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NONTRADITIONAL WOMEN PERSISTING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO MEET THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

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Ph.D.   degree in   Community, Agriculture,
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NONTRADITIONAL WOMEN PERSISTING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO MEET THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

By

Charlene Ann Lutes

A DISSERTATION

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resources

2005

ABSTRACT

NONTRADITIONAL WOMEN PERSISTING IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO MEET THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS

By

Charlene Ann Lutes

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of women as they persist in higher education while managing their daily lives. Nontraditional women who are at risk in college because of life's situations seek strategies to meet their learning needs. Very little research has been done about women who, without a formal support system, are able to complete their educational goals in spite of the odds.

Grounded theory, a qualitative approach, was used to organize and interpret the data. This naturalistic inquiry allowed for the examination of women's lives firsthand and provided a rich stream of data that could classified to reach conclusions about how these women were able to succeed in college. Eleven women were interviewed before saturation was reached. Although the women's experiences were relative to their individual times and places in life, a common set of propositions emerged, with one overall identifying theme.

Key propositions pointed to these women and their commitment to relationships while pursuing their studies. They formed new positive ones as they exhibited the ability to adapt to varying circumstances while they pursued their dream of a college education. They also learned how to respond to adversity in new ways in order to stay in school. Finally, the women saw how their family backgrounds could negatively influence their future if they allowed it.

The one overarching theme uncovered as a strategy they used to stay in school was the significance of the power of relationships. They were able to distinguish between negative relationships that interfered with their goals, and they were able to identify the positive relationships that were helping them to succeed. They saw that their achievement, the conviction they developed, the choices they made, their beliefs and their growth and development all had to do with the quality of their relationships.

Finally, this study found that women identified reliable and positive relationships that helped them persist. Their views changed from negative before they entered higher education to positive after experiencing college and forming new relationships. As more time passed, the women's outlooks changed about their abilities to do college. The women identified positive relationships as the reasons they changed their overall view. Finally, they saw the value in directly seeking out positive relationships to help sustain them in school.

The information in this study is beneficial to college practitioners and other professionals who are helping to advance the status of women. It is also beneficial to other nontraditional women who are attempting to reach higher educational goals for the first time in their lives.

This study is dedicated to my daughter, Annie, my son, Andrew, and my husband,

Dennis. They gave me the motivation and inspiration to continue.

This study is also dedicated to the women herein who told their stories so that others

could benefit. May their stories give countless others the motivation and inspiration to

seek their college goals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful to many unique people who supported me through this research project. Looking back, I see that my experience is analogous to a ship at sea in search of a desirable and distant shore.

I was very privileged to have as my committee chair and compass, Dr. Joe Levine, a gem of an educator and advisor. With his untiring support as captain of my committee, I arrived at this long-sought destination. Through his leadership, I navigated through personal and professional benchmarks, growing personally and professionally. Thank you, Joe.

Dr. Marilyn J. Amey, committee member and mentor, offered insight from a woman's perspective that helped map the way through the course of the project in order to steer clear of any obstacles ahead. Thanks to Dr. Fred Whims who sensitized me to the bigger picture and provided wisdom. Finally, a big thank you to Dr. James Bristor who, with his attention to detail, helped complete this voyage.

Especially, I want to thank the women who agreed to become part of this research. Their illuminated voices provided depth to the journey's purpose, and they are living examples of strength of the human spirit. This project is for you.

In conclusion, I would like to thank my committee and my friends and colleagues who always offered a positive word of encouragement, even though at times I felt adrift and lost at sea. With praise and thanksgiving to my husband and children, I was able to conclude my studies and reach my horizon, this lifelong goal.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Women who are students in higher education experience circumstances unique to their gender, situation and day-to-day life as they attempt to reach their educational goals. Statistics show that nontraditional women are increasing in numbers on college campuses. They are able to master college while managing children, family and work. The views of women who are able to persist in their college goals can be helpful for the understanding of how they see themselves able to cope with multiple responsibilities. They have perceptions relative to their circumstances worthy of examination. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of nontraditional women as they persisted in higher education while managing their daily lives.

Background of the Study

"Education has always been a hallmark of the American dream, and a college education has been the route to lasting economic self-sufficiency and social mobility in the United States." (Center for Women Policy Studies, 2003, p. 1) During the Clinton administration through the year 2000, community colleges, in particular, were deemed ideal sites of higher education to begin vocational training that could improve work opportunities and financial status. These colleges were geographically more easily accessible to women who had families to manage, and community colleges typically have lower tuition rates. They also made sense for women with families who had to work.

