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Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Nontraditional Male Drop-outs

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Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Nontraditional Male Drop-outs

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The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out of a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree described their perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. Although previous research identified multiple issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of the information focused on females. The researcher believes this study was important because it complemented the current literature and added the perspective of the male gender to the research reported. Phenomenology is the study of the shared meaning of a similar experience or situation by individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449), which allows a researcher to determine how ordinary members of society determine meaning in the world around them and how they make meaning out of social interactions (Creswell, 1998, p. 53).

Fourteen interviews were conducted in person. Participants met the following criteria: (a) only included males; (b) met four or more nontraditional criteria to be included in the study; (c) were enrolled in an undergraduate degree program; (d) were enrolled within the last two calendar years with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree; and, (e) dropped out before obtaining bachelor's degree. Interview questions

were divided into three categories based on Schlossberg's Transition Theory: moving in, moving through, and moving out, with four areas covered in each category: situation, support, self, and strategies.

There were eight recurring themes—personal and institutional related. The personal themes were: (a) participants appeared to be family oriented; (b) a perception of time issues/constraints; (c) job related issues/constraints; and, (d) financial concerns. The institutional related themes were: (a) perception of institutional support; (b) faculty interaction; (c) a perception of lack of follow up from the institution when participants did not return; and, (d) a lack of understanding of what is expected when a person attends college (unknown expectations).

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This feels like an academy awards speech...there are so many people to thank that made this degree and experience possible…and I do not want to leave anybody out! I started this journey almost seven years ago. All of the people I have known and come into contact with since 2003 had some part or impact on the development of this study.

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you for your time, interest, proof reading, presentation practice sessions, chauffeuring, a place to stay, lending me your ear (and sometimes your shoulder), and for the unconditional emotional support. You have all been so wonderful!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out of a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree described their perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. Although previous research identifies multiple issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of the information focuses on females. This study was important because it complemented the current literature and added the perspective of males to the research base. This perspective was valuable as the number of males attaining bachelor degrees has been declining since 1991 (Mortenson, 2007, p. 12).

Background of the Study

The number of nontraditional students enrolled in higher education has increased three times more than traditional students between 1970 and 2000 (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005, p. 912), translating to more than six million nontraditional students in 2000 (Chao & Good, 2004, p. 5). Nontraditional students often balance coursework, employment, and family responsibilities (p. 5). For the purpose of this study, a nontraditional student was characterized as meeting at least one of the following criteria as outlined by Choy (2002):

- delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he finished high school);
- attends part-time for at least part of the academic year;
- works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;

- is considered financially independent for purposes of eligibility for financial aid;
- has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- is a single parent (either not married or married-but-separated and has dependents); and/or,
- does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school). (p. 3)

Almost three-quarters of today's undergraduates meet one of these characteristics (Choy, 2002, p. 3). Horn, as cited in the NCES Special Report by Choy (2002), described nontraditional as being on a continuum based on the number of characteristics present:

- One characteristic—minimally nontraditional,
- Two or three characteristics—moderately nontraditional, and
- Four or more characteristics—highly nontraditional. (p. 3)

Figure 1 represents the percentage of undergraduates with nontraditional characteristics in 1992-93 and in 1999-00.
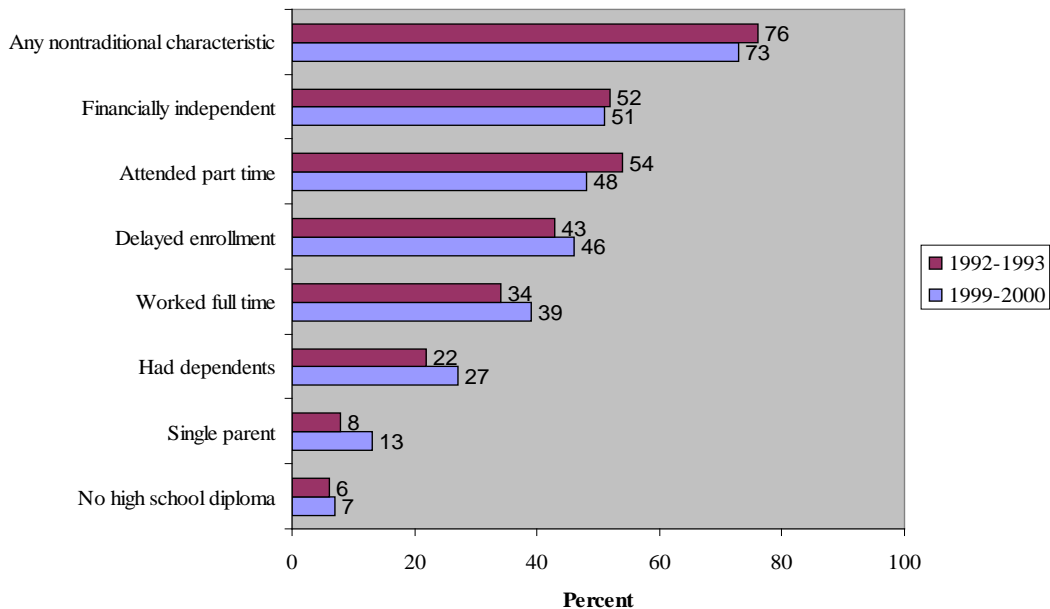
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES. National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 2000), p. 4.

Figure 1. Percentage of undergraduates with nontraditional characteristics.

Of the nontraditional students who enroll in postsecondary education, 57% come from lower socioeconomic groups, and 50% come from families with no education beyond high school (Leonard, 2002, p. 60). As far back as 1980, less than 3 of 10 high school graduates attended college in the traditional way (within the same calendar year as high school graduation) (Ottinger, 1991, p. 4). Statistics indicate that students who delay enrollment into higher education (nontraditional students) are less likely to attain a degree than those who enroll at a traditional age (Choy, 2002, p. 2). Among nontraditional students who entered college in 1989-1990 whose goal was to obtain a bachelor's degree at any time, only 31% had earned a bachelor's degree by 1994, compared with 54% of traditional students (p. 15). For highly nontraditional students, the attainment rate was only11% (p. 15)! According to Leonard (2002), by 1996, only 17% of high or moderate nontraditional students earned a bachelor's degree (p. 60). There is a need for concern as this population does not attain bachelor's degrees at the same level as traditional students, yet nontraditional students make up the majority of the student population on college campuses (Borrego, 2002, p. 2; Hanniford & Sagaria, 1994, p. 3; Hart, 2003, p. 100).

This concern is magnified for nontraditional males. Mortenson (2007) asserted that American males between the ages of 25 and 29 with a bachelor's degree first peaked in 1976 at 27.5% and then at 27.9% in 2000 (p. 11). However, the rate of degree attainment for males between the ages of 25 and 29 declined by 2.2% between 1976 and 2006, yet degree attainment increased by 11.5% for females between the ages of 25 and 29 during that same time period (p. 11). In 1991, for ages 25 to 29, women held a greater share of bachelor degrees than men, and since 2006 men have lagged behind women by 6.3% (p. 12). As Mortenson (2005) pointed out, undergraduate enrollment of

nontraditional males has been declining since 1979. Male undergraduate enrollment last

surpassed that of females in 1978 when there were 5,640,998 men and 5,640,094 women

(p. 6). In the fall of 2002, there were 7,202,116 men and 9,409,595 women enrolled in

U.S. Title IV degree-granting institutions (p. 6). The first year that more bachelor's

degrees were awarded to females than to males was in 1982—49.7% to men and 50.3%

to women (p. 8). By 2002, there were 1,291,900 bachelor degrees awarded in the United

States; 42.6% (549,816) were awarded to men and 57.4% (742,084) to women (p. 8).

This decline in the education of males in American society affects not only the lives of

the men but also the lives of those with whom the males live and associate, and it also

affects the American economy (p. 1). As Mortenson emphasized, the focus of his

research is not on what women have accomplished, but on what men have not; he stated

that women are doing "very nicely without our help" as demonstrated by the gains in

education that have carried over into the labor market; it is the men who need help (p. 1).

Theoretical Base

This study used Schlossberg's Transition Theory as the theoretical base.

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) stated the transition model allows

practitioners to understand a student's needs through a structured approach to predicting,

measuring, and modifying reactions to change. According to Schlossberg et al. the

transition theory can be applied to students who are "young or old, male or female,

minority or majority, urban or rural" (p. 13). When an adult thinks about returning to

school, returns, and then leaves, he or she is in transition (p. 13). Schlossberg examined

factors that influence a person's coping abilities, as well as how individuals move

through transitions. According to Sargent and Schlossberg (1988), there is a basic

systematic process of mastering change (p. 60). This process consists of the Four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 51; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 113; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 55; Leibowitz, Schlossberg, & Shore, 1991, p. 44; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5).

- Situation (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 51; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 17) refers to how an individual views the transition. Does the individual perceive the transition as positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired or dreaded? How does the individual perceive the timing of the transition? Is this the "best time" for the transition, the "worst time," "on time," or "off schedule?" Another factor to consider is whether the individual perceives the transition as voluntary or imposed.

- Self (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 60; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 17) defines what type of strengths and weaknesses the individual brings to the transition. "Self" considers what previous experience the individual has, does he or she believe there are options, does the individual feel a sense of control, and does the person consider himself or herself an optimist and resilient?

- Support (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 55; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 18) shows sources of support available to the person in transition. Support

could be from a spouse or partner, family member(s), friend(s), co-worker(s), neighbor(s), organization(s), or institution(s). Sources of support can be both positive and negative, such as, is the individual getting what he "needs" from the source of support, or is the source of support more of a "hindrance" to the individual during the transition?

- Strategies (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 66; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 18) involve questions such as whether an individual uses more than one coping strategy, can the individual creatively cope by changing the way he or she views the situation, can the individual manage his or her emotions/reactions to the stress of the transition, and is the person flexible?

Individuals move through the transition process through a series of phases, termed "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 1, 73, 233; Evans et al., 1998, p. 111; Goodman et al., 2006, p. 166). Moving in can be associated with a person being confronted with a transition or change; moving through follows the moving in process, and this is where the day-to-day management begins; and moving out can be associated with the passing or end of the change or transition (Komives & Brown, n.d., p. 5).

Grand Tour Question

This exploratory and phenomenological study attempted to address how a nontraditional male drop-out moves in, moves through, and moves out of the college process, specifically focusing on the situation, support, self, and strategies according to Schlossberg. The grand tour question was: In retrospect, how does a nontraditional male

student, who dropped out of college prior to earning his baccalaureate degree, describe his situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process? Sub-research questions that were explored included:

1. Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to enrollment)?

2. How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's?

3. In the context of each of four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the period of time after enrollment)?

Methods

Qualitative methods, specifically phenomenology, were used to address this question. Phenomenology is the study of the shared meaning of a similar experience or situation by individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449), that allows a researcher to determine how ordinary members of society determine meaning in the world around them and how they make meaning out of social interactions (Creswell, 1998, p. 53). Interviews were conducted in person at a neutral location, at a personal residence, and via telephone, all interviews were recorded, and were transcribed verbatim. Interview questions were divided into three categories (moving in, moving through, and moving out) with four areas covered in each category (situation, support, self, and strategies). The expected sample population consisted of nontraditional males who were previously enrolled at one western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university within the last two calendar years with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree. Homogeneous and criterion sampling was used. Participants met the following criteria:

1. The participants only included males.

2. The participants met four or more nontraditional criteria to be included in the study.

3. The participants were enrolled in an undergraduate degree program authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

4. The participants were enrolled within the last two calendar years with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree.

5. The participants dropped out before obtaining bachelor's degree.

The administration at one western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university agreed to provide the researcher with names and contact information for male students who dropped out prior to earning a bachelor's degree. The researcher contacted potential participants by mail. Each potential participant was sent the Introductory Letter (see Appendix A), as well as the Participant Pre-survey (see Appendix B) with a postage paid return envelope. The Introductory Letter explained the purpose of the study and asked for participation in the study. The Participant Pre-survey asked a series of questions to determine if the potential participants had been pursuing a bachelor's degree, was a nontraditional student (and to what degree), enrollment information, family composition at the time of enrollment, and demographic data. After three follow up attempts, 59 pre-surveys were obtained. Sixteen participants met the selection criteria and 14 agreed to be interviewed.

Definitions

Consciousness—perceiving or noticing through controlled thought or observation (Merriam-Webster online, n.d.b).

External Variable—situational and structural variables (Marongiu & Ekehammar, 1990, p. 421), such as family pressures, societal pressures, and financial pressures.

First Generation—an individual whose parents did not complete a bachelor degree or an individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent and that parent did not complete a bachelor degree (U.S. Department of Education, TRiO online, n.d.b).

Internal Variable—personality and trait variables (Marongiu & Ekehammar, 1990, p. 421), such as personal satisfaction, motivation, and career aspirations.

Intuition—the way humans respond to objects (Maggs-Rapport, 2001, p. 376) or the power of direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference; quick and ready insight (Merriam-Webster online, n.d.a).

Lived Experience—experiences that reveal the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness one has regarding events in which one has participated (Kleiman, 2004, p. 2).

Low-income—an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount (U.S. Department of Education, TRiO online, n.d.b). For example, see Appendix C for low income guidelines for 2008 and 2007 and poverty guidelines for 2008 and 2007.

Nontraditional Student—nontraditional students are characterized as meeting one of the following criteria: delays enrollment; attends part-time for at least part of the academic year; works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled; is considered financially independent for purposes of eligibility for financial aid; has dependents other

than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others); is a single parent; and/or, does not have a high school diploma (Choy, 2002, p.2).

Perception—a person's becoming aware or conscious of a thing or things; the state of being aware; understanding (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.).

Phenomenon—the appearance of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or ways we experience things (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, n.d.).

Phenomenology— the study of the shared meaning of a similar experience or situation by individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449), that allows a researcher to determine how ordinary members of society determine meaning in the world around them and how they make meaning out of social interactions (Creswell, 1998, p. 53).

Assumptions

This study assumed that the participants were able and willing to describe their experiences prior to enrollment, during enrollment, and after enrollment to the researcher. Also assumed was that the participants were able to describe their situation, support, self, and strategies to the researcher. An additional assumption was that participants valued attaining a bachelor's degree and would consider themselves "unsuccessful" if they did not earn the bachelor's degree. Finally, the researcher assumed that participants' experiences fit into the Schlossberg Transition model.

Delimitations/Limitations

Delimitations

1. The study is confined to the following sample criteria:

    a. The participants only included males.

      b.   The participants met four or more nontraditional criteria to be included in the study.

      c.   The participants were enrolled in an undergraduate degree program authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

      d.   The participants were enrolled within the last two calendar years with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree.

      e.   The participants dropped out before obtaining bachelor's degree.

2. Data collection was limited to the collaborating institution.

3. The study was based on participants' own perceptions.

Limitations

1. Participants were volunteers; therefore, this may decrease the generalization of the findings.

2. Findings are subject to multiple interpretations as qualitative studies use different aspects of reality as data, and it is the combination of this data and different perspectives that allow for different interpretations (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 5).

3. Homogeneous and criterion sampling is essential to a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998, p. 118); therefore, a much more narrow population is selected and this may decrease the generalization of the findings.

4. Interviews were conducted in varying manners: in person at a neutral location, at a personal residence, and via telephone.

5. Bias of the researcher.

Significance of the Study

Although there have been numerous studies on barriers and support services, and studies on nontraditional students, there has not been a comprehensive, qualitative study on the process a nontraditional male college student undergoes from attempting to earn a bachelor's degree to determining that a college degree is no longer a viable option. Attrition is costly to both the institution and the student (Farabaugh, 1989, p. 162; Metzner & Bean, 1987, p. 15). The findings of this research helped to address the gap and complement the current literature by conducting personal interviews with nontraditional males and asking them, (a) how does a nontraditional male drop-out move in, move through, and move out of the college process, specifically focusing on the situation, support, self, and strategies; (b) what challenges were faced; and, (c) to speculate as to what would have helped them to stay enrolled.

The target audience for the results of this study included top level administrators, as well as leaders in both student affairs and academic affairs. Although the sample was small, findings from this study provided insights to basic systematic processes of mastering change regarding nontraditional males and college enrollment. Admissions and enrollment management personnel can utilize these research findings when recruiting and retaining students. Orientation, advising, counseling staff, and freshman year experience staff are better able serve nontraditional male students by understanding nontraditional male students' needs, identifying possible issues before they threaten or cause the student to leave the institution, and proactively connecting nontraditional males with appropriate campus services. Furthermore, understanding what this group of nontraditional male students perceived as barriers to completing a four-year degree allows collaborative

arrangements between academic affairs and student affairs, changes and/or increases in student affairs program offerings, and adjustments to available institutional support.

Chapter Summary

Nontraditional students comprise the majority of students enrolled in higher education today. Previous research has considered the barriers, roles, needs, and support required for nontraditional students; however, a vast majority of this research has been focused primarily on nontraditional female students. As the number of males enrolled in college and thus graduating with a bachelor's degree has continued to decline over the past three decades, the negative impact on families, communities, and society is alarming and cause for investigation.

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out from a public university before completing a bachelor's degree described their experience using Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

The qualitative research method used in this study was phenomenological interviews. Homogeneous and criterion sampling were used, which resulted in a pool of 59 nontraditional males who dropped out of college prior to earning a bachelor's degree. Fourteen participants were selected and interviewed (interviews were taped and transcribed; each participant was asked to review his transcribed interview), interviews were coded, and the researcher looked for themes and patterns.

In 1967, Schlossberg published a study about "Men in Transition," of which two points were poignant. The first is: "women can enter and leave the labor market and in the public eye can be considered 'interesting.' The man who engages in prolonged role exploration, on the other hand, is more often considered neurotic, confused, and

unmasculine." The second is that Schlossberg stated (bold and underlined) that "the men surveyed were cooperative and hopeful that university life could be made better for them" (p. 4 & p. 9). Schlossberg quoted respondents to a questionnaire and interview process regarding nontraditional men in higher education: "You are the first person to take an interest in someone like me," and "If I can be of further help, please let me know" (p. 9). The men interviewed in this study were helpful and cooperative. Most were very frank about their situations and their home lives. So, maybe through the findings of this study, university life can be made better for nontraditional male students.

This study was a "snapshot" of a sample of eligible participants. The results may point the way toward further research. Understanding the scope and sequence of research that has been done is important as it outlines the context and basis for this study. In the next chapter the researcher discusses pertinent literature related to both nontraditional students and Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Purpose of the Study

Although previous research identified many issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of the information focused on females. The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out of a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree described their perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. Although previous research identifies multiple issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of the information focuses on females. This study was important because it complemented the current literature and added the perspective of males to the research base. This perspective was valuable as the number of males attaining bachelor degrees has been declining since 1991 (Mortenson, 2007, p. 12). The ramifications to males, families, communities, states, and nations, both socially and economically, could be exponentially detrimental.

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher discusses nontraditional students in higher education and previous research. Findings included: (a) supporting information, focusing on educational attainment, societal ramifications, and economics, (b) the purpose of the study, (c) background information on nontraditional students, focusing on profile,

transitional events, concerns, motivation, degree completion, obstacles, perceived role,

and class status; and (d) information on Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Rationale of the Study

The low educational attainment of males in America may be devastating to the

future of our nation and have global ramifications. Mortenson (2006) asserted that for

decades men have been disengaging from the labor force, from families (and the children

they have fathered), getting into serious trouble with the law, disengaging from civic

roles and even killing themselves at record rates (p. 1). Goods-producing jobs are gone or

are rapidly disappearing, and service jobs are replacing these lost jobs and many men are

not succeeding in this new world (p. 1). In 1950, 80% of jobs were classified as

"unskilled" (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2008, p. 19). Today it is

estimated that nearly 85% of jobs are classified as "skilled"—meaning education or

training beyond high school (p. 19). Men are frustrated and angry and represent lost

economic productivity (Mortenson, 2006, p. 1). Men find identity and fulfill socially

valuable roles when they have jobs (p. 2). Additionally, the Council for Adult and

Experiential Learning (CAEL) (2008) asserted the current educational system has not

produced the educated workforce our country needs, and it has not served the

nontraditional student well (p. 9). Shugart (2008) echoed this statement, adding that a

large number of "retiring educated workers are being replaced with insufficiently large

numbers of uneducated workers. The result is and will be a pervasive shortage of

educated and skilled workers in nearly every profession and craft" (p. 20). He further

asserted that in the United States we will need to address the workforce shortage and that

nontraditional students are our best chance of success (p. 21). Previous research identifies

many issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending

postsecondary institutions; however, the majority of the literature focuses on females.

Low educational attainment of nontraditional students should be of concern

because education is often linked to employment and prosperity (Mortenson, 2007, p. 1).

State policymakers know that an educated workforce is more employable, attracts new

business, supports the economic needs of families, contributes significantly to the state

and federal tax base, and is more likely to contribute to civic life (CAEL, 2008, p. 10).

Education may even define a person or family; however, education is more than just

income and earnings. The positive influence of education on a community, state, and

nation is easily assessed by reviewing the following list of factors with which educational

attainment has been positively correlated (Mortenson, 2007, p. 7):

- [Higher] Voting rates
- [Higher] Seat belt use while driving drunk
- [Higher] Seat belt use while driving sober
- [Higher] Volunteering
- [Higher] Home Ownership
- [Higher] Internet Use
- [Higher] Employment
- [Higher] Work-life expectancy
- [Higher] Labor force participation
- [Higher] Computer use at home and work
- [Higher] Rank in the military
- [Higher] Health Insurance coverage
- [Higher] Household wealth
- [Higher] Regular exercise and playing sports
- [Higher] Annual dental visits
- [Higher] Taking vitamin supplements
- [Higher] Experiencing moderate stress
- [Higher] Breast feeding by mothers
- [Higher] Healthy food choices
- [Higher] Employer involvement in adult education
- [Higher] Attendance at ballet and opera
- [Higher] Newspaper reading and radio listening

- [Higher] Attendance at jazz and classical music performances
- [Higher] Visits to museums and historic parks
- [Higher] Reading literature

- [Higher] Camping, hiking, and canoeing
- [Higher] Observe and photograph wildlife
- [Higher] Voting for Republicans

Educational attainment has been negatively correlated with the following (Mortenson, 2007, p. 7):

- [Lower] Unemployment Rates
- [Lower] Poverty Rates
- [Lower] Minimum wage employment
- [Lower] Incarceration
- [Lower] Cigarette smoking
- [Lower] Obesity
- [Lower] Workers with severe disabilities
- [Lower] Food stamp use
- [Lower] Government housing assistance
- [Lower] Medicaid

- [Lower] Interest in sex
- [Lower] Low birth weight babies
- [Lower] Infant mortality
- [Lower] Unhealthy food choices
- [Lower] Death rates for people 25-64 years of age
- [Lower] Gun ownership
- [Lower] Unmarried motherhood
- [Lower] Voting for Democrats
- [Lower] Banning unpopular books from public libraries

CAEL (2008) asserted that the jobs that are expected to support our economy in the future will depend on a skilled workforce that is able to learn and adapt quickly (p. 7). Higher education is critical to the future success of Americans. A college degree is worth 75% more than a high school diploma or more than $1,000,000 over a lifetime in the workforce (King & Bannon, 2002a, p. 4; Terry-Long & Riley, 2007, p. 39). Currently, only 28% of American adults have a college degree (Symonds, 2005, p. 1) and in the United States more than 59 million people are completely untouched by postsecondary

education (CAEL, 2008, p. 21). Furthermore, over 26 million Americans have no high

school diploma and more than 32 million have not attended college and earn less than a

living wage (p. 7). Thomas Friedman, as cited by Mortenson (2007), asserted that around

the year 2000 the world became flat, in other words, the Human Capital Economy

(economic leadership and prosperity measured by the educational attainment of the

workforce) had gone global and the prosperity of entire countries was determined by the

educational attainment of its workforce; countries with the best educated workforces have

prospered, while those with poorly educated workforces have suffered (p. 1). Mortenson

(2007) presented this information as an issue for the United States because many

countries recognized this and have actively addressed the needs of educating their

workforce, while America has not (p. 1). In approximately 1980, the United States

switched from a progressive higher education policy (marked federally by the first and

second Morrill Act, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, the National Defense Education

Act and the Higher Education Act, as well as through state levels e.g. land grant colleges,

state normal schools, and community-colleges) to a regressive policy (as noted by

reduction of Pell Grants, shift from grant aid to loan aid, educational borrowers for loan

programs, and the creation of tax plans) (p. 6).

As recently as 1998, the United States ranked first among industrial nations in its

share of 25 to 29 year olds who possessed a bachelor's degree (Mortenson, 2007, p. 1).

As cited by Mortenson (2007), in 2004, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD), an association of 30 democracies that cooperate to address

economic, social, and environmental challenges, reported that the average for OECD

countries for the population between the ages of 25 and 34, who had obtained at least a

bachelor's degree, was 24%; the United States had an average of 30%; and, the European

Union had an average of 21% (p. 2). However between 1998 and 2004 the United States

ranked fifth and was surpassed by Norway (37%), Israel (34%), Netherlands (32%), and

Korea (31%) (p. 2). If trends continue the United States will fall to 9th by 2007, 15th by

2011, and 19th by 2019 of industrial nations with 25 to 29 year olds who possess a

bachelor's degree (p. 5). This is not because of a decline in the American education

system, but rather because other nations have closed the gap and surpassed the United

States (CAEL, 2008, p. 22). CAEL contended that the United States can no longer claim

to be the world leader in education (p. 10). Mortenson (2007) reported that national labor

markets are continuously being fed with new and young workers to replace older and

retired workers (p. 5). The United States has not actively worked to create an incoming

college educated workforce, while other countries have (p. 5). Between 2000 and 2004,

each of the 24 OECD countries proportionately increased their population of 25 to 34

year olds with a bachelor's degree (or its equivalent) with the exception of the United

States and Greece, which both had zero change; the countries with the highest change

included Netherlands (+8%), Iceland (+7%), Finland (+6%), Ireland (+6%), Korea

(+6%), New Zealand (+6%), and Sweden (+6%) (p. 5).

Nontraditional Students

Profile

The profile of the incoming freshman today is influenced by the nontraditional

student. Nontraditional students meet one of the following criteria: delays enrollment;

attends part-time for at least part of the academic year; works full-time (35 hours or more

per week) while enrolled; is considered financially independent for purposes of financial

aid eligibility; has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others); is a single parent; and/or, does not have a high school diploma (Choy, 2002, p. 2). Students today are more likely to have a career, a home, and a family than to belong to a fraternity or have a dorm room (Fincher, 2002, p. 350).

Nontraditional students are no longer the minority in higher education (Borrego, 2002, p. 2); almost 75% of students are considered nontraditional (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006, p. 73; Evelyn, 2002, p. 1). Additionally, women are the majority, representing 56% of the population (Choy, 2002, p. 1). Other characteristics of all undergraduates included: 39% of the population attended part-time and 39% of students are age 25 or older (p. 1). Compton et al. (2006) stated that nontraditional students are more likely to be pursuing a vocational certificate or degree, have focused goals for their education (primarily to enhance their work skills), are more likely to enroll in distance education courses, and view education as a means of moving into another life phase (p. 74). Farabaugh (1989) asserted that nontraditional students are high academic performers and often the opportunity to return to college is a "one-shot deal;" therefore, institutions should be concerned about nontraditional student attrition (p. 3).

Transitional Events Bring Enrollment

Wyman (1988) declared that many nontraditional students are actually re-entry students who are returning because of a change in career, their children are now older, they have encountered a divorce, or they now have an opportunity to finish an interrupted degree (p. 32). Compton et al. (2006) corroborated this statement, asserting that the majority of nontraditional students enroll in higher education due to a major life transition such as divorce, widowhood, or career change (p. 74). Many nontraditional

students come to college as a result of a transitional event such as a divorce, loss of

employment, or other life change (Christensen, 1994, p. 19). Outsourcing and layoffs

have forced many adults back into the job market, only for them to discover they lack the

necessary skills to be gainfully employed (Compton et al., 2006, p. 74). Loftus (1998)

found that nontraditional students returned to college most often because of career

considerations (e.g., promotions, advancement, or stability) and secondly for personal

satisfaction or accomplishment (p. 59). Returning to college may also be due to a midlife

change, a separation-individuation process, or a marital separation/divorce (Champagne

& Petitpas, 1989, p. 264). Compton and Schock (2000) echoed this statement by adding

that everything from career advancement to divorce can lead to a student's return to the

classroom, and this return brings many decisions such as choosing a college, negotiating

tuition costs, and balancing work, family, and class work (p. 14, 15). Milheim (2005)

added that corporate downsizing or a poor job market can be factors that may cause

individuals to assess where they are in their career and how to remain competitive in the

workplace (p. 120). Other reasons students may return to college include older children, a

divorce, or an opportunity to finish an interrupted degree (p. 122). Spanard (1990)

reported that graduated nontraditional students perception of the benefits of a college

degree for their careers and personal satisfaction is quite high (p. 311). When asked if

they would do it again, 95% reported a college degree provided greater benefits than cost

(p. 311). Nontraditional students' decisions to return to school are clearly and directly

related to changes in their lives (careers, family, health, religion, or leisure

opportunities)—getting a degree is not an end, but a means to future change or coping

with changes that have already occurred (p. 312). Farabaugh (1989) stated that

nontraditional students want to be in college; they are stimulated and challenged by

coursework (p. 6). Schlossberg et al. (1989) ascertained that 1974 was the first year that

more marriages terminated as a result of divorce rather than the death of a spouse

(p. 152). As nontraditional students often have family and career obligations, they do not

have the luxury of going to whichever university interests them; they pursue education

only if they can without sacrificing their career and family (Fincher, 2002, p. 350).

Nontraditional Student Concerns

Ortiz (1995) found that nontraditional students have the same issues as traditional

students, just on a larger scale—this may include family and work responsibilities; age

may be a factor (they may feel they "should know" how to manage the college

environment, but their break in formal education may leave them disconnected); and,

they may be more goal oriented and motivated than traditional students, but feelings of

incompetence make it difficult to have the self-esteem necessary to achieve their

educational goals (p. 3). Pinardi (2007) asserted that many nontraditional students do not

think of themselves as students because they do not fit in; therefore, how can they be

successful when they do not think of themselves as students or as equals to traditional

students (p. 9)? Pusser et al. (2007) declared that nontraditional students have typically

been an afterthought in higher education, with policy makers often stereotyping

nontraditional students as displaced workers and homemakers seeking to enter the job

market (p. 3). While in reality nontraditional students are often trying to balance work

and family commitments, they often lack resources, and are often beginning with an

information deficit (p. 3). Pinardi (2007) echoed this statement by asserting that

nontraditional female students reported feeling like "misfits" on campus because most

class schedules, student activities, messages, and instruction are geared toward traditional

students (p. 197). To further add to the burden of nontraditional students, 60% of them

are from single income households, half of them work full-time, and they must often

adapt to a system designed to serve younger, full-time students (Pusser et al., 2007, p.

3).Wyman (1988) agreed that many nontraditional students are trying to juggle jobs,

children, and school work (p. 32). Apps (1987) cited lack of time due to job and home

responsibilities, lack of money, lack of childcare, and transportation problems as barriers

for students (p. 7). Pinardi (2007) found that nontraditional female students were

concerned about how to maintain their households, care for their families, attend to work

responsibilities, and find time to attend classes (p. 204). Frost (1980) found that students

left because they did not fit in, they had rusty study skills, they felt lonely, they were

uncertain about finances, and/or family responsibilities created conflicts (p. 5). Attewell

and Lavin (2007) stated that nontraditional students often juggle family and work

obligations (or both) and may be forced to part-time status or stop out while earning

money for next semester's tuition and living expenses, having a child, or accepting a

promising job opportunity (p. 1). For some students, physically accessing a

postsecondary institution may be a challenge due geographical isolation/barriers or

transportation issues (CAEL, 2008, p. 63). Other barriers, according to Swift (1987) have

included financial problems, job responsibilities, moving from the area, transportation,

and inadequate course offerings (p. 10). Additional comments that warrant attention

regarding nontraditional students are that many are from low socio-economic

backgrounds and many are under-prepared (Drew, 1990, p. 1). The ultimate result is that

nontraditional students are less likely to obtain their degree than their traditional

counterparts (Chartrand, 1992, p. 193; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005, p. 912).

Nontraditional students often fit the profile of low-income working-class families, they

are often first generation (neither parent has a bachelor's degree), many are students of

color, and others have a history of dropout behavior and trauma associated with their

home life (Rendon, 2002, p. 646). Swift (1987) reviewed 10 studies pertaining to drop

out behavior and noted that there was not one study that provided all of the data and

reasons that a student drops out; additionally, research conducted by one person or group

may prove to be contradictory to research conducted by a different person or group (p.

12).

Bundy and Smith (2004) declared that nontraditional students are a diverse

population that typically has needs for assistance with orientation, financial aid,

childcare, remedial course work, and career counseling (p. 4). These authors further

asserted that college counselors would be more effective if nontraditional students were

identified as soon as possible, outreach services were provided at times that are

convenient for the students, students were assisted in making connections to campus, and

involvement for the nontraditional student's family was also provided (p. 4). Loftus

(1998) found that feelings of inadequacy, fear of poor or less than perfect performance,

and feelings of uncertainty were expressed by almost a third of participants in his study

(p. 67). Farabaugh (1989) stated nontraditional students often doubt their academic

ability and lack the confidence to navigate the academic process (p. 177). Finally, many

nontraditional students are serious, highly anxious about their abilities and acceptance in

the college culture, and have given up much of their current life for a chance to be

educated and knowledgeable (Kasworm, 1993, p. 164).

Age. Spanard (1990) emphasized that if an 18 year old high school graduate states she is enrolling in college in September, she is most likely to be congratulated on her decision to attend (p. 317). Yet if a 43 year old employee tells his parents, wife, children, and coworkers that he is planning on attending college in September, he is most likely met with issues of timing and cost, and the decision is questioned (p. 317). Pinardi (2007) asserted that nontraditional students are worried about their age in relation to other students on campus and hope to connect with other students who share similar experiences (p. 7).

Mellchar (1994) mailed a 54-question survey to 400 vocational institute instructors in Georgia inquiring about instructors' attitudes towards their students based on age, there was a 77.8% response rate. Mellchar found that instructors rated nontraditional students more positively than traditional students in the following areas: ability to concentrate, common sense, reasoning ability, time management, listening skills, paying attention, class preparation, completion of assignments, behavior in class, coursework, initiative, eagerness to learn, good organizational skills, being responsible, career goals, and concern for others (p. 27). Instructors rated nontraditional students lower than traditional students in only a few areas: schoolwork affected by financial and family responsibilities, schoolwork affected by physical health problems, how comfortable students appeared to be in school, and level of sociability (p. 28).

Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992) reflected on their own teaching experiences with nontraditional students. They wrote nontraditional students regard the instructor as a peer, have higher internal motivation to learn than traditional students, and are more goal oriented. However, Bishop-Clark and Lynch (who taught two different disciplines) noted

that nontraditional students have more obvious discomfort in the classroom, and this discomfort was a theme the authors noted when conducting focus groups (p. 2). They also noted that nontraditional students preferred active, hands-on, and practical examples and discussions when in the classroom (p. 3). Finally, the authors stated that nontraditional students rank the importance of subject matter by how well the material will further the student's educational goals (p. 3).

  Stress. Stress is the extent to which students believe that they experience mental tension from physical, chemical, or emotional factors (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). In a study by Morris, Brooks, and May (2003) the authors administered the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations and the Goals Inventory to 103 undergraduates from a small northeastern liberal college. The purpose was to examine task and emotion-oriented coping among traditional and nontraditional students and determine if there was a tie to achievement (p. 2). Task-oriented coping, as defined by the authors, is a system in which the individual purposefully attempts to solve a problem by actively seeking a solution (p. 3). Emotion-oriented coping is defined as a strategy that is self-focused and usually has an intense emotional response to stress (p. 3). Nontraditional students used learning goal orientation (problem mastery) and task oriented coping; they reported higher grade point averages than traditional students (p. 3). The researchers speculated that nontraditional students may endorse task-oriented coping either as a result of the multiple roles they fill or because of increased maturity (p. 4). Study findings did not support that traditional students use performance goal orientations (focus on outcome of task) or the use of emotion-oriented coping (p. 4). However, the nontraditional students had higher

levels of both task- and emotion-oriented coping, which the authors reasoned may be due to a larger "repertoire of coping strategies" (p. 4).

