardly any of the participants received funding during high school, and these were very hard times for them because they were living in another city far from their families. They had to rent out a house, which was sometimes unsafe. If government agencies could provide dorms or more financial help to high school students, we may see more students graduate.

It is so important female students feel they are in a safe environment. Adding staff and professionals to aid the gender office could be a benefit to students as they feel more confident in reporting harassment. Furthermore, more effort should be made to break the cultural barrier of inferiority women face in the university environment.

It is also imperative that you continue to provide resources for blind students, including braille books in the high schools, so that blind students can benefit from the same opportunities seeing students have. Supporting blind students is a worthy endeavor and pays off in the productive citizens you produce.

Transportation is another way the government can help students pursuing a master's degree, as many of the classes are at night but students could not find available transportation to get to the college or return from home. This experience ended up being very frustrating to several participants, especially because of the danger of traveling at night and the expense of taxis at this time. This problem was because sister campuses were further away from Addis. University Transportation should be available for students pursuing their master's degree.

10.4.2 Religious Organizations

I found that religious organizations were doing great things to help students on their journeys through college. However, I noticed that participants did not talk at all about how churches helped them in their education endeavors in primary and secondary school. Furthermore, because high schools are in a separate town, religious institutions could do more to support female students when they arrive for high school. One way they could do this would be by providing safe dormitories for females as they are far from their families and need a safe place to study. Another way to help high school students would be to provide transportation on the weekends when accessible so that they can get home to their families without the burden of walking many miles with dangers abiding or trying to come up with bus money. Helping students financially could be another way religious institutions could help ease the burden of school on students and families. Any hand up can encourage a student in their academic achievements.

10.5 To the Qualitative Researcher

There is much that I have learned on this journey of completing a cross-cultural Narrative Inquiry dissertation. The first thing I learned was that 35 participants was a lot for a Narrative study. The data was unending and took a long time to code. Furthermore, it is important to stay in contact with your participants for follow up and member checks, but it was much harder with such a large group of participants. Additionally, it was hard to remember everyone. Though I enjoyed getting to meet so many heroic women and they were certainly excited to share their

stories with me, I think I would have cut the number down significantly and focused on a follow up interview to go more in-depth with some of the stories.

When I was half way through with my dissertation, I was reminded that good qualitative work happens with ongoing participant input. This was a year after I had collected my data and I was very concerned because I had only interviewed the participants once and only had an ongoing relationship with one of them. I was not in Ethiopia where I could see them and talk to them about my work. Furthermore, my IRB agreement stipulated that I could only follow up by phone, which was difficult because of the language barrier. I almost gave up contacting them, but my friend Anis encouraged me to follow up, and so two years later I bought some Skype credit and began following up with them by phone. It was a wonderful experience and got me excited about my research again. Participants were so happy to hear from me and welcomed friendship with me and all wanted a copy of my dissertation when it was completed. Therefore, I say to the researcher, do not neglect getting to know the participants in your study because they are the reason for the research in the first place.

For anyone doing research on another country it is imperative to have feedback from local people from that country. I was also incredibly thankful for my friendships in Ethiopia who I could share ideas with, especially my research assistant Jerusalem. I sent her so many emails asking questions, and she always responded so cheerfully, excited to give me cultural insight. If I had more time, I would explore the rural areas in Ethiopia more and visit the schools so that I could have more of an insider view of the education students are getting. I only was able to visit universities, yet so many of the participants shared their stories about primary and secondary school.

I also learned it was important to let the participants' words speak for themselves. I may have been tempted to sum up stories in my own words, but many times I put the participants' words in because it was so imperative that their voices be heard. I found that one quote from a participant stirred some of my mother's Ethiopian mentees.

Because, especially in Ethiopia, any woman who is not educated her value is very low. They have to increase their value by educating and they have to face any challenge. They have to increase their value. Otherwise, a woman not educated in Ethiopia, her life will be a very challenged.