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However, four-year institutions are also experiencing a rise in nontraditional enrollments. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reported that while in 2003 women learners totaled 56 percent of enrollment in all higher education institutions, they totaled 58 percent of community college enrollments. The characteristics that describe today's college enrollments in America are also changing.

"Today's college undergraduate population is different than it was a generation ago. It was 72 percent larger in 1999 than in 1970," according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2002, p.1). However, the Association of Nontraditional Students in Higher Education (ANTSHE) reports further "Today more than 47 percent of college students are over the age of 25 and being a student is not their full-time job. They are pursuing careers, rearing children and providing extraordinary service in their communities while they go to school." (2003, p.1) And 56% of those over the age of 25 are women. (NCES,2004) Higher education is becoming more and more a necessity for today's workforce, while, at the same time, federal government initiatives have made getting to college and staying there more difficult, especially for women.

<u>Times of Change</u>

One event that affected college enrollments and created a need to pursue a college education in order to improve economic status was the federal government's welfare reform act of 1996. The goal of the act was to reduce the welfare roles and put welfare recipients to "work first." Statistics revealed that welfare recipients were and have been mostly women. (Karier, 2003)

This federal act made immediate employment and not education the goal of low-income Americans. It presented a difficult hurdle for aspiring college students who

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needed education and training for a job that would provide the economic means for the basic necessities. " Most recipients who left welfare found jobs; however, the jobs pay between $5.50 and $7 an hour, higher than minimum wage, but not enough to raise a family out of poverty. Most of the jobs are in the services and retail trade, and few families can escape poverty." (Tweedie, Reichert, O'Connor, 2000, p. 2)

According to the 1996 federal act, by fiscal 2002, 50 percent of all welfare recipients in America would be working. The definition of "work" was rewritten to mean that each recipient who was not married had to work at least 30 hours a week. For two-parent families work was defined as 35 hours per week. These work standards imposed difficulties for those former female welfare recipients who needed more education to improve their economic status. (Karier, 2003) Research has shown that completing high school is not enough. "The surest path to a middle-class income is to complete at least two years of education beyond the high school level." (Moscovitch, 1997, p.1)

State agencies at the federal government's direction can often deny childcare assistance for those who are working and attending college too. This adds to the burden of women who are attending institutions of higher education to improve their economic status. The denial of childcare was to promote work first and discourage school as a way of life. (S. Wiper, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, personal communication, July 10, 2003)

> According to 2000 statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, one woman in four heads a family that is below or at the poverty level. For low-income women, the merging path for adult students into higher education promises to be more than self-enrichment; it is a significant step toward

economic security. (Wellesley College Center for Research
on Women, 2003, p. 2)

Looking to the future, of the new jobs created between 1998 and 2008, 62 percent

are expected to require an associate's degree or higher. (Wellesley College Center for

Research on Women, 2003) "The benefits of higher education are not limited to those

who get a bachelor's degree or higher. A two-year degree from a community college can

boost earnings significantly. Even those who have taken some college courses without

getting a degree can earn 5 to 11 percent more than high school graduates." (Waldron,

Roberts, Reamer, 2004, p. 15) While there is hope in obtaining a college education,

whether it is at a community college for an associate's degree or at an institution of

higher education for further studies, the work standards as a result of welfare reform

continue to make it difficult for the women persisting in their educational goals.

Institutions of Higher Education

Women who have little resources, but attempt to improve their lives through a

college education and are able to stay in school anyway, demonstrate resolve by their

very persistence. Even before welfare reform in 1996 made it more difficult to attend

college, the first-year attrition rate in 1992 as reported by the American College Testing

Program at two-year community colleges was 47.9 percent of all enrollments. Over 50%

of these were women [at that time]. (Tinto, 1993) Today women have replaced men as

the majority undergraduate population on campus, (NCES, 2002) and, as the early studies

show, internal departure factors relating to the institution and external departure factors

relating to the lives of learners who find it necessary to withdraw from higher education.

Adjustment [to college], incongruence [perception of not fitting in], isolation [lack of

integration] and difficulty [of classes] are primary institutional reasons for departure.