Apps (1987) studied barriers for returning nontraditional students were studied in an attempt to improve the learning environment through (a) study skills; (b) characteristics of exemplary instructors of returning students; and (c) the effects of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary schooling on nontraditional students' preferred learning. The study was based on a stratified random sample of 91 students enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (p. 7). Participants were graduate students in the School of Education or the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (p. 7). Data were collected over a five-semester period beginning with the spring 1981 term and ending with the spring term 1983 (p. 7). Participant criteria included: age 25 or older, U.S. citizen, and three years between current and previous enrollment in postsecondary education (p. 7). The author determined that the five most serious barriers encountered by nontraditional students were (a) increase in stress, (b) parking in and around campus, (c) balancing family and school time, (d) balancing job and school time, and (e) spending time with immediate family (p. 8). Additionally, 90% of participants cited that "increase in stress" was a barrier to their learning; one third of participants noted an "increase in stress" as a serious or very serious barrier (p. 8). As a result of the increased stress, 45% of participants stated there was a change in their health, and they were "less healthy than when they started school" (p. 8). A year later (now the participants' third semester) participants were interviewed again, and the same five barriers remained the top five barriers (p. 9). Furthermore, 90% of the participants interviewed during their first semester had reported that an "increase in stress" was a barrier, and by the third semester

that number that stated they had an "increase in stress" had increased to 95% (p. 10).

Although this study did review nontraditional students, there was not a break down by

gender and participants were graduate level students.

Gibson (1993) examined how successful re-entry community college students

coped with the stress of college attendance (p. ii). The author mailed a community (a)

college survey, (b) the COPE inventory, and (c) a participant agreement to a stratified

random sample of 160 male students under the age of 22, 160 female students under the

age of 22, 160 female students over the age of 27, and 116 male students over the age of

27 (p. 6). The response rate was 51% or 301 responses; however, one response was

considered invalid bringing the total number of respondents to 300 (p. 41). The data were

obtained during the spring semester 1992 from the Southeast Community College at

Cumberland, Kentucky (p. ii). The author performed two MANOVA's and several

regression analyses to determine the effects of appraisal and coping (p. ii). Gibson stated

five important conclusions : (a) younger students appraise the stress associated with

college attendance more negatively than do older students; (b) younger students used

more dysfunctional or maladaptive coping strategies than did older students; (c) the

appraisal of stressors associated with college attendance may be influenced more by

immediate concerns than by past academic performance; (d) family support has a positive

effect on appraisal of stress associated with college attendance as well as with coping

strategies a student utilizes; and, (e) academic advising has a positive effect on the

appraisal of stress associated with college attendance (pp. 129-130). The author also

listed some "minor" conclusions, such as: (a) males and females appraisal of stress

associated with college attendance is similar; (b) women use more emotional-focused

coping strategies; (c) external environmental factors (e.g., finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and high school performance) have an effect on the coping strategies employed by students; (d) academic variables (e.g., academic advising, hours of study, percent of class missed, and current credit hour load) have an effect on the appraisal of stress associated with college attendance; and, (e) academic variables (e.g., academic advising, hours of study, percent of class missed, and current credit hour load) have an effect on the coping strategies employed by students (p. 139).

Encouragement/Support. A student who comes from a family that is perceived as loving, encouraging, and interested is more likely to persist (Bucklin & Bucklin, 1970, p. 8). Zehner (1979) corroborated this statement. He found that nontraditional participants in his study received encouragement, moral support, and acceptance from their families (p. 13). Bodensteiner (1985) found that when one spouse attends college that person may grow emotionally and intellectually, while the non-attending spouse does not experience the same growth and this may lead to the spouse "outgrowing" his or her mate (p. 88).

In 1976, Roach reported the obstacles a nontraditional female student faced when choosing to return to college. In this 30-year-old article, the author found that female students had less time for their families and friends, as well as less interest in and time to devote to housekeeping responsibilities (p. 86). Additionally, women also faced resistance from their husbands, family, and friends regarding their decision—sometimes even losing their friend group (p. 87). Female students who enrolled in college reported feeling guilty and experienced resentment from their children (p. 87). Thirty years ago researchers were concerned about the status of female students, the barriers they faced,

and the degree of emotional turmoil. Presently, researchers and institutions are still

addressing the needs of female students; little is written about male students' status,

barriers and emotional turmoil.

Galvin (2006) reported statistics about divorce among postsecondary

nontraditional students—the study did not specify males or females, only that participants

were nontraditional students. The author cited 45% of nontraditional students reported

being married or living with a partner; 33% reported being separated, divorced, or

widowed; and, 25% reported being parents (p. 420). As a graduate student, an instructor

for nontraditional students, and as an assistant professor, she observed students dealing

with relational distress and some students' marriages ending (p. 420). She observed some

students leaving the institution in order to care for family or attend to relational issues (p.

420). Nontraditional students reported that families and spouses were often supportive of

the student entering college; however, support was directly related to the student and the

spouse working together to negotiate a plan (p. 421). Nevertheless, both the student and

the spouse reported that the student's return to college was stressful on the family and the

marriage (p. 421). Issues that affected the family included: (a) less time to assist with

parenting, (b) less quality time for the family, (c) less social life, (d) less time to help with

household duties, and (e) a general preoccupation with work or school (p. 421). Galvin

recommended that the student and spouse make conscious and continuous efforts to

communicate and problem solve in order to balance the strain of work, college, and

family demands (p. 421). To balance the strain of work, college, and family, specific

goals such as an expected matriculation date; awareness of college demands; the

student's willingness to listen to the needs of the family and work with the family; and

the family's willingness to sacrifice time and demands on the student were important, but other factors that influenced the success of the student and the family unit included the timing of the college entrance combined with the life stage of the family (p. 422). Finally, students reported that the main stressor while attending was the lack of family and/or partner in understanding the demands of college work (p. 422). Spouses also cited frustration at the student's lack of availability, the demands of college work, and the student's slow progress (p. 422).

Pinardi (2007) the author examined learning experiences and perceptions of successful nontraditional females and identified the barriers and facilitating factors to their learning (p. iii). The study utilized a phenomenological approach with seven women and a process known as portraiture to convey the experience of the participants (pp. iii-iv). Pinardi discovered that most of the preconceived ideas of the participants revolved around fear—fear of rejection, fear of academic readiness, fear of the classroom, and fear of time constraints (p. 196). The author determined that the most supportive environment for nontraditional women was a disciplined classroom that allowed for connections and commonalities with other students (p. 205). Participants in her study stated a need for information early in their academic careers related to support services (p. 218). Participants perceived that they had to work harder than traditional students for the same grade, while unbeknownst to them there were services available that would have assisted them (p. 218). Time management was the biggest personal barrier the nontraditional participants' faced, while all participants cited poor advising was an institutional barrier (pp. 220-221). The author noted that six of the seven participants were married and of the participants who were married, all stated they had issues with their spouses being

supportive only part of the time (p. 225). Participants explained that when they

encountered difficulties at school their spouse did not encourage them to continue, but to

find ways to alleviate the stress and if that meant leaving the institution, they would

support that decision (p. 225). However, the participants viewed their return to college as

an opportunity to be a role model for their children and as a benefit to their family

(pp. 225-226). Some recommendations that Pinardi made for institutional personnel

included, (a) workshops for faculty regarding adult learning theories; (b) allow older

students to intertwine their life experience into their coursework; (c) communicate the

availability of support services to nontraditional students; and, (d) assign advisors

immediately and focus on not only courses that fit into the student's schedule, but that

permit students to take courses in the necessary order to allow a timely graduation (pp.

226-229).

Kember and Leung (2004) conducted a study in which 208 adult students enrolled

in an open university in Hong Kong were given a 28-item questionnaire examining how

part-time students coped with adjusting their schedules to fit studying into their already

full days. The authors used three coping mechanisms (sacrifice, support, and negotiation)

in relation to four operating domains (self, work, family, and social lives) to measure for

a sense of belonging, which the authors believed was directly related to retention (p.

345). Students were given the questionnaire when signing up for the next semester's

courses and were asked to turn the questionnaire in as they left (p. 348). Although this

study did address support, family, and work responsibilities with adult students in Hong

Kong, the study did not identify if the students were male or female or what the definition

of an "adult" student was. Results indicated that the highest domain score was for self

support and self sacrifice (p. 351). The researchers interpreted this to mean that participants perceived self determination, motivation, and intrinsic interest to be important to the progress of part-time study (p. 351). Family was the next highest domain, with students indicating a sense of belonging if there had been a negotiation with the family that allowed the student time and a place to study (p. 351). There was a strong correlation between family support and family negotiation (p. 353). Families that established a routine and made arrangements that allowed students to work on their courses were perceived to have a positive effect on students' ability to continue in school (p. 353). Employment had the lowest mean score of the domains (p. 351). However, the authors stated that this does not imply that employment is not significant, rather the opposite; they ascertained that students perceived that little can be done about work demands and that work tasks take precedence over studying, and that employment can be interpreted as the most important domain as it is not a variable that can be manipulated (p. 351). In summary, Kember and Leung reported that sense of belonging has theoretical, logical, and evidential links to persistence. Therefore, if a student's sense of belonging is high through intrinsic means (self) or can be increased through means of the family; there is a greater chance the student will remain enrolled and graduate (p. 355).

Farabaugh (1989) modified the theory presented by Bean and Metzner to test the theoretical and empirical utility of the casual model (p. i). Questionnaires were mailed to 347 freshmen (age 22 years and older) and after two follow up attempts, surveys were received from 174 (51%) of respondents (p. i). The author measured 19 variables associated with nontraditional student attrition. Of the 28 major relationships predicted, 16 held up under path analysis (p. ii). Farabaugh determined that three variables had a

direct effect on attrition (age, college GPA, and intent to leave) and 10 variables had an indirect effect—the strongest being goal commitment and support (p. iii). The author suggested that support may mediate external pressures for a nontraditional student who has returned to college (p. 169). She stated nontraditional students can manage multiple roles if there is support from family, friends, and college personnel (pp. 169-170). Farabaugh asserted that earning a degree is not a solitary activity—many people enable a student to earn a degree, such as parents, friends, advisors, babysitters, professors, and college personnel (p. 175). An indirect path the author found was that male nontraditional students reported more financial problems than female nontraditional students, female students worked more hours, and students who experienced financial difficulties reported they felt they had less support and were less committed to the university (p. 185). Additionally, these students also reported more academic problems and were more likely to intend to drop out (p. 185). Farabaugh claimed if a student's goals mirror those of the institution (e.g., earning a degree), then persistence is not a problem; however, if the student is more committed to other things, then attrition is possible and even likely (p. 175). The author concluded by offering three possible solutions to increased retention of nontraditional students: (a) intervening into the academic preparation and process; (b) offering emotional and physical support services to the nontraditional student and family; and,(c) providing financial information and assistance to nontraditional students (pp. 176-177).

Tripp (1988) studied spousal support through an instrument developed by Huston-Hoburg (p. 42). Tripp's goal was to measure attitudinal, emotional, and functional support from the student's spouse (p. 43). She mailed questionnaires to 600 randomly

selected married, United States students, enrolled during the fall semester at Oklahoma State University for at least six credit hours (p. 40). Tripp had a 56% response rate (N=323). The participants were 48% male and 52% female; 36% had two children, 23% had no children, and 21% had one child; and, 40% of respondents were returning after a 1-5 year absence, and 24% were returning to college after a 6-10 year absence (pp. 74, 81, & 84). The author determined that the sex of the student most often led to significant differences, followed by the student's age, and then the number of children (p. 161). Tripp reported that married male students reported receiving more support than did married female students (p. 162). The author speculated this may be due to wives being more supportive of their student-husband because college enrollment enhanced the traditional "breadwinner" role. In this study, more males than females were currently employed and were attending college for career advancement (p. 162). Another possibility suggested by Tripp is that married female students were receiving less support as the student-wife was spending less time at home in a homemaker role (p. 162). Older students reported greater emotional support from their spouses, while younger students reported more agreement with their spouses and less adjustment to household tasks (pp. 162-163). Tripp found that emotional and functional spouse support were influenced by the number of children in the household; families with no children or one child had greater agreement with their spouses and families with no children had few adjustments to household tasks (p. 163). Recommendations from the author included:

1. The placement office should offer information for nontraditional students (often these students are returning for career advancement and need

information that is different from that of traditional students who have no

work experience and will be seeking entry level positions).

2. Offer general education and upper division classes during the day, evening, and on weekends to accommodate nontraditional students with children.

3. Department heads, faculty, and staff should be trained to be sensitized to the unique needs of nontraditional students.

4. Counselors and advisors should be aware that married male students perceive more attitudinal support than did married female students as this could be affecting the student role of both genders.

5. Offer low cost daycare facilities.

6. Adjust office hours for evening and weekend students.

7. Offer enrollment by telephone.

8. Provide a nontraditional student lounge area.

9. Recruitment materials should reflect nontraditional students.

10. Adjust recruiting practices to meet the schedule of nontraditional students (pp. 165-166).

Family Responsibilities. Nontraditional students invest a huge amount of personal effort and financial resources in order to simultaneously pursue a degree, establish a career, maintain personal relationships and meet parental obligations; however, little is known about how work and family influence a nontraditional student's persistence in higher education (Hanniford & Sagaria, 1994). During the mid 1980's, researchers began to focus on external variables such as finances, support of others, and hours of employment and how external variables were related to persistence (p. 7). In this

study, the authors used data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School

Class of 1972 and the fifth follow-up study from 1986 (p. 9). Participants were surveyed

during their senior year in high school (all public and private schools in the United States

were included; institutions for the mentally or physically handicapped and legally

confined were excluded). They were questioned about individual characteristics, attitudes

and experiences including ability, socioeconomic status, home background, community

environment, significant others, school and work experiences, aspirations, plans, and

opinions (p. 9). Follow-up studies were conducted in 1973, 1974, 1976, 1979, and 1986

with response rates between 85 and 95% for each follow-up study. Respondents to the

1986 survey were approximately 32 years of age and had been out of high school for

approximately 14 years (p. 9). Participants were divided into three categories: completers,

active degree seekers, and inactive completers (pp. 10-11). The authors were interested in

determining how background characteristics were related to degree completion and

therefore focused on race/ethnicity, parental socioeconomic status, high school

background, college attendance, and degree plans (p. 11). Family responsibility was

measured using three indicators, (a) relationship patterns, (b) childbirth experienced, and

(c) the age of the youngest child at the time of enrollment (p. 13). Race/ethnicity was

found to be significant for all categories except baccalaureate females regarding degree

progress; however, the impact was minimal on degree progress for all baccalaureate

students compared to associate degree students (p. 18). Students' high school program

related to degree progress was only significant for associate degree students (p. 19).

Attending college directly after graduating from high school had minor effects for all

groups when other factors were considered (p. 19). Students' degree intentions were

found to be generally consistent; i.e., students who had plans for earning a degree were more likely to be degree completers than those who did not intend to earn a degree (p. 19). The authors found that full-time employment negatively affects degree completion for male and female baccalaureate students (p. 21). Relationship patterns only proved to be significant for associate degree men and baccalaureate women, those who were married were more likely to be degree seekers than degree completers (p. 20). An interesting finding from this study was that women who gave birth some time during their college enrollment were more likely to be degree completers than women who did not give birth (p. 20). However, for all groups, having school-aged children at the time of enrollment slowed degree completion but did not stop it (p. 20). Furthermore, findings did not indicate that women were any more disadvantaged than men by having children while being enrolled (p. 22). Additionally, the authors asserted that family/spousal support encouraged persistence for nontraditional students (p. 22). Hanniford and Sagaria concluded that the ways that family responsibilities impact degree progress were "not clearcut" (p. 23). Two noteworthy items mentioned in this study were that baccalaureate degree students (especially male students) were not as influenced by background characteristics as associate degree students (p. 25) and individual colleges and universities played an influential part in student persistence (p. 26).

Kimbrough and Weaver (1999) implemented a three-year study using three intervention methods designed to assist nontraditional students to improve chemical and mathematical backgrounds. The need for interventions for nontraditional students was a result of chemistry instructors noticing that a significant number of nontraditional students had a "detrimental gap" between the time they completed prerequisite courses

and the time they actually enrolled in the course (p. 198). Characteristics the authors

mentioned in their article included: (a) nontraditional students were more likely to be

female, and (b) that they have many nonacademic pressures such as jobs, children,

spouses and mortgages that add to the scholastic pressures of rusty study skills (p. 198).

Nontraditional students also have questions about their academic ability and motivation,

as well as feeling physically and emotionally isolated from other students (p. 198).

Austin (2006) conducted a study that provided monetary grants to ten

nontraditional female students to continue their college education from a two-year

college to a four-year college. This study considered both the needs of transfer students

and nontraditional students, but once again the focus was on female students. The women

ranged in age from 26 to 43, and all but one had at least one child (p. 277). In addition to

the financial support, the women received:

1. academic and social support,

2. peer and faculty mentoring,

3. help from a faculty or administrative staff associate with the Initiatives for
   Women's office, and

4. monthly round table luncheons (p. 279).

All participants reported the scholarship to be of tremendous help; for some, it even

eliminated the need for part-time employment (p. 279). According to Austin, the next

critical element was that the participants were given an in-depth orientation to the

university with individualized attention from the administration, and the monthly round

table luncheons built on this foundation by discussing topics such as campus resources,

study skills, time management, career planning, and graduate school (pp. 280-281). The

impact of family was tremendous, both for the participant and for the administrators assigned to the participants (p. 286). Many students faced challenges in balancing school and home, many were conflicted, and many expressed guilt because they felt that their families needed them (p. 286). Administrators were unprepared for the "magnitude of life issues" that participants faced and the potential threat(s) to the students' retention (p. 286).

Schlossberg (1967) administered a questionnaire to 420 male students, aged 35 and over, with 322 questionnaires returned. She then conducted a semi-structured group interview with eight of the men, and finally, conducted a discussion between two panels of eight men regarding the role of counselors and educators working with adult students. Most respondents stated that returning to college for advancement or the importance of the degree was the number one motivating factor (125 respondents), followed by self improvement (58 respondents), then the need for a degree for career advancement (53 respondents), and fourth was for security (34 respondents) (pp. 21-22). Previous deterrents to returning to school included finances (91 respondents), family demands (67 respondents), time (57 respondents), and lack of guidance (40 respondents) (pp. 21-22). A major motivating factor for men returning to school was family (p. 24). The author stated only when men felt freed of their family responsibilities did they return to college (p. 24). The interest and cooperation of family members were essential, not only for monetary reasons, but also because of the time commitment involved (p. 25). Men felt they could fight academic barriers, but not their wives (p. 25). Other interesting comments made by respondents in Schlossberg's study included: "a man should have settled on his career between the ages of 24 and 25" (pp. 15); "often a man doesn't pick a

career . . . the career picks the man" (pp. 24); "education will allow a person to work with their brains and not their body" (pp. 27); and "people should finish school between the ages of 20 and 22" (pp. 30). The researcher also noted other deterrents for nontraditional male students included rigid admissions procedures, unsympathetic counselors, and sometimes younger and arrogant faculty (p. 32). During the panel discussion, respondents suggested changes they believed would be helpful, e.g., a place to relax before class, a decent place to eat, financial aid, and a need for flexibility with people and requirements (p. 34). In a follow-up article to this study, Schlossberg (1970) declared that "if we wish to encourage adults as students we need to reassess whether or not our requirements and processes are discouraging rather than facilitating" (p. 39). There is very limited research on nontraditional males; therefore, this study, although more than 40 years old, is still relevant. Schlossberg's study was qualitative and focused on nontraditional males perceptions of barriers and desired services.

Kelly (1984) investigated the needs of nontraditional students (students over the age of 25) during the spring semester 1983 (p. xi). Kelly surveyed 852 nontraditional students at 18 institutions participating in the Higher Education for Adult Mental Health Project (pp. 28-33). The researcher used the Adult Learner Needs Assessment Survey to evaluate the personal and educational needs of nontraditional students, as well as adding 30 questions to collect demographic data, and an additional 13 questions that allowed participants to express their feelings (pp. 30-31). He found that marital status was related to the needs of nontraditional students (p. 114). Students who were divorced, separated, or widowed had greater needs than single or married students in regard to job and career planning, family problems, and re-enrollment concerns; married students needed more

assistance with job and career planning (p. 114). Additionally, the author ascertained that the number of children was a factor in the needs of nontraditional students regarding Institutional Reentry Concerns factor and the Special Family Problems factor (p. 114). As the number of children increases, so does this factor (p. 114).

Finances. Terry-Long and Riley (2007) found that an individual with a college degree earned 75% more than an individual with a high school diploma, equating to $1 million over a lifetime (p. 39). Osborne, Marks, and Turner (2004) stated that interviewees were concerned about the cost of college and were fearful of incurring substantial debt (p. 306). Osborne et al. interviewed pre-enrolled nontraditional students by telephone to determine the decision-making process of students from the initial consideration of becoming a student to the possibility of becoming a student (p. 294). Although, two-thirds of respondents were female, the researchers were able to discover an interesting perception of the male respondents (pp. 294 & 310) The male respondents saw themselves as the "bread winner" and the main source of income for their families; therefore, many of these nontraditional students were reluctant to enroll on a full-time basis because they perceived they needed to work (p. 310). CAEL (2008) stated that most data collected in the US on learners is based on age; therefore, data on nontraditional students is often non-representative of nontraditional students because age is only one of seven factors that determine if a student is nontraditional (p. 20). Furthermore, Attewell and Lavin (2007) asserted that part-time students are not eligible for certain types of financial aid, and federal requirements generally classify most students as financially "dependent" upon their parents until age 23, even if they have been financially self supporting (p. 3).

When reviewing barriers to adult participation in higher education, CAEL (2008) described affordability as the percentage of income required to pay in-state tuition and fees (p. 46). College Board (2008a) stated that the in-state cost for tuition and fees at a four-year public university for 2008-2009 was $6,585—up 6.4% from 2007-2008 (p. 6). However, between 1977 and 2007, family incomes only rose 3% for the 20% of the poorest families, 22% for middle income families, and 86% for the wealthiest families (2008a, p. 16).
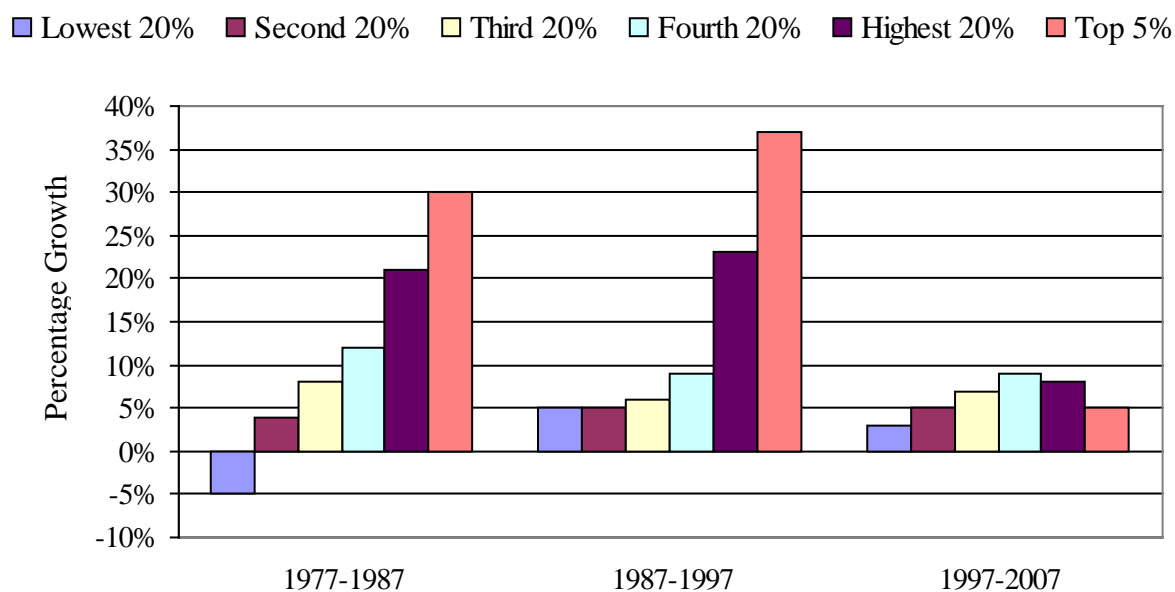
	Lowest 20%	Second 20%	Third 20%	Fourth 20%	Highest 20%	Top 5%
$ change 1977–2007	$463	$4,946	$11,275	$22,675	$69,940	$146,650
% change 1977–2007	3%	15%	22%	33%	60%	86%
2007 income bracket	$27,864 or less	$24,865 to $49,510	$49,511 to $75,000	$75,001 to 112,638	$112,639 or higher	$197,216 or higher

Source: College Board, 2008a, p. 16.

Figure 2. Percentage growth in mean family income by quintile (in Constant 2007 Dollars), 1977–1987, 1987–1997, and 1997–2007.

With the widening gap in income compared to the cost of attendance, more students are

applying for financial aid. Federal applications for financial aid have risen 16% in the last

two years (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 17).

Eighty-six percent of full-time, full-year undergraduate independent students

received some type of federal financial aid, while 77% of dependent full-time, full-year

undergraduate students received some type of federal financial aid (U.S. Department of

Education, NCES, 2009a, p. 5). According to the NCES, for the 2007-2008 academic

year at four-year non-doctoral granting colleges, financial aid awarded was:

- 70.2% of students received some type of aid,
- 52.2% received some type of grant aid,
- 43.4% took student loans,
- 7.3% had work-study,
- 2.4% had Veterans Benefits, and
- 3.9% had Parent PLUS loans. (NCES, p. 5)

College Board (2008a) determined that full-time undergraduate students at four-

year public universities received an estimated $3,700 in federal financial aid, leaving

$2,900 to pay of the $6,600 tuition and fee bill (p. 11). CAEL (2008) found that for the

lowest two quintiles, public four-year college tuition and fees represented 19% of the

median household income for 25- to 44-year olds and 15% of the median household

income for 45 to 65 year olds (p. 46). Compared to 9.7% of 25 to 44 year olds and 8.3%

of 45 to 65 year olds in the middle quartile, this is quite a discrepancy (p. 46.)

Furthermore, the College Board stated that in 2006-2007, 34% of Pell grants went to

public four-year colleges (2008b. p. 2). This meant that much of the remaining cost of a

student's education was paid for through student loans.

The average cost of a four-year college (tuition, fees, room and board) that was covered by the maximum Pell grant increased from 36% to 41% between 1997-1998 and 2002-2003, but declined by 30% by 2007-2008, before increasing to 33% in 2008-2009 (College Board, 2008b, p. 2). Even though Pell grants increased, a Pell grant only covered 32% of costs at a public four-year college in 2007-2008 compared to covering 50% of the in 1987-1988 (2008b, p. 14). College Board reported that 58% of Pell grants went to independent students (age 24 or older, students with children, married students, orphans or wards of the court, and veterans) (2008b, p. 14).

Student borrowing has doubled over the past decade—to approximately $85 billion for the 2007-2008 academic year, bringing total student debt to over half a trillion dollars (Kristof, 2009, p. 62)! Undergraduates (all undergraduates) received 41% of financial aid from federal loans (College Board, 2008b, p. 7). Between 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 subsidized Stafford loans increased by 11% and unsubsidized loans grew by 6% (2008b. p. 2). College Board estimated that 60% of all students seeking a bachelor's degree borrowed student loans to fund their education—a rise in 18% from 2000-2001 to 2006-2007 (2008b, p. 11). Kristof (2009) asserted that student loans from private lenders has increased from 7% to 23%, and, for students with over $40,000 in debt upon graduation, it would take more than 10 years to pay their loans (p. 62). Fitzgerald (2004) declared financial barriers create burdens of heavy borrowing and long work hours in order for many students to attend a reasonably priced postsecondary institution, and it is this barrier that lowers the probability that the student will remain enrolled and graduate (p. 13).

The percentage of 16-24 year old, full-time college students enrolled at a public four-year institution who work full-time (35 hours per week or more) has more than doubled, from 3.7% in 1990 to 8.9% in 2007, while the number of part-time students working 35 hours or more per week has decreased from 54.75 to 48.5% (NCES 2009, p. 244).

Table 1

Percentage of 16- to 24-year-old College Students who were Employed, by Attendance Status, and Hours Worked per Week

| | Full-time Students | | | | Part-time Students | | | |
| | Hours Worked Per Week | | | | Hours Worked Per Week | | | |
Year	% Employed	Less than 20hr/week	20-34 hrs/week	35 or more hrs/week	% Employed	Less than 20hr/week	20-34 hrs/week	35 or more hrs/week
1990	43.0	19.8	18.6	3.7	87.4	4.2	27.9	54.7
2000	50.5	19.1	21.5	9.0	87.3	8.5	26.4	50.9
2007	44.7	14.9	20.1	8.9	78.3	6.4	23.1	48.5

Source: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, The Condition of Education 2009b, p. 244.

However, Greer (1980) stated nontraditional students work more hours per week than traditional students (p. 5). Additionally, King and Bannon (2002b), found:

- 46% of all full-time working students work 25 or more hours per week (p. 2).
  - 42% of these students reported that working hurt their grades (p. 2).

- 53% of all full-time working students who work 25 or more hours per week reported that employment limited their class schedule, and 38% said that work limited their class choice (p. 2).

- One in five full-time working students works 35 or more hours per week (p. 4).

- 74% of all full-time enrolled students work (p. 3).

- of students who are both employed and enrolled, 84% said they work to pay for school (p. 3).

  (Information did not denote the type of institution in which students were enrolled or if students were traditional or nontraditional.)

Institutional Barriers. Declining GPA, failure to succeed in a chosen major, alienation from campus, and financial problems are a few of the institutional barriers listed by Jones and Watson (1990, p. 10). Loftus (1998) reported that participants listed institutional barriers, such as lack of timely feedback regarding financial aid applications, transcript evaluations, billings, and inquiries about degree plans (p. 70). Apps (1987) listed inconvenient schedules or locations, full-time fees for part-time study, inappropriate courses of study, and difficulty in obtaining necessary campus registration or general information as institutional barriers (p. 7). Pinardi (2007) reported that interviewees identified a lack of information regarding support services as a barrier to reaching their academic goals. Because they were nontraditional students they were not required to take an introductory university course or to attend an orientation session (traditional students attendance was required); therefore, they did not receive information on support services (p. 218). Schlossberg et al. (1989) stated curriculum content, course

schedules and structures, grading, policies on attendance, discipline, and financial aid are rarely determined through student participation (p. 8). Zamanou (1993) found that institutional barriers may consist of sex and age quotas, financial aid practices, regulations, deficiencies in curriculum planning, insufficient student personnel services, faculty and staff attitudes, discrimination against part-time students, and a virtual lack of financial support for part-time students. She elaborated on these barriers by stating that many institutions are not flexible, while very few institutions review course scheduling and cycles systematically to provide availability for part-time students (p. 6). Also, time limits imposed on degree requirements may prove to be a hindrance, as well as course locations, and the time the course is offered (p. 6). Finally, student services such as the career planning and placement office, advising, financial aid, counseling, the book store, and the library are often open at times that are more convenient for the staff than for the student (p. 6).

Milheim (2005) determined that nontraditional students have an overall discomfort when returning to college. The institution can diminish the discomfort by implementing accessible registration processes (including evenings and weekends), tutorials for the institution's website, campus tours, and orientation for services such as the library, cafeteria, parking and bookstore (p. 123). Additional measures that can be taken to reduce nontraditional students' discomfort in the classroom include understanding that older students will have a different orientation towards the professor(s); nontraditional students may have different learning styles; and, the possibility of hostility between age groups (p. 124). To address these classroom barriers, the author recommended encouraging personal contact, discussing differences during

class, exercises to increase awareness of similarities among students, and allowing time for students to get to know one another (p. 124). Other institutional barriers include the scheduling of classes (classes may need to be offered evenings, weekends or in a shortened or extended format), traditional classroom environments (courses may need to be offered through a variety of means such as independent learning, open learning, contract programs, satellite classrooms, or distance learning centers), and technologically advanced libraries (libraries may need to assign staff to work specifically with nontraditional students, taking a concrete approach when working with nontraditional students, provide in-depth answers for nontraditional students, and create quiet study areas) (pp. 125-126). Another area that is often a barrier for students is paying their tuition (p. 126). Creating a payment program or a deferred tuition payment plan to assist nontraditional students may help in removing barriers (p. 126).

Adickes and Worthman (1976) met with 24 female students that attended Staten Island Community College. The students were selected because they had responded to a questionnaire from the researchers. The authors stated that "many of the women stated they had graduated from high school, worked, married, and had children" and "were filled with anxiety, questioning their ability" (p. 3). The authors reported that of the participants with children, many were torn between the guilt of leaving their children and going to college (p. 4). Adickes and Worthman also wrote that most of these women did not feel comfortable asking their husbands to step out of the traditional male role and to help with the housework or the children (p. 4). The authors declared because many of these woman are in this type of a family situation, they are in need of an encouraging and supportive environment; however, they have often found the institution to be inflexible

and impersonal (p. 9). Participants claimed they were confused by the institution and felt a lack of support, the participants did not feel that the institution had rallied to meet their needs in the same way that the needs of traditional students needs were met (p. 10). Areas to be addressed, as determined by the authors, included: extensive counseling services (that may at times include husbands and children), a career advocate, and women administrators and female faculty members to serve as role models (pp. 11-12).

Cotnam and Ison (1988) compared day students to evening students; 452 former Monroe Community College (MCC) participants were sent questionnaires to determine (a) why they did not return to MCC, (b) factors that influenced their decision to leave MCC, (c) their likelihood of returning to MCC, (d) the major reason for attending college, and (e) their rating of their college experience at MCC. The response rate was 39% with the majority of responses related to experience and likelihood of return rated positively (p. 3). However, 90% of participants stated that personal reasons, rather than institutional reasons, were the primary reason they did not return to MCC (p. 3), with 25% of participants stating financial problems as a contributing factor to departure (p. 13). Additionally, 85% of participants claimed no intervening factors would have helped them to stay enrolled (p. 3). Day students most often cited leaving college to pursue employment, followed by studying at another college, losing interest in further study, and finally, failing to see job pay off (p. 6). Evening students most often cited (a) inability to simultaneously balance work and school, (b) inability to balance family and school, (c) courses filled/cancelled, and (d) employer withdrew support (p. 6). This study, while interesting, did not note whether the students were nontraditional or not, nor did it specify gender.

Motivation

In a study by Eppler and Harju (1997), conducted on 262 students, the authors examined the motivation of college students by applying Dweck's model of achievement. The researchers grouped the students into two categories, traditional students and nontraditional students (p. 560). The authors found that nontraditional students are more intrinsically motivated to acquire knowledge and develop competence (value learning for the sake of learning) than traditional students (p. 569). Weiss (1999) corroborated this statement by adding that advisors of nontraditional students have found that nontraditional students are more committed to education, more involved in the process, and want to insure that their time is not wasted (p. 9). Eppler and Harju (1997) reported that older students were often involved in a variety of roles such as parenting or pursuing career options and reported that the average time off from college was 8.4 years. When comparing the traditional and nontraditional students, they found that nontraditional students were more likely to be working full-time while enrolled and were enrolled for fewer semester credit hours than traditional students (p. 561). Seventy-four percent of the nontraditional students were enrolled full-time . . . just for fewer total credits than the traditional students (p. 561). For nontraditional students who were working, there was a negative correlation between the number of hours worked and GPA and study time (the authors found that nontraditional students work three times more than traditional students) (p. 567). Additionally, they found that more nontraditional students were first generation than was traditional students (38% vs. 13%) (p. 562). An interesting finding was that the correlation between nontraditional students and irrational beliefs (learned helplessness) was insignificant (p. 570). The authors speculated this may have been due

to the nontraditional students' life experiences or because nontraditional students were engaged in multiple roles (such as student, spouse, parent, worker, etc.) and therefore may have areas of confidence and competence from which to draw (p. 570).

Chartrand (1992) investigated the predictors and consequences of psychological adjustment by a testing model (developed from Bean and Metzner's work) of nontraditional student adjustment. The study was comprised of 347 nontraditional undergraduate students (228 women and 119 men) and investigated the following variables: background, academic, environmental, social, psychological, and intent (p. 196). The author stated that nontraditional students often have work, family, and community responsibilities outside of the college environment (p. 193). Additionally, nontraditional students were less likely to obtain a degree than their traditional counterparts (p. 193). Participants in the study characterized themselves as "average" in regard to school performance and study skills; they reported moderate difficulty in financing their college education, yet a strong intention to continue their educations (p. 197). Chartrand found that support from friends and family influenced both male and female nontraditional students in terms of psychological distress and in the intention to continue (p. 200). Findings from this study suggested that understanding the support needs and dynamics of the nontraditional student is important for personnel at high education institutions (p. 200).