My mom is also very interested in seeing girls in Ethiopia succeed and could not wait for me to send her a draft so she could also gain insights to help students she mentors. She pulled this quote from my dissertation for a meeting with 22 of her Ethiopian secondary student mentees. She said the students started cheering when my mom read this statement to them. This is from Zahera, who had gone before them and faced the hardship these students are facing now. To hear Zahera's words was so much more encouraging than anything my mom could have said, and they connected with those words instantly. So I hope that the voices of the participants are heard throughout this paper.

10.5.1 Coding

I spent so much time doing open coding because I did not know what I was looking for in the data. As a result, I came up with many codes that were not helpful towards my research questions. Furthermore, it was incredibly time consuming. I had not seen anything in the literature on data analysis about reading through the interview as a whole and drawing out themes instead of slicing it into parts. In the end, that is what I did, and the data and story coming

across was so much richer because I got the whole story instead of just coded sentences. If I were to do this again, I would first read the stories as a whole and find major themes in each story. Then I would code these themes to see if I find overall themes across interviewees.

10.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to look at the educational success stories of Ethiopian women so that we could learn from their heroic efforts. This paper showed the incredible strategies participants put in place---strategies of endurance, survival, persistence, preparation, and tactical endeavors. Furthermore, we looked at the way relationships aided the persistence of participants whether it was family or friend support. Additionally, we saw how institutions played a role in helping participants thrive through monetary and mental support. We also saw how blind schools played an important role in the education of blind students. Later we looked at how important motivation was to the survival of the participants, and we saw how their dreams and intellect played a role in their motivation as well as their desire to provide for their families. We also saw the positive role their teachers and role models had in their pursuit of an education.

This dissertation has been written in such a way that one can also take away different points from the stories that were told. I hope the reader is able to come to her or his own conclusions as well as transfer some of the strategies and motivations to other students who are trying to complete their education. May the tenacious Ethiopian women rise to their educational success.

Appendix A Interview Questions

1. Name
2. Where are you from?
3. What universities did you go to?
4. Did you go to a private elementary school or public?
5. What is your family like? What did they do for a living? (Tinto, Weidman, Yosso)
6. What is the education background of your family? (Tinto, Weidman, Yosso)
 - a. Did your siblings get a college education? (Tinto, Weidman, Yosso)
7. Tell me about your educational experiences from grade school through your master's degree. (Tinto, Weidman, Yosso)
 - a. Did your family support you during this time?
 - b. How did you get to school?
 - c. How did finances play a part in your success?
 - d. Did you have a teacher or mentor? (Tinto)
 - e. What organizations were you involved in at college? (Tinto)
 - f. What did you major in and why?
 - g. What kind of support did you get from the Gender office and other programs on campus? (Tinto)
 - h. What made you decide to get a master's degree?

- i. Did you have similar experiences with the master's degree like you did with the undergraduate degree?
8. What do you think are the biggest challenges that most women in Ethiopia face in getting an undergraduate degree? (Yosso)
 - a. How did your friends and acquaintances react to these challenges? (Weidman)
 - b. Did you face those same challenges and how did you react to them?
 - c. Were you ever bullied or sexually harassed by male professors or male students?
(Tinto)
 - i. How did you react to these things?
 - d. Are the challenges different in a master's degree?
9. What characteristics do you think you possess that enabled you to do so well in school?
(Yosso, Weidman, Tinto)
10. If you are going to encourage other women to finish their college degrees what advice would you give them? (my question)

Appendix B Institutional Review Board Clearance



University of Pittsburgh
Institutional Review Board

3500 Fifth Avenue
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(412) 383-1480
(412) 383-1508 (fax)
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

Memorandum

To: Anna-Maria Karnes
From: IRB Office
Date: 4/25/2016
IRB#: PRO16030190
Subject: Triumph through Adversity: The Tenacious Ethiopian Woman and Her Rise to Success

The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the above referenced study by the expedited review procedure authorized under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Your research study was approved under:
45 CFR 46.110.(6)
45 CFR 46.110.(7)

The IRB has approved the waiver for the requirement to obtain a written informed consent for all study procedures.

The risk level designation is Minimal Risk.

Approval Date: 4/25/2016
Expiration Date: 4/24/2017

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