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"As to the external factors that shape persistence, two stand out. These can be described as "obligations" and "finances." (Tinto, 1993, p. 38). Obligations are described as relating to family, work and other matters of the learner while finances refer to the ability to pay for college.

One of the key findings in the national report "What do you want to be?" was that women "out of necessity weighed other criteria over their own satisfaction and long-term career development in choosing jobs or education. Despite perceiving the need for further education, respondents postponed investing in education and other career-building strategies to shoulder care giving responsibilities." (Women Employed Institute, 2004, p. 1) Examining the perceptions of women who have managed to persist in their higher education goals anyway is worthy of discussion for purposes of discovery.

Need for the Study

Erika Kates, from The Center for Women Policy Studies in Washington, DC, writes that during the past two decades women have increased their participation more than men at all levels of education and training. (Kates, 1992) She states that nontraditional women attempting to master higher education will continue as a national trend. (iii)

More importantly, her report states that in the literature it is not clearly documented how the needs of nontraditional women are different from other learners to better understand how to support them in their quest for an education.

However, the Women's Ways of Knowing Project study, reported that "With the Western tradition of dividing human nature into dual but parallel streams, attributes

traditionally associated with the masculine are valued, studied, and articulated while those with those associated with the feminine tend to be ignored." (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1997, p. 6)

Kates (1992) also underscores the fact that these women face multiple challenges other than money in trying to gain an education.

> Women who choose higher education confront many
> obstacles and pay a heavy price, financially and personally,
> for their choice. Because of the toll on their lives and those
> of their families, it continues for several years. It is
> essential that more comprehensive, in depth data be
> obtained in order to learn more about the costs as well as
> the benefits, of obtaining a college degree. (Kates, 1992,
> pp. 3-4)

Despite the extensive body of literature about college student retention, there is still much we do not know about its character and the complex interplay of forces which give rise to attrition. (Tinto, 1993) Studies show welfare, poverty, domestic violence and other factors contribute to attrition (Lyon, 2000), but this study focuses on the voices of women who have been able to keep going in spite of setbacks and multiple responsibilities.

Significance of the Study

Examining the perceptions of women learners persisting in higher education as they manage their daily lives will add to knowledge by providing information to higher education professionals about this specific campus population. It will also contribute more timely information to the literature gap and professional knowledge base with regard to successful women learners. The professional significance of this study also includes the opportunity to provide information for policymakers and planners in order to

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create services for this unique group of learners. Finally, the significance of this study provides information to other nontraditional women in higher education.

As community colleges, including other institutions of higher education, admit these more diverse and disadvantaged students, the institutions will have to meet the students' more complex needs in vocational and academic areas. This will necessitate that practitioners not only expand their knowledge for working with these learners, but also find better, effective methods for doing so. (Gibbs, 1999)

In the past, post-secondary institutions placed the responsibility of breaking down barriers these learners might face upon the learners themselves. However, yet today these learners seek community organizations and services to help them address external issues that impact their college attendance. There has been an increase in organizations on college campuses to support students as they deal with issues specific to them. A corresponding number of publications and listservs have been established in the last few years as well. During the time of the major welfare reform act, a non-gender specific organization, ANTSHE, was formed in 1996 by a group of people representing academic institutions in the U.S. and Canada to advocate for the needs of the emerging nontraditional college population.

Research Questions

The focus of this research study is "nontraditional" women learners persisting in higher education. There are three broad areas of focus. These areas are women learners in higher education, barriers to persistence of nontraditional learners, and humanistic

psychology and goal achievement. The following questions are used to frame the research:

1. What do nontraditional women in community college identify as helping them persist in their education?

2. Do women's views of college they held before entering change after they have begun their course of study?

3. If women's views of college change, what significance do the changes have as they persist in school.

4. What do the women identify as the reasons for the change.

5. What do the women see as helping them persist in school.

Methodology

This study was descriptive research. Its goal was to find "what exists" with regard to the perceptions of "nontraditional" women as they persisted in higher education. The qualitative approach of grounded theory was chosen for this study because it is particularly useful in examining individuals' reactions to their environment. For the examination of how women are persisting in higher education, a grounded theory study is appropriate. Grounded theory research produces an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation. (Creswell, 1998) It also provides information for future study.