Drew (1990) wrote an article on freshman retention at the community-college level. The author stated that many nontraditional students were filling the classroom and were more mature; many did not have financial support or emotional support; many were females, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, were under-prepared or undecided; and,

many would not persist to complete a degree (p. 1). To add emphasis, she reported that

40% of entering freshmen in four-year colleges will never earn degrees (p. 1). Drew

asserted that approximately 15% of drop-outs were "involuntary," in other words,

academic in nature or a social dismissal (violation of institutional rules and regulations)

(p. 2). The other 85% of dropouts were "voluntary" and dropped out for a multitude of

reasons, such as no previous intent to complete a degree, or financial hardships, or work

demands, or family obligations or pressures, or career indecision, or poor academic

records, or ineffective study skills, or low institutional commitment, or poor school

support (p. 2). Citing an article on nontraditional students, Drew quoted "the evidence is

overwhelming that life outside the classroom is crucial to students' happiness" (p. 3). The

author concluded with proposed plans for freshman retention ranging from ideas on

orientation to mentoring programs to structured courses (pp. 3-5).

Greenlee and Greenlee (1997) conducted a survey in 1995 on 159 non-returning

students at a suburban university in Virginia (548 were contacted by pollsters). The

authors stated that the students were academically prepared, based on ACT/SAT scores

and GPA calculations (p. 12). According to the authors, leading factors for students

choosing to enroll in postsecondary education were for external reasons, such as parental

pressures, getting a better job, making more money, or obtaining a degree (p. 12).

Osborne et al. (2004) reported that career advancement was the most important motivator

for nontraditional students as well. However, Justice and Dornan (2001) found the

opposite—nontraditional students were more likely to be internally motivated and

traditional students were more likely to be externally motivated. Greenlee and Greenlee

(1997) speculated that because the non-returnees were externally motivated, they were

likely to place college second; when faced with challenges (personal, academic, or financial), they were willing to give up their academic attendance. When students were specifically asked why they left the institution, the top three answers were: financial reasons (46%), family complications (30%), and employment complications (29%) (p. 15). Although this study was interesting, it did not note if the students were traditional or nontraditional, or participant's gender.

In Ford's 1998 dissertation, she used surveys from 76 nontraditional women, eight ethnographic interviews, and three classroom observations (based on comments from the eight interviews of who was a "great teacher") to study nontraditional women and their motivation for returning to college, how women learn, barriers to participation, and effective instructional techniques. The author divided responses from the questionnaires by age into four categories (25 to 30, 31 to 36, 37 to 42, and 43 to 48). Ford determined that the number one reason nontraditional women returned to college was the desire to have a degree (33%) followed by the desire to learn (18%) (p. 43). When interviewed, respondents reported that what motivated them to return to college was to do something for themself, or they were in a dead end job, or due to a divorce, or were taking advantage of an employment tuition program (p. 48). Ford coded responses to questions regarding motivation as either internal or external (p. 48). Overall, motivation to return was tied to employment and/or self satisfaction (pp. 51-52). Respondents stated the biggest barrier to participating in college was almost a tie between home responsibilities (26%) and job responsibilities (25%) (p. 45). Ford determined there were three categories of barriers: institutional, situational, and dispositional (p. 54). Questions regarding how nontraditional women learn determined that respondents used

many different techniques (visual learner, rewriting notes, keeping a journal, classroom discussions, etc.), but generally most respondents could be categorized as visual learners (p. 57). Ford observed three different classrooms. Her choice of whose classroom to observe was based on the eight interviews and the names of professors that seemed to come up repeatedly. Ford learned that the three professors teaching styles were very interactive, and the respondents preferred the interactive learning situations that utilized higher order thinking skills, oral communication, and built self-esteem (p. 60).

Schlossberg et al. (1989), reviewed the higher education environment and made recommendations that they believed would assist institutions to recruit, retain, and graduate "adults." They stated nontraditional students were more motivated, involved with learning and studying, and interacted more with faculty than did traditional students (p. 31). Additionally, these authors asserted that nontraditional students spent more of their discretionary time (time after studying, working, eating, and household and family responsibilities) studying than did traditional students (p. 31). Furthermore, nontraditional students have defined clearly their work and family roles/relationships and may have less need to search for peer relationships (p. 32).

Greer (1980) conducted a study at Clayton Junior College in Georgia in which she reviewed SAT scores, high school averages, and placement scores of freshmen beginning in fall 1976 and summarized three different studies. The first two studies determined the influence of age on persistence; the third study reviewed age in relation to goals and expectations (p. 4). For the first two studies, the sample was comprised of 567 beginning freshmen in 1976 who were divided into three groups: leaver, stayer, or graduate, with leaver and stayer further subdivided into subgroups "successful" (GPA between 2.0 and

4.0) and "unsuccessful" (GPA between 0 and 1.9) (p. 8 & p. 10). One hundred twenty six freshmen could not be definitively classified and were therefore excluded from analysis (pp. 8-9). For the third study, the sample included 393 17 to 19 year olds and 148 students ages 25 or older that were enrolled during the fall 1979 semester (p. 12). This group was given the Entering Student Questionnaire to measure the students' educational goals, institutional commitment, and their expectation regarding their college experience (p. 14). The author determined that older students who were enrolled in an academic program were more successful, academically, than their younger counterparts; however, the older students had a higher attrition rate (p. 20). Older students were more certain of their goals than traditional students (less traditional students had declared a major); older students were more self-motivated; older students viewed the campus as a place to take classes versus a place to socialize, meet new people, or make friends; and, older students scored more positively on the area of campus image (pp. 21, 22). However, findings were inconclusive regarding the level of commitment to educational goals and the author's speculation that older student's goals would be more job related was unsubstantiated.

Degree Completion

Bucklin and Bucklin (1970) asserted that students who drop out of college were less sure about the role college plays in their futures (p. 7). In other words, students did not see the return on investment (p. 7). Frost (1980) stated that students who have not declared a major are less likely to be successful, i.e. graduate (p. 6). Degen (1985) determined that the more education students completed the more they believed they had better job opportunities and would be better off financially (p. 10).

Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) investigated degree completion among nontraditional college students, using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The sample contained 5,555 people who were born between January 1, 1957 and December 31, 1964 (p. 918). The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth surveyed participants every year from 1979 to 1994, and then biannually from 1996 throught the time of publication of this article in 2005 (p. 918). The retention rate of participants ranged from as high as 96.3% in 1983 to 80.6% in 2000 (p. 918). One of the reasons the authors conducted this study was the concern that there was an increasing number of nontraditional students attending college, yet a lower completion rate (p. 912). Of the nontraditional students who enrolled in 1989-1990, with the intention of completing a four-year degree, only 31% did so by 1994, compared to 54% of traditional students (p. 912). One of the factors considered was part-time enrollment (p. 913). Obviously, students enrolled part-time take longer to complete each grade level, and prolonged enrollment is easily interrupted by periods of absence from school that can interfere with continuity of learning (p. 913). Taniguchi and Kaufman thereby inferred that students, enrolled part-time and with probable absences, may have difficulty progressing from basic courses to more advanced courses, resulting in a barrier to degree completion (p. 913). Additionally, part-time students have limited interaction with their instructors and fellow students outside the classroom, which results in limited support and connection (p. 913). Also, part-time students are at a financial disadvantage in the amount of money received from the institution, as they are not usually eligible for scholarships, assistantships, tuition waivers, and full-student loans (p. 914). Taniguchi and Kaufman also explored the theory of human capital (p. 914). Human capital is the amount of time

and money invested (in this case, in education), to gain a marketable skill (p. 914).

According to this theory, the decisions students make to attend and to continue attending

college depends on whether the expected returns outweighs the costs (p. 914).

Furthermore, the authors surmised that older students may leave college and thus not

benefit financially because of limited years in the work force (p. 915). Nontraditional

student may not attend college because it is not economically logical for nontraditional

students to leave the workforce (p. 915). Lastly, those with previous employment

background, may be detoured from completing a degree; if that employment was of "low

status" students may not have the necessary background to complete degree work (p.

915). The authors considered the family-school nexus (p. 916). They stated that marriage

may have a negative effect on men's enrollment, unless the man has been married more

than two years (p. 915). Additionally, they asserted that married women were more likely

to complete a degree than unmarried women (p. 916). Taniguchi and Kaufman speculated

that this may be in part to having financial support from non-enrolled spouses and the

non-enrolled spouses assisting with household responsibilities (p. 916). They found that

the opposite was true concerning parenthood; because raising children required financial,

physical, and emotional care, both men and women were discouraged from attending

college (p. 916). However, Taniguchi and Kaufman cited studies that claimed there was

no evidence that having children lowered a parent's college attendance, and that some

mothers may actually dispel their guilt by rationalizing that her college attendance serves

as a role model for her children (pp. 916-917). Kinser (2007) corroborated this statement

by stating that many students cited family responsibilities as a barrier, but these same

participants specifically mentioned their children as making a substantial difference in

their maturity level and providing strong motivation for returning to college. In summary, Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) found that part-time enrollment lowered students' chances of graduating. There was significant variation among students in terms of human capital—students have unequal resources. Marriage did not have an effect on degree completion (but married students did persist more than students who were divorced), and young children have a negative effect on degree completion. An interesting point in this study was that student-parents may find that the long term benefits of completing a degree outweigh the downside. Also, parents who act as role models for their children may in turn create more academically motivated students (pp. 924-925). Therefore, educational institutions could contribute to the learning environment, and family well-being, by ensuring that childcare be available for student-parents who need it (p. 926).

Brown and Robinson (1988) studied the difference between nontraditional males who continued their postsecondary educational enrollment and those that dropped out. The population included 545 men, 25 years or older, who completed the fall semester at the University of Wisconsin's two-year Centers (p. 95). Four sites were selected that serve commuter populations and are dispersed throughout Wisconsin (p. 95). Surveys were collected by telephone with the ending sample consisting of 321 undergraduate men, representing 59% of the total population of nontraditional men at the four Centers (p. 96). Items in the survey included open-ended questions with coded responses and a series of Likert scale items used to describe goal commitment, academic integration, social integration, and role conflict (p. 96). According to Brown and Robinson, there were no significant differences e.g. in marital status, age, employment, income, or enrollment status between students who continued and those who dropped out (p. 96).

The authors stated goal commitment was the strongest factor between students who continued and those who dropped out (p. 97). Participants who intended to continue committed more time to school, took more credits, and tended to work less hours (p. 98). Continuing students reported using advising services more, while dropouts reported they had not used the service or were not aware of the service (p. 98). Additionally, continuing students were more likely to have known other students, to have spoken with instructors in and out of class, and attended social events (p. 98). However, there was no correlation between whether students continued or dropped out in regard to high school rank, previous college enrollment, study habits, use of tutoring services, and night hours for campus offices (p. 98). Role conflict was the major cause of participants' choices to drop out (p. 99). Over half (65%) of dropouts said that they left school because of a conflict with work (p. 99). Most participants, those who continued as well as those who dropped out, stated that their wives, significant others, parents, children, and friends were supportive (p. 99). Two last comments from this study worth noting are that: (a) the claim that most services for nontraditional students have been designed for the returning adult female (p. 95); and, (b) none of the participants in this study said they had enrolled at a specific Center because of a particular desire to attend that Center; they had enrolled for the sake of convenience (p. 99).

Fitch (1981) examined retention and attrition of part-time evening and weekend nontraditional students at a private, for-profit college. The author gathered data using a questionnaire that measured 36 variables by administering the survey through classrooms, by phone, and by mail (p. iii). Respondents included 215 persisting students and 117 non-persisting students (p. iii). Fitch determined persisting students enrolled in

more credit hours per semester and had higher grade point averages than non-persisting

students (p. 76). Additionally, he found that a student in his or her freshman year of

college was more likely to drop out than if the student was a sophomore, junior, or senior

(p. 77). The author attributed this to the idea that a student at the freshman level had less

time, effort, and money invested and therefore, had less to lose (p. 77). The author found

that students under the age of 30 with two to five years of work experience were more

likely to persist; women are more likely to persist than men; socioeconomic status,

residency, and marital status had no effect on persistence; and, in this particular study,

nonwhites were more likely to persist than whites (pp. 77-80). Fitch also reviewed

personal problems in relation to persistence. He found that non-persisting students

reported a higher incidence of personal illness, had more difficulty managing financial

resources, and had difficulty saving for future tuition payments (pp. 80-81). An

interesting finding from Fitch's study was that unemployment was not related to

persistence. He stated more persisting students are unemployed than non-persisting

students (p. 82). Additional personal problems that were investigated included home

responsibilities, job responsibilities, lack of childcare, and lack of transportation (p. 82).

The author stated he came to the same findings that Sanford (1979) and Trammell (1977)

had found—that there was no significant relation between personal problems and

persistence (p. 82). Fitch listed 12 areas that are key to retaining students: (a) quality

instruction; (b) convenient class locations; (c) class size that allows for individual

instruction; (d) convenient class schedules; (e) meaningful and relevant curriculum; (f)

reasonable tuition and fees; (g) adequate and clean facilities/equipment; (h) reasonable

admissions standards; (i) adequate auxiliary services; (j) availability of advising and

counseling; (k) effective and good administration and communication between departments and between departments and students; and, (l) reasonable financial aid (pp. 15-16). Finally, the author listed several recommendations to assist institutions with retention efforts, an example of one of his recommendations was to create a survey to identify non-persisting students followed by an orientation program for potential non-persisting students (pp. 88-89). Fitch stated all students should attend at least one orientation session, but potential non-persisting students should be expected to attend additional sessions that would focus on career goals, selection of major, course requirements, development of an educational plan, managing one's finances, and maintenance of proper health (p. 89).

Geisler (2007) studied nontraditional student persistence and attrition using Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of Departure as her theoretical base (p. 73). The setting for this study was a nontraditional student degree completion program at a small, private, four year college in southeastern Pennsylvania in which the program offers evening, weekend, online, and accelerated courses (p. 81). The author attempted to contact over 400 students and ultimately had 46 interviews (11 with new students, 11 with persisting students, 14 with stop-outs/withdrawn students, and 10 with faculty/administration) (p. 96). The author held 20 hours of observations in classrooms, three student service areas, the library, and common areas (p. 85) and documented participants regarding demographic information, educational background, gender, marital status and family composition, race/ethnicity, employment, major, and credit hours (p. 86). The study was conducted over a one year time period beginning during the summer semester 2006 and finishing after the spring semester 2007 (p. 92). What Geisler determined was that all

students were at risk of dropping out, especially nontraditional undergraduates (p. 157).

The author stated that pressures and overwhelming obstacles make a student vulnerable

to attrition, no matter how many indicators of success are present (p. 157). However,

Geisler did note that students who were more likely to persist reported higher levels of

personal motivation and goals, had more effective coping skills and time management

skills, and had numerous interactions with institution personnel (p. 157). Participants in

their first year of college often reported career advancement or compensation as goals for

enrolling in college, while participants in subsequent years of college frequently cited a

combination of career and personal motivations for attending college (p. 160). New

students that were interviewed reported less confidence in their academic abilities,

reported encountering academic difficulties, and stated disappointment in not being

contacted regarding their experience or progress (pp. 160-161). The author found that

attrition was most often related to students' external environments and, more often than

not, the balance of obligations along with the added responsibility of attending college (p.

163). Areas that had the largest impact included health crises (the student or an

immediate family member) and finances (inability to pay, issues with financial aid) (p.

163). Regarding academic integration and social integration, the author found that

persisting students expanded their coping skills and utilized student services or sought

assistance from faculty or peers (p. 164). Interviewed participants claimed positive

feelings and feelings about being a part of the university mainly due to the special

program in which they participated (p. 165). Ultimately, Geisler's study re-affirmed what

Tinto had found: persistence and attrition decisions are very individualized (p. 166) and

the first year of attendance is critical to retention (p. 167). A key finding that Geisler

emphasized in her study is that the decision to persist often happens during periods of crisis in students' personal or academic life and that these decisions were often affected by specific individual at the institution—usually an instructor or academic advisor (p. 169). Recommendations included that institutions must have a retention plan, persistence must be a campus-wide initiative, the gap between academic and administrative sectors of campus must be, retention efforts must begin with enrollment, and more methods for nontraditional financial assistance should be investigated (pp. 171-183). Additionally, Geisler added five retention interventions: (a) demonstrate an understanding of andragogical principles; (b) assist adults with motivation and goal development; (c) implement measures to strengthen self efficacy beliefs; (d) develop academic strategies and coping skills in adult students; and (e) increase opportunities for outreach and interaction (pp. 172-181).

Obstacles

Bowl (2001) reviewed the institutional barriers associated with higher education in the United Kingdom. This study was in part a response to the declining enrollment rates, the need for maintaining recruitment, and an increase in the number of first time nontraditional entrants into postsecondary education (pp. 141-142). The author interviewed 32 nontraditional students who were attempting to transition into higher education (p. 141). Participants, mainly women, were concerned with inadequate funding, lack of childcare, and the unresponsiveness of the educational institutions (p. 145). Bowl used excerpts from three female participants to illustrate the financial and institutional barriers they encountered (p.141). For example, one participant, "Salma," was a single parent attempting to attend college (p. 146). Salma qualified for Income

Support as a single mother, however, she had to take out a student loan to pay her tuition and she was concerned how that would affect her Housing Benefit (p. 146). Salma had tried to talk with Social Security, but reported they were not very helpful (p. 146). In the end, Salma's deduced that people who are on Social Security probably do not attend the university (p. 146). Salma then approached her tutor for assistance and was told that "you'd better get that cleared up, because [Brookvale] don't hang around waiting for people to pay their tuition fees. They're going to come after you" (p. 146). In another situation, Salma felt additional financial hardship and lack of personal support when she had to purchase a home computer (p. 147). Due to childcare commitments, she could not stay at the university and use the institution's computers (p. 147). In the end Salma did graduate; however, she reported that she had graduated in spite of the university, rather than because of support offered to her (p. 147). Participants commented on a feeling of isolation and alienation; some claimed they had experienced feeling "different," and participants described their school experience made them feel that higher education was not something they could aspire to, but would be better suited for vocational training (p. 152). Additional issues nontraditional female students expressed included lack of family information and support, a strong fear of failure, time management issues, learning the rules of academia, and issues regarding childcare—but felt that institutions rarely take into account the complexities of nontraditional students' lives (pp. 152-155). Participants reported feeling disadvantaged by their "parent's outsider status and the lack of information and guidance which they were able to offer as a result" (p. 153). This is now recognized as a disadvantage and is termed "first generation" status (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The strong fear of failure in these participants had

numerous reasons—prior failures, lack of contact with the university prior to entry, giving up a secure job, and past humiliations (Bowl, 2001, p. 155). Nontraditional students needed to combine study, childcare, family responsibilities, and sometimes, employment (p. 156). Participants reported they "skimped" on schoolwork—reading only what was necessary and snatching time to study whenever they could in order not to neglect family responsibilities or miss work (p. 156). Regarding the rules of academia, both full-time and part-time students felt there was a certain amount of difficulty or ineptness in this area including time management, reading and structuring assignments, failing to understand what tutors wanted from them, failing to understand the advice and support offered by tutors, not feeling they had gained clarification on matters after speaking with a tutor, and not feeling that they had relevant life experiences to add or share in class discussions (pp. 155-156). The researcher stated the university rarely took into account the complex arrangements required for nontraditional students attending who have children. Nontraditional students with children had to find time to study in the evenings, when that is the same time when the children want attention (p. 155). Those students had to arrange for children to be taken to school if a lecture began before 8:30 a.m., arrange for children to be picked up from school if a class goes beyond 3:00 p.m. and meet the cost of childcare (p. 155). In summary, Bowl's study found nontraditional students to be highly motivated but frustrated, and the educational institution to be unresponsive (p. 141). Furthermore, the author emphasized that her findings pointed to the need for institutional change if nontraditional students are to thrive (p. 141).

Mohney and Anderson (1988) interviewed and audio taped 38 women to determine the factors that had promoted their entry into college at that time, their

motivations for returning, and their life histories (consisting of family origin,

developmental history, work history, and current family composition). The participants

were first-time evening students at a small liberal arts college, and most participants were

between the ages of 25 and 34, had some college experience, were married, and were

employed full-time (p. 271). The interviews were between 37 and 90 minutes long; the

researchers summarized the interviews in the final segment and asked the participants for

agreement and/or clarification (p. 272). Additionally, 10 of the 38 tapes were selected at

random and verified by two other professionals for accuracy (p. 272). According to the

authors, most of the women were seeking an increase in competency; secondly, women

were motivated by a sense of security or the ability to take care of themselves

independently; and lastly, all wanted to be financially independent and viewed college as

a means to achieve that goal (p. 272). Participants listed role demands, child-related

variables, self-image, family of origin, finances, and unavailable classes as barriers to

enrollment (p. 272). The reason most-often-stated for not enrolling in college at an early

time was role demands; and usually that role was related to caregiver to an adult or

extended family (e.g., ill grandparents, small children, unsupportive partner) (p. 272).

The second most-often-cited barrier was job demands (p. 272). Participants claimed that

the most frequent event that enabled them to return to college was a lessening of role

demands (p. 272). Mohney and Anderson divided enabling factors into five categories:

role demands lessened, support from others, financial ability, available classes, and

self-image needs (p. 272). They determined that participants had more than one enabling

event that allowed them to return to college and each combination was unique (p. 273).

Of the 38 participants, only one did not mention child rearing as a lessening role demand

that enabled the participant to return to college (p. 273). Many of the participants referred to their decision to enroll in terms of the needs of others—that it seemed to be necessary to many of the participants that their decision to return to college did not adversely affect those in their lives whom they cared about (p. 273). Additionally, life events are real barriers for women, as women have the major responsibility for nurturing and homemaking, along with employment demands (p. 273). The authors concluded that it is important that counselors are aware and sensitive to the external factors that women may be facing as well as understand the wide variation among women in barriers and motivation to return to college (p. 273). This study reviewed factors that brought women to college, motivations for returning, and barriers encountered; however, this study did not include the nontraditional male student.

CAEL (2008) published a study on adult learning with both national and state-by-state data. The authors determined that nontraditional students may not be motivated to seek out postsecondary education, as many were raised in an environment with little or no education beyond high school (p. 64). Additionally, students were unaware of the benefits of a college education and were often students who performed poorly in high school and therefore were fearful of returning to an academic setting (p. 64). Finally, CAEL identified low self-esteem as a barrier for nontraditional students contemplating postsecondary education (p. 64). Although this report focused on nontraditional students, data related to gender was not specifically mentioned.

Perceived Role

Pinardi (2007) found that the nontraditional women in her study had many roles (wife, parent, employee) and were determined to manage all the roles, even when adding

a new role (student) without taking anything away from previous responsibilities. However, by trying to manage all roles seamlessly, many students endured stress and found themselves postponing studying until after the children were in bed or at school (pp. 204-205). Myers and Mobley (2004) found that the most detrimental factor associated with being a nontraditional student was "feeling overwhelmed or conflicted about fulfilling all my role responsibilities" (p. 41).

Home (1997) examined surveys from 443 women enrolled at 17 different Canadian schools. The final sample consisted of 85% part-time students—60% of respondents were graduate level students, and the remaining 40% were undergraduate students in their final year (p. 4). She investigated the relationships among stress, role strain, perceived role demands, and perceived support (p. 1). The author asserted that women bore the primary responsibility for the family; when women enrolled in college, they were expected to show that neither family nor school suffered because of their dual involvement (p. 2). Because of this expectation and the multiple roles women play, multiple-role women have reported "constant overload, frequent role conflicts, and inadequate support" (p. 2). Additionally, more women than men drop out of college for nonacademic reasons (p. 2). Home measured four independent variables: (a) life situation (employment status, student status, ethnic origin, income, age, program of study, parenting and caregiver status, and age and number of children); (b) perception of demand; (c) tangible institutional support (distance education, university day care, assignment date flexibility in crisis situations, study skills workshops, instructor accessibility, part-time study, study leave, employer tuition assistance programs, and access to workplace equipment/data/personnel); and (d) perception of support (p. 4).

Findings indicated that the most important predictor in regard to stress, and the only one that remained significant, was income (p. 6). She ascertained that two child-related variables warranted further study: (a) increased role strain reported by mothers of children under the age of 13, and (b) less stress reported by mothers of several children (p. 6). Home further explained that multiple-role women with children under the age of 13 reported increased role strain (even though there is an assumption that childcare needs diminish when children are old enough to attend school) because it is still perceived to be the woman's role to be available when the children are out for holidays, out sick, and to attend to the children's school or medical appointments (p. 6). Findings also indicated that the perceived role demands were a better predictor of stress and role strain than the actual role situations (p. 6). Regarding support, study participants reported 57% received support from family and friends (in varying degrees), and 19% received support from the workplace; only 13% stated they received support from the university (p. 7). The author suggested further research to determine which attitudes and behaviors were perceived as supportive (p. 7).

Carney-Crompton and Tan's (2002) study compared traditional and nontraditional female students on the aspects of social support systems, childcare, psychological functioning (depression and anxiety) and academic performance. The study was comprised of 63 females ranging in age from 21 to 55 who attended full-time at a midsized Canadian university and were recruited from third and fourth year undergraduate social humanities classes (p. 142). The authors reported that, compared to traditional students, nontraditional students often engaged in multiple roles (p. 140). Nontraditional female students who engaged in multiple roles reported feeling role

conflict and role strain (p. 141). Findings were reported in five categories: psychological functioning, overall academic performance, emotional and instrumental support, relationships among variables, and sources of support (pp. 144-146). There were no significant differences found between traditional and nontraditional students regarding psychological functioning (p. 144). Nontraditional students had a higher overall academic performance level than traditional students (p. 144). The results were reversed for emotional and instrumental support, with traditional students reporting greater numbers of individuals available to them for emotional and instrumental support (p. 145). The relationship among variables revealed numerous correlations. For the traditional students, greater depression was associated with greater anxiety (p. 145). For both groups, there was a positive correlation between the quantity and quality of emotional support and instrumental support (p. 146). Using frequency count for 15 sources of support listed by participants, the researcher found that traditional participants cited boyfriend, grandparents, and parents as major sources of support. Nontraditional students listed spouse/partner and child (p. 146).

Quimby and O'Brien (2004) studied 354 nontraditional college women enrolled at a large mid-Atlantic university to determine their confidence level in their ability to manage multiple roles. They surveyed participants who ranged in age from 26 to 68 (p. 326). The researchers cited Bretz (1994) and Hackett and Bretz (1981) as stating that "historically, many women have lacked confidence in their ability to succeed academically and to pursue career related tasks" (p. 323); therefore, nontraditional women may be at risk for low confidence which could affect academic achievement, which could lead to low self-efficacy as a student and in career planning, which may

cause psychological distress, which may cause the student to drop out (p. 323). The authors used the short form of Taylor and Betz's (1983) original Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale and found that nontraditional women reported moderate levels of perceived career barriers and high levels of perceived social support (p. 326). Additionally, data were analyzed between nontraditional women with children and those without (p. 326). The researchers determined that there were few differences between nontraditional women with children and nontraditional women without children regarding support and career decision-making self-efficacy; additionally, nontraditional women had significant confidence in their ability to manage multiple roles while pursing career related tasks and had high levels of support (p. 334). Nontraditional women with children were found to be older, more likely to be married, and to have taken more time off prior to returning to college (p. 331). Results pertaining to nontraditional women without children included more difficulty with decision making, lack of confidence, and dissatisfaction with career (p. 331). This study attempted to determine if a connection can be made between a student's perceived support barriers and assistance from career counselors. Quimby and O'Brien stated that their findings have implications for career counselors, as career counselors may want to assess the number of career barriers and the amount of support available to students (p. 334). Also, nontraditional women may vary regarding their perceived career barriers and social support systems and therefore require a great deal of assistance from the career counselor (p. 334).

Class Status

Degen (1985) surveyed 26 people who left the Access Program at the University of Manitoba between May 1980 and August 1983. Of those 26, 7 had attended less than

12 months, 7 had attended 12 months or more, and 12 had graduated (p. 9). Participants

included 7 men and 19 women who were surveyed over the telephone with the

interviewer writing the answers on the questionnaire (p. 9). One of the questions that the

researcher had asked pertained to the participant's social life and their friends. Fifteen of

the 26 participants reported they now had different close friends, often because of

geographic reasons, new interests, meeting them at school, dissatisfaction with their old

friends (p. 10). Degen also asked participants about how their home communities

interacted with them (p. 11). Five participants reported interactions were negative, 7 said

interactions were positive, 2 saw a little of each, and 12 said there was no change;

however, several participants stated they were treated more formally and held at a

distance (p. 11). The author determined that families were often negatively affected by

the students' educations (p. 11). Nine of 19 reported a negative impact on their

relationship, 9 of 19 thought their spouses were adversely affected, and 8 of 21 believed

their children were negatively impacted by their college attendance (p. 11). Only 2

participants said their education had a positive effect on their spousal relationship and 5

reported their education had a positive impact on their children. The remaining

participants stated there was no difference in their family relationships (p. 11).

Additionally, 12 of the 26 believed their general health declined and often cited increased

stress (p. 12). On a positive note, 18 participants stated they felt better about themselves

for attending, listing positive attributes such as more confidence, being more assertive,

having a feeling of pride, an increased sense of self-worth, being more independent, and

being more outspoken as benefits of their attendance (p. 12). In the end, 24 of 26 believed

their time spent at the university was worthwhile (p. 13).

Reay (2003) conducted an interview-based qualitative study with 12 "working-class" women attending an Access course at a university in the United Kingdom. Participants ranged in age from 29 to late forties; 7 were mothers (6 of them single mothers) and the other 5 lived with a partner. Eleven were from manual working-class backgrounds, and one woman was self-employed (p. 303). Reay found the nontraditional women attended school for the sake of learning, the women communicated a strong desire to contribute to society (p. 304). The working-class women expressed guilt, as well as a desire, that moving beyond their "place" was "illegitimate" (p. 306). Mothers dealt with their guilt by viewing themselves as a role model for their children (p. 309). Another common theme expressed among the women interviewed was a "powerful sense of being unimportant and maginalised in the schooling context, 'of slipping through' and being 'unwelcome'" (p. 307). All the women, but especially those with children, believed they were attempting to balance multiple roles that included studying, domestic responsibilities, needing to earn money, and (for five participants) volunteering (p. 308). Reay found that many of the women did not leave college because of college, but rather due to outside pressures (p. 313). Some participants did not have enough credits; some had financial hardship; some were exhausted by trying to balance school, children, and work; and ultimately, of the original 12 participants, only one was able to enter into the university (p. 303). The author interpreted from two participants' quotes that "social problems have been 'psychologised' and turned into personal inadequacies" (p. 313). Reay stated that although enormous efforts were made by the women to return to education, their efforts were significantly unrewarded (p. 314). This study included many

quotes and excerpts from participant interviews that conveyed the struggle these nontraditional women encountered, and how ultimately most were not successful.

Nontraditional Summary

Pusser et al. (2007) performed a longitudinal case study that encompassed 700 institutions and 1,500 students. The researchers conducted 180 interviews in 9 states (p. 9). The majority of participants classified themselves as Caucasian (p. 9). The ages ranged from an average of 40.7 years at the smallest institutions to 37.9 years at the largest institutions (p. 9). What the authors discovered were four things: (a) there is no "typical" nontraditional student; (b) a key area of adult learning is poorly understood (the authors are referring to non-credit classes); (c) the well-worn path will not work for most nontraditional students; and (d) to find the right path, nontraditional students need a guide (p. 4). Participants suggested that childcare and more convenient delivery systems (such as online courses/programs) would be of great help (pp. 8-9).

When reviewing reasons offered by students who leave institutions, Heard (1988) stated that many students will state "personal" reasons because it is a good catch all or "financial" because it is an acceptable answer. However, researchers began to realize that there had been few attempts to explain the complex rationale associated with a student's decision to leave college (p. 13).

The previously listed articles described studies of nontraditional students and how they approached their education. Numerous studies such as Bowl (2001), Mohney and Anderson (1988), Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002), Quimby and O'Brien (2004), Reay (2003), and Home (1997) have explored issues associated with higher education and women, ranging from stress and barriers to the pressure of performing perceived multiple

roles. However, few (if any) studies discussed the issues faced by the nontraditional male. The study by Kimbrough and Weaver was not specifically focused on nontraditional male students and what barriers they may face or what support may be needed to attain the bachelor's degree. Adickes and Worthman reviewed institutional barriers to education, but only for female students. Eppler and Harju's study did not report specifically or separately on the nontraditional male student and his experience. Chartrand did not list findings by gender—specifically, the nontraditional male student and what barriers he may have been facing or what support he may have needed to attain the bachelor's degree. Drew did not discuss the nontraditional male student and what obstacles he may be facing. Ford added more information to the literature available on nontraditional women, and although it was interesting, it did not shed any light on the nontraditional male and why he may or may not be returning to college. Although Taniguchi and Kaufman's study provides information on both traditional and nontraditional students, the study was not specifically focused on the nontraditional male student. The literature regarding nontraditional males in higher education is sparse. Surely, nontraditional male students have perceived needs and barriers when enrolling, attending, and matriculating through the higher education system!

Theoretical Base

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Student development plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of college students (Evans et al., 1998). Understanding student development theories allows student affairs practitioners to have more options and tools when interacting with students, providing rationales for student programming, building alliances with staff members,

connecting with faculty, and recognizing opportunities (p. 5). Adulthood is marked by a

number of developmental tasks and transitions. According to Champagne and Petitpas

(1989), these tasks include:

1. the ability to be a self-differentiated individual with a meaning and purpose in
   life;
2. the ability to maintain intimate relationships and to care for oneself and
   others;
3. the ability to take responsibility for one's choices and their consequences, to
   renounce unattainable choices, and to recognize that some variables
   influencing choices are out of one's control;
4. the ability to deal with the disappointments and frustrations of adult life; and
5. the ability to balance, continuously, individual, work, and family roles.
   (p. 266)

Nancy K. Schlossberg, a clinical psychologist, developed the "Transition Theory"

and is a well-known and respected practitioner. Schlossberg's Transition Theory presents

factors related to transition, the individual, and the environment to determine the degree

of impact the transition has on the individual at a particular time (Carroll & Creamer,

2004, p. 2). Summers (2002) stated that Schlossberg's Transition Theory is based on the

research of 15+ different authors and was originally presented in 1981 (p. 4).

To understand Schlossberg's Transition Theory requires the explanation of

several terms (Goodman et al., 2006, pp. 33-39):

- Transition: any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships,

  routines, assumptions and roles.

- Anticipated Transition: transitions that are predictable.

- Unanticipated Transition: transitions that are not predictable.

- Nonevents: transitions that are expected, but do not happen (such as when a

  student expects to graduate but does not).

- Role of perception: a transition exists only if it is defined by the individual experiencing it.

- Impact: determined by the degree to which a transition alters one's daily life.

Transition

Individuals adapt to change differently (Schlossberg, 1981). Additionally, the same person may react differently to different types of changes or may react differently to the same type of change at different times in his or her life (p. 2). Transitions are occurrences or non-occurrences that elicit certain changes in the individual's perception of self or of the world that cause a new pattern of behavior that may or may not be effective (p. 5). The individual's perception of the transition is more important than the actual transition—the transition is defined by the person experiencing the transition (p. 5). She asserted that adults continuously experience transitions, and transitions do not happen in a sequential order, nor does everyone experience the same transitions or in the same order (p. 3)—life stage is more important than chronological age (p. 4).

Adaptation

How individuals adapts to a transition depends on how individuals perceive their balance of resources to deficits in terms of the transition, their sense of competency, their sense of well-being, and their sense of health (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 7). An example presented by Schlossberg was of two women suffering from slipped spinal discs (p. 8). The condition was painful, incapacitating, and psychologically distressing, but the condition could be corrected for both women (p. 8). The first woman had ample resources to balance the deficit in her well-being (tenured position, supportive family, friends, and colleagues and was generally a coper) (p. 8). The second woman was low on resources at

TRANSITION

Event or nonevent resulting in
Change or assumption
Change of social networks
Resulting in growth or deterioration

PERCEPTION OF THE
PARTICULAR TRANSITION

CHARACTERISTICS OF
PRETRANSITION AND
POSTTRANSITION
ENVIRONMENTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE INDIVIDUAL

Role Change: gain or loss
Affect: positive or negative
Source: internal or external
Timing: on-time or off-time
Onset: gradual or sudden
Duration: permanent, temporary,
            or uncertain

Internal Support Systems:
    Intimate relationships
    Family unit
    Network of friends
Institutional Supports
Physical Setting

Psychosocial Competence
Sex (and Sex-Role
    Identification)
Age (and Life Stage)
State of Health
Race/Ethnicity
Socioeconomic Status
Value Orientation
Previous Experience with a
    transition of a similar nature

Degree of Stress

ADAPTATION

Movement through phases following
    transition: pervasiveness through
    reorganization
Depends on:

1)   Balance of individuals
     resources and deficits

2)   Differences in pre-and post-
     transition environments
     re perception, supports, and
     individual

Figure 3. A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition (from Schlossberg, 1981,

p. 5).

this particular point (recently had a double mastectomy—so she was low on physical stamina and self-esteem, recently divorced, works as a potter— therefore her livelihood is threatened due to her bad back, and was an average coper) (p. 8). The second woman's deficits outweighed her resources, making adaptation very difficult (p. 8). Adaptation also depends on the degree of similarity or difference in one's assumptions about self and the environment (p. 8). In other words, the amount of change or adaptation a person perceives is important.

Factors affecting adaptation: Characteristics of transition.

Role Change: Gain or Loss. Some, but not all, transitions require a role change (Schlossberg, 1981). Some roles are looked at as a "gain" such as getting married, becoming a parent, or taking a job (p. 8). Other role changes are viewed as a loss, such as divorce, becoming widowed, or retirement (p. 8).

Affect: Positive or Negative. Schlossberg (1981) mentioned that some changes bring feelings of pleasure (getting married or being promoted) and some are associated with painful feelings (getting divorced or losing a job). Often changes can produce both positive and negative feelings, such as an individual may eagerly anticipate retirement; however, when the change becomes a reality, painful feelings may arise (p. 9). Ultimately, all changes produce some degree of stress (p. 9).

Source: Internal or external. Some changes come about through a conscious decision by the individual and other changes are thrust upon the individual by other people or circumstances (Schlossberg, 1981). The author hypothesized that a person adapts more easily if the change was a choice made by the individual (p. 9). She further asserted that the issue is one of perceived control over one's own life (p. 9).

Timing: On-time or off-time. Schlossberg (1981) asserted that all people have an internal social clock by which they judge if transitions are on-time or off-time. For example, transitions such as getting married, having children, going to college, taking a job, or retiring are linked with age in people's minds (p. 9). To be off-time carries psychological and social "penalties" (p. 9). A person may feel "deviant" for not completing transitions when society dictates (p. 9).

Onset: Gradual or sudden. Many transitions are expected and may be even inevitable or are a result of a deliberate decision (Schlossberg, 1981). An example Schlossberg gave was of a college student anticipating graduation and entry into the job market (p. 9). Transitions that have a gradual onset are easier to adapt to because the individual can prepare for them (p. 9). If a transition is unexpected or occurs suddenly, such as the untimely death of a spouse, the individual may have a more difficult time adapting because they have not had time to prepare or rehearse for the change (p. 9).

Duration: Permanent, temporary, uncertain. The expected duration of a transition is also a factor in adaptability (Schlossberg, 1981). A change that is viewed as permanent is perceived differently than a change that is viewed as temporary (p. 9). A transition that is painful and/or unpleasant may be more easily tolerated if an individual is assured of a limited duration (p. 9). For a permanent change, if the individual perceives the transition as desirable, then the perceived permanency of the change results in reassurance (p. 9). The greatest degree of stress is related to uncertainty of duration, and Schlossberg cited the example of having an illness with an unknown cause or prognosis and that may be more stressful than having a diagnosis . . . even for a terminal illness (p. 9).

Degree of stress. The final characteristic of a transition is the degree of stress involved for the individual (Schlossberg, 1981). Any change, positive or negative, gain or loss, causes some stress (p. 9). An interesting note from Schlossberg et al. (1989) was that, in general, during a time that is non-stressful, people can often determine many options to a given situation; however, during a period of stress or in the middle of a transition, people often freeze and can only see one option (p. 96). This greatly affects a person's ability to cope!

Factors affecting adaptation: Characteristics of pretransition and posttransition environments.

Interpersonal Support Systems. Schlossberg (1981) stated that interpersonal support systems are essential to successful adaptation. Interpersonal support systems are comprised of intimate relationships, the family unit, and the network of friends (p. 10). Intimate relationships involve trust, support, understanding, and the sharing of confidences (p. 10). A family unit has been defined by focusing on the bonds of coherence and unity, common interests, affection, and a sense of economic interdependence (p. 11). Family unit support has been associated with easing transitions and less stress (p. 11). Schlossberg et al. (1989) asserted that male students who believed their spouses were supportive did not think in terms of household duties (usually because the wife was already doing that), but rather in terms of the wife being willing to make few demands of their time or attention, allowing them the freedom to fulfill the student role (p. 105). Schlossberg (1981) described the network of friends as an important social support system that can cushion a sudden shock, as friends can draw together for mutual support and comfort, often helping the individual through the first grim period.

Schlossberg et al.'s (1989) reported that male students stated that friends did not enter into the picture, whereas female students stated their friends were generally supportive—however, neither male nor female students considered friend support significant enough to mention without being specifically asked (p. 105).

Institutional support systems. Schlossberg (1981) wrote that institutional support systems include occupational organizations, religious institutions, political groups, social welfare, or other community groups. Individuals may seek support from a variety of sources and ritual occasions that mark a particular transition, such as weddings and funerals often represent an institutional support system (p. 11).

Physical setting. Schlossberg (1981) asserted that physical setting is a broad category. Physical setting can include climate, weather, urban or rural location, neighborhood, living arrangements, and workplace (p. 11). Although many studies have been conducted regarding personal space, crowding behavior, and sensory deprivation, according to Schlossberg the most important dimensions are comfort, privacy, and aesthetics (p. 12).

Factors affecting adaptation: Characteristics of the individual.

Psychosocial competence. Psychosocial competence is divided into three areas: self-attitude, world attitude, and behavioral attitude (Schlossberg, 1981). Self attitude is comprised of a moderately favorable self-evaluation (self-esteem and a sense of personal worth), an internal locus of control (belief that one's actions have some causal relation to one's life), and a sense of responsibility (p. 12). World attitude was defined as optimism (or hope) and moderate trust—the feeling that what is desired is also possible (p. 12). The behavioral attitude is defined as an active coping orientation, high initiative, realistic goal

setting, substantial planning, capacity of enjoying success, response to suffering failure, and the ability to learn from both successes and failures (p. 12).

Sex (and sex-role identification). Schlossberg (1981) reported males and females are socialized to different attitudes and behaviors. The degree to which a male or a female internalizes these norms influences his or her ability to adapt (p. 13). An example she used was that in our society men are taught to hide their emotions while women are allowed greater freedom to express emotion (p. 13). Therefore, women may have greater capacity for intimacy which allows them to adapt to transitions easier (p. 13).

Age and (life stage). Schlossberg (1981) asserted that most experts agree that chronological age is not as important as biological age, psychological age, social age, and functional age. Biological and physiological changes occur continuously over a person's lifetime and may be regarded as transitions; the most notable are puberty and menopause (p. 13). Life stage may be more useful than chronological age regarding transitions (p. 13). Stressors for younger individuals may be higher than for those who are middle aged or older (p. 13). As an individual ages, subtle factors cause changes in perspective and satisfaction (e.g., the realization that one has not accomplished as much as one would like, or thinking in terms of years left to live rather than years since birth) (p. 13).

State of health. State of health may assist an individual in the adaptation process or it may be a cause of stress such as if the person is in ill health (Schlossberg, 1981). Health may be assessed subjectively and objectively, how a person perceived his or her health may be different than from a medical diagnosis (p. 14). An individual may be a health pessimist, a health realist, or a health optimist (p. 14). Individuals' perspectives

will affect how they adapt to a transition and whether their health is a resource or a deficit (p. 14).

Race/ethnicity. Schlossberg (1981) reported that the effects of a person's race/ethnicity are mediated by other factors such as value orientation and cultural norms. Schlossberg cited examples, such as if an individual's racial/ethnic background emphasizes extended family that person will probably have more interpersonal support, assisting with adaptation (p. 14). However, if a person's racial/ethnic background is more isolated, that person will probably have more difficulty adapting to a transition (p. 14).

Socioeconomic status. Schlossberg (1981) noted that socioeconomic status is measured in numerous ways: income, occupation, education, and sometimes in a combination of these factors. Higher levels of stress may be associated with lower socioeconomic status (p. 14). For example, lower-income families may find adaptation more difficult than a middle class family during times of economic hardship as they are restricted in income, health, energy, space, and ideas for coping with transition (p. 14).

Value orientation. An individual's basic values and benefits may assist with adapting to change (Schlossberg, 1981). Religious belief was an example stated by Schlossberg of value orientation (p. 15). An additional source of value orientation may include a strong commitment to an ideology or cause (p. 15). An example Schlossberg listed was draft dodgers who moved to Canada not to escape from a difficult situation, but for ideological reasons (p. 15). She further added that these individuals were more likely to adapt than those who moved to Canada to escape or seek adventure (p. 15).

Previous experience with a transition of a similar nature. Schlossberg (1981) stated that experts agree that an individual who has successfully adapted to a certain

transition in the past will probably be successful to adapting to similar transitions in the future. The same is true for an individual who has not successfully adapted to a situation in the past; he or she will most likely be more vulnerable and less able to cope in the future (p. 15). The experience to some degree sets the person's mental state and if the past experience was negative, then the mental state may become a self-fulfilling prophecy (p. 15).

The 4 S's

Coping is generally referred to as the typical style in which an individual responds to a stressful situation (Morris et al., 2003, p. 2). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) elaborated that coping is a behavior that protects individuals from being harmed psychologically, in other words, things people do to avoid being harmed by life strains (p. 2). The Transition Theory is based on the "4 *S*'s"—a system designed to assist individuals in understanding change. This system is often referred to as "taking stock" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 49; Evans et al., 1998, p. 111). The taking stock process involves determining an individual's resources, i.e. "your situation, your supports, your self, and your strategies" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 49).

- Situation (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 51; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 17) refers to how an individual views the transition. Does the individual perceive the transition as positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired or dreaded? How does the individual perceive the timing of the transition? Is this the "best time" for the transition, the "worst time," "on time," or "off

schedule?" Another factor to consider is whether the individual perceives the transition as voluntary or imposed.

- Self (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 60; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 17) defines what type of strengths and weaknesses the individual brings to the transition. "Self" considers what previous experience the individual has, does he or she believe there are options, does the individual feel a sense of control and does the person consider himself or herself an optimist and resilient?

- Support (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 55; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 18) shows sources of support available to the person in transition. Support could be from a spouse or partner, family member(s), friend(s), co-worker(s), neighbor(s), organization(s), or institution(s). Sources of support can be both positive and negative, such as, is the individual getting what she or he "needs" from the source of support, or is the source of support more of a "hindrance" to the individual during the transition?

- Strategies (as described by Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 66; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5; Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 18) involve questions such as whether an individual uses more than one coping strategy, can the individual creatively cope by changing the way he or she views the situation, can the individual manage his or her emotions/reactions to the stress of the transition, and is the person flexible?

According to Chickering and Schlossberg (1995), the 4 S System rests on several assumptions; first, there is not one <u>single</u> factor that is necessary in order to cope with change (p. 51). Second, each individual has a balance of resources and deficits for facing transitions (p. 51). According to Champagne and Petitpas (1989), an individual's ability to adapt to transitions depends on the balance of assets and liabilities the individual has in his or her coping resources (p. 266). Next, the individual's potential resources and deficits are not permanent, but change over time (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 51). Last, there are things that the individual can do to turn deficits into resources (p. 51).

According to Goodman et al. (2006), events or transitions fall into three categories: anticipated, unanticipated, or a non-event. An anticipated event is one that occurs predictably, an unanticipated event is one that is not scheduled, and a non-event is a transition that is expected to occur, but does not (pp. 34-35). Evans et al. (1998) stated that the individual's appraisal of the transition is also a factor in the coping process. These authors declared that an individual's view of the transition as being "positive, negative, or irrelevant" affected how the individual coped with the transition and that the primary appraisal of the situation may change as the individual moves through the transition (p. 113). Therefore, participants were asked during the interview to describe the initial circumstances when they enrolled in college, such as, was the enrollment something that was planned and looked forward to or was the enrollment the result of life circumstances, i.e., injury, divorce, or career related and viewed as thrust upon the participant or perceived as a negative transition.

Goodman et al. (2006) wrote that "We all hear clients who state, 'I'm a pessimist and always see the glass as half empty,' or 'I'm usually up for change but this one really knocked me out'" (p. 65). The last area of Schlossberg's Transition Theory that was incorporated into this study was the idea that individuals move through the transition process by phases, termed "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 1, 73, 233; Evans et al., 1998, p. 111; Goodman et al., 2006, p. 166).

Moving in can be associated with a person being confronted with a transition or change; moving through is related to how the individual copes with the transition or change—be it successfully or unsuccessfully. Moving in is the process of leaving behind one known context and entering into a new one (Komives & Brown, n.d., p. 4).

Moving through follows the moving in process and this is where the day-to-day management begins (Komives & Brown, n.d.). According to Komives and Brown, this process may be short (a two week seminar) or it may be longer (four years of college) or it may be a lifetime (marriage) (p. 5). Additionally, the moving through process may require tasks be completed and decisions made, as well as a developmental process (p. 5). An example that Komives and Brown cited was that a traditional-aged student attending college may address the following areas when moving through the college transition: choosing a major, time management, developing mature relationships, and finding one's place in the community (p. 5).

Moving out can be associated with the passing or end of the change or transition. Komives and Brown (n.d.) associated the moving out process with the end of a cycle or transition in which the individual asks "where do I go from here?" (p. 5). Generally

speaking, the moving out process is also the beginning of a new moving in process (p. 7).

For example, graduation may indicate the moving out of phase of college and starting a

new job may be beginning of the moving in phase.

The concept of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" was

particularly relevant to this study, because all participants have passed through these

three stages and the researcher was looking for a common theme among the participants.

Chapter Summary

Material in this chapter reviewed (a) the rationale for the study, (b) the purpose of

the study, (c) background information on nontraditional students, focusing on profile,

transitional events, concerns, motivation, degree completion, obstacles, perceived role,

and class status; and (d) information on Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

There are many factors that affect how well an individual adapts to a transition.

Additionally, one needs to understand the meaning of a transition for a particular

individual and to consider the context, type and impact of the transition (Evans et al.,

1998, p. 112). Characteristics associated with the transition include: role change, affect,

source, timing, onset, and duration (Schlossberg, 1981). Characteristics of the

environment include: internal support systems (intimate relationships, family, and

friends), institutional supports, and the physical setting (p. 10). Characteristics of the

individual include psychosocial competence, sex (and sex-role), age, state of health,

race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, value orientation, and previous experience (p. 12).

Additionally, all transitions are associated with a certain amount of stress (p. 9).

Individuals move through the transition process through a series of phases, termed

"moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995,

pp. 1, 73, 233; Evans et al., 1998, p. 111; Goodman et al., 2006, p. 166; Komives & Brown, n.d., p. 4). Schlossberg identified four major sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition known as the "4 S's": situation, self, support, and strategies (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 51; Evans et al., 1998, p. 113; Goodman et al., 2006, p. 55; Komives & Brown, n.d., p. 4; Leibowitz et al., 1991, p. 44; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, p. 60; Schlossberg, 1990, p. 5) This study focused on nontraditional male students, while incorporating aspects of Schlossberg's Transition Theory through direct questioning and looking for patterns that emerged from the participant's interviews.

In the next chapter the researcher will discuss the methods used in this study—purpose of the study, research design rationale, sampling procedures, recruitment of participants, data collection, data analysis, and verification procedures. Additionally, phenomenology is explained.

Chapter 3

Methods

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out of a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree described their perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. Although previous research identifies multiple issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of the information focuses on females. This study was important because it complemented the current literature and added the perspective of males to the research base. This perspective was valuable as the number of males attaining bachelor degrees has been declining since 1991 (Mortenson, 2007, p. 12).

Introduction

The grand tour question of this study was: In retrospect, how does a nontraditional male student who dropped out of college prior to earning his baccalaureate degree describe his situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process? This question was explored using a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is the study of the shared meaning of a similar experience or situation by individuals (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449) that allows a researcher to determine how ordinary members of society determine meaning in the world around them and how they make meaning of social interactions (Creswell, 1998, p. 53). This methodology summary describes the rationale for the choice of the study design,

phenomenology, sampling procedures, recruitment of participants, data collection, data analysis, and verification procedures.

Rationale

Creswell (1998) listed eight reasons why or when qualitative research should be selected as a research design. Five of the eight fit this study. They include: (a) the research question asks how or what, (b) a topic needs explored, (c) there is a need to present a detailed view of the topic, (d) to study individuals in their natural setting, and (e) to emphasize the researcher's role as an active learner (pp. 17-18). Additionally, qualitative research is best applied when little is known about the problem and a detailed understanding of the central phenomenon is desired (Creswell, 2005, p. 45).

Though all qualitative studies revolve around participant perspectives to some degree, a phenomenological study focuses much more on the consciousness of human experiences (McMillan, 2004, p. 274). Using a phenomenological research design allows the researcher to understand the essence of the phenomenon from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 239). In this particular study the phenomenon is dropping out of college. Additionally, Plano-Clark and Creswell stated that using a phenomenological design is useful when little is known about the meaning of the phenomenon (p. 239). The researcher discovered numerous studies regarding nontraditional females and baccalaureate degree attainment, as well as the barriers, motivation, support, and roles nontraditional females perceive while in pursuit of their degree. However, this particular research study was investigating nontraditional males and baccalaureate degree attainment (or barriers to degree

attainment), and failed to uncover substantial literature…meaning there is little known about the phenomenon of nontraditional males completing bachelor degrees.

Phenomenology is focused on understanding the participants' voices. "This can be stated directly, as in 'What is the essence of meaning behind student conferences with counselors?' or less directly, as in 'What is the relationship between a school counselor and student really like?'"(McMillan, 2004, p. 274). The participants in a phenomenological study are selected because they have lived the experiences being investigated, are willing to share their thoughts about the experiences, and can articulate their conscious experiences (Donalek, 2004, p. 6). Using this approach assumes that all selected participants have a unique experience of the phenomenon (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 238). Participants in this study had all experienced the same phenomenon, but were asked to share their conscious experiences within the frame of Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

According to Plano-Clark and Creswell (2010), there are four key characteristics of phenomenological research: (a) when the researcher's purpose is to determine the essence of a single phenomenon; (b) when the researcher sets aside individual experiences regarding the phenomenon and collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (c) when the researchers analyzes the data for significant statements and meaning regarding the phenomenon; and, (d) when the researcher reports themes, descriptions, and the essence of the phenomenon (p. 239). All four of these key characteristics applied to this study. Additionally, phenomenology was an appropriate qualitative method for this study because of the ability to interview participants, probing

for specific and in-depth information, which allowed the researcher to explore the central phenomenon from the perspective of those who were closest to the phenomenon.

Phenomenology

All research methods are grounded in certain philosophical beliefs (Donalek, 2004, p. 6). Qualitative research represents a diverse set of philosophies and human sciences, representing disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy (Maggs-Rapport, 2001, p. 375). Phenomenology originates from the 20th century philosophical movements (Donalek, 2004, p. 6) in Germany before the First World War (Dowling, 2004, p. 31). Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is credited with the development of phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004, p. 3; Maggs-Rapport, 2001, p. 376; Orleans, n.d., p. 1; Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 239). According to Maggs-Rapport (2001), Husserl argued that consciousness is unavoidable; whether or not its presence is acknowledged, its presence is felt (p. 376). Phenomenology is defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (n.d.) as "the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view." Phenomenology is concerned with objective phenomenon—facts, feelings, concepts, dreams, sensations, and thoughts (Maggs-Rapport, 2001, p. 376). Another distinction regarding phenomenology is that phenomenologists believe persons cannot be detached from their own presuppositions (Groenewald, 2004, p. 7), and therefore the researcher should acknowledge all biases and beliefs regarding the phenomenon through "bracketing" (Dowling, 2004, p. 32; Maggs-Rapport, 2001, p. 377; Orleans, n.d., p. 2; Owen, 1994, p. 3).

Phenomenology focuses on an individual's lived experiences and seeks to find commonalities or shared meaning (Dowling, 2004, 31). Owen (1994) asserted that

phenomenology gives equal attention to the personal and social meanings of life—

something that is often missing in quantitative research (p. 2). Utilizing this research

method for this study is a good match, as the researcher is investigating how

nontraditional male dropouts perceive the transitions prior, during, and after enrollment,

as well as how they coped with each transition regarding their situation, self, support, and

strategies. Furthermore, phenomenology is often used when little is known about a

subject or the subject content is sensitive (Donalek, 2004, p. 6). In this particular study,

little was known about why nontraditional males do not complete their bachelor's degree

and much of the information may be considered "sensitive," as the reasons for leaving a

postsecondary institution could be personal, traumatic, embarrassing, or a myriad of other

possibilities. Interviewing is the primary technique for gathering data in

phenomenological studies. Groenewald (2004) stated that the qualitative interview is

literally an "inter view" or an interchange of views between two people with a common

interest (p. 13). Additionally, Edward (2006) asserted that phenomenological inquiry

allows participants' knowledge to be considered data (p. 1).

Research Instrument and Tool

The researcher's role in conducting this study was as a key instrument. Creswell

(2009) stated that qualitative researchers collect data themselves, they do not tend to rely

on questionnaires or instruments developed by others (p. 175). Qualitative researchers

use a protocol, but they are the ones who are actually examining documents, observing

behavior, or interviewing participants (p. 175). For this study, an Interview Protocol

(Appendix E) was used to insure that questions asked during the interview process were

consistent among participants. However, the Interview Protocol was designed to be

flexible and allowed for open-ended responses relevant to the phenomenon. The Interview Protocol was piloted on four nontraditional male students who did not complete their bachelor's degree and had been enrolled at some point during the two calendar years prior to the onset of the study. Participants for the pilot study were selected because they met the study criteria, they were available to meet with the researcher, and they were not eligible for the study due to a previous academic affiliation. Two of the interviews in the pilot study were conducted as a mock interview; the participants were asked for feedback and suggestions at the end. The few changes to the initial Interview Protocol included the placement of one question on the Interview Protocol and the addition of one question to the Participant Pre-survey. The other two pilot interviews were conducted as a mock interview in order to determine the flow and flexibility of the Interview Protocol, as well as the approximate length of time needed to conduct the interview. From these two interviews it was determined that the flow of the Interview Protocol worked well and approximately an hour was needed for the interview. Additionally, the researcher determined the microphone on the recorder worked exceptionally well and a quieter public meeting place would need to be found.

Methodological Procedure

Purposeful Sampling

In order to complete the study, it was necessary to have a reliable means of contacting potential participants. Homogeneous and criterion sampling were used to select participants. In criterion sampling all participants meet a common criterion (Creswell, 1998, p. 118). Homogeneous sampling is when participants share a common experience, and criterion sampling is useful for quality assurance and is essential for a

phenomenological study (p. 118). After Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was

secured from both UNL and the cooperating institution, I requested a list of

undergraduate male student names' from the Registrar and Office of Institutional

Research with the following criteria:

1. undergraduate male students had enrolled in a four year bachelor's program;

2. had attended at some point during the last two calendar years;

3. had not received a bachelor's degree;

4. had completed institutional information: the student's ID number, last term of

   attendance, major, college affiliation, grade level; and,

5. had specific contact information: last known address, phone number, and

   email address.

The cooperating institution provided the researcher with a list of male students

who had enrolled and attended between January 2007 and April 2009. This list contained

1,771 names. However, because the spring 2009 semester was not over, the Institutional

Research Office could only identify male students who had enrolled and attended during

that semester; they were not able to determine if the male student had or had not

withdrawn from the institution. After reviewing the names of the students with a last term

of attendance listed as spring 2009, it was determined that the majority of those students

were currently enrolled and continuing their education and therefore, not eligible for the

study. As a result, the pool of potential participants included 838 male students who had

attended between January 2007 and December 2008 and were on record as not returning

and not completing a bachelor's degree. Eight names were eliminated because they were

international students and no longer resided in the United States, three additional names

were eliminated from the list because they participated in the pilot study, and one additional name was deleted due to being a female student. The final pool of potential participants consisted of 826 names.

Recruitment of Participants

An Introductory Letter (see Appendix A) and Participant Pre-survey (see Appendix B) was mailed to each of the 826 potential participants, along with a postage paid return envelope on April 21, 2009. The Introductory Letter stated a submission deadline of May 22, 2009 for participation in the study. Additionally, envelopes were printed with an address service request so if there was a new address for the recipient the researcher would be notified.

After one week, six completed surveys were received, two responses from respondents stating they were enrolled at another institution, one response that the respondent was active duty and stationed in Iraq, 89 notifications of a new address but that the letter had been forwarded, 27 letters that were undeliverable but had a new address listed, and 92 letters that were undeliverable. The 27 letters that were returned as undeliverable but had a new address were re-sent to the new address listed by the Postal Service.

Due to the exceptionally low rate of return, an email reminder was sent on April 28, 2009, to 674 potential participants. The email was sent to the last known email address on record with the cooperating institution.

```
826    potential participants
 -6    completed survey
 -3    not eligible (transferred to another institution, active duty)
-92    undeliverable (did not receive the survey, so nothing to remind them of)
-51    no email address listed
674    email reminders
```

Of the 674 emails sent, 52 bounced back.

By May 4, 2009, 9 additional completed surveys were received—for a total of 15. Five potential participants responded they were enrolled at another institution, two responded they had earned their bachelor degree from a different institution, one survey was returned listing the recipient as deceased, 16 letters were returned as undeliverable, 14 notifications of a new address but that the letter had been forwarded, and one notification of undeliverable but a new address (the letter was resent).

Because of the low response rate (1.8%), four callers were hired to phone 633 potential participants that had not responded to the request for participation. Callers received 30 minutes of training including background information on the study, who they were calling and why, a list of names and contact information, as well as two scripts— one for leaving a message (Appendix F) and one if someone answered the phone (Appendix G). Callers phoned 633 potential participants from 6:00 pm-8:00 pm on May 4 and 5, 2009. In response to phone calls soliciting participation in the study, 20 completed surveys were submitted (for a total of 35), one respondent stated he was enrolled at another institution, two respondents stated they had obtained their bachelor degree from another institution, one respondent was in the process of re-enrolling at the cooperating institution, 14 requested another Introductory Letter and Participant Pre-survey be mailed, and 39 potential participants requested the Introductory Letter and Participant Pre-survey be emailed to them.

As Participant Pre-surveys were received, each survey was reviewed to determine if the respondent was eligible to participate in the study—male, enrolled within the last two calendar years, was pursuing a bachelor's degree but did not graduate, and was a nontraditional student. Participant Pre-surveys were further analyzed to determine the level of nontraditionalism (one characteristic—minimally nontraditional, two or three characteristics—moderately nontraditional, and four or more characteristics—highly nontraditional). As of May 12, 2009, the following Participant Pre-surveys had been received:

11	Not eligible (did not meet nontraditional criteria, still enrolled, graduated, etc)
7	Minimally Nontraditional
9	Moderately Nontraditional
<u>10</u>	Highly Nontraditional
37	Participant Pre-surveys

However, there were 69 potential participants that had indicated when called on May 4 or 5, 2009, they were willing to participate.

On May 12 and 13, 2009, the researcher called the 69 potential participants that had indicated they would be willing to participate but had not submitted the Participant Pre-survey. This effort resulted in 13 returned Participant Pre-surveys, 14 potential participants requesting the Introductory Letter and Participant Pre-survey be emailed to them, three requested another Introductory Letter and Participant Pre-survey be mailed, two Introductory Letter and Participant Pre-survey were hand delivered, and two respondents were enrolled at another institution.

By the listed deadline date of May 22, 2009, the following Participant Pre-surveys had been received:

11	Not eligible (did not meet nontraditional criteria, still enrolled, graduated, etc)
16	Minimally Nontraditional
16	Moderately Nontraditional
<u>16</u>	Highly Nontraditional
59	Participant Pre-surveys

Respondents in the Highly Nontraditional group were contacted for interviews. Respondents that were not eligible were thanked by written correspondence and notified they were not eligible for the study (Appendix H), while the Minimal (Appendix I) and Moderate (Appendix J) group were thanked for their time and notified that at this time interviews would be conducted with the Highly Nontraditional group.

Number of Participants

Because the researcher was interested in exploring how a nontraditional male who dropped out of college prior to earning his baccalaureate degree described his situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process, thick, rich descriptions of their experiences needed to be obtained. All 16 of the Highly Nontraditional participants were contacted and asked if they were willing to be interviewed. Fourteen of the 16 agreed.

Research Participation

Criterion sampling was met. Criteria for inclusion consisted of:

1. The participants only included males.

2. The participants met four or more nontraditional criteria to be included in the study.

3. The participants were enrolled in an undergraduate degree program authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965.

4. The participants were enrolled within the last two calendar years with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree.

5. The participants dropped out before obtaining bachelor's degree.

The sample was homogeneous as all participants had shared a common experience: enrolled at the cooperating institution to pursue a bachelor's degree and dropping out before obtaining the degree. The study was limited to Highly Nontraditional participants because the researcher believed they would have the most interesting stories.

Ethical Issues

This study was approved both by the Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, and by the cooperating institution (see Appendix F and G). After greeting a participant, the participant was asked to choose a pseudonym. For the entire interview the participant was referred to by the pseudonym. This allowed anonymity for the participant in all aspects of the study. Data collected were sensitive, pertaining to grades, family, and life situations.

Data Collection

Nine of the 14 interviews were conducted at a local restaurant, three were phone interviews, one was conducted at the participant's place of employment, and the remaining interview was conducted at the participant's parents' home. Five steps were followed before each interview. First, introductions were made, and then casual conversation to put the participant at ease (how are you, weather, would you like something to drink, etc.). Second, each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym. Third, in accordance with IRB policy each participant was given a Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix D) explaining the participant's rights, permission to audio record the

interview, and permission to obtain the participant's academic transcript from the cooperating institution. Participants interviewed over the phone were emailed a Letter of Informed Consent and then asked if they had received the Letter of Informed Consent, reviewed the letter, understood the letter, if they agreed to be recorded, and if they allowed the researcher to obtain their transcript. Next, each participant was asked the 76 questions from the Interview Protocol. Lastly, at the end of the interview the participant was given a $10 gift card for participating in the study. On average, interviews lasted one hour to a maximum of an hour and a half.

Data Analysis

In analyzing data collected in the tradition of phenomenology, it is essential to follow accepted procedures. The procedures ensure that the findings reveal valid, usable information. Creswell (1998) stated in the book *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Traditions*,

> The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon. The researcher then finds statements (in the interviews) about how individuals are experiencing the topic, lists out these significant statements (horizonalization of the data) and treats each statement as having an equal worth, and works to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements. These statements are then grouped into meaning units, the researcher lists these units. (Creswell, 1998, p. 149)

All interviews were recorded in their entirety and transcribed verbatim. A professional transcriptionist was used and a confidentiality agreement was signed. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy. Each participant was contacted and asked if he would like to review the transcripts for accuracy and to ensure the meaning/intention of his words and answers was conveyed. Allowing participants to review, edit, and/or amend their responses assisted with data credibility. Ten of the 14 participants reviewed and approved

their transcripts, one declined to review his transcript, and the remaining three were sent their transcripts but did not respond in any manner. Of the 10 that chose to review their transcripts, other than grammatical corrections by one participant, there were no content changes.

The data were analyzed on an individual basis. Each transcript was reviewed individually. The first reading was to get a sense of the data, the participant, and the situation, as recommended by Creswell (2009). Each transcript was read twice; noting general thoughts about the data were noted in the left hand margin (p. 185). Each transcript was then re-read; the researcher focused on the notes in the margins; chunks of data or themes were noted in the right hand margin (p. 186). Next, a list of significant statements and clustered themes was created (p. 186). Transcripts were then reviewed for the clustered themes (p. 186). After all codes and themes were compiled, the data were reviewed and patterns or similarities were recorded. In order to be thorough, the researcher printed each of the 76 questions on a separate piece of paper and reviewed each participant's answer to each individual interview question; noting patterns, common words, and majority responses. Finally, the data were divided by the three phases (moving in, moving through, and moving out) with the four subcategories (situation, support, self, and strategies) in order to look for themes, patterns, and common responses specific to each phase.

Verification

Creswell and Miller (2000) defined validity as "how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (pg. 253). Validity for qualitative data does not carry the same conditions that it does for

quantitative data, nor can the results be generalized or viewed as reliable in the same way that quantitative data can (Creswell, 2003, p. 195). In order to determine if a qualitative study is accurate, believable, and trustworthy, qualitative researchers often turn to multiple forms of verification. Creswell offered eight verification procedures:

1. prolonged engagement and persistent observation;

2. triangulation (using multiple methods, theories, investigators, and sources to provide corroboration);

3. peer review or debriefing (intercoder agreement);

4. negative case analysis;

5. clarifying researcher bias;

6. member checks;

7. rich, thick description; and,

8. external audits (Creswell, 1998, p. 201; Creswell, 2003, p. 196).

For the purpose of this study, verification consisted of: (a) bracketing researcher bias; (b) rich, thick descriptions; and, (c) an external audit.

Clarifying researcher bias. Creswell (1998) asserted that clarifying researcher bias from the outset of a study is a verification technique (p. 202). In this clarification the researcher notes past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that may influence the study (p. 202). This statement was corroborated by Hatch (2002) who advised researchers to submit a self-disclosure statement detailing biases about what is being studied (p. 84). McMillan (2004) went one step further and stated that attributes of the researcher such as age, gender, race, hostility, and physical appearance may influence research results (p. 213).

Researcher's disclosure statement. The researcher for this study was a 39 year old, white female, blonde, and approximately 5'3" tall. I first enrolled in college in 1987 and attended a community college part time during my senior year of high school, completing 21 credits. In 1988, directly after graduating from high school, I transferred to a four-year, public institution. I attended as a traditional student for two years, living in the residence halls for one year and then living off campus. I had no dependents, was not married, and was considered dependent for financial aid purposes. After the spring semester 1991, I left college for a year. During that time, I married and had my first child. I returned to the same institution in August of 1992 as a nontraditional female student—I was married (now considered independent for financial aid purposes), I had a child, and I worked two jobs. My mother lived in the same town and provided free childcare, academic support in the form of study help and proof reading papers, and moral support and general encouragement. My extended family (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins) also provided encouragement and moral support. My husband was not supportive in any manner. I graduated in 1994 with two bachelor degrees.

I next enrolled in June of 2000, again as a nontraditional student, enrolled fulltime, but now separated, a single parent of two children, and employed full-time. My mother continued to provide free childcare and assistance with the children, as well as moral support and encouragement. My extended family continued to provide encouragement and moral support. My estranged husband was not supportive in any manner.

My last enrollment was in August of 2003—still a nontraditional student, enrolled part-time, but now divorced, single parent of two children, employed full-time, and

moved to another state where I had no family or friends. At the time of this writing, my extended family continues to be a source of support. Additionally, during this enrollment I got engaged and my fiancé is very supportive of my academic endeavors—proofreading papers, helping with the children, helping with household logistics, and providing endless encouragement and moral support.

I have worked in higher education since 1994. I have always worked for federal grant programs that provide academic assistance to disadvantaged students. During my employment I have heard many stories from males and females alike of the academic and financial barriers they are facing, or the challenges they are encountering from their home situation that make college a struggle, or the difficulty of attending while having children at home, and of the arduous task of balancing work, family, and school. As I have personally experienced the majority of these situations, I am often empathetic to the plight of these students. I do not believe that I favor, have a bias, subscribe to any preconceived ideas, or hold any orientations towards nontraditional students or traditional students, as at one time or another I have been a traditional student and a nontraditional student, I have been in supportive situations and unsupportive situations, and I have attended because of a desire to learn and earn a degree and I have attended to earn a degree I thought would lead me out of a bad life situation. As I have never been a male, I cannot begin to assume how a male thinks, feels, reacts, or what his needs might be. Through the interview process I can hope to develop an understanding and broaden my awareness.