In keeping with the grounded theory method, the study relied on open-ended, semi-structured interviews of women successfully persisting beyond their first year of higher education. Twenty women's names were selected from a college list of women

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who met the nontraditional definition. Four names were randomly selected at a time from the 20. In-person interviews were conducted, and preliminary data analysis was performed. This process was repeated until saturation of data was achieved. Saturation of data was achieved at the 11th interview at which time no further interviews were conducted. The study documents the respondents' own language as they describe their perceptions of their own experiences as they have persisted in higher education.

Definition of Terms

The terms in this study are identified for clarity before examining female enrollments in higher education. The definitions in this study are identified according to current industry standards.

Definitions Defined

*Nontraditional female learner-*25 years of age or older, single, married or divorced, children, must work, attends college, has GED or high school completion later in life by different means. (NCES, 2002)

*Persistence-*the ability for individuals to adjust both socially and intellectually to a new college environment. (Tinto, 1993)

Student Departure- ways in which the social and intellectual communities that make up a college comes to influence the willingness of students to stay in that college. (Tinto, 1993)

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Assumptions

One assumption of this study is that nontraditional women learners who are persistent were able to reflect on their situations and provide meaningful insights about their experiences. That is, they were able to fully express accurately what they were thinking and feeling and how they were seeing their experiences. Another assumption is that the women were truthful about their experiences although some experiences might be difficult to talk about. That is, the women had had enough courage to share about their experiences without withholding valuable insights that might have had more accurately described their lives.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was that the subjects were selected from one institution of higher education; and, therefore, the results could not be generalized to the general population. A second limitation of this study was that the boundary decisions of the project, which are the number of subjects, the timeline, events and processes used to gather information, might or might not have had a clean beginning and ending. A third limitation of this study was that there may or may not have been sufficient information to provide a clear-cut outline of a strategy common to all the women.

Order of the Study

Chapter I provides the overall introduction to the study. Chapter II presents a review of literature to support the rationale that led to this research project and assumptions made in this study. Chapter III presents the methodology and specific

implementation. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. Chapter V presents

implications, conclusions and recommendations for further study.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This research project examines the views of nontraditional women as they persist in higher education. It studies their perceptions to reveal how they are able to achieve their educational goals while managing children, family and work.

In addition to other specialists, the work of four major individuals and one unique educational research project primarily provide the foundation for this study. Educational researcher K. Patricia Cross has contributed knowledge in the area of learning and women as adult learners. Researcher Vincent Tinto has studied the resonance between the learner and the learners' institutional experiences and why learners leave college. Psychologist Carl Rogers contributed research about experiences of people, their values and their relationships with others, while the motivation theory of psychologist Abraham Maslow gives reasons for what motivates people to achieve their goals. Finally, major educational research about women, the Women's Ways of Knowing Project that began in the 1960's but was updated in the 1990's, found that women learners take different paths [than men] in developing their understanding of their intellectual potential.

Therefore, in order to understand nontraditional women learners and their perceptions in relation to their busy daily lives of work, family, school and home, the review of literature was drawn from three primary areas: women learners in higher education, barriers to persistence of nontraditional women learners, and humanistic psychology and goal achievement.

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Women Learners in Higher Education

K. Patricia Cross (1991) reported that since the growth of the learning society began and continues today, nontraditional women are still more likely to participte in college and is one element of diversity that characterizes most college campuses. With emphasis on development of women's self, voice and mind, the Women's Ways of Knowing reports that women have a different way of looking at themselves because their early experiences with education have been different.

"Instead of opening the world up to them, the kind of education and educators they encountered as children and adolescents were alienating and irrelevant to their lives. It was only after some crisis of trust in male authority in their lives, coupled with some confirmatory experiences that they could know something for sure," the report states, "that women from these backgrounds could take steps to change their fate and 'walk away from their past.'" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1997, p. 58) The report revealed that these women returned to education because of what they had learned in their lives and that their subjective knowing was not ushered in by the educational experience itself.

Unlike the past when higher education was not expected of women because their role in society was limited, today's women find higher education necessary. The Center for Women Policy Studies in Washington, DC, (2003) reports that during the last two decades women have increased their participation more than men at all levels of education and training. The center reports that women attempting to master higher education will continue as a national trend in the future.

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Until the year 2010, NCES projects an increase of 14 percent in the number of learners 25 years of age and over. (Post-Secondary Education Statistics, 2002) Further more women than men earn degrees, and the number of women receiving all types of degrees has increased at a faster rate than for men. During the 1990's, degrees awarded to women rose by 26 percent. (Post-Secondary Education Statistics, 2002) These trends show that more women are entering higher education.