Rich, thick description. According to Creswell (1998), a rich, thick description allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability based on shared

characteristics (p. 203). This is done by providing detailed accounts of the participants and the setting (p. 203). Chapter Four provides rich, thick descriptions that allow the reader to see connections and patterns. Statements and excerpts from participants are used to demonstrate meaning and corroborate findings. Often participants' words are used in the coding process (*in vivo* coding) (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). The massive amounts of data are often summarized using the participants' own words.

External audit. The last method of verification employed was an external audit. An external auditor examined both the process and the product, assessing accuracy and determined if the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data (Creswell, 1998, p. 203) (See Appendix M for comments). The external auditor was skilled in qualitative research and was not connected to the study in any way (see Appendix N for qualifications).

Appropriate sampling techniques. Purposeful sampling techniques are an additional way to add valid representation to data collection, according to Morse and Richards (2002, p. 173). Additionally, Creswell (1998) asserted that purposeful sampling is essential to a phenomenological study (p. 118). For this study, homogeneous and criterion sampling was used. The participants selected for this study were all nontraditional males who previously attended a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university as an undergraduate with the intentions of pursuing a bachelor's degree within the last two calendar years, but did not complete their education, thereby meeting the definition of homogeneous and criterion sampling for this study.

Qualitative reliability differs from validity in that reliability indicates the "researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). Morse and Richards (2002) stated simply, that reliability requires that if another researcher replicated a selected study, the same results would be obtained (p. 168). Additionally, the data for this study is considered reliable because of the extensive literature review and sampling structure. Because of the nature of qualitative research, replication is usually difficult, and may be impossible (p. 168); however, the following procedures can be used as a means of ensuring reliability for single researcher studies:

1. ensure appropriate preparation (skill/knowledge level) of the researcher;

2. ensure appropriate review of the literature (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 168);

3. coding reliability; and,

4. ensure transcripts do not contain obvious errors (Gibbs 2007, as cited by Creswell 2009, p. 190).

For the purpose of this study, all four reliability techniques were used.

Appropriate preparation (skill/knowledge level) of the researcher. Morse and Richards (2002) stated "any study is only as good as the researcher" (p. 168). This statement holds true even more so for qualitative research, as the "*researcher is the instrument*" (p. 168). Therefore, being prepared in qualitative methods prior to the undertaking of a qualitative study is essential (p. 168). The researcher for this study successfully completed doctoral level courses in qualitative methods and questionnaire

design. Additionally, the researcher was supervised by a qualified instructor through out

the process.

   Literature review. Morse and Richards (2002) addressed the need to survey

literature in order to "get a grip" on what is known and to learn where the gaps are in the

current body of knowledge. Additionally, they declared that new theory does not just

rename what has previously been reported and that as a researcher one must be able to

recognize what is already known and give credit to what was previously discovered

(p. 169). They posited that because the researcher is the instrument of collection, he or

she must be able to ensure the quality of the data, the interpretation of the data, and the

creation of the theory (p. 168). Surveying the literature allows a researcher to gain an

understanding of what information has already been studied, what information is weak,

and what has already been proven or learned (p. 169). Additionally, reviewing the

literature allows the investigator to recognize previously reported patterns and concepts

(p. 169). The literature reviewed for this study served as a "springboard" for the

researcher to investigate the needs of nontraditional male students' perceptions in

attaining a bachelor's degree and to frame the semi-structured interview questions.

   Coding reliability. Creswell (2009) wrote that ensuring that there is not a shift or

change in meaning for codes is a reliability procedure (p. 190). To ensure there is not a

drift in coding, the researcher must constantly compare the data with the codes, writing

notes and definitions about the codes (p. 190). Transcripts were reviewed in their entirety

six times. First a general reading; then each transcript was re-read twice, noting general

thoughts about the data (p. 185). During the fourth reading, the researcher looked for

chunks of data or themes, noting the general thoughts about the data (p. 186). Next, a list

of significant statements and clustered themes was created (p. 186). The researcher then reviewed each transcript looking for the clustered themes, separating the data out by themes (p. 186). After all codes and themes were compiled, data was reviewed for patterns or similarities. Each of the 76 interview questions was then printed on a separate piece of paper. Participant responses to each interview question were reviewed by individual interview question. Finally, data and codes were reviewed according to the three phases (moving in, moving through, and moving out) and the 4 S's (situation, support, self, and strategies).

Insure transcripts do not contain obvious errors. Each participant was contacted and asked if he would like to review the transcripts for accuracy and to ensure the meaning/intention of his words and answers was conveyed. Allowing participants to review, edit, and/or amend their responses added reliability to the study. Ten of the 14 participants reviewed and approved their transcripts, one declined to review his transcript, and the remaining three were sent their transcripts but did not respond to the researcher by the given deadline. Of the 10 that chose to review their transcripts, one participant indicated two grammar changes.

Creswell (1998) recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two verification procedures (p. 203). By using three verification techniques additional credibility is implied.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the researcher discussed the methods used in this exploratory phenomenological study. Phenomenology is the study of experiences from the first person point of view, a method that focuses on individuals' lived experiences and then

seeks to find commonalities or shared meanings from the investigated experience (Dowling, 2004, p. 31). The chosen data collection method was homogeneous and criterion sampling, as all participants needed to have had a similar experience (e.g., attending college) in order to share their perception of the experience. Initially, 826 former students met part of the sampling requirements: undergraduate, male, enrolled within the last two calendar years at the cooperating institution, pursuing a bachelor's degree, and did not graduate with a bachelor's degree. All potential participants were sent correspondence regarding the study and three follow attempts were made. All participants were interviewed in a comfortable, neutral location or by phone, and participants were asked to review their transcripts (transcribed verbatim) for accuracy. Each transcript was reviewed, coded and a list of themes was created. Next, all codes and themes were compiled, and transcripts were reviewed for patterns.

The last section discussed verification. For this study verification procedures consisted of: identifying researcher bias; rich, thick descriptions; and, an external audit. Reliability procedures consisted of: an extensive literature review; and homogeneous and criterion sampling. In the next chapter the researcher presents a summary of the participants, their demographic and academic data; findings (or themes), presented by sub-category; and, recurring themes that emerged.

Chapter 4

Portrait of Participants and Synopsis of Responses

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out of a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree described their perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. Although previous research identifies multiple issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of the information focuses on females. This study was important because it complemented the current literature and added the perspective of males to the research base. This perspective was valuable as the number of males attaining bachelor degrees has been declining since 1991 (Mortenson, 2007, p. 12).

Introduction

Fourteen participants were interviewed for this study. In the following chapter the researcher will discuss a summary of the participants, the findings related to the grand tour question and sub-questions, and an identification and documentation of recurring themes. Demographic and academic data for each participant included: age, ethnicity, marital status at the time of enrollment, number of children under the age of 18 that resided in the home with the participant for at least six months during a calendar year, gross wages at the time of enrollment, grade level at the time of college departure, total credits earned, cumulative GPA, number of times the participant enrolled in college, and the last semester attended.

Summary Portrayal of the Participants

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 57. The two largest age brackets were 21-30 and 31-40; there were five participants in each of these brackets. There were three students in the 41-50 age bracket and one student in the 51-60 age bracket.

Twelve of the 14 participants (or 85%) were White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic). One participant (7%) was Latino and one (7%) was Native American. This sample was representative of the student body at the cooperating institution. Institutional Research reported in fall 2008 that the student body was comprised of 85% White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic), 5.1% Native American, and 3.5% Hispanic/Latino.

During their period of enrollment, all participants were in a committed relationship, 13 were married, and one was living with his girlfriend. Ten of 13 had at least one child during the time of enrollment.

The participants' incomes during their enrollment were spread through-out the state gross income brackets (see Table 2). Only one participant was considered below the poverty guidelines (Peter, with a gross income of $0-$2,300).

Six participants were freshman (0-29 credits); three participants were sophomores (30-59 credits); three participants were juniors (60-89 credits); and two participants were seniors (90+ credits). Eight of the participants had previous college experience, but for all participants their most recent enrollment was at the cooperating institution. The number of credits completed at the cooperating institution varied from 3 to 94 credits. With the exception of two participants, everyone was in good academic standing (having a GPA of 2.0 or higher).

Table 2

Participant Income Demographics

Number of Participants	State Gross Income Bracket
One	$0 - $2,300 a year
One	$2,301 – $4,600 a year
One	$4,601 - $9,200 a year
One	$9,201 - $13,800 a year
One	$13,801 - $18,400 a year
One	$18,401 - $22,900 a year
Three	$22,901 - $32,100 a year
Three	$32,101 - $45,900 a year
Four	$45,901 - $80,300 a year
One	$80,301+ per year

Table 3 displays the general demographics of age, ethnicity, marital status, number of children living in the home at the time the interview was conducted, and gross income at the time the participant was enrolled. Table 4 displays the general academic information of current grade level, total credits earned, cumulative GPA, institutional credits, institutional GPA, number of enrollments. Table 5 displays semester enrollment information.

Grand Tour Question

The grand tour question was: in retrospect, how does a nontraditional male student who dropped out of college prior to earning his baccalaureate degree describe his

Table 3

Participant's General Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Family Status	Number of Children	Gross Income
Jay	29	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	2	$32,101-$45,900
Jake	28	Latino	Married	0	$45,901-$80,300
Paul	49	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	2	$45,901-$80,300
Joe	57	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	2	$45,901-$80,300
Mark	37	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Lived with girlfriend	0	$9,201-$13,800
Richard	39	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	3	$22,901-$32,100
Rod	38	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	3	$45,901-$80,300
Mike	35	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	2	$22,901-$32,100
Nick	23	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	0	$18,401-$22,900
Scott	31	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	2	$32,101-$45,900
Andrew	30	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	3	$32,101-$45,900
Peter	29	Native American	Married	2	$0-$2,300
Allen	45	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	1	$22,901-$32,100
David	45	White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	Married	2	$80,301+

Table 4

Participant's General Academic Information

Pseudonym	Grade Level	Total Credits Earned	Cumulative GPA	Institutional Credits	Institutional GPA	Number of Enrollments
Jay	JR	87	2.97	87	2.97	2
Jake	FR	22	2.91	15	3.05	2
Paul	SO	42	3.71	34	3.74	4
Joe	FR	18	4	9	4	3
Mark	FR	12	1.66	12	1.66	1
Richard	FR	6	1.2	6	1.2	1
Rod	SO	35	2.48	13	3.76	2
Mike	JR	66	2.64	3	3	4
Nick	FR	7	2.12	7	2.12	1
Scott	SR	92	3.52	45	3.82	4
Andrew	SR	94	3.18	94	3.18	4
Peter	JR	71	3	71	3	2
Allen	FR	6	4	6	4	2
David	SO	55	2.07	27	2.47	6

Table 5

Participant's General Academic Information

Pseudonym	Enrolled Spring 2007	Spring 2007 # of Credits	Spring 2007 GPA	Enrolled Summer 2007	Summer 2007 # of Credits	Summer 2007 GPA	Enrolled Fall 2007	Fall 2007 # of Credits	Fall 2007 GPA	Enrolled Spring 2008	Spring 2008 # of Credits	Spring 2008 GPA	Enrolled Summer 2008	Summer 2008 # of Credits	Summer 2008 GPA	Enrolled Fall 2008	Fall 2008 # of Credits	Fall 2008 GPA	Enrolled Spring 2009
Jay	Yes	14	2.85	No			No			No			No			No			No
Jake	Yes	15	3.66	No			Yes	3	0	No			No			No			No
Paul	Yes	3	3.3	No			Yes	6	4	Yes	3	4	No			No			No
Joe	Yes	3	4	No			No			No			No			No			No
Mark	No			No			No			No			Yes	6	3	Yes	12	0.76	No
Richard	No			No			No			Yes	13	1.2	Yes	3	WD	No			No
Rod	No			No			Yes	13	3.76	No			No			No			No
Mike	Yes	3	3	No			No			No			No			No			No
Nick	Yes	7	2.12	No			No			No			No			No			No
Scott	Yes	10	3.43	No			No			No			No			No			No
Andrew	Yes	4	2.5	No			Yes	6	WD	No			No			Yes	4	3	Yes
Peter	Yes	3	WD	No			No			No			No			No			No
Allen	No			Yes	3	4	No			No			No			No			No
David	No			No			No			Yes	3	0	No			No			No

situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process?

Participants described their college experiences positively, and nine participants would like to return at some point. The situation, support, self, and strategies were in place and their assets (strength/success factors) outweighed their liabilities (detrimental factors), so they could/should have been successful. In the end, most participants left because of an external factor, rather than any reason tied to the cooperating institution. Participants acknowledged they had a choice in whether to stay or drop out and accepted responsibility for their decisions. For each participant, after an informal cost/benefit analysis, a college degree was determined to not be worth X (job promotion, career opportunity, loss of time—at work, with family, for leisure activities, etc.).

Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory

The researcher based the study on Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The three phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out, provide a conceptual framework of the study. The three phases are tempered by the 4 S's: situation, support, self and strategies. In order to determine if there were patterns or similarities among the participants, transcripts were reviewed, analyzed, and coded in their entirety and by individual interview question. Responses from each participant were analyzed and coded by individual interview question, then the interview questions were grouped by phase (moving in, moving through, and moving out) and by the 4 S's (situation, support, self and strategies). Each phase has a corresponding table broken down by each of the 4S's. If the participant answered positively to the question, the answer was indicated with a ✔ , and if the participant answered negatively (or stated there was an absence of the item in

question), the answer was indicated with a ▤ . In some cases the participant's answer

may have been neutral or indifferent, as indicated with a [I] on the chart, or the

answer may not have been applicable and is indicated with a ▆ on the chart. The

final section presents recurring themes that were present through-out participants' entire

interviews and not related to just one sub-category.

Moving In

Sub-research question one was: Dealing with each of the four S's, how do

nontraditional males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to

enrollment)?

Situation. Most (11 of 14) nontraditional males interviewed described their

situation when moving in as positive and that the timing was "good" for them to attend

(9 of 14). Five participants indicated that it was not a good time for them to go to college.

One was attending due to an injury that forced him to leave his current occupation;

however, the reasons the other four participants listed could have only been determined

after attending, such as not being academically prepared or not having the time to attend;

otherwise, why would they enroll?

Table 6 is a visual display of the participants' responses to sub-question one:

Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving in

process (the period of time prior to enrollment); specifically, the first S, situation.

Support. All participants listed someone as immediate family; the most common

answer was wife and children (10 of 14). Table 7 is a visual display of the participants'

responses to sub-question one: Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional

Table 6

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving In, Situation

	SITUATION		
Pseudonym	**Interview Question: Moving In 1a** When you enrolled in college, was the timing right for you to go to college?	**Interview Question: Moving In 1c** How far in advance did you decide to go to college before you enrolled?	**Interview Question: Moving In 1d** How did you view your initial enrollment in college? Was it positive, negative, or you didn't really think about it?
Jay	Asset	Asset	Asset
Jake	Asset	Liability	Liability
Paul	Asset	Asset	Asset
Joe	Liability	Liability	Asset
Mark	Liability	Liability	Asset
Richard	Asset	Asset	Asset
Rod	Liability	Liability	Asset
Mike	Asset	Liability	Neutral (I)
Nick	Liability	Asset	Asset
Scott	Asset	Not Applicable	Asset
Andrew	Asset	Asset	Asset
Peter	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable
Allen	Asset	Liability	Asset
David	Liability	Not Applicable	Asset

Legend: ✔ Asset   ▤ Liability   **I** Neutral   ■ Not Applicable

Table 7

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving In, Support

Pseudonym	Interview Question: Moving In 2a — Tell me about your family.	Interview Question: Moving In 2b — What did your family think about you enrolling in college?	Interview Question: Moving In 2b, i — In what ways was your family supportive?	Interview Question: Moving In 2b, ii — In what ways was your family not supportive?	Interview Question: Moving In 2c — Did you discuss what enrolling in college would mean for the family?	Interview Question: Moving In 2d — What did your friends think about you enrolling in college?	Interview Question: Moving In 2e,i — In general, how important to you is agreement?	Interview Question: Moving In 2e,ii — In general, how important to you is assistance?	Interview Question: Moving In 2e,iii — In general, how important to you is affection?	Interview Question: Moving In 2e,iv — In general, how important to you is feedback?
Jay	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Jake	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Paul	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Joe	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Mark	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable
Richard	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Rod	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset
Mike	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Nick	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Scott	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Andrew	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Peter	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Allen	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
David	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset

✔ Asset   ▬ Liability   **I** Neutral   ■ Not Applicable

males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to enrollment); specifically, the second S, support.

While moving in, participants believed they had support from family (13 of 14) and friends (10 of 14)—this was one of the strongest areas where participants had assets to help them adapt. Thirteen of the 14 participants perceived the response from their family regarding their decision to enroll in college as positive.

> *Allen:* I think they were supportive. I think they were, you know, they were encouraging, especially later. I think at first they didn't understand why I would enroll in one intro to psychology online class you know, but I think that, as I continue to take credits, and I explained to them that I had kind of what I felt was a window where I could get into a degree program, and I think they were pulling for me. They knew the odds were long, and I think that they were pulling for me.

When asked if there were any ways in which their family was not supportive, only 2 of the 14 participants said yes, and both were related to wanting the participant's time.

Agreement, assistance, affection and feedback are related to the participant's internal support system (Komives & Brown, n.d., p. 5). Participants were asked, "In general, how important to you is: agreement (others deem your decisions as appropriate and understandable); assistance (financial assistance, assistance with children, assistance at home with household chores); affection (respect, love, caring, understanding); and, feedback (reinterpretations of situations, different perspectives, challenge or reaffirm your interpretation)?" Participants rated:

- agreement ➡ important to very important 13 of 14,
- assistance ➡ important to very important 14 of 14,
- affection ➡ important to very important 14 of 14, and
- feedback ➡ important to very important 13 of 14.

Self. Twelve of 14 participants commented they reported they felt positive about their "self" while moving in as expressed by Nick's comment.

> *Nick:* Oh, I was taking online classes, so it was a whole new experience. Actually not stepping into a classroom, not seeing a teacher, but I was excited about it, excited for the college and to start working towards something—so overall, I was excited about it, but it was a completely different experience for me.

Only half (7 of 14) could recall a previous experience that was similar in nature to attending college that they could draw from to help them through the transition. In reality, all participants have had some sort of previous experience that they should have been able to learn from, whether the transition was a success or a failure. But recognizing an experience, and being able to capture that knowledge to use to your advantage in a later situation, is what helps an individual to successfully navigate later transitions (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 15).

Thirteen of 14 participants rated their coping skills as above average to well above average.

> *Nick:* Because I've been involved in so many different aspects of life, different jobs. I've dealt with different people. I've been through different life situations that have, I guess, made me easily have to adapt and change and deal with different things all the time so it's just something that you become accustomed to.

Eight participants, like Nick, listed life experience, work experience, and working with people as reasons they considered their coping skills to be above average to well above average, but half of them could not recall a previous experience with a similar transition.

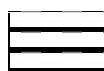Table 8 is a visual display of the participants' responses to sub-question one: Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to enrollment); specifically, the third S, self.

Table 8

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving In, Self

Pseudonym	SELF				
	Interview Question: Moving In 3a How did you feel when you first enrolled in college?	**Interview Question: Moving In 3b** Had you experienced any change or transition that was similar to attending college?	**Interview Question: Moving In 3b,ii** Would you consider it a successful experience?	**Interview Question: Moving In 3b,iv** What did you do that allowed you to be successful in that experience?	**Interview Question: Moving In 3c** On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your coping skills? Why would you give yourself a score of _____?
Jay	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Jake	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Paul	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Joe	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Mark	Asset	Liability	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Asset
Richard	Asset	Liability	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Asset
Rod	Liability	Liability	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Asset
Mike	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Nick	Asset	Liability	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Asset
Scott	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Andrew	Asset	Liability	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Asset
Peter	Asset	Liability	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Liability
Allen	Asset	Liability	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Asset
David	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset

✔ Asset   ▬ Liability   **I** Neutral   ■ Not Applicable

Strategies. Strategies while moving in was another area that participants had many assets to help them through the transition. Table 9 is a visual display of the participants' responses to sub-question one: Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to enrollment); specifically, the fourth S, strategies.

Participants could identify what they used as problem solving strategies (14 of 14). Most participants (13 of 14) were able to list the strategy they used when they first were trying to adapt to life as a college student. Only one participant applied his problem solving strategy to adjusting to life as a college student, others used traditional methods such as time management (five), planners/to do lists (two), utilizing class time (one), utilizing resources (one), and ensuring a good study environment (one).

Nearly all of the participants (13 of 14) believed they had to sacrifice something in order to attend college. The most common response was time (12 of 14), followed by money (5 of 14), and then sleep (3 of 14). Only one participant did not feel he made any sacrifice to attend college.

Half of the participants (8 of 14) stated they would endure or quit in a situation that was not working out for them. Four stated they would change the circumstances (such as change advisors, change classes, change employment), and two would change their behavior (such as join study groups, visit with a professor to see what they could be doing differently).

> *Joe:* Well, that's very depending on the situation I guess. I have endured some long term horrible type situations, and other things, I have walked away immediately, so I can't really say I'm one way or the other, depending on the situation. If it has something to do with a personal relationship or a friend or wife

Table 9

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving In, Strategies

Pseudonym	STRATEGIES			
	Interview Question: Moving In 4a When you first encounter a problem or a new situation, what is your first reaction? Then what?	**Interview Question: Moving In 4b** What strategies did you use to adjust when you first enrolled in college?	**Interview Question: Moving In 4c** What did you sacrifice to attend college?	**Interview Question: Moving In 4d** When things aren't working out are you the type of person who Endures, Quits, tries to Change your Behavior, or tries to Change the Circumstances?
Jay	✔	✔	✔	**CB**
Jake	✔	✔	✔	**CC**
Paul	✔	✔	✔	**E** (Liability)
Joe	✔	✔	✔	**E** (Liability)
Mark	✔	Liability	Liability	**CC**
Richard	✔	✔	✔	**E** (Liability)
Rod	✔	✔	✔	**E** (Liability)
Mike	✔	✔	✔	**E** (Liability)
Nick	✔	✔	✔	**CB**
Scott	✔	✔	✔	**E** (Liability)
Andrew	✔	✔	✔	**CC**
Peter	Liability	✔	✔	**Q** (Liability)
Allen	✔	✔	✔	**E** (Liability)
David	✔	✔	✔	**CC**

✔ Asset	Liability	**I** Neutral	■ Not Applicable	

or whatever, I will endure until whatever it takes, but, at the same time, if it's something that I see that's going to take a huge amount of work and still probably won't work out, I'm not gonna waste my time on it.

Summary of moving in. When preparing to enroll in college participants were excited and most expressed that it was a good time to go to college. All perceived that they had family support for their decision, and each participant was able to give an example of what he considered support from his family—with the top answers being "time to do homework" and "encouragement." Participants regarded their initial enrollment with positive affect, and most should have had the coping skills to adapt to life as a college student. However, only half of the participants perceived they had any previous experience that would have helped them adapt to the college transition. Thirteen participants believed they had given something up, or sacrificed something, to attend college with the most common answer being "time." The majority of participants could identify problem solving strategies and had logical, practical, time tested strategies to adapt to their college transition—the most common answer was "time management." However, only six participants utilized a proactive strategy for addressing situations that were not working out.

When considering the assets to liabilities ratio, participants had a many more assets than liabilities in this phase of their transition. Table 10 depicts participants' assets to liabilities ratios, based on participant responses to interview question. The areas with the largest liabilities were (a) having a proactive strategy for addressing situation that is not working out, (b) the participant's perception of having previous experience to draw from, and (c) adequate planning time when moving from thinking about enrolling to actually enrolling.

Table 10

Participant's Individual Asset to Liability Ratio, Moving In

	Moving In	
Pseudonym	Assets	Liabilities
Jay	19	1
Jake	17	3
Paul	19	1
Joe	17	3
Mark	13	5
Richard	17	1
Rod	15	3
Mike	17	3
Nick	17	1
Scott	19	0
Andrew	18	0
Peter	16	1
Allen	18	0
David	17	2

Moving Through

Sub-research question two was: How do nontraditional males perceive the moving

through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's?

Situation. While moving through (actually attending), all participants expressed

positive feelings about the situation (14 of 14), adding words such as "rewarding,"

"accomplishment," "learning," and "expanded horizons." All of the participants viewed

the addition of their new role as a gain (14 of 14).

> *Paul:* It was just fun. It was just fun. I just find it mentally stimulating. I find everything, I haven't had a class yet I didn't like. Every one of them—there's something I learned, and I loved the professors, and it is fun engaging with the other students. I feel like I am gaining friends and getting to know people, and understanding more about the world I live in. I just—I just find all of it completely fascinating, the whole, everything about it.

Seven of 14 had an expected graduation date, but none of the participants

expressed any reassurance from knowing the duration of the transition. Five of the seven

who listed a graduation date explained that the date was either too far away or not really

"set" so, they did not find reassurance that comes from knowing the duration of a

transition. As the other seven did not have a graduation date to begin with, there was

obviously no known duration of the transition, and so no reassurance.

Participants rated stress that resulted from their enrollment as below average (5 of

14), average to above average (8 of 14), and one participant separated his answer—below

average when attending online and above average when attending on campus due to the

commute. Jake was 28 years old, married, no children, and working full-time. He had

been in the military for 11 years. He was able to recall a previous experience that was

similar to the college transition (deployment to Bosnia); he viewed his enrollment

positively; and he thought the timing was good. He rated his stress as a four; when asked

why he gave himself a four, this was his response:

> *Jake:* Because it wasn't as stressful as some things I've done in the past, and so, I can put that into perspective. Studying and going to work after school is a lot less stressful than being shot at—so, pretty easy when I think about it that way.

Scott rated his stress as "average." He was 31 years old, married with two children and worked full-time. He was able to recall a previous experience that was similar to the college transition (Church of the Latter Day Saints mission); he viewed his enrollment positively; he thought the timing was good. His response to the question "On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate the stress in your life that resulted from you attending college?" was:

> *Scott:* That resulted from the college? Well, everybody's life is stressful, but definitely the college added with the family and the work and everything made it more stressful. At times, you know, it probably took it to a nine or a ten, you know, when it came time for finals or anything else. I mean that's probably the most stressed I've been was at that time—heaping that on top of everything else that I have . . . . For the most part, during not that much, you know, just average—but when it came crunch time—to getting everything done definitely were the more stressful times.

At the top of the scale, Rod rated his stress as "pretty high." He was 38 years old, married with three children and worked full-time. He was not able to recall a previous experience that was similar to the college transition; he viewed his enrollment negatively; and thought the timing was bad. Rod's response to why his stress that resulted from college was "pretty high" was:

> *Rod:* It was just, you know, the amount of homework and the amount of class time kept me from, you know. I am a contractor, so I am expected to be at my jobs during the day, and it made it almost impossible to do it, to be present, and, you know, it made it, I just don't have time, okay. You know, I run the business, I gotta do the bills, I gotta put together proposals and plans for other jobs, and that had to take a backseat to, you know, chemistry so.

After reviewing the stress level of these three participants, as well as the asset and liability categories that people utilize when adapting to a transition, it would appear that having a positive view of the transition, sensing the timing is good, and being able to

draw from previous experiences does help a person adapt to a transition, as indicated by the lower stress levels.

Table 11 represents participants' answers to sub-question two: How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the first S, situation.

Support. Eleven of 14 participants perceived they received support from their immediate family, but all of them (14 of 14) discussed the demands of their coursework with their immediate family. Most participants (13 of 14) perceived their family to understand those demands.

> *Paul:* Well the biggest one is my wife, you know. Like—she didn't hesitate to do what needed to be done, and so if I didn't get to the laundry or cook dinner, she would either do it herself or she would take the kids out to dinner so there was no, like—extra stress from her as far as being aggravated that I couldn't do maybe all of the things that I would normally do for the family. And emotionally she was very supportive. Very supportive emotionally. When I'd get stressed out about time constraints, or a test, or whatever, she's say, "You can do it."

Only 6 of 14 participants listed their parents as immediate family; of those six, five believed they received support while they were enrolled. However, four participants who did not list their parents as immediate family stated their parents were supportive of their enrollment. When asked about their network of friends, and if they perceived they received any support from them, 6 of 14 said yes. Slightly over half (8 of 14) believed they received support from the institution while they were attending. Only three participants listed any of the student support services available at the cooperating institution; others viewed institutional support as interaction with faculty or assistance with a problem/crisis. Only one participant stated he was contacted by the institution and asked if there was anything he needed.

Table 11

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Through, Situation

Pseudonym	SITUATION			
	Interview Question: Moving Through 1a What was attending college like? Did you feel like you were gaining something or losing something?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 1b** Was the experience something you would consider positive or negative?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 1c** Did the fact that you had an expected graduation date provide reassurance in any way?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 1d** On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate the stress in your life that resulted from you attending college? Why would you give yourself a score of _____?
Jay	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset
Jake	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset
Paul	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset
Joe	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable	Liability
Mark	Asset	Asset	Liability	Liability
Richard	Asset	Asset	Liability	Liability
Rod	Asset	Asset	Liability	Liability
Mike	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable	Asset
Nick	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable	Asset
Scott	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable	Asset
Andrew	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Peter	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable	Asset
Allen	Asset	Asset	Not Applicable	Asset
David	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset

✔ Asset   ▬ Liability   ■ Not Applicable

Participants were asked "Was there any *one* or any *thing* in particular that was not supportive of your education—more of a barrier?" This was the first time a question regarding barriers was asked. Twelve of the 14 participants said that there was.

- health ➡ 3 of 14,
- job related ➡ 3 of 14,
- academic related ➡ 3 of 14,
- location ➡ 2 of 14,
- family ➡ 1 of 14, and
- none ➡ 2 of 14.

Table 12 represents participants' answers to sub-question two: How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the second S, support.

Self. During the participant's actual attendance, moving through, self was one of the strongest categories regarding assets. Most participants indicated they believed attending college was a realistic goal (10 of 14) because, as many expressed, they were capable, it was financially feasible, and/or attendance was possible. All participants (14 of 14) believed they had an internal locus of control (belief that one's actions have some causal relation to one's life). Only 8 of 14 considered themselves optimistic—three were pessimistic, two were realists, and one was a "goal setter." All 14 participants considered themselves to be resilient and resourceful. The following is an example of why David considered himself resourceful.

> *David:* I make MacGyver look like a sissy. I could rewire this house with a pocket knife or a Leatherman. Just whatever I need to do, literally. Here's a "for instance." Running a big, you know, ranch and literally I had three billionaires there for a party and their families, and the well got struck by lightning. Luckily, the well had two pumps in it. One of the pumps is fried. One of the starters on the

Table 12

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Through, Support

Pseudonym	SUPPORT						
	Interview Question: Moving Through 2a Did your family offer support while you were attending college?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 2a, i** Did you discuss the demands of your course work?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 2a, ii** Did your family seem to be understanding of the demands of your college attendance?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 2b** Did your parents offer support while you were attending college?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 2c** Did your friends offer support while you were attending college?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 2d** Did the institution offer support while you were attending college?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 2e** Was there any one or any thing in particular that was not supportive of your education, more of a barrier?
Jay	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Liability
Jake	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Liability	Liability
Paul	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Liability
Joe	Liability	✔	✔	Liability	✔	✔	Liability
Mark	Liability	✔	Liability	✔	Liability	✔	Liability
Richard	✔	✔	✔	Liability	✔	✔	Liability
Rod	✔	✔	✔	✔	Liability	Liability	Liability
Mike	✔	✔	✔	Liability	Liability	Liability	Liability
Nick	✔	✔	✔	✔	Liability	✔	✔
Scott	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	Liability
Andrew	✔	✔	✔	✔	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	✔
Peter	✔	✔	✔	✔	Liability	✔	Liability
Allen	✔	✔	✔	Liability	Liability	Liability	Liability
David	Liability	✔	✔	Liability	Liability	Liability	Liability

✔ Asset   ▬ Liability   ■ Not Applicable

pump is fried. I got a piece of dryer cord, wired the one to the other and, you know, it was quite an engineering feat, and I got them back on line, and nobody ever knew anything was wrong. There you have it. And I've done stuff like that every day.

Table 13 represents participants' answers to sub-question two: How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the third S, self.

In the midst of attending, 12 of 14 reported they felt positive about their enrollment. Common words that participants used to describe their enrollment included: "felt good," "satisfied," gratified," "proud," and "enjoyment." The two that did not feel positive about their enrollment both indicated they felt "overwhelmed." Both of these participants stated it was a bad time to be in college; neither could recall a previous experience with a similar experience from which to draw; both rated their stress as high, and neither had friend support while they were enrolled. Both listed health as a barrier.

Strategies. This section of the moving through process had the largest liabilities. Table 14 represents participants' answers to sub-question two: How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the fourth S, strategies.

The main strategy for adapting to life as a college student while attending was "time management" (10 of 14). None of the participants participated in extracurricular activities. Most stated it was because "they were an online student" (5 of 14) or because they "did not perceive they had time available to participate" (4 of 14). Only 5 of 14 utilized any institutional support. For those who did utilize institutional support, services mentioned included the (a) Academic Support Center, (b) their advisor, (c) Student

Table 13

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Through, Self

Pseudonym	Interview Question: Moving Through 3a — Was attending college a realistic goal for you?	Interview Question: Moving Through 3b — Would you agree with the statement: "one's actions have some causal relation to one's life?" Why?	Interview Question: Moving Through 3c, i — Would you consider yourself resilient?	Interview Question: Moving Through 3c, ii — Would you consider yourself optimistic?	Interview Question: Moving Through 3c, iii — Would you consider yourself resourceful?	Interview Question: Moving Through 3d — How did you feel about attending college?
Jay	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Jake	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset
Paul	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Joe	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Mark	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability
Richard	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset
Rod	Liability	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability
Mike	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset
Nick	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Scott	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Andrew	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Peter	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset	Asset
Allen	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
David	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset

Legend: ✔ Asset   ▬ Liability   ■ Not Applicable

Table 14

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Through, Strategies

Pseudonym	STRATEGIES			
	Interview Question: Moving Through 4a What strategies did you use to help you adapt to life as a college student?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 4b** Were you involved in any extracurricular activities on campus?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 4c** Did you utilize any institutional support such as a religious organization, counseling service, or community group to help you adapt to becoming a college student?	**Interview Question: Moving Through 4d** What was the greatest barrier you encountered while attending college? What did you do to try to overcome that barrier?
Jay	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
Jake	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability
Paul	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
Joe	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability
Mark	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability
Richard	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability
Rod	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
Mike	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
Nick	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
Scott	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
Andrew	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
Peter	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability
Allen	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
David	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability

☑ Asset   ▤ Liability   ■ Not Applicable

Opportunity Services/TRiO, (d) Veterans Upward Bound/TRiO, (e) Career Services, and

(f) Health Services. Barriers participants perceived they faced while attending included:

- time　　　　　➡ 5 of 14,
- family　　　　➡ 3 of 14,
- academic related ➡ 2 of 14,
- location　　　 ➡ 1 of 14,
- job related　　➡ 1 of 14,
- money　　　　➡ 1 of 14, and
- health　　　　➡ 1 of 14.

Participants were asked about barriers in the support section of the moving

through process and then again in the strategies section of moving through process. One

question asked if there was any *one* or any *thing* that was not supportive and the other

question asked what was the greatest barrier. Participants' responses to questions

regarding barriers to their education during the moving through phase are displayed in

Table 15. Some participants had different answers and some did not.

Summary of moving through. While actually enrolled and attending classes, all

participants viewed their role change as a gain—participants reported that they gained

knowledge, information, and were learning; all participants considered their enrollment

experience as positive. An expected graduate date should be of reassurance to

participants, as it limits the duration of the transition; however, only 7 of the 14

participants had an expected graduation date and none of them found that date reassuring.

Five participants rated their stress that resulted from their enrollment as below average.

All participants discussed their coursework with their families, and most believed their

Table 15

Participant's Individual Responses to Barriers, Moving Through Phase

Pseudonym	Support	Strategies
	Was there any *one* or any *thing* in particular that was not supportive of your education, more of a barrier?	What was the greatest barrier you encountered while attending college?
Jay	location/not all classes online	location
Jake	online classes	time
Paul	inner restraints (family)	inner restraints (family)
Joe	lack of academic preparation	lack of academic preparation
Mark	health	sociology
Richard	job	time
Rod	health	time
Mike	job	money
Nick	none	work hours/time zone difference
Scott	job	time
Andrew	none	kids
Peter	health	health
Allen	location	life stage (family)
David	academic preparation	time

families were supportive and understanding. Nine participants perceived their parents and

the cooperating institution were supportive during their attendance and half believed their

friends were. Ten participants believed that attending college was a realistic goal and

viewed their enrollment as positive; all believed there was an internal locus of control,

they were resilient, they were resourceful; and most considered themselves optimistic.

All participants perceived they used a strategy to adapt to college life. None of the

participants participated in extracurricular activities, and five utilized institutional

support. All participants believed they faced some barrier/challenge during their enrollments.

When considering the assets to liabilities ratio, participants' liabilities substantially increased during this phase of their transition. Table 16 depicts participants' assets to liabilities ratios, based on participant responses to interview question. The areas with the largest liabilities were (a) participation in extracurricular activities, (b) utilizing institutional support, and (c) the lack of perception of friend support during their attendance.

Moving Out

Situation. Twelve participants chose to drop out for personal reasons and the remaining two dropped out because of institutional related reasons (Richard and Allen). Only 2 of 14 (Mark and Peter), literally could not attend due to health reasons. The remaining 12 were not willing to make certain sacrifices to persist in their enrollment. In other words, after analyzing the "cost" of attending (time, money, energy, etc.) versus the "benefit" of attending (degree attainment, knowledge, self betterment, etc.), 12 participants determined the cost was not worth the benefit and therefore, dropped out of college. It took most participants (11 of 14) between one minute and two months to make this decision (two are not eligible to return, and one applied to a competitive program, but was denied). Of those 11 participants, four thought about it for 30 minutes or less, two thought about it for a day, one thought about it for two to three weeks, one thought about it for one month, and three thought about it for two months.

Table 16

Participant's Individual Assets to Liabilities Ratio, Moving Through

	Moving Through	
Pseudonym	Assets	Liabilities
Jay	16	5
Jake	15	6
Paul	16	6
Joe	13	7
Mark	11	10
Richard	14	7
Rod	10	11
Mike	12	8
Nick	15	5
Scott	16	4
Andrew	16	3
Peter	15	5
Allen	13	7
David	12	9

Nine participants stated that they hope to finish their bachelor's degree "some day." In retrospect, 8 of 14 reported that this was a good time for them to go to college, and 7 of 14 participants believed it is necessary to earn a four-year degree.

Table 18 displays participants' answers to sub-question three: In the context of each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the period of time after enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the second S, situation.

Table 17

Participant's Individual Reasons Cited for Dropping Out of College

Pseudonym	Reason for Dropping Out
Jay	Job promotion
Jake	Job offer
Paul	No employer support
Joe	no time
Mark	Health
Richard	Lost financial aid
Rod	Returned to previous occupation
Mike	Job, home, money
Nick	Job conflict
Scott	No time
Andrew	Online course expectations
Peter	Health
Allen	Applied to competitive degree program (not accepted)
David	Job conflict

Participants had mixed emotions regarding their decision to drop out, three stated it was a gain, six said it was a loss, three cited it was both a gain and a loss, and two declared it was neither a gain nor a loss. The following excerpts demonstrate participants' perceptions.

> *Jay:* I would have to view it just as a gain, because I'm not racking up any more student loans, and I have a good enough job so, I mean, I hate to say that, but I think it is a gain that I'm not trying to do two things at once right now.

Table 18

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Out, Situation

Pseudonym	SITUATION			
	Interview Question: Moving Out 1bi How long did you think about it?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 1biii** Was this a bad time for you to be in college?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 1c** What is your opinion of the necessity of earning a four-year degree?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 1d** Do you view your departure from college as a gain or a loss?
Jay	Asset	Asset	Asset	Asset
Jake	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset
Paul	Liability	Liability	Liability	Liability
Joe	Liability	Liability	Asset	Asset
Mark	Not Applicable	Asset	Liability	Liability
Richard	Not Applicable	Asset	Asset	Liability
Rod	Liability	Liability	Liability	I
Mike	Liability	Asset	Asset	Liability
Nick	Asset	Liability	Asset	I
Scott	Liability	Asset	Asset	Liability
Andrew	Asset	Liability	Liability	Asset
Peter	Asset	Asset	Liability	Liability
Allen	Asset	Liability	Liability	Liability
David	Liability	Asset	Asset	Liability

Legend: ✔ Asset   ▬ Liability   ■ Not Applicable

Jake: It's a big gain. Well, I'm nine years away from retirement in my field. I am making twice the salary that I was before college, more than twice the salary. My wife is able to stay home. We don't have any financial issues. I've got free health insurance, free dental. I shouldn't say free, it is paid for, for my job. It's not, I mean, it's the best career move I've made thus far—to get away from going full-time and then going full-time back into the guard so.

Paul: A loss, cuz I really enjoy it. I think going to school and learning does bring a self-value as well as bringing that more value to my work, and I do a better job of my work even though I am excellent at what I do now, it makes me more efficient, and I understand the processes of a lot of things there.

Support. Ten of 14 participants discussed the situation with their families. Family support/reaction when the participant decided to drop out was mixed. Seven of 14 believed their family understood and supported their decision; four perceived their family's reaction to be negative (disappointed, did not approve, etc.), and three expressed their family was indifferent to their decision.

Five of 14 discussed the decision with their friends but perceived the situation as supportive. Only three participants stated there was any type of response from the institution when they decided to drop out. Of those three, one stated he received a letter stating his financial aid appeal was denied; one received a response to his email request to withdraw, and one stated "positive nagging" that he explained as a staff member contacting him to ask "Why haven't you signed up for classes Mr. Paul? What can we do to help?" Additionally, of the participants who stated there was no response from the institution, three thought there might have been a registration reminder, one received a letter notifying him he was on academic probation, and one received a bill.

Table 19 displays participants' answers to sub-question three: In the context of each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the

Table 19

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Out, Support

Pseudonym	SUPPORT			
	Interview Question: Moving Out 2a How did your family view your leaving college?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 2b** Did you discuss your decision to leave college with your family?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 2c** Did you discuss your leaving with your friends?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 2d** What did the institution do when you decided to leave college?
Jay	Asset	Not Applicable	Asset	Liability
Jake	Liability	Asset	Liability	Liability
Paul	Liability	Asset	Asset	Asset
Joe	Neutral (I)	Asset	Asset	Liability
Mark	Neutral (I)	Liability	Liability	Liability
Richard	Liability	Asset	Liability	Asset
Rod	Liability	Asset	Liability	Liability
Mike	Neutral (I)	Asset	Liability	Liability
Nick	Asset	Asset	Liability	Liability
Scott	Asset	Asset	Liability	Liability
Andrew	Asset	Asset	Liability	Asset
Peter	Asset	Asset	Liability	Liability
Allen	Asset	Asset	Asset	Liability
David	Asset	Liability	Asset	Liability

Legend: ✔ = Asset ≡ = Liability I = Neutral ■ = Not Applicable

period of time after enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the first S, support.

Self. Regarding how they perceived about their decisions to drop out, 7 of 14 defined their emotional reaction to dropping out negatively (upset, regret, depressed, failure, etc.), while 6 of 14 defined the reaction positively (relieved, free, good), and one participant stated he was indifferent to the decision.

Table 20 displays participants' answers to sub-question three: In the context of each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the period of time after enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the third S, self.

Nine participants acknowledged they had a choice whether to drop out or not, four thought they did not have a choice, and one stated it was not an option he chose to pursue. Only one participant believed that gender was a factor in his decision to drop out, but 6 of 14 thought that age impacted their decisions.

> *Scott:* Age probably does, just because of where it put me in life. Obviously, if I was nineteen, I wouldn't be married with three kids and have the job that I do, so probably just stage of life I'm at, so that'd be age.

None of the participants believed their health had been negatively affected by their enrollment. One participant was positive about his health because of his enrollment.

> *Richard:* Going to college helped keep me positive, helped keep me busy, helped me set goals, and completing as many goals as I, completing the classes that I completed, helped me feel good. Completing the assignments one by one helped me feel good.

Strategies. In retrospect, 6 of 14 could identify a previous experience in which they were unsuccessful that could serve as a learning experience. Overall 12 of 14

Table 20

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Out, Self
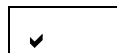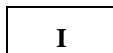
Pseudonym	**Interview Question: Moving Out 3a** How did you feel about leaving college?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 3b** Did you feel you had a choice to leave college or were there no other options?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 3c** Do you think your gender had any bearing on your decision to leave college?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 3d** Do you think your age had any bearing on your decision to leave college?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 3e** On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your general health compared to when you first enrolled in college? Why would you give yourself a score of _____?
Jay	✔	✔	✔	Liability	✔
Jake	✔	✔	Liability	✔	✔
Paul	Liability	✔	✔	Liability	✔
Joe	✔	✔	✔	Liability	✔
Mark	Liability	Liability	✔	Liability	✔
Richard	Liability	✔	✔	✔	✔
Rod	✔	I	✔	✔	✔
Mike	I	Liability	✔	✔	✔
Nick	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Scott	✔	✔	✔	Liability	✔
Andrew	Liability	✔	✔	Liability	✔
Peter	Liability	Liability	✔	✔	✔
Allen	Liability	✔	✔	Liability	✔
David	Liability	Liability	✔	✔	✔

✔ Asset   Liability   **I** Neutral   ■ Not Applicable

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reflected that their college experience was positive (great, loved it, pleasant, enjoyable, etc.). Of the remaining two participants, one was neutral in his view, and the other elaborated that the experience was "poor" because he could have tried harder.

Table 21 displays participants' answers to sub-question three: In the context of each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the period of time after enrollment), again considering each of the four S's specifically, the fourth S, strategies.

Table 22 displays how participants perceived their greatest barrier to staying enrolled to be and what participants speculated could have kept them enrolled.

The last question that participants were asked was "What are you doing now, since you left college?" Twelve of the 14 participants were employed, one participant was on disability, and one was unemployed.

Moving out summary. Most reasons that participants stated for deciding to drop out were external in nature (time, employment, health) and not related to the cooperating institution. Most participants did not spend a lot of time contemplating their decision to drop out—11 participants made their decision in 30 minutes or less. Overall, 12 of participants expressed that their college experience was positive; it was a good time for them to be in college, and they would like to return at some point to finish their education. Regarding support, 10 participants discussed their decision to drop out with their family, and five also discussed their decisions with friends. Seven participants perceived their family was supportive of their decision. Only one participant stated there was any positive response from the cooperating institution when they did not re-enroll.

Table 21

Participant's Individual Responses to Moving Out, Strategies

Pseudonym	STRATEGIES		
	Interview Question: Moving Out 4a Have you had a similar experience where you were not "successful" by society's standards?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 4b** How do you view your college experience?	**Interview Question: Moving Out 4c** What was your greatest barrier to staying enrolled and getting your bachelor's degree?
Jay	▬	✔	▬
Jake	▬	✔	▬
Paul	▬	✔	▬
Joe	✔	✔	▬
Mark	▬	▬	▬
Richard	✔	✔	▬
Rod	✔	**I**	▬
Mike	**I**	✔	▬
Nick	▬	✔	▬
Scott	▬	✔	▬
Andrew	✔	✔	▬
Peter	✔	✔	▬
Allen	▬	✔	▬
David	✔	✔	▬

✔ Asset   ▬ Liability

Table 22

Participant's Individual Responses to Barriers and Speculated Success Strategies/Tools

	Barrier to Staying Enrolled	Most Helpful, Personally	Would Enroll Again	"If only I had known"
Jay	location/distance	more online classes	Yes	gone right out of high school
Jake	breadwinner	no online classes	Yes	no online classes
Paul	employment	release time from work	Yes	change major
Joe	time	better academic preparation	No	went to Adult Education Center
Mark	lack of academic preparation	better academic preparation	Yes	went to Adult Education Center
Richard	time	not working	Yes	better understanding of the time commitment
Rod	college not a priority	lower standards	No	nothing
Mike	time & money	financial aid	Yes	recognized difficulty of online courses
Nick	employment	less hours and day shift	Yes	no online classes
Scott	time	stayed in school when 18	Yes	stayed in school when 18
Andrew	online courses	no online classes	Yes	recognized difficulty of online courses
Peter	health	cure	Yes	stayed on medication
Allen	location/distance	transfer & accept credits	Yes	gone right out of high school
David	time	no online classes	Yes	gotten employer support

Half of the participants had a negative affect associated with their decision to leave

school, but most stated they had a choice whether to drop out or not. Only one participant

perceived that gender played a part in his decision to leave; almost half perceived age to

be a factor in their decision. None of the participants believed their health was negatively

impacted by their college attendance. Six participants stated they had a previous experience that could be considered unsuccessful from which to draw. When speculating on what might have made a difference, answers varied from "having more online classes," to "not taking online classes," to "working different hours", to "not working." Twelve participants stated they would do it again and knowing what they know now, common changes included "attending when younger," "having a better understanding of expectations," and "being more academically prepared."

When considering the assets to liabilities ratio, participants' liabilities substantially increased again during this phase of their transition. Table 23 depicts participants' assets to liabilities ratios, based on participant responses to interview question. The areas with the largest liabilities were (a) perceiving no institutional response (support) when deciding to drop out, (b) discussing their decision to drop out with friends, and (c) viewing the role change (no longer a student) as a loss.

Recurring Themes

Recurring themes emerged during the interview process that were not limited to the moving in, moving through, and moving out phases. Two distinct themes emerged, one related to the participants on a personal level and the other regarding the relationship/interaction the participant had with the cooperating institution. The top personal themes, based on the number of participants who spoke to the theme, were: (a) participants appeared to be family oriented, (b) a perception of time issues/constraints, (c) job related issues/constraints, and (d) financial concerns. The top institutional themes, based on the number of participants who spoke to the theme, were: (a) perception of institutional support (positive and negative), (b) interaction with faculty,

Table 23

Participant's Individual Assets to Liabilities Ratio, Moving Out

	Moving Out	
Pseudonym	Assets	Liabilities
Jay	11	4
Jake	9	7
Paul	7	9
Joe	10	5
Mark	3	11
Richard	10	5
Rod	6	7
Mike	7	6
Nick	10	5
Scott	9	7
Andrew	10	6
Peter	9	7
Allen	8	8
David	9	7

(c) a perception of lack of follow up from the institution when participants did not return, and (d) a lack of understanding what is expected when a person attends college (unknown expectations).

Personal Themes

Family oriented. Thirteen of the 14 participants appeared to be family oriented. Comments were coded as family oriented if the participant mentioned family in a positive

manner at times other than when asked questions that were family related. For example,

answers to the question "In what ways was your family supportive?" were not coded as

family oriented, yet 13 of the 14 participants made comments regarding their families

during the interview. For example, Mike's response to the question "Was she [his wife]

understanding of the demands of your college attendance?" was:

> *Mike:* Family has to come first and there are responsibilities that I have as a father and a husband that had to be taken care of.

Allen expresses similar feelings about his family as well. Comments from participants

regarding their families illustrated that they had concern, guilt, and a deep bond. Paul had

previously mentioned that work was an ongoing conflict with his college attendance.

When he was asked if his greatest barrier to staying enrolled in college was just work, his

response was:

> *Paul:* Yeah, work and… just that family worry that I have about neglecting my family. That's the thing that's like, wow, is this really worth it? My family's extremely important and why would I leave them all these hours during their teenage years and why would I not be there for my mom who has Alzheimer's.

Both of the following responses are in regard to the question about the greatest barrier to

staying enrolled was:

> *Andrew:* College is demanding, so it was really tough. I'm always… I'm the guy that puts family first.

> *Jake:* Probably my need to be the breadwinner for the family; to provide that full-time income, to provide that insurance, to be kind of the "solid rock" of the household so to speak. I did have a little bit of that, what do you call it… like, I don't know if you want to say, like male attitude of "the man needs to be the leader of the house" kind of thing and so I wanted to bring home the bacon, so to speak. My wife and I were kind of on par salary wise and so I didn't have any ill will against her for that, I mean that was great, but I wanted to be up here. You know, I didn't want her to have to worry about being the primary breadwinner and so that why I decided to take the position and move out of the full-time college atmosphere.

When he was asked how he felt about college in the moving through phase, Mike's

answer was:

> *Mike:* I guess I felt good about attending college, because I knew I was bettering myself and also, you know, being a little bit of an example to my son who was struggling at school.

When discussing support in the moving in phase, Rod was asked "In general how

important to you is assistance be it financial assistance, assistance with the kids,

assistance at home, household chores?" The following is an excerpt from the

conversation that ensued.

> *Rod:* Now are we talking about assistance from whom? My family or outside of…?
>
> *Researcher:* Family, friends, parents.
>
> *Rod:* Outside of my family it's not important at all. There isn't any but with my family. I can't operate without it. Critical.
>
> *Researcher:* In general how important to you is affection meaning respect, love, caring, understanding?
>
> *Rod:* Again I would have to divide my answer into family, very important. Others, totally irrelevant.

Lastly, when asked about what was sacrificed to attend college, the following participants

stated:

> *Scott:* Obviously, money. It's [college] expensive. And then of course time and time away from my job which of course in turn turns into more money, but mostly probably time with my family because I'd work all day and then I would have the homework and such to do, so that I couldn't spend time with my kids much. Weekends were tied up.
>
> *Andrew:* I sacrificed a lot of time with my family. I sacrificed sleep and that's about it really. Those are the main things.
>
> **Time issues/constraints.** The second theme, a perception of "time

issues/constraints," was mentioned by 13 of the 14 participants. Many participants

mentioned time in regard to their family, their job, as a barrier, having a lack of time, and

losing their free/personal/leisure time. The following are comments from the participants

demonstrating the description of time issues/constraints.

> *Allen:* If I would have had all the discretionary time where, you know, I wasn't having to work and you know, had a family to help support and stuff, you know, that was the main barrier. I could have otherwise, I could have continued going to school, but that was a big barrier.

> *Allen:* Well, I sacrificed, I guess, my time. I guess I could have been putting my time towards something else around the home or, you know, down the road. I was actually working less and I kind of in working less basically I was telling my employer that the college at that point was more important to me than the job.

> *Joe:* Basically, all my time was being used up. I just couldn't stand having no time to myself, no time for my family.

> *David:* I kind of robbed from Peter to pay Paul, took my personal time away so it wouldn't affect the family is what I tried to do.

> *Rod:* Again, it was just, you know, the amount of homework and the amount of class time kept me from, you know, I am a contractor so I am expected to be at my jobs during the day and it made it almost impossible to do it, to be present, and, you know, it made it, I just don't have time, okay. You know, I run the business, I gotta do the bills, I gotta put together proposals and plans for other jobs, and that had to take a backseat to, you know, chemistry so.

Rod was also concerned about meeting his family responsibilities, his job requirements,

and having time for college. When asked if an anticipated graduation date brought him

any reassurance, he replied:

> *Rod:* No, on virtually all accounts. The first two years [of college] are easier than the last two, and since the first semester was an unbelievable amount of time, you know, it consumed much more time than I had to spare. I just realized I couldn't possibly do it and continue to work. And so—since everyone depends on me to eat you know.

When asked why he did not re-enroll the next semester, Mike's response was:

> *Mike:* Just life. I became, I got on additional boards for work. My work load increased. My responsibilities at home increased a little bit with my son's

difficulty in school and requiring me to dedicate more time to him. That's pretty much it I think.

Scott's response to "how did you view your initial enrollment; positive, negative, didn't really think about it?" was:

> *Scott:* … Actually, I prefer going to the school rather than doing the online. That's probably what's held me back at this point. [It's] more with my work schedule and time. Pretty much I'd need to do online courses and I liked the in class interaction lecture type situation much better so…

Lastly, Rod had responded his greatest barrier to staying enrolled was:

> *Rod:* You know, just having to, having a job that requires my 60 hours a week that I didn't have to give.

> **Job related issues/constraints.** The third theme was "job related

issues/constraints." Eleven of the 14 participants mentioned their job in a negative

manner—as a barrier, as consuming time, as a priority, and not being allowed release

time. The following excerpts are from participant transcripts:

> *Nick:* I would say "yes it was kind of a bad time" cuz I had so much other things going on in my life, and like, I said before, with working being more of the priority, I couldn't focus myself on the studies like I would want to and get results. I didn't end up doing as well in school as I had hoped.

> *Richard:* It was a good time [to be in school], I just made the wrong choice; to work while I was getting educated. That's what killed me and I shouldn't have been working when I was trying to get my studies done and it was a good time, it was just a bad decision.

> *Scott:* The last time I enrolled I think I enrolled in all online courses and I think I took three of them or something, and with as busy as I got with work as I got into them I realized that it was way too much so I dropped the classes and since then I haven't got back in basically.

In response to the question, "Now that you've had a chance to attend college what are

some things that 'if I had only known' might have made a difference?" David stated:

David: I think I would have put in my contract with the second owner. It was a goal that he was not only paying for it, but he was going to allowing me time to do it. Then I still would have had to drive seventy miles to _____ or ninety miles to _____, but I would have overcome those minor barriers that were hold me back.

The following responses were in regard to barriers participants perceived they faced:

David: Barrier? Time. Career or however you want to put it. It's just the profession I was in was very demanding.

Richard: I had to work during the period where I was supposed to be getting my studies done and it wasn't working for me.

Mike: Gosh, I don't know. My job, I mean, it was difficult. It's difficult because the job that I have doesn't allow me to like schedule, you know, two, three months in advance what it's going to take to get through a semester. My job is kind of a this week I could have nothing going on and then next week I have to be at three different meetings in _____ and _____, and _____. So, I think that was probably one of the barriers.

Time constraints and choosing college as a priority, were not the only "job related issues/constraints." In the following excerpt, Paul passionately described a shift in policy at his place of employment that created challenges to remaining enrolled.

Paul: I struggled two different times to go through college as a lower level peon. I watched all the upper management get to go to class during their work hours and I had to do it all on my own. I struggled through that process, got frustrated, and gave up twice before. And then—now that I'm wearing a gold badge, all the people that made fun of me for not having a degree or the people who were in the positions that made fun of me for not having a degree, are now the ones that are telling me things have changed—you don't get to go. And now the situation is flip-flopped, and now—the people below me get to go and they are covered on shift and I'm not! There was this 180 degree flip-flop of who got to go and who didn't!

Financial concerns. The last theme was "financial concerns," as discussed by 11 of the 14 participants. Comments included concern about the cost of tuition as well as the need to pay living expenses.

Mark: It was more financial. I needed, you know, to get back to work, you know. I mean I'm on disability right now, but that doesn't really do much at all. I mean

it pays my medical and so it, pretty much, a lot of it had to do with money. I didn't see how I could do that for four more years and survive.

Joe: Yeah, there wasn't any [benefit]. Yeah. It was excruciating for me at the time because of the amount of time it took to do it [college] and actually I was sitting in my office one day and I was thinking God, I've gotta make some more money somehow and I got to thinking about it. I thought well, I'm making x amount now and I'm working all week and I'm working on my college on the weekend. I can't even get a second job, so I thought, wait a minute. If I retire I get a nice big fat check every month and I can go work a second job. Basically that was the decision it was. I pretty much ran from it [college].

Allen: In this day and age when a college education is, can be so expensive. There are different types of, you know, assistance. As far as getting an education paid for that to me seems to be the biggest stumbling block for a lot of people. Just how am I going to pay for this?

Mike: Probably money then time. Just not having, you know, the resources to be able to take a whole bunch of classes at once and trying to get it done as quickly as possible and then time.

Scott: …later on when I had the desire to finish there were things that came in that required the time and the money that needed to be used elsewhere. You know the family, the career…

When asked about the timing of deciding to enroll in college, Joe responded that it was a bad time, but also…

Joe: It was also very expensive because I had to pay…I paid for it all myself too and it was like why am I putting on this money? 'Cuz I was planning on retiring and going to work for a corporation, which I did anyway but, you know, it was just…

When asked about the decision to drop out and whether losing the role of "student" was a gain or a loss, Mark's reply was that it was a gain because:

Mark: Work, financial. Don't have to worry about the bills so much now.

When deciding whether to enroll for the next semester or not, one of the factors that Jay

considered was the increase in fuel used for his two-hour, one-way commute to the

collaborating institution three times each week and the increase in debt. Jay's response to

the question, "What happened that made you decide to leave college?" was,

> *Jay:* I would say a couple factors, the most important probably being I got a
> promotion at my job so I was making more money and enjoying it more. The
> second would have to be just the cost of gas to travel. I was going just more in
> debt trying to do that.

Institutional Themes

Regarding institutional themes, the first theme was "institutional support." Some

participants perceived the cooperating institution as supportive citing specific support

services available to students, while others did not feel there was institutional support

citing poor service from specific offices or negative responses to their requests. The most

often positively mentioned student support service was the Academic Support Center

(aka, the math lab) and the Advising Center was the support service most often

negatively referred to by participants. Additionally, other participants stated they did not

use institutional support because they were an online only student or were not aware of

services. The following responses are in regard to the question "Did the institution offer

support (feedback, aid, affirmation, academic resources, role models) while you were

attending college? Could you give me examples of how they gave you support?" The

following excerpts are examples that participants considered positive interactions:

> Institutional reference

> *Scott:* Yeah, that's one thing I liked about school here versus the other place I was
> at, is it seemed like I could get a little more one on one type attention. You know,
> when I was taking economics classes or some of those other that were a little
> more difficult courses they were always very good to meet with me, go through
> things. I think I always got very good attention.

Faculty references

Nick: Yes they did, whenever I needed it. There was, at one point I had an issue with one of my papers that had been turned in online, and the instructor didn't get it, and I called and got in touch with them. They were willing to work with me and quickly resolved the issue.

Jay: Yeah, well I think that the teachers I had, I never had a problem with, you know, explaining situations or asking questions to my teachers so they supported me that way.

Institutional support programs/offices

Peter: Oh yeah, like the math lab and stuff like that. I don't know how I would have did it without them.

Mark: I spent a lot of time in that math lab.

Richard: Yep, the math lab and computer lab. I suck at math so I took full advantage of that. I cannot get for the life of me, I cannot get above algebra and so yeah I took advantage of that math lab.

Jake: Yes, I did…. I used nothing related to that[counseling office] but the, is it the Academic Learning Center…
Researcher: The ASC, the Academic Support Center.
Jake: Yes.

Richard: I was working with the vets on some of my studies so, okay, it's not a club but Upward Bound, so VUB. Yeah, that's it. Veterans Upward Bound. They helped me with tutoring in the math lab. I had one of the tutors constantly look for me and help me out.

Andrew: They do. And I think everybody does. I have financial aid. They, you know, the financial aid department is great. I know they're overwhelmed and I'm very demanding of making sure my college is gonna be paid for so…

Some participants stated there was no institutional support from the collaborating institution, while others relayed negative experiences regarding institutional support.

Jake: No, besides setting me up for classes I mean I…That was, it's all on you, so I don't perceive _____ to have supported me per se.

Allen: Not that I can think of, no…

Rod: No.

David: No. For instance, asking for the permission to be excused from threaded discussions and so forth or, you know, I got to admit a couple of them were alright about it, but a lot of them were pretty hard-nosed about it, and I could see where they're coming from because I know with the younger group of people that are, make any kind of excuse to get out of it or whatever, but working professionals on school boards. Being on all these boards and whatever, you know, and kids, you know. You have a life. You've got things to do and your seven o'clock threaded discussion just doesn't fit in there anywhere, sometimes.

Others, like Mark, had mixed experiences.

Researcher: Did the institution offer any type of support?

Mark: Yes, they sure did. I'd have to say _____ has a great support system—except for my advisor who would, you know, I can't really blame anybody but myself.

Researcher: And can you give me some examples of the great support system?
Mark: Well that SOS program, the mentor program. I've, I mean, I got involved with it from a fellow classmate and they were pretty much helping him get through school. I mean, the tools are there. That's why I have nothing but good things to say about them.

Researcher: And then could you elaborate a little bit more on the advisor?

Mark: My advisor? You mean the one that hooked me up with school and classes?

Researcher: You said that it was a pretty good support system except for your advisor. Can you give me a little bit more on that one?

Mark: Yeah, well, she should have said well go to _____ and take a semester of brush up classes that won't cost you anything. Later I found out that, you know, the 101 math and the 100 English, financial aid won't, they don't pay for them, it's not a credit. I can't use it even if I was to the end of graduating. I would have had to come up with my own tuition and stuff. I would have ran out of financial aid. I didn't find that out until later. And you'd think they'd know that, you know. That's what I mean by that.

The second institutional related theme was "faculty interaction." Twelve of the 14 participants made comments related to interaction with faculty at the cooperating institution. There were four negative comments (such as professors appearing unprepared

for class, making negative comments about nontraditional students) and 12 positive

comments. The following excerpts are examples of participants' perceptions of positive

interactions with faculty:

> *Jake:* Yes, Professor _____ would be there, and I would come in before class and work on my online math 'cuz you have online and the in-class stuff, and so, I would work on online, and she would come in early for her, before her hours started, and be there and be available to the students that were there to work on stuff to try to get ahead in class. What I would usually try to do to stay ahead of what we were doing, and so she was supportive there. She would always make herself available to ask questions and answer questions.

> *David:* I had a particular experience and it was resolved in a good way. I think it was a political science class. A professor had a fairly liberal point of view and asked for my opinion, and I, of course, on the blog I put my—they called it a "threaded discussion"—but it's [a blog], I expressed my absolute opinion and then I got scolded for it. So I called her personally, and said look, you asked me. I didn't ask you, and your opinion is fine. We're in America, but I have an opinion too, and by the way, I am paying you to teach me, not give me a political point of view. So, that was one of the things that kind of stuck with me.

> *Jake:* I am really horrible at math but I had a great professor by the name of _____, I can't remember how to say it but she helped me out a lot with associations with how to apply math to kind of fit my psyche so I understood it and therefore, I got an A in that class with her as a professor so.

> *Joe:* Good teacher. We hit it off and he enjoyed me because I was a nontraditional student with a lot of life experience and he was somewhat fed up with the younger students and their attitudes, and not even coming to class prepared or anything so we got along very well.

> *Joe:* Yeah, I think I was gaining something. It was fun to kind of analyze my perspective on life with the younger students in the course. I had a lot of fun with the teacher and I learned some good communication skills and how it works, and everything else.

> *Rod:* Liked the instructor. I have never been exposed to most of the information. I just really enjoyed it.

> *Peter:...* the college has other stuff, like if I had a question for the professor, and stuff, they were always really good at it.

Some participants cited specific interactions with faculty that they perceived as negative.

Mark: My instructor kind of laid out the facts of a nontraditional college student and his chances of making it. He really got me thinking. And it really, you nothing against him or anything, but it really made me not so excited about college anymore. Yeah, he really broke my spirit.

Joe: Some of my teachers I thought were just faking it. They didn't prepare well for class and [it] just seemed like they were putting in their time—and I hate that.

Jake: Yes, my second semester there I took an online economics class with a professor by the last name of _____, I think is what her name was and she did not e-mail me back on many of my assignments that I had questions on because my only form of conversation with her was online. She maintained office hours and I would go down to her office two weeks in a row. She would not show up and I come to find out that she doesn't even live here. At that time she had moved overseas, but still maintained an office and office hours, so that perplexed me as to how they can have somebody working there who supposedly has and office that you can come in and talk to, but doesn't even reside in the United States. And so that was very difficult and that class ended putting me under that 3 point mark, well I put myself under that 3 point mark, because there were unanswered questions and I couldn't complete the assignments correctly because I didn't have anybody to talk to. Once again I need that professor there and so it was my mistake for maybe taking that online class, but I think MSU-Billings' mistake for keeping a tenured professor on who doesn't even reside in the United States. Even though it was an online course.

Jake: That last semester [see previous excerpt] put a bad taste in my mouth with the online course and the lack of help that I got from the dean's office in that section because I did try to contest that grade, and they shot me down basically saying that I needed to basically prove that she was of no help to me, when in fact none of my e-mails were returned and they could definitely see that on the system, and she lived out of the county while maintaining a tenured status in _____, was part of the reason that I decided to quit going to _____.

David: Nope. I was going to line me out some professors, let them know who was paying for the deal.

The third institutional theme was the "lack of follow up" when the participant did not return to the cooperating institution. Participants were specifically asked, "Did the institution do anything when you decided to leave? Exit interview, letters, phone calls?" Eleven of 14 stated there was no response from the institution when they decided to drop

out. Some thought it was possible they may have gotten a reminder to register the next

semester, but they were not sure.

> *David:* Nothing really. Sent a bill. The thing that they always do. It's a cold, hard place. It's the real world.

> *Mark:* No, nothing at all. They sent me a letter saying I was on academic probation.

> *Richard:* Well, they sent me a letter saying that I wasn't approved for financial aid and the reason, but that was it.

> *Allen:* I don't remember anything from _____ as far as, you know. There might have been an e-mail saying as far as enrolling in the next term or something, but I can't remember anything like to the extent of "hey, we want you back" or something like that.

> *Mike:* I think I got a letter that just reminded me that the new semester was coming up and something like that, but that was about it.

> *Nick:* I got an e-mail, but it was a reminder to enroll in classes for the following semester, but other than that there wasn't much follow-up from the college.

> *Peter:* Not that I know of, no. They might have sent me something, but I can't remember.

> *Rod:* No, no. I never even got my grades.

> *Jake:* No.

> *Joe:* No.

> *Jay:* No, no.

Some participants even initiated contact with the cooperating institution when they

decided to drop-out, but there was still little to no response.

> *Scott:* I think I just e-mailed was all I did.

> *Researcher:* So you emailed the institution?

> *Scott:* I emailed them, yeah, and withdrew from the courses and that was about it.

> *Researcher:* And then, but you didn't hear back?

Scott: Not that I recall that I didn't. I got an e-mail back saying that they would take care of it, but that's about all I can remember.

Researcher: What did the institution do? Did they do exit interview, letters, phone calls, e-mails?

Andrew: You know I e-mailed both my professors and let them know actually before I left, I guess the business department or whoever…

Researcher: Your advisor.

Andrew: My advisor, yeah. I let them know before I let my advisor know and they responded back by saying you know, hey, I can't remember exactly what they said but they wished me well and hoped to see me back in school again. So my advisor was very understanding and I think I told my advisor at that time that the online classes just wasn't for me and that I need to be more face-to-face so.

The last theme was a "lack of understanding of what is expected when a person attends college" (unknown expectations). Nine of the 14 participants made comments ranging from not understanding how to begin the college process…

Jake: It was difficult. I was not sure where to go, who to talk to, and this was during the time where they had that, which your records will reflect, where they had the old _____ Hall set up. Now it is a lot more user friendly. But yeah, during that time you really didn't know where to go or where to start, so.

Jake: A little disoriented because I enrolled during a time when they did not have the camp, the orientation. It was between that time. But I felt good, but a little disoriented with where everything was.

Peter: Kind of confused 'cuz I didn't know where to go and stuff, but I kind of, I was excited and confused kind of, but everything turned out…

To the amount of time college would require…

Rod: It was just, you know, the amount of homework and the amount of class time.

Rod: …we just talked about me being absent and, you know, what we expected, how much time I expected it to take out of my life. It actually took considerably more than I expected but…

Richard: … I wasn't able to cope with the rigor of time management that was

necessary to get homework done. I mean, being the family man I tended more to my family than I did my homework and both were, should have, I mean homework should have been the priority where my family life became the priority and that is where I failed, so coping was really poor.

Richard: If I'd have known that time management was as big a deal as it became I would have then tried to be more prepared for that. Balancing family life with education.

To not knowing how online courses work…

Nick: I think it was a good learning experience for me. I mean it helped by just taking a couple classes and introduced me to what I would be able to expect in the future when attending college again.

Nick: I guess like the format of the online courses. I didn't know what to expect out of them and had I really known more about how the online classes were gonna work, I'd probably wouldn't have signed up for them. I would have looked for alternative classes somewhere where I could be in the classroom.

Andrew: I was doing online classes and I didn't realize how much time you spend on the computer. You know, you have a lot of discussion questions. I had one class where I had to do online chat and it was at 5:00 on Thursdays and I was at work at 5:00 on Thursday, and I couldn't get the time off so left college and I made the decision to leave because online wasn't really for me. I guess I didn't have an understanding of what it entailed so.

Andrew: I think if I'd had a better understanding of what the online classes were I probably would have actually stayed with that degree first.

Summary of Recurring Themes

Overall, eight themes became apparent, half were of a personal nature and half were institutional related. Nearly all participants were family oriented, time was a major concern followed by employment and money. All participants had an opinion regarding institutional support, some negative and some positive, faculty were very influential to almost every participant, there was virtually no follow up with participants who did not return to the institution, and more than half of participants were caught off guard by

expectations associated with postsecondary education. Table 24 is a visual display of the tally of recurring themes, both the number of comments and the total number of participants represented.