<center>Reasons for Change</center>

Literature suggests changes in laws, changes in lifestyles caused by the economy, personal life crises such as abuse and divorce, job advancement requirements driven by the changing world market and other societal influences are all reasons adults seek higher education. While the reasons that women seek higher education may vary, there are reasons the literature suggests that are common to the majority of women learners.

Welfare Reform-The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, known as "welfare reform," is a significant contributor to adults seeking higher education. This act was the first to put most of America's welfare recipients to work and consequently seek more education as well. (Public, Private Ventures, 1998)

As discussed in Chapter I, most welfare reform participants affected by the 1996 Work Act are single parents, and the *majority are women*. They are working at jobs that pay higher than minimum wage, but not enough to raise a family out of poverty toward self-sufficiency. (Tweedie, Reichert, O'Connor, 1999) A college education is an option for these women who desire to improve their status.

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Domestic Violence-As welfare reform is a widely reported initiative of the 1990's, so is domestic violence, for example, a phenomenon under continual study into this decade. A comprehensive report published by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (2002, p. 7) said, "Some women have partners who actively interfere with their efforts to work or attend school or training; such women have more difficulty sustaining their participation." Domestic violence is among the reasons that lead women to seek more education to better themselves. The majority of welfare women have been the targets of domestic abuse in their adult lives. Tolman and Raphael (2000) found that nearly one in four women would experience some type of domestic abuse at some point in their lives. Sexual and psychological violence often occurs in cases of physical violence. Professional organizations like Zonta International, which consults regularly with the United Nations about the status of women worldwide, supports its own Zonta International Strategies to Eradicate Violence Against Children and Women (ZISVAW) and provides scholarships for women to attend college as a way to improve their economic status to escape domestic violence. (Zonta International, 2004) This organization's support of women in the form of material resources to help learners achieve educational goals substantiates that women need help to overcome the barrier that this phenomenon produces in the lives of women.

Divorce Rate-As domestic violence is a barrier to women learners achieving their educational goals, divorce is also considered a reason women seek higher education. Forty three percent of all marriages in the United States end in divorce. This rate is expected to continue to rise well into this decade. This leaves the majority of single parent households headed by women. (Divorce Statistics Collection, 2001) The need to

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improve their earning capacity to support their children drives them to consider a college education. The Aslanian and Brickell study (as cited in Benshoff and Lewis, 1992) showed that movement from one status to another requires new knowledge, skills and credentials. The throes of divorce and residue of broken relationships involving families lingers long after women are in higher education

Other Reasons-Among other reasons women seek higher education are the technological advances requiring training in technology for careers. Advancement of technology is also responsible for changing lifestyles. With pressure to conform to the workforce where technology skills are required, more training programs are available to learn new skills. Today's women, especially those in the baby boomer aging population, are able to set educational goals for themselves as their children get older. Education means new skills leading to new careers. It becomes a way of filling an "empty nest." Whether married or single, women who want and need a change look to higher education as a way to achieve their goals and improve their status. Because women enrollments are increasing in higher education, the characteristics of this "nontraditional" population are important to discuss.

<u>Nontraditional Women</u>

"The enrollment of students 25 and older increased from 5.8 million in 1990 to approximately 6.1 million in 1998; projections to the year 2010 predict an enrollment of 6.8 million adult students." (Howell, 2001, p. 7)   The need for education throughout one's life span is widely acknowledged in the new Millennium and has led to categorizing learners in higher education into two groups for purposes of understanding their needs. Adult education researcher K. Patricia Cross (as cited in Bensholff and

Lewis, 1992) describes the adult who returns to school full- or part-time while maintaining responsibilities such as employment, family and other responsibilities of adult life as "nontraditional." These students also may be referred to as "adult students," "re-entry students," "returning students," and "adult learners."

NCES (2002) has published a list of nontraditional characteristics. According to NCES, the more of these characteristics a learner has the more nontraditional the student becomes. They include delayed college enrollment or does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year of high school completion; does not have a traditional high school diploma, but completed high school through a GED, correspondence courses or certificates of some sort; attends postsecondary part time for at least part of the academic year; works full time or 35 hours or more a week; considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid; has dependents other