Table 24

Tally of Recurring Themes

Pseudonym	Family (Oriented)	Job (Negative)	Money (Negative)	Time (Negative)	Interaction with Faculty	No Institutional Follow Up with Drop Outs	Institutional Support	Unknown Expectations/Disoriented
Jay	7	3	1	1	1	1	2	1
Jake	6	1	1	2	4	1	2	2
Paul	11	4		1	1		1	
Joe	1	1	3	7	4	1	1	
Mark			3		2	1	5	1
Richard	3	7	2	4		1	3	1
Rod	7	2	2	6	1	1	1	2
Mike	10	4	3	4		1	1	2
Nick	1	8	1	2	1	1	1	2
Scott	9	5	1	9	1		1	
Andrew	9		2	2	2		1	2
Peter	6	2		1	1	1	5	1
Allen	8	4	1	3	1	1	1	
David	4	4		6	3	1	1	
Total Comments	82	45	20	48	22	11	26	14
Number of Participants	13	11	11	13	12	11	14	9

Chapter Summary

Demographic, academic, and semester enrollment data for each individual was presented in this chapter. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 57, all were married or in a committed relationship, most had children, most were white, and gross income ranged from $0-80,301+. Participants ranged in grade level from freshman to senior; the number of enrollments was between one and six, with 2.7 being the average; cumulative GPAs ranged from 1.2 to 4.0; only five participants had attended full-time; and all three modes of attendance were represented (on campus only, online only, and mixed).

The grand tour question was: In retrospect, how does a nontraditional male student who dropped out of college prior to earning his baccalaureate degree describe his situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process? The answer? Overall, participants described their college experience positively and most would like to return at some point. The situation, support, self, and strategies were in place and their assets outweighed their liabilities, so they could have been successful. In the end, most participants left because of external factors, not institutional factors. After an informal cost/benefit analysis, a college degree was determined to not be worth X (job promotion, career opportunity, loss of time—at work, with family, for leisure activities, etc.).

The first sub-question was: Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to enrollment)? Overall, most participants perceived their enrollment was positive and it was a good time to go to college. They had family support, discussed what going to college would mean for the family and perceived their family to be supportive of their

decision to go to college. Participants thought that agreement, assistance, affection, and feedback were important and believed they had above average coping skills. Few could identify a previous experience to draw from. They were able to identify their personal problem solving strategies and list what strategy they used to adapt to college life, but most used a less than proactive strategy to address a situation that was not working out.

The second sub-question was: How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's? Overall, all the participants perceived their role change as a gain and considered their enrollment positively. They believed in an internal locus of control and considered themselves resilient and resourceful. Participants did not feel any reassurance from an expected graduation date, but were able to identify strategies they used to adapt to the college transition. Participants believed they were optimistic and that attending college was a realistic goal. Responses to the amount of stress that resulted from attending college varied from high to low, but most believed they had family support during their enrollment. Participants believed the collaborating institution was supportive, but few utilized institutional support. No one participated in extracurricular activities and everyone believed they encountered a barrier/challenge during their enrollment.

The third, and final, sub-question was: In the context of each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the period of time after enrollment)? Overall, most participants thought this was a good time to be in college and viewed their college experience positively. They acknowledged they had a choice to drop out or not, felt negatively about leaving, and would like to finish their education at a later time. Participant families were supportive of their decision to drop out, but they did not

discuss the decision with their friends and there was no response from the collaborating institution when they did not re-enroll. Participants generally took less than 30 minutes to decide whether to drop out or not and most dropped out for personal reasons. Age was a factor in their decision and gender was not. All participants perceived barriers/challenges to staying enrolled. Some speculated that if they had attended right out of high school, or had an understanding of college expectations, or taken classes on campus, or were better prepared academically, they may have been successful.

Overall, eight themes emerged, half were of a personal nature and half were institutional related. The personal themes that emerged were: (a) participants appeared to be family oriented, (b) a perception of time issues/constraints, (c) job related issues/constraints, and (d) financial concerns. The institutional related themes that emerged were: (a) perception of institutional support, (b) faculty interaction, (c) a perception of lack of follow up from the institution when participants did not return, and (d) a lack of understanding what is expected when a person attends college (unknown expectations).

In conclusion, although each participant is a unique individual with his own story to tell; themes emerged, telling a common story—not enough time, something has to go, and college is not the priority.

In the next chapter the author summarizes this exploratory phenomenological study, as well as presenting implications and recommendations.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Purpose

The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study was to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out of a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree described their perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. Although previous research identifies multiple issues, role conflicts, and barriers for nontraditional students attending postsecondary institutions, the majority of the information focuses on females. This study was important because it complemented the current literature and added the perspective of males to the research base. This perspective was valuable as the number of males attaining bachelor degrees has been declining since 1991 (Mortenson, 2007, p. 12).

Summary of Findings

Demographic, academic, and semester enrollment data for each individual was presented in this chapter. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 57, all were married or in a committed relationship, most had children, most were white, and gross income ranged from $0-80,301+. Participants ranged in grade level from freshman to senior; the number of enrollments was between one and six, with 2.7 being the average; cumulative GPAs ranged from 1.2 to 4.0; only five participants had attended full-time; and all three modes of attendance were represented (on campus, online, and both on camps and online).

The grand tour question was: In retrospect, how does a nontraditional male student who dropped out of college prior to earning his baccalaureate degree describe his

situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process? The answer? Overall, participants described their college experience positively and most would like to return at some point. The situation, support, self, and strategies were in place and their assets outweighed their liabilities, so they could have been successful. In the end, most participants left because of external factors, not institutional factors. After the students conducted an informal cost/benefit analysis, each determined that a college degree was not worth giving up X (job promotion, career opportunity, loss of time—at work, with family, for leisure activities, etc.).

The first sub-question was: Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to enrollment)? Overall, most participants indicated they felt their enrollment was positive and it was a good time to go to college. They had family support, discussed what going to college would mean for the family and perceived their family to be supportive of their decision to go to college. Participants thought that agreement, assistance, affection, and feedback were important and believed they had above average coping skills. Few could identify a previous experience to draw from. They were able to identify their personal problem solving strategies and list what strategy they used to adapt to college life, but most used a less than proactive strategy, such as enduring a situation or quitting, to address a situation that was not working out.

The second sub-question was: How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's? Overall, all the participants perceived their role change as a gain and considered their enrollment positively. They believed in an internal locus of control and considered

themselves resilient and resourceful. Participants did not feel any reassurance from an expected graduation date, but were able to identify strategies they used to adapt to the college transition. Participants believed they were optimistic and that attending college was a realistic goal. Responses to the amount of stress that resulted from attending college varied from high to low, but most believed they had family support during their enrollment. Participants believed the collaborating institution was supportive, but few utilized institutional support. No one participated in extracurricular activities and everyone believed they encountered a barrier/challenge during their enrollment.

The third, and final, sub-question was: In the context of each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the period of time after enrollment)? Overall, most participants thought this was a good time to be in college and viewed their college experience positively. They acknowledged they had a choice to drop out or not, felt negatively about leaving, and would like to finish their education at a later time. Participant families were supportive of their decision to drop out, but they did not discuss the decision with their friends and there was no response from the collaborating institution when they did not re-enroll. Participants generally took less than 30 minutes to decide whether to drop out or not and most dropped out for personal reasons. Age was a factor in their decision and gender was not. All participants perceived barriers/challenges to staying enrolled. Some speculated that if they had attended right out of high school, or had an understanding of college expectations, or taken classes on campus, or were better prepared academically, they may have been successful.

Overall, eight themes became apparent, half were of a personal nature and half were institutionally related. The personal themes that emerged were:

1. *Participants appeared to be family oriented*—participants' answers often mentioned family, sometimes in a positive context, sometimes in a negative context, and often when the question did not pertain to family. For example, in response to the question "When you first encounter a problem or a new situation, what is your first reaction?" Allen's response was, "I would say, how it affects me and my family."

2. *A perception of time issues/constraints*—of the 14 participants, 13 of them referred to time in a negative manner or stated there was a lack of time. Scott mentioned 'time" nine times during his interview, time as a problem, time away from his family, needing time to study, not enough time for work and school, and lack of time as his biggest barrier and reason for dropping out of school.

3. *Job related issues/constraints*—11 of the 14 participants made negative comments about their job as an issue or constraint to continuing their education. For example, Nick mentioned his job as a barrier eight times during his interview. Nick stated that work became a priority for him and school became a "second thought." Nick also stated that he worked nights and lived in a different time zone than where the college was located, so even though he was enrolled in online courses, his "hours were definitely off shift for the hours that my school work needed to be done."

4. *Financial concerns*—of the 14 participants, 11 made comments regarding money that indicated finances were a concern. Mark rated the stress in his life that resulted from being enrolled in college as an eight (on a scale of one-10).

When probed as to why he would rate his stress as an eight, he stated health and finances were issues. Mike listed money as the greatest barrier he encountered while attending college and Rod believed he sacrificed money (lost wages) to attend college.

The institutional related themes that emerged were:

1. *Perception of institutional support*—participants referred to institutional support with mixed answers. For example, Jay believed he did receive support because his instructors answered his questions in class (he stated he did not communicate with his professors outside of class). As did Mark when he said "I'd have to say _____ has a great support system. . . ." However, Jake did not think he received institutional support as reflected in his statement: "No, besides setting me up for classes I mean I, that was, it's all on you so I don't perceive _____ to have supported me per se."

2. *Faculty interaction*—participants were not directly asked about faculty interaction during the interview process, however, 12 of the 14 participants mentioned faculty in their responses. Furthermore, of the 12 participants who mentioned faculty interaction during their interview, there were 22 instances in which faculty were discussed. This would indicate that faculty-student interaction is very influential regarding a student's perception of their college experience and environment. For example, when Jake was asked what his favorite course was, he responded math: "I am really horrible at math but I had a great professor." Mark had the opposite experience. When asked how he perceived his college experience during his enrollment he stated,

> Positive except for my sociology class. That's when things started going downhill. My instructor kind of laid out the facts of a nontraditional college student and his chances of making it, and he really got me thinking. And it really, you nothing against him or anything, but it really made me not so excited about college anymore. Yeah, he really broke my spirit.

3. *A perception of lack of follow up from the institution when participants did not return*—11 of the 14 participants stated there was no follow-up or interaction when they did not enroll with the institution the following semester. Two participants thought the institution may have sent an email reminding them to register; one participant thought he might have been sent a letter reminding him to register, but he was not sure; three participants stated they were not asked about registering for the upcoming semester, but were sent communication—a bill, notification of academic probation, and notification of suspension of financial aid; and four participants stated there was no communication from the institution at all when they did not register for the next semester.

4. *A lack of understanding of what is expected when a person attends college (unknown expectations)*—9 of the 14 participants stated they did not know or understand what attending college would entail. For example, some participants reported they felt lost from the beginning. When I asked Jake, "How did you view your initial enrollment. Was it positive, negative, didn't really think about it?" he responded, "It was difficult. I was not sure where to go, who to talk to. . . ." When Rod was asked if he and his wife had discussed what his enrolling in college would mean for the family, he stated "I mean, we just talked about me being absent and, you know, what we expected, how

much time I expected it to take out of my life. It actually took considerably

more than I expected but. . . . ” When Richard was asked what he would

change about his college experience now that he had had a chance to attend,

he stated

> Having more money would have been a, if I had known I need it I
> would have had it. If I'd have known that time management was as big
> a deal as it became I would have then tried to be more prepared for
> that. Balancing family life with education. If I'd have known that was
> going to be so difficult I would've said hey wife, this is your job. I've
> got to do this and you had your turn now it's my turn. You take care of
> it. I've got to do this. That's, though, that's what I would have done
> differently. I would've required that she would've taken over more
> responsibilities of the house and the home.

In conclusion, although each participant is a unique individual with his own story

to tell; there are many similar themes that emerged and they began to tell a common

story—not enough time, something has to go, college is not the priority.

Discussion

The following section compares information from the literature review with the

findings from this study. The researcher found the findings of this study to be consistent

with information presented in Chapter 2.

- A college degree is worth 75% more than a high school diploma or more than

  $1,000,000 over a lifetime in the workforce (King & Bannon, 2002a, p. 4,

  Terry-Long & Riley, 2007, p. 39); yet a student who drops out of college does

  not see the return on his or her investment (Bucklin & Bucklin, 1970, p. 7).

- According to Heldman (2008), the average cost to recruit 3,000 students for a

  public four year institution is over $2 million. If the average tuition for a state

school is $6,200 and 15% of those 3,000 students drop out after the first year, the institution will lose $8.3 million (p. 6).

In each of these instances, the parties involved must decide the cost versus the benefit. The student weighs what is being sacrificed and what is being gained. Institutional personnel must determine if retaining a student is given as much planning and resources as recruiting a student.

Transitional events (see Chapter 2) often bring nontraditional students to college, as evidenced by studies such as, Champagne and Petitpas (1989), Christensen (1994), Compton et al. (2006), Loftus (1998), Milheim (2005) and Wyman (1988). Transitional events such as the student's children are now older (making college attendance easier on the student), they have encountered a divorce, they now have an opportunity to finish an interrupted degree, career related (change in career, career loss, advancement, or stability loss of employment), or personal satisfaction or accomplishment. This study corroborated that finding. Nine participants returned to college for career related reasons, one to finish an interrupted degree, and four for personal satisfaction or accomplishment.

Apps (1987), Attewell and Lavin (2007), Bishop-Clark and Lynch (1992), Bundy and Smith (2004), Farabaugh (1989), Fitzgerald (2004), Galvin (2006), Hanniford and Sagaria (1994), King and Bannon (2002a & b), Loftus (1998), Mellchar (1994), Ortiz (1995), Pinardi (2007), Roach (1976), Spanard (1990), and Tripp (1988) found that nontraditional students have many concerns when attending college, such as (see Chapter 2):

- balancing family and work responsibilities;

- age as a factor (being "too old" to go to college);

- feelings of incompetency or inadequacy; and,

- lack of time, money, and childcare.

Participants in this study had many of these concerns. In this study, the majority of

participants were working while attending classes, all had a spouse or significant other,

the average age of participants was 37 (the youngest participant was 23 and the oldest

was 57), and time (13 times of 14) and money (11 times of 14) were a factor for most

participants. Table 25 depicts which participant had which concern(s) that were found in

the literature.

Table 25

Relationship of Participants' Concerns to Concerns Found in Literature Review

Pseudonym	balancing family and work responsibilities	age as a factor (being "too old" to go to college)	feelings of incompetency or inadequacy	lack of time or money
Jay	X	X		X
Jake	X			X
Paul	X	X	X	X
Joe	X	X	X	X
Mark	X	X	X	X
Richard	X	X	X	X
Rod	X	X		X
Mike	X	X		X
Nick	X	X		X
Scott	X	X		X
Andrew	X	X		X
Peter	X		X	X
Allen	X	X		X
David	X	X	X	X

Drew (1990) asserted that approximately 15% of drop-outs are "involuntary,"
(academic suspension, conduct suspension, etc.) but the other 85% of dropouts are
"voluntary" (institutionally permissible, but student chooses not to enroll for subsequent
semesters) (see Chapter 2). In this study, these statistics were accurate. Two of the 14
participants, or 14.3%, dropped out due to health concerns that made enrollment
impossible. The other 12, or 85.7%, chose to drop out. Chartrand (1992), Greenlee and
Greenlee (1997), Osborne et al. (2004) found that support from friends and family
influenced nontraditional students regarding the student's intention to continue or stay
enrolled in college. This is consistent with the findings in this study. When deciding to
enroll in college, all participants stated they had the support of their family. However, by
the time the participants decided to drop out of college, only four stated their family was
still supportive of their college enrollment—three participants stated their spouse was
disappointed in their decision to drop out and one stated his spouse did not approve of his
decision to drop out. Three participants stated their spouse or significant other was
indifferent to their decision to drop out and seven participants stated their spouse
supported their decision to drop out!

Schlossberg (1981) indicated that substantial planning is a measure of behavioral
attitude (category: Psychosocial Competency, sub-category: Characteristics of the
Individual, (p. 12) (see Chapter 2). "Substantial planning" was determined by verifying
the semester the participant enrolled and then reviewing his answer to the question "How
far in advance did you decide to go to college before you enrolled?" At the cooperating
institution, participants generally needed a minimum of one month to have their
admissions application processed and register for classes (Johannes, 2009) and two

months to have their financial aid application processed and awarded (Chapman, 2009).

Regarding the financial aid process, 6 of the 14 participants did not have substantial

planning time. Three of the 14 participants stated they decided to enroll in college one

month in advance and two decided one week in advance—not a lot of planning.

Fitch (1981) found that a student in his or her freshman year of college is more

likely to drop out than if the student is an upperclassman (see Chapter 2). In this study,

six participants were in their freshmen year, three were sophomores, three were juniors,

and two were seniors. So, consistent with Fitch's findings, the majority of the participants

that dropped out were in their freshmen year of college. Geisler (2007) determined

pressures and overwhelming obstacles make a student vulnerable to attrition, no matter

how many indicators of success are present. Only 2 of the 12 participants cited a college

related reason for dropping out (not accepted into a competitive academic program and

unknown online course expectations), all others cited external reasons for leaving

college. Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) stated two factors that influenced low degree

completion rates for nontraditional students included: (a) part-time enrollment, and (b) it

may not be economically rational for a nontraditional student to leave the workforce (i.e.,

the return on investment is not justified by the remaining number of employable years)

(pp. 913 & 915). Findings from this study were consistent with the findings of Taniguchi

and Kaufman. Only two participants were enrolled on a full-time basis during their last

semester in college and 13 participants were employed while they attended college.

How an individual adapts to a transition depends on how the individual perceives

his or her balance of resources to deficits (Schlossberg, 1981). According to Chickering

and Schlossberg (1995), the 4 S System rests on several assumptions: (a) there is not one

single factor that is necessary in order to cope with change. Each individual has a balance of resources and deficits for facing transitions; (b) the individual's potential resources and deficits are not permanent, but change over time; and (c) there are things that the individual can do to turn deficits into resources. Table 26 depicts the asset to liability ratio for each participant and as a collective group. Notice: as the participants moved from "moving in" to "moving out" that the assets decreased and the liabilities increased (see Chapter 2).

Table 26

Assets to Liabilities Ratio

	Moving In		Moving Through		Moving Out	
	Assets	Liabilities	Assets	Liabilities	Assets	Liabilities
Jay	19	1	16	5	11	4
Jake	17	3	15	6	9	7
Paul	19	2	16	6	7	9
Joe	17	3	13	7	10	5
Mark	13	5	11	10	3	11
Richard	17	1	14	7	10	5
Rod	15	3	10	11	6	7
Mike	17	3	12	8	7	6
Nick	17	1	15	5	10	5
Scott	19	0	16	4	9	7
Andrew	18	0	16	3	10	6
Peter	16	1	15	5	9	7
Allen	18	0	13	7	8	8
David	17	2	12	9	9	7
Assets : Liability	239	25	194	93	118	94

Implications

At the time of this study, the educational attainment of nontraditional males was less than it was for females. The first year that more bachelor's degrees were awarded to females than to males was in 1982—49.7% to men and 50.3% to women (based on all graduating students) (Mortenson, 2005, p. 8). By 2002, there were 1,291,900 bachelor degrees awarded in the United States; 42.6% (549,816) were awarded to men and 57.4% (742,084) to women (based on all graduating students) (p. 8). This decline in the education of males in American society affects not only the lives of the men but also the lives of those with whom the males live and associate, but it also affects the American economy (p. 1).

For the purpose of this study, a nontraditional student was characterized as meeting at least one of the following criteria as outlined by Choy (2002):

- delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
- attends part-time for at least part of the academic year;
- works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
- is considered financially independent for purposes of eligibility for financial aid;
- has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- is a single parent (either not married or married-but-separated and has dependents); and/or,
- does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school). (p. 2)

Almost three-quarters of today's undergraduates meet one of these characteristics (Choy, 2002, p. 3). Horn, as cited in the NCES Special Report by Choy (2002), described nontraditionalism as being on a continuum based on the number of characteristics present:

- One characteristic—minimally nontraditional,
- Two or three characteristics—moderately nontraditional, and
- Four or more characteristics—highly nontraditional. (p. 3)

This study sought to develop a description of how highly nontraditional males described their perceptions of their situation, support, self, and strategies, while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. What needs to be kept in mind is that all students are experiencing a transition when they come to college and how they perceive their situation, support, self, and strategies will determine the ratio of their assets to liabilities that they will utilize to adapt to that transition. Geisler (2007) determined that attrition was most often related to a student's external environment and the balance of obligations along with the added responsibility of attending college (p. 163). This study supported that conclusion. So the question becomes: What could postsecondary institutions do to better recognize and address factors that influence a nontraditional male to drop out? Answers from the participants themselves can provide insight.

Late Applications

The amount of time participants took to move from thinking about enrolling to actually enrolling was generally between one week and three months. This is not sufficient planning time to attend college. In order to ensure eligible students will have financial aid they are eligible for when the semester begins, the application process takes five to six months. This is the rationale for having a "priority deadline" of March 1 for filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (Chapman, 2009). Half of the participants that made their decision to attend college in three months or less reported having a very high stress level due to attending college.

Late application recommendations.

1. Deadlines: Institutions can take steps to help mediate the likely outcome that a nontraditional male student will become a drop out rather than a graduate. If the institution has an application deadline, the deadline should be upheld. "Bending" the deadline for students may not be in the student's or the institution's best interest. If the institution does not have an application deadline, institutional personnel know from experience which applications are coming in "late." The Admissions office and the Financial Aid office can work together, to determine what constitutes a "late" application. Also, the Institutional Research office should be able to provide information on retention rates based on application dates.

2. Referrals: Once the "late" date has been determined, all applications that are received "late" could be treated as an at risk student.

   a. If the student has applied for financial aid, he should be referred to financial aid immediately so that his application and the ensuing process can be discussed with financial aid personnel.

      1) If it is not likely that his financial aid will be in place when the semester starts he should be told.

      2) If the student does not have another means of paying his tuition, someone should suggest to him that he sit out a semester so that his financial aid will be in place when he starts.

a) Once his tuition payment is in place, the nontraditional male student could be referred to the institutional staff member or specific office for further precautionary steps.

    1) The staff member or specific office could meet one-on-one or with small groups of at risk students to assess the student's situation, support, self, and strategies.

    2) From this assessment, any deficits or liabilities could be addressed.

3. Pairing the "late" applicant with a peer mentor is another option. A peer mentor could provide advice, guidance, support, and be a point of contact for the nontraditional male student.

4. Another idea would be to offer an institutional admissions checklist with the admissions application. Informing students of the logistics that need to be taken care of prior to enrolling would allow students to decide if their timeline is realistic.

Unknown Expectations

Most participants in this study reported they had unknown expectations regarding the amount of time college required, the amount of homework demanded, navigating online classes, and/or trouble navigating the institution. Institutions may find it beneficial to first conduct a survey or focus group of their student body to determine how students perceive the expectations of the institution. How many hours do they spend doing homework? Reading class assignments? Participating in group projects? How much time do they spend on online classes? Doing threaded discussions, chats, homework, readings, and exams? Ask students within their first semester, how did they physically locate the

admissions office, registrar, etc.? Did they attend an orientation? If not, why? How did they register for classes? What was their registration experience like? Did they get lost? Was the signage clear or not? How difficult was it to find their classrooms? Questions such as these can provide insightful information for new students.

Unknown expectations recommendations.

1. Institutional representatives could discuss the expectations of attending college at new student orientations or possibly assemble a packet of information, such as, "What to Expect When You Enroll in College" materials that is mailed to students who will be new to the institution before the semester begins.

2. Another strategy would be to address expectations in a Freshman Seminar course.

3. Regarding the expectations of an online course, instructors of online courses could post a "quiz" that each student must take at the onset of the course that would outline what is expected.

4. Another option would be to have an institutional specific DVD that outlines the student's "academic journey" that would cover how much time the student can expect to spend on homework, the amount of assignments and reading associated with attending college, online courses and what is expected, institutional support services, and any other information that a student would need to know to be successful at the institution or that was discovered during the focus group. This DVD could be sent to students with their admissions acceptance letter.

5. A final technique that could be used to relay college expectations would be to add a "college expectations" page to the institution's web site or add an online "quiz" that students who are new to the institution have to take the first time they log into their secure area, similar to online loan counseling.

Academic Preparation

Academic preparation was another area that was mentioned by participants. Some participants perceived they were not academically prepared to attend college level math and/or English courses. Furthermore, two participants specifically stated they should have been advised differently due to their poor academic placement scores.

Academic preparation recommendations.

1. Institutions may want to assess a student's chances for success based on their placement scores. For example, if a student tested into remedial level English, math, and reading, is the student capable of passing a college level science or philosophy course? Most likely they are not. However, enrolling the student for purposes of FTE (Full Time Enrollment—upon which much institutional funding is determined) is a bad choice for the student, and in the long run, a bad choice for the institution.

2. Establish a collaborative relationship with the local Remedial Education Center or Community College. By working together, the student can complete a refresher course, his skills will be up to par and he is on course to be a successful college student rather than a college drop out.

3. Another possibility would be to offer a summer bridge program for students scoring low on their placement tests. The institution could offer remedial

courses over the summer that would that would allow students to be prepared by the time the fall semester started.

4. Other options include institutions teaching remedial courses on site; however, if these courses are for credit, they do not usually count towards degree requirements and often financial aid will not pay for courses considered less than college level.

5. A final option is to utilize grant programs such as the Student Support Services/TRiO program designed to raise student's academic levels to address student's remedial needs.

Institutional Support

Home (1997) listed tangible institutional support as distance education, university day care, assignment date flexibility in crisis situations, study skills workshops, instructor accessibility, part-time study, study leave, employer tuition assistance programs, and access to workplace equipment/data/personnel (p. 4). Schlossberg (1981) stated institutional support systems included occupational organizations, religious institutions, political groups, social welfare, or other community groups (p. 11). Less than half (5 of 14) utilized any institutional support. Some participants perceived the cooperating institution as supportive citing specific support services available to students, while others did not feel there was institutional support citing poor service from specific offices or negative responses to their requests. Other participants stated they did not use institutional support because they were an online only student or were not aware of services.

Institutional support recommendations.

1. Institutions could increase nontraditional male students' awareness of institutional support services by again, pairing the nontraditional male student with a peer mentor, or college staff member/faculty mentor that could provide advice and direction.

2. Another idea would be to send a post card to all students at mid-terms alerting them to academic support programs on campus.

3. If the institution is host to a federal grant program that provides academic support, nontraditional male students meeting grant criteria could be automatically referred by the Admissions office, Financial Aid office, and Advising office.

4. Another technique would be to involve faculty. Faculty could require or give extra credit when a student uses an institutional support. For example, a history professor may allow students to take a returned essay to the Writing Lab, review the assignment with a tutor, and resubmit the assignment for extra points or an increase in letter grade.

5. A New Student Day could be implemented the day before classes start to educate students as to the range of institutional support available.

6. Another idea is to put an early alert system in place. Faculty or staff members could notify designated institutional personnel when they notice a student is in trouble. The designated institutional personnel could then contact the student and make the appropriate referral.

7. Institutional support services should be mentioned on the institution's web site, in the student handbook, in the college catalog, and in any Freshman Seminar classes that are offered.

Career Goals

Several of the participants had not declared a major and/or did not have a career goal in mind. Two of the participants indicated that this lack of direction influenced their decision to drop out. Institutions can identify nontraditional male students who do not have a major during the admissions and advising process.

Career goals recommendations.

1. Referring these students to the institution's Career Services office as soon as possible is critical.

   a. Career counselors should be able to administer attribute, personality, and occupational inventories to assist students to focus on an occupational area (such as investigative, enterprising, artistic, etc.) and then deductively narrow the focus to a few occupations to explore.

   b. Web based career assessments are also available for students. Students can access career assessments online or career assessments can be offered through the Career Services office.

      1) Free assessments include, the O*NET Interest Profiler, offered by the U.S. Department of Labor. Some states also offer free assessments, such as the Montana Career Information System.

      2) Subscribing to an online service such as those provided by the Bridges Transition company ($550/year for up to 300 students), or purchasing

individual assessments such as the Self Directed Search ($6/student) or
Career Key ($1/test—minimum of 30 tests) allow institutions to offer
and monitor students' occupational needs and inquiries, while
providing current and convenient access to ability profilers and career
development software.

2. Pair the nontraditional male student with a peer mentor or institutional staff
member that can provide advice and guidance.

3. A job shadow program can assist undecided students in determining a career
path.

4. A Freshman Seminar course is an ideal time to provide nontraditional male
students with career information and interest inventories.

5. Institutions can also follow-up on Freshman Seminar courses with a sister
course in Career Exploration.

6. Another idea is to have an academic advisor that works solely with undecided
students.

7. Hosting career fairs or career days in which students can review displays and
speak with representatives/employees in different occupations is another
technique to assist students in choosing a major and selecting a career path.

Faculty Interaction

Faculty interaction is influential to nontraditional male students. When
participants were asked about their favorite course or sources of support, many reported
instructors as a positive influence. Unfortunately, for some participants, interaction with

faculty was negative, and this was influential as well—for two students it was directly related to their decision to leave college.

Faculty interaction recommendations.

1. Institutions can ensure that nontraditional male student interaction with faculty is positive by providing the faculty with workshops, seminars, and information on:

    a. nontraditional students and how they are different than traditional students,

    b. institutional support that may be needed or useful to nontraditional students,

    c. understanding various learning styles and using various teaching techniques,

    d. how to communicate with a nontraditional student, and

    e. respecting nontraditional students age and valuing their experience.

2. Another possibility is to implement a faculty mentoring program for nontraditional male students.

3. Utilizing time faculty are required to advise students is another opportunity for nontraditional male students and faculty to connect. Training faculty to be proactive and take an interest in students is a great way for students to connect with faculty for faculty to be a positive influence on students.

4. Offering a substantially reduced rate at the institution's cafeteria for faculty and staff is a way to draw faculty into a student environment and setting the stage for faculty/student interaction and dialog.

5. Another option is to involve faculty in Student Life, whether that is orientation, activities such as movies and comedians, or service projects such as food drives or housing projects. Involving faculty in Student Life activities provides another point of contact for nontraditional male students to interact with faculty members.

6. Lastly, faculty members need to be reminded from time to time that retention is a campus wide effort.

Staff Interaction

Staff interaction with nontraditional male students needs to follow the same techniques as those outlined for the faculty. Faculty make a lasting impression on students, good or bad; but institutional staff do the work behind the scenes to keep the nontraditional male students on a successful academic track. In this study, the most often positively mentioned institutional support office was the Academic Support Center and the most often negatively mentioned institutional support office was the Advising Center. Participants perceived they did not receive sound information or good customer service at the Advising Center. Participants reported that advisors seemed to be "overworked" and Jake described his interaction with the Advising Center as:

> *Jake:* You better sit down and start talking, tell them what you want to do, and get your classes, 'cuz they've got another appointment ready to come in right after you.

Staff interaction recommendations.

1. To avoid marginalizing students, support staff can participate in customer service training and cross train in positions to ensure that student/staff contact is amicable, efficient, and that correct information is relayed.

2. For the Advising Center specifically:

    a. The institution could also hire more personnel. This would allow Advisors to spend more time with students and develop an understanding of the student's situation, academic background, and career goals, so they are properly advised.

    b. Within the Advising Center, appointments could be set in long increments that would allow Advisors more time with students.

    c. Another option would be to create a "getting to know you" form that students could complete while waiting for their appointment. This form could ask questions about the student's situation, academic background, and career goals, as well as general logistics, such as what time the student can be on campus in the morning, what time do they need to leave campus, what days are they available to take classes, and so on.

    d. Advisors can quickly scan the form when meeting with the student and provide advice on course selection that is realistic for the student, as well as make any necessary referrals.

Drop Out Decision

Almost half of the participants in this study contemplated their decision to drop out for one day or less. Pairing minimal contemplation time with the perception that the cost of college is to high versus the benefit of completing a college degree, and dropping out of college will be the result. Five of the participants were juniors or seniors. This meant they had completed at least half of their education, but even that was not enough to keep them enrolled. Family and friend support waned from when the student was

thinking about going to college to when they were actually attending. Furthermore, when the student chose to drop out, over half of the participants stated their family supported that decision. If there is going to be an intervening factor, it will have to be the institution.

Drop out decision recommendations.

1. Connecting early and connecting often is the key—once a nontraditional male student reached his stress threshold, it does not take him long to decide what to cut in order to reduce his stress and "save himself." Many of the previously mentioned recommendations would assist nontraditional male students to connect with some one or some office on campus, such as:

   a. Peer Mentoring program.

   b. Freshman Seminar course.

   c. Referring nontraditional male students to institutional support services. However, institutional staff could go one step farther in their efforts and check with the office the nontraditional male student was referred to, ensuring a connection was made.

   d. Faculty Mentoring program.

2. Internships and job shadowing options can also be implemented that would allow the nontraditional male student an opportunity to see his career choice in action and give him a glimpse of his future.

3. The college Counseling or Wellness Office could offer a support group for nontraditional male students. Strategies for balancing school, work, and family could be addressed; and/or, discussing institutional support services

available; and/or, meeting to provide a means of support, encouragement, and fellowship for nontraditional male students.

4. A Nontraditional Success Coordinator could be hired. This person could be responsible for:

    a. Initial contact with the nontraditional male student.

    b. Checking midterm grades of the nontraditional male student and making appropriate referrals.

    c. Conducting surveys or focus groups to determine what services the nontraditional male student is looking for on campus.

    d. Offer presentations targeting nontraditional male student interests and/or needs, such as support services, studying techniques, and parenting strategies.

5. Campus activities could be designed to specifically target the nontraditional male student, often including his family. Activities such as family swim night, family carnival nights, family orientation day, and holiday themed events would all allow the nontraditional male student to connect with campus while including his family.

Minimal Institutional Response

The majority of participants (11 of 14) stated there was no response from the institution when they decided to drop out or did not return the next semester. Only one participant reported receiving a phone call asking "What can we do? What do you need, a different schedule? What about these classes—you could take at a different time." According to Heldman (2008), the average cost to recruit 3,000 students for a public four

year institution is over $2 million. If the average tuition for a state school is $6,200 and 15% of those 3,000 students drop out after the first year, the institution will lose $8.3 million (p. 6). The figures in Heldman's example ($8.3 million loss—if 15% of the 3,000 new freshmen were to drop out) are conservative. Considering the national attrition rate is 24.5% (NCHEMS, 2010), and the attrition rate for the 2008 full-time new freshman at the cooperating institution was 41% (Wham, 2009)!

Minimal institutional response recommendations.

1. It may be beneficial to institutions if an institutional staff member or support service was designated to personally contact students who have not registered for the upcoming semester in a proactive, concerned manner. Three participants speculated they may have gotten a reminder to register, but none of them considered this a "response from the institution."

   a. Setting a registration deadline two to four weeks prior to the commencement of the semester would allow the staff member of the designated office time to contact the non-enrolled student to inquire as to his circumstances and if he can be enrolled.

2. Add a secondary form to all course evaluations. This secondary form could ask if the student plans on returning the next semester with response options such as: yes or no because I am: graduating, transferring to another college, or other.

   a. The secondary form could be coded with the student's institutional identification number and then all students responding "no" and "other"

could be contacted personally by institutional personnel to determine what could be done to retain the student.

3. Advisors, faculty or staff, could report to Deans/Chairs or the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs the number of their advisees who had enrolled for the upcoming semester and the number that had not (and why). This technique could increase proactive and early contact between the advisor and the nontraditional male student.

Many of the previously mentioned recommendations would also assist to identify possible drop outs prior to the beginning of the upcoming semester, such as:

a. Peer Mentoring program.

b. Freshman Seminar course or Freshman Year Experience.

c. Faculty Mentoring program.

Recommendations for Future Inquiry

This study presented a narrative on how nontraditional male students who dropped out of college prior to earning their baccalaureate degree described their situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. Based on this study, opportunities for further study can be recommended.

First, repeat the study using a different level of nontraditionalism or conduct the study as a quantitative study. Either approach would add to the literature pertaining to nontraditional male college students. Additional research that can confirm or challenge the findings of this study would also add to the literature.

Next, conduct the study with additional demographic or academic data as the criteria, possibly focusing on criteria such as income or ethnicity or mode or attendance or class level in college. Participation for this study was limited to males who had been enrolled at a public, four year institution within the last two calendar years with the intention of earning a bachelor's degree that had four or more characteristics of a nontraditional student. The study could be micro-refined by adding an age, ethnicity, family status, number of children, grade level, mode of attendance, cumulative GPA, or chosen major criterion. This would provide specific information for a select group that would add to the literature on nontraditional male students, as well as provide specific insight into how they attempted to adapt to the college transition that would allow institutions to develop practices to intervene prior to their departure.

Another opportunity for further research would be to repeat the study longitudinally; interview nontraditional male students when they first enroll, at the end of each semester, and then those that do not return, i.e. drop out. This study was asking participants to think back, up to two years, and indicate how they felt, what they thought, what they did, and what the situation was. Granted this was their perception; however, perceptions change over time. By interviewing participants at specified intervals, the researcher will be able to document the participant's feelings, thoughts, and situation in its current context. This type of longitudinal study could be expanded by not only conducting the study longitudinally, but also comparatively. Comparison groups could include: nontraditional males who drop out versus those who graduate, nontraditional males who drop out versus nontraditional females that drop out, nontraditional males who attend on campus versus nontraditional males that are strictly online, or nontraditional

students who drop out versus traditional students who drop out. A comparative study could reveal differences between how and why some students successfully adapt to the college transition and others do not. Comparing females to males could provide insight as to how the different genders approached the college transition (unsuccessfully), that would allow institutions to respond with specific programs or policies to intervene and retain prospective drop outs. Additionally, the results from a comparison study would be more comprehensive.

Another approach would be to repeat the study but focus only on one of the four S's. This study was large and complex. Focusing on one of the four S's (situation, support, self, and strategies) would allow the researcher the opportunity to explore the topic more in depth. Additionally, if the study was narrowed to one of the four S's and also conducted longitudinally, it would allow for a micro-refinement of the current study. For example, if a researcher only wanted to focus on support and was able to follow a cohort from acceptance until departure (either graduation or dropping out), the researcher could explore interpersonal support systems (intimate relationships, the family unit, and the network of friends, Schlossberg, 1981, p. 10) and/or institutional support systems (occupational organizations, religious institutions, political groups, social welfare, or other community groups, Schlossberg, 1981, p. 11) (see Chapter 2). The data gathered from such a focused study would provide institutions with very select information that they could then respond to tangibly.

Lastly, repeat the study but focus on one of the phases of the transition. In this study participants' assets to liabilities were strongest when they first enrolled, but the liabilities continued to increase as they moved through the transition. Studying one

particular area of the transition, moving in, moving through, or moving out, could help to identify how, when, and why the liabilities increased. This information would allow the institution develop programs and policies that would address areas that are liabilities before they become a liability.

Conclusion

This study explored how some nontraditional male students who dropped out of college prior to earning their baccalaureate degree described their situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. This study presented a narrative of how some nontraditional males described their attempt to adapt to the college transition. The findings of this study are significant to higher education and contribute to the literature on nontraditional male students. Pertaining to higher education, the findings provide insight into the perception of the nontraditional male on his college experience and direction for possible programs and policies.

Participants' perception of liabilities increased as they moved through the transition phases. This is not surprising because the end result (dropping out) is already a known fact. However, what is interesting is that most participants began the transition with a fair number of assets, but as the transition progressed and barriers/challenges arose there were not enough assets to overcome the liabilities and keep the participant enrolled.

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Appendix A

Introductory Letter

Date

Participant Name
Participant Address
Participant City, State and Zip Code

Dear Participant,

I am a student enrolled at the University of Nebraska Lincoln where I am pursing my doctoral degree. I am writing to ask for your help. Would you be interested in participating in a study of nontraditional male students who did not complete their bachelor's degree? The purpose of this study is to investigate how nontraditional males who drop out from a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree describe their perception of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. This study is being conducted for educational purposes and could be used by the college to determine how to better address the needs of nontraditional male students.

From information listed in the Montana State University Billings computer system, it is my understanding that you were enrolled at MSUB and that you did not complete your bachelor's degree. If this information is incorrect, please disregard this letter. ***However, if you are interested please:***

1. call me at 406-657-1668 (work),
2. call me at 406-254-8887 (home),
3. email me at doctoralstudy@gmail.com   OR,
4. return the included Participant Pre-survey in the enclosed pre-paid envelope.

Selection for this study is limited, so if you are interested return your Participant Pre-survey as soon as possible! Information from the Participant Pre-survey will be used to determine if you meet the minimum criteria for this study as well as demographic data that will be reported in aggregate form in the study results. Your answers are completely confidential and participation is voluntary. If you participate you will receive a gift card as a form of appreciation for your participation. You can greatly help by sharing your experience! If you have any questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to talk with you. Thank you very much for helping with this important study!

Sincerely,

Monica Powers

**In order to participate in this study, you must contact me or return the
Participant Pre-survey by May 8, 2009!**

Appendix B

Participant Pre-survey

Participant Pre-survey

Name:_____
First   Middle Initial   Last

Date of Birth:_____Gender:_____Phone #:_____

Address:_____
Mailing address   City   State   Zip

Section I:

1. Within the past two years, were you enrolled at a four-year college with the intentions of pursuing a bachelor's degree?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Do you have a GED?   ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. While attending college, were you a single parent? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. While attending college, were you married?   ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. While attending college, did you have dependents other than a spouse?

☐ Yes ☐ No

6. While attending college, did you work while you were enrolled in college?

☐ Yes ☐ No

  If yes, how many hours per week? _____

7. If you received financial aid, were you considered ☐ Yes ☐ No
  independent (you did not have to supply your
  parent's tax information)?

8. Did you attend college the same year you   ☐ Yes ☐ No
  graduated from high school?

9. At any time during your college enrollment,

  did you attend part-time?   ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section II:

Regarding your most recent college enrollment:

10. When did you first enroll in college?   Month:_____Year:_____

11. When was the last semester you attended?   Month:_____Year:_____

12. What was your anticipated graduation date?   Month:_____Year:_____

13. What was your major: _____

14. What was your primary method of attendance?
    ☐ On campus, in person   ☐ Online only   ☐ Mixed, on campus and online

15. What was your student status by number of completed credits when you left college?

☐ Freshman (0-30)   ☐ Senior (91-120)

☐ Sophomore (31-60)   ☐ 5th year senior (120+ credits)

☐ Junior (61-90)

Section III:

16. Which best described your relationship situation when you were enrolled in college?

☐ Married   ☐ Widowed   ☐ *Single-lived with relatives

☐ Married, but separated ☐ *Single-lived on own ☐ *Single-lived with room mate

☐ Divorced   ☐ *Single-lived with parents ☐ Lived with boy/girlfriend

*(Single=Never married)

17. When you were enrolled in college, did you have a child or children? If so, please list each child's age when you began college: ☐ Not applicable

Ages: child 1: _____   child 4: _____

        child 2: _____   child 5: _____

        child 3: _____   child 6: _____

18. Did your child or children live with you (at least six month out of the year) when you were enrolled in college?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

19. What income bracket applied to you when you were enrolled in college (in gross wages)? (from the MT tax bracket)

☐ $0-$2,300 a year   ☐ $18,401-$22,900 a year

☐ $2,301-$4,600 a year   ☐ $22,901-$32,100 a year

☐ $4,601-$9,200 a year   ☐ $32,101-$45,900 a year

☐ $9,201-$13,800 a year   ☐ $45,901-$80,300 a year

☐ $13,801-$18,400 a year   ☐ $80,301+ per year

20. What is your ethnicity?

☐ White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic)   ☐ African American

☐ Hispanic   ☐ Native Alaskan

☐ Latino   ☐ Asian American

☐ Native American   ☐ Other

Thank you very much for taking time to complete this survey. If you are selected for participation in this study, you will be contacted within two (2) weeks.

Appendix C

Low-Income Guidelines

Low-Income Guidelines

(Effective February 2008; from U.S. Department of Education using Taxable Income)

Size of Family Unit	48 Contiguous States, D.C., and Outlying Jurisdictions	Alaska	Hawaii
1	$15,600	$19,500	$17,940
2	$21,000	$26,250	$24,150
3	$26,400	$33,000	$30,360
4	$31,800	$39,750	$36,570
5	$37,200	$46,500	$42,780
6	$42,600	$53,250	$48,990
7	$48,000	$60,000	$55,200
8	$53,400	$66,750	$61,410

(Effective February 2007; from U.S. Department of Education using Taxable Income)

Size of Family Unit	48 Contiguous States, D.C., and Outlying Jurisdictions	Alaska	Hawaii
1	$15,315	$19,155	$17,625
2	$20,535	$25,680	$23,625
3	$25,755	$32,205	$29,625
4	$30,975	$38,730	$35,625
5	$36,195	$45,255	$41,625
6	$41,415	$51,780	$47,625
7	$46,635	$58,305	$53,625
8	$51,855	$64,830	$59,625

Poverty Guidelines

2007 Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines

Persons in Family or Household	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	$10,210	$12,770	$11,750
2	13,690	17,120	15,750
3	17,170	21,470	19,750
4	20,650	25,820	23,750
5	24,130	30,170	27,750
6	27,610	34,520	31,750
7	31,090	38,870	35,750
8	34,570	43,220	39,750
For each additional person, add	3,480	4,350	4,000

2008 Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines

Persons in Family or Household	48 Contiguous States and D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	$10,400	$13,000	$11,960
2	14,000	17,500	16,100
3	17,600	22,000	20,240
4	21,200	26,500	24,380
5	24,800	31,000	28,520
6	28,400	35,500	32,660
7	32,000	40,000	36,800
8	35,600	44,500	40,940
For each additional person, add	3,600	4,500	4,140

Appendix D

Letter of Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF Nebraska
Lincoln

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Letter of Informed Consent

You have been selected to participate in a research project entitled "Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Nontraditional Male Drop-outs: A Qualitative Study." The purpose of this exploratory and phenomenological study is to investigate how nontraditional males who dropped out from a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university before completing a bachelor's degree describe their perception of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process. This research is being conducted to fulfill partial dissertation requirements in the doctoral program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, under the supervision of Dr. Richard Hoover. This phase of the project should be completed by August 2009. To be selected for this study you must be a nontraditional male student who was enrolled at a western four-year, Title IV authorized, public university within the past two years with the intention of pursuing a bachelor's degree. For the purpose of this study, nontraditional students will be characterized as meeting one of the following criteria (taken from NCES, 2002):

- delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
- attends part-time for at least part of the academic year;
- works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
- is considered financially independent for purposes of eligibility for financial aid;
- has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); and/or,
- does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school).

Your participation will involve being interviewed for approximately thirty minutes to one hour concerning your college experience of attempting to attain a bachelor's degree. Participation in this study involves sitting in a comfortable room, talking to a researcher, and having the conversation recorded. The conversation will then be transcribed verbatim and you will be asked to review the transcripts for accuracy. Additionally, your transcripts will be obtained from the institution. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary.

There are no known risks to this study. The purpose of this research is to develop a better understanding of how the nontraditional male student describes the transitions he went through in the college process from start to finish, specifically focusing on the situation, self, support, and strategies. This information could be used to help establish or improve collaboration efforts student affairs and academic affairs, the creation of student programming, and an acknowledgement as to how to better serve and communicate with nontraditional male students.

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. Transcripts and demographic information, will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigators' offices, will only be seen by the investigators during the study, and will be kept for three years after the study is complete. Audiotapes will be erased immediately after the transcripts have been verified. The information will be shared at professional meetings, and possibly used in professional publication. You will not be identified in any way, and demographic results will be presented only in aggregate form.

You will be compensated with a $10 gift card for your time. You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. You may call the investigators at any time at Monica Powers at 406-657-1668 (office) or email doctoralstudy@gmail.com or Dr. Richard Hoover at 402-472-3058 (office) or email rhoover2@unl.edu. Please contact the investigator if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research or in the event of a research related injury.

141 Teachers College Hall / P.O. Box 880360 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / (402) 472-3726 / FAX (402) 472-4300

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:

You wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant;
To voice concerns or complaints about the research;
To provide input concerning the research process;
In the event the study staff could not be reached.

You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or Montana State University Billings. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. All information is given voluntarily and becomes property of the researcher.

_____ Initial here if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

_____ Initial here indicating you understand and agree that your transcripts will be obtained by the researcher.

_____   _____
Signature of the Participant   Date

Name and phone number of investigator(s)
    Monica Powers, M.Ed. (primary investigator)   Office: (406) 657-1668
    Richard Hoover, Ph.D. (secondary investigator)   Office: (402) 472-3058

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Nontraditional Male Drop-outs:
A Qualitative Study

Interview Protocol

Name (Pseudonym)_____Date_____

Location_____

Interview Process

Before the interview: Ask the participant for permission to tape record the interview. Set up a time that allows for the interview to go long if need be. Set up a place that is quiet with minimal distractions and convenient to the participant, such as at the Montana State University Billings campus (there are three campus locations in the Billings area).

Start with a little small talk to set the participant at ease. Explain the purpose of the interview and research. Have the participant review and sign the letter of consent.

Ask the background questions and finish with the principal questions. Follow questions with additional probing questions to get as much information as possible. Probing questions may include: Tell me what you mean by _____? When did that happen? Can you tell me more about _____? I am not sure I understand what you mean . . . Can you tell me about a time when you felt that way? Record the interview and take notes.

At the end of the interview thank participant for his time, and ask him if he would be willing to read and verify the transcripts. If so, state approximate date transcripts will be available for review, determine delivery method for transcripts, and agree on a date for transcripts to be returned.

Script for Interview:

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today. Would you please

acknowledge that you have received an informed consent, have read it, and

understand it. With your permission, I will be recording and transcribing what we

say. I will be asking you to review the transcription that results from the audio-

recorded interview. It is important that I reflect in my writing what you mean. For

that reason the transcription will be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase

something you've said with an incorrect interpretation. Your identity, as well as the identity of the institution you attended, will remain completely anonymous. Additionally, any demographic data that is reported will be in aggregate form. What I am interested in finding out in this study is, "From your perspective, that of a nontraditional male who left college before attaining bachelor's degree, how did you adapt to the transitions associated with college prior, during and after your enrollment; specifically reviewing how you perceive your: 1) situation, prior, during, and after enrollment; 2) self, prior, during, and after enrollment; 3)support you received (or didn't receive), prior, during, and after enrollment; and, 4) strategies for coping, prior, during, and after enrollment." I will ask five brief background questions and then four primary questions (with sub questions) regarding three different areas. I really want to know as much as possible about your experience and your perspective, so please feel free to relate specific examples, or discuss your views in general. I may ask some additional questions as we go along in order to learn more and to clarify what you mean. Again, I want to remind you that all information that you share with me today will be confidential.

Interview Questions

Background Questions (posed in order to help the participant feel comfortable and to "break the ice"):

1. Why did you decide to enroll in college?

2. How long were you in school?

3. Did you declare a major while you were at the university? If so, what was it?

4. What was your career goal?

5. What was your favorite course? Why?

Moving In: Preparing to enroll in college.

The following questions focus on your experience prior to attending classes. I am interested in the process you went through to come to the decision to initially enroll.

1) Situation
   a. When you enrolled in college, was the timing right for you to go to college?

   b. Tell me about your decision to go to college.

   c. How far in advance did you decide to go to college before you enrolled?

    d. How did you view your initial enrollment in college? Was it positive, negative, or you didn't really think about it?

2) Support

    a. Tell me about your family. (Possible probes: immediate family, extended family, spouse, significant other, boyfriend/girlfriend, children)

    b. What did your _____ think about you enrolling in college? (immediate family, extended family, spouse, significant other, boyfriend/girlfriend, children . . . depends on the participant's answer to question 2a)

        i. In what ways was your _____ supportive? (immediate family, extended family, spouse, significant other, boyfriend/girlfriend, children . . . depends on the participant's answer to question 2a)

        ii. In what ways was your _____ not supportive? (immediate family, extended family, spouse, significant other, boyfriend/girlfriend, children . . . depends on the participant's answer to question 2a)

    c. Did you discuss what enrolling in college would mean for the family (as defined by the participant in question 2a)? Could you tell me about that?

    d. What did your friends think about you enrolling in college? What discussions did you have with them about you entering college?

    e. In general, how important to you is:
        i. Agreement (others deem your decisions as appropriate and understandable)?

        ii. Assistance (financial assistance, assistance with children, assistance at home with household chores)?

        iii. Affection (respect, love, caring, understanding)?

        iv. Feedback (reinterpretations of situations, different perspectives, challenge or reaffirm your interpretation)?

3) Self
    a. How did you feel when you first enrolled in college? Excited? Anxious? Overwhelmed? Hopeful? In control? In denial?

    b. Had you experienced any change or transition that was similar to attending college?

        i. If so, how did that go?

        ii. Would you consider it a successful experience?

        iii. Could you tell me about that?

        iv. What did you do that allowed you to be successful in that experience?

    c. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your coping skills? Why would you give yourself a score of _____?

4) Strategies

    a. When you first encounter a problem or a new situation, what is your first reaction? Then what?

    b. What strategies did you use to adjust when you first enrolled in college (hang back and observe, seek assistance, explore resources)?

    c. What did you sacrifice to attend college?

    d. When things aren't working out are you the type of person who endures, quits, tries to change your behavior (possible probes or jump starts: study groups, study schedule, time management), or tries to change the circumstances (possible probes or jump starts) change advisors, change classes, change employment)?

Moving Through: College Attendance.

The following questions are in regard to actual attendance, when you were on campus and enrolled in courses.

1) Situation
   a. What was attending college like? Did you feel like you were gaining something or losing something?

   b. Was the experience something you would consider positive or negative? Could you tell me more about that—give an example?

   c. Did the fact that you had an expected graduation date provide reassurance in any way? Why?

   d. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate the stress in your life that resulted from you attending college? Why would you give yourself a score of _____?

2) Support
   a. Did your family (as defined by the participant in question 2a: Moving In) offer support (affection, feedback, aid, affirmation) while you were attending college? Could you give me examples of how they gave you support?

      i. Did you discuss the demands of your course work?

      ii. Did your family (as defined by the participant in question 2a: Moving In) seem to be understanding of the demands of your college attendance?

b. Did your parents (as defined by the participant in question 2a: Moving In) offer support (affection, feedback, aid, affirmation) while you were attending college? Could you give me examples of how they gave you support?

c. Did your friends offer support (affection, feedback, aid, affirmation) while you were attending college? Could you give me examples of how they gave you support?

d. Did the institution offer support (feedback, aid, affirmation, academic resources, role models) while you were attending college? Could you give me examples of how they gave you support?

e. Was there any one or any thing in particular that was not supportive of your education, more of a barrier? Can you tell me about that? Do you have specific examples?

3) Self
    a. Was attending college a realistic goal for you? Why?

    b. Would you agree with the statement: "one's actions have some causal relation to one's life?" Why?

    c. Would you consider yourself:
        i. Resilient? Why?

        ii. Optimistic? Why?

       iii. Resourceful? Why?

    d. How did you feel about attending college?

4) Strategies

    a. What strategies did you use to help you adapt to life as a college student?

    b. Were you involved in any extracurricular activities on campus? Why?

    c. Did you utilize any institutional support such as a religious organization, counseling service, or community group to help you adapt to becoming a college student? Such as? Could you explain how they helped you adapt?

    d. What was the greatest barrier you encountered while attending college? What did you do to try to overcome that barrier?

Moving Out: Choosing to Leave College.

The following questions are in regard to your decision to leave college. I am interested in the process you went through in coming to the decision to leave college.

1) Situation

    a. What happened that made you decide to leave college? Could you elaborate?

    b. Can you tell me about the process you went through in deciding to leave college?

        i. How long did you think about it?

        ii. Do you think you will return?

        iii. Was this a bad time for you to be in college? Why?

    c. What is your opinion of the necessity of earning a four-year degree?

    d. Do you view your departure from college as a gain or a loss? Why?

2) Support

    a. How did your family (as defined by the participant in question 2a: Moving In) view your leaving college?

b. Did you discuss your decision to leave college with your family (as defined by the participant in question 2a: Moving In)?

      i. What did you say?

      ii. What did they say ?

c. Did you discuss your leaving with your friends?

d. What did the institution do when you decided to leave college (exit interview, letters, phone calls, email, inquiry as to problems)?

3) Self
    a. How did you feel about leaving college?

    b. Did you feel you had a choice to leave college or were there no other options? Can you explain that to me?

    c. Do you think your gender had any bearing on your decision to leave college? Why?

    d. Do you think your age had any bearing on your decision to leave college? Why?

    e. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your general health compared to when you first enrolled in college? Why would you give yourself a score of _____?

4) Strategies

    a. Have you had a similar experience where you were not "successful" by society's standards? Can you tell me about that?

    b. How do you view your college experience?

    c. What was your greatest barrier to staying enrolled and getting your bachelor's degree?

        i. What could have been different that would have helped you stay in school and get your degree? What would have been the most helpful to you personally?

        ii. If you had to do it again, would you enroll in college again? What would you change?

        iii. Now that you have had a chance to attend college, what are some things that "if you had only known" may have made a

difference in whether you attended college or not, what you majored in, and what type of degree you chose to seek.

d. What are you doing now, since you left college?

Appendix F

University of Nebraska Lincoln Internal Review Board Approval

University of Nebraska
Lincoln

March 23, 2009

Monica Powers
Department of Educational Administration
1126 Iristan Ln Billings, MT 59105

Richard Hoover
Department of Educational Administration
119 TEAC UNL 68588-0360

IRB Number: 2009039735 EX
Project ID: 9735
Project Title: Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Nontraditional Male Drop-outs: A Qualitative Study

Dear Monica:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 03/23/2009. This approval is Valid Until: 03/22/2010.

1. The approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (Powers Letter of Informed Consent-Approved.pdf file). Please use this form to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
• Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
• Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
• Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
• Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
• Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board. For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Mario Scalora, Ph.D.
Chair for the IRB

Appendix G

Montana State University Billings Internal Review Board Approval

MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY
BILLINGS
Access & Excellence

Office of
Research Compliance

MSU-Billings Institutional Review Board #1
(IRB00001622)

March 31, 2009

TO: Monica Powers

FROM: Matthew N. McMullen, Ph.D.
             Chair, MSU-Billings IRB

RE: Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Nontraditional Male
             Drop-outs: A Qualitative Study

Your research protocol was received by the IRB. Due to the nature and design
of the proposed study, it received an expedited review rather than being
reviewed by the complete IRB. Everything appears to be in order with your
protocol and approval is granted for the class project as it has been described.

Please be aware that no modifications can be made without further review.

Good luck in your research endeavors.

cc: D. McGinnis

Appendix H

Script when Leaving Message

Script callers were given and directed to follow when leaving a message.

Script for leaving a message:

Hi, my name is _____ and I am calling on behalf of doctoral student Monica Powers who is conducting a research study. Hopefully last week you received a letter explaining the study, a Participant Pre-survey, and a business response envelope. I am calling to ask for your help in participating in this study.

Please call Monica at home at 254-8887 or at work 657-1668.

Thank you in advance for helping with this very important study.

Appendix I

Script when Calls were Answered

Script callers were given and directed to follow when the call was answered.

Script for answered phone:

Hi, is _____available? My name is _____, I am calling on behalf of doctoral student Monica Powers. Hopefully last week you received a letter explaining the study, a Participant Pre-survey, and a business response envelope.

Did you receive that packet?

If yes:
- ask for help by participating in the study.
    - Ask if they received the letter explaining the study, a Participant Pre-survey, and a business response envelope,
    - Do you still have the survey?
        - If yes, ask if they could please complete the survey and return it by Friday, May 8th.
        - If no, ask if they would like a survey mailed to them OR emailed to them
            - Yes - to what address or email address and if they could please complete the survey and return it by Friday, May 8th.

If no they did not receive the packet:
- The study is about nontraditional males who did not complete their bachelor's degree. Does that criteria fit you?

If yes, the criteria fits:

- ask if they would like a survey mailed to them OR emailed to them
    - to what address or email address and
    - please complete the survey and return it by Friday, May 8th.

If no, the criteria doesn't fit:

Common Answers: I graduated, transferred, at COT, returning in summer or fall . . .

If so: Thank you for your time. I will make a note of that in the files.

Do you have any questions?

Would you like Ms. Powers' contact information?
        Home 254-8887
        Work 657-1668
        Email doctoralstudy@gmail.com

Thank you very much for helping with this important study.

FAQs

Where did you get this information?

- From information listed in the Montana State University Billings computer system, it appears that you were enrolled at MSUB sometime between Spring 2007 and Fall 2008 and that you did not complete your bachelor's degree at MSUB. Monica was given public information, such as your last known address and phone number.

What is the purpose of this study?

- To see how nontraditional males who did not complete their bachelor's degree describe their college experience.

What if I am planning on returning to college?

- If you are planning on returning to college (at MSUB or anywhere) during the summer 2009 or fall 2009, you are not eligible for this study.

What if I have been enrolled numerous times or at different institutions?

- This study is regarding your enrollment at MSUB if you were enrolled between Spring 2007 and Fall 2008. Monica is interested in your most recent enrollment.

Will I be compensated?

- From the completed surveys, Monica will select 15 participants to interview. Participants who are selected to be interviewed will receive a $10 gift card.

How long will it take?

- The survey is 20 questions and takes approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. If you are selected to be interviewed, the interview will take approximately one hour.

Do I have to?

- No. All participation is voluntary and all answers will remain confidential.

Appendix J

Letter to Respondents that were not Eligible for the Study

May 23, 2009

Dear,

Thank you for completing the Participant Pre-survey regarding the research study involving nontraditional males who did not complete their bachelor's degree. In order to participate, you must be a nontraditional male. There are seven criteria that determine if a student is nontraditional or not. A student must meet at least one criterion in order to be classified as nontraditional. The criteria include:

- delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
- attends part-time for at least part of the academic year;
- works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
- is considered financially independent for purposes of eligibility for financial aid;
- has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); and/or,
- does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school).

After reviewing all submitted surveys, I have determined that you are not eligible to participate in the research study as you do not meet the definition of a nontraditional student. If I have made an error, please contact me at your earliest convenience to remedy the situation.

Again, I thank you for your time, willingness to participate, and submitting the survey. Best of luck in your future endeavors,

Monica Powers
406-254-8887 home
406-657-1668 work

Appendix K

Letter to Respondents that were Minimally Nontraditional

May 23, 2009

Dear ,

Thank you for completing the Participant Pre-survey regarding the research study involving nontraditional males who did not complete their bachelor's degree. In order to participate, you must be a nontraditional male. There are seven criteria that determine if a student is nontraditional or not. The criteria include:

- delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
- attends part-time for at least part of the academic year;
- works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
- is considered financially independent for purposes of eligibility for financial aid;
- has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); and/or,
- does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school).

Additionally, there are levels of nontraditionalism. If you meet 1-2 criteria you are minimally nontraditional, if you meet 3-4 criteria you are moderately nontraditional, and if you meet 5 or more criteria, you are considered highly nontraditional. After reviewing all submitted surveys, I have determined that you are minimally nontraditional. If I have made an error, please contact me at your earliest convenience to remedy the situation.

The next step in the research process is to conduct interviews with nontraditional males who did not complete their bachelor's degree. After speaking with the supervisory committee, it was determined that the best approach would be to start by interviewing the highly nontraditional group first. After those interviews are completed, a decision will be made as to whether enough data has been collected or if the next (moderately nontraditional) group of respondents will need to be interviewed.

I wanted to be sure to thank you for your time, willingness to participate, and submitting the survey, while keeping you posted on the progress of the research study. I will keep your contact information and survey on file in the event I need to contact you for an interview or if in the end you are not selected to participate in the research study. I know this is a lot of information, so please do not hesitate to contact me if you should have any questions.

Thank you again!

Monica Powers
406-254-8887 home
406-657-1668 work

Appendix L

Letter to Respondents that were Moderately Nontraditional

May 23, 2009

Dear,

Thank you for completing the Participant Pre-survey regarding the research study involving nontraditional males who did not complete their bachelor's degree. In order to participate, you must be a nontraditional male. There are seven criteria that determine if a student is nontraditional or not. The criteria include:

- delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
- attends part-time for at least part of the academic year;
- works full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
- is considered financially independent for purposes of eligibility for financial aid;
- has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); and/or,
- does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school).

Additionally, there are levels of nontraditionalism. If you meet 1-2 criteria you are moderately nontraditional, if you meet 3-4 criteria you are moderately nontraditional, and if you meet 5 or more criteria, you are considered highly nontraditional. After reviewing all submitted surveys, I have determined that you are moderately nontraditional. If I have made an error, please contact me at your earliest convenience to remedy the situation.

The next step in the research process is to conduct interviews with nontraditional males who did not complete their bachelor's degree. After speaking with the supervisory committee, it was determined that the best approach would be to start by interviewing the highly nontraditional group first. After those interviews are completed, a decision will be made as to whether enough data has been collected or if the next (moderately nontraditional) group of respondents will need to be interviewed.

I wanted to be sure to thank you for your time, willingness to participate, and submitting the survey, while keeping you posted on the progress of the research study. I will keep your contact information and survey on file in the event I need to contact you for an interview or if in the end you are not selected to participate in the research study. I know this is a lot of information, so please do not hesitate to contact me if you should have any questions.

Thank you again!

Monica Powers
406-254-8887 home
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Appendix M

External Auditor's Attestation

External Audit Report
Dr. Betsy Palmer

Monica S. Powers requested that I conduct a methodological audit of her phenomenological dissertation study entitled *Applying Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Nontraditional Male Drop-outs: A Qualitative Study*. I met with Ms. Powers on December 17th, 2009 in order to review the materials provided for the audit. I conducted the audit on December 27 – 30, 2009. The purpose of the audit was to examine both the process and the product of her phenomenological research to determine the level of trustworthiness of the study.

Schwandt (1997) defines a qualitative audit as "a procedure whereby a third-party examiner systematically reviews the audit trail maintained by the inquirer. The purpose of the audit is to render a judgment about the dependability of procedures employed by the inquirer and the extent to which the conclusions or findings of the study are confirmable (p. 6)."

The procedures I followed in conducting the methodological audit were as follows:
1. Review the materials provided for the audit with Ms. Powers and ask any relevant clarifying questions.
2. Review the dissertation proposal document to ascertain the proposed methodology for the study.
3. Review documents related to the process of sampling and data collection.
4. Review the interview process including informed consent procedures and interview protocol.
5. Review handwritten notes taken during the interview process for a sub-sample of eight participants.
6. Review the transcribed interviews for the sub-sample of eight participants.
7. Review coding and analysis procedures.
8. Review the final dissertation document to establish if the results presented represent the data collected.
9. Write and submit the audit report.

On December 17, 2009, Ms. Powers provided me with a box of materials related to her study which included the following items:
1. Notes regarding the population and sampling techniques.
2. Original list of potential participants who were contacted via regular mail.
3. List of potential participants contacted via email.
4. List of potential participants contacted via telephone call.
5. Script for telephone call to solicit participation.
6. Detailed notes regarding the outcome of solicitation telephone calls/emails/mailings.
7. Notes regarding the final sampling procedures and arrangements for interviews.

8. List of potential participants with demographic information.
9. List of final participants with detailed notes regarding setting up interviews.
10. Blank copies of pre-survey and interview protocol.
11. Notes regarding mapping of pre-survey and protocol questions to purposeful sampling criteria and study research questions.
12. Notes regarding interview procedures.
13. Key for assigning pseudonyms.
14. Original documents containing the information from the pre-survey for sub-sample of eight participants.
15. Informed consent documents for sub-sample of 8 participants.
16. Notes from interviews for sub-sample of 8 participants.
17. Original transcription of eight interviews which included color coding and notations in the margins.
18. Key for coding notations.
19. Coding notes cross-referencing significant statements with research questions related to background, moving in, moving through, and moving out.
20. Notes summarizing across the moving in, moving through, and moving out coding structure.
21. Assets and Liabilities coding spreadsheet.
22. Assets and Liabilities analysis notes.

Initial Meeting and Review of Documents. Ms. Powers verbally described her research procedures to me during our meeting and then reviewed the documents that pertained to each step of the process. I was able to examine each type of document briefly and ask clarifying questions regarding her research procedures. At the conclusion of our meeting, Ms. Powers provided electronic copies of her dissertation proposal and final draft of the dissertation document as of 12/17/09.

Review of Dissertation Proposal. I reviewed the dissertation proposal document paying particular attention to the sections describing the research questions, the theoretical framework guiding the study, and the description of proposed research methods. On page 12 of the dissertation proposal, Ms. Powers lists the grand tour research question as:

"In retrospect, how does a nontraditional male student who dropped out of college prior to earning his baccalaureate degree describe his situation, support, self, and strategies while moving in, moving through, and moving out of the college process?"

She lists the sub-research questions for the study as:
   "1) Dealing with each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving in process (the period of time prior to enrollment)?
   2) How do nontraditional males perceive the moving through process (the period of enrollment), again considering each of the four S's?

3) In the context of each of the four S's, how do nontraditional males perceive the moving out process (the period of time after enrollment)?"

Sampling and Data Collection. I reviewed the description in the proposal, the notes and all documents related to Ms. Power's sampling procedures. From the original list of 838 potential respondents, twelve names were eliminated due to ineligibility. The remaining potential participants were mailed an introductory letter and pre-survey. However, this mailing failed to generate a large enough response, so Ms. Powers modified her sampling technique in order to procure more participants. She emailed potential participants (674 potential participants) and conducted telephone calls (633 potential participants) to solicit additional participation. Follow-up emails and phone calls were also completed. The results of this multi-pronged recruiting strategy resulted in 59 potential participants who submitted a completed pre-survey. Of these 59, 16 participants were selected based on the purposeful sampling criteria for selecting highly non-traditional students outlined in the proposal. Fourteen of the 16 participants agreed to an interview. In reviewing the sampling process completed by Ms. Powers, I believe she used every available measure to ensure that her sample fit the criteria set out in the proposal for the study and that she was unbiased in her selection of participants.

Data Collection and Interview Procedures. I reviewed materials presented in the dissertation proposal, blank copies of informed consent forms and interview protocol and handwritten notes completed during the sub-sample interviews. I also reviewed Ms. Power's notes which "map" sections of the pre-survey and interview protocol to research questions and aspects of the conceptual framework. Ms. Power's procedures for conducting the interviews were unbiased and met the highest standards for the ethical treatment of human subjects. Ms. Powers included extensive notes regarding member-checking procedures and the changes requested by participants after transcription. There is ample evidence that the participants were given the opportunity to add to or challenge the content of the interviews and that they did not choose to do so.

Coding and Analytic Procedures. I reviewed eight coded transcripts from a sub-sample of participants, Ms. Power's key for her coding notations, her notes cross-referencing significant statements with research questions related to background, moving in, moving through, and moving out, her notes summarizing across the significant statements, her spreadsheet summarizing participant's stated assets and liabilities while moving in, moving through, and moving out of college, her analysis notes regarding the assets and liabilities spreadsheet and her notes regarding her coding and analysis procedures. Ms. Powers indisputably analyzed the transcripts in multiple ways in order to increase her ability to understand the data. She read whole interview transcripts, re-read across individual questions and sub-questions and performed open coding, axial coding and selective coding at different points in the analysis process. Ms. Powers also made extensive use of charts and spreadsheets to visually represent the data in ways that would allow her to observe patterns across participants. In addition, she clearly paid attention to negative cases that did not support common themes.

Review of Findings. I reviewed a sub-sample of eight coded transcripts, the coding documents described above and the final draft of the dissertation document. Based upon the subsample (57%) of the interviews that I had access to, the summaries of the data represent the interviews as transcribed. Quotations are accurately lifted from the transcripts and illustrate the main themes. Based upon the evidence I reviewed, Ms. Powers has accurately documented the information provided by her participants.

Conclusions. After reviewing the documentation provided by Ms. Powers, it is my opinion that trustworthiness of this study can be established for both the research process and the manuscript product. Ms. Powers carefully designed her study to respond to the research questions she had proposed. She modified her proposed methodology only in response to unexpected circumstances and the modifications resulted in a stronger design. She employed a number of verification procedures including a thorough sampling strategy based on criterion sampling, member checking, multiple analytic techniques and a very thorough data auditing trail. Her summary of participants' responses clearly represent the data collected.

Attested to by Dr. Betsy Palmer this 30th day of December 2009.

Betsy Palmer
Associate Professor
Educational Research and Statistics and Adult and Higher Education
Montana State University
Bozeman, Montana

Schwandt, T. A. ,(1997). *Qualitative Inquiry: A dictionary of terms*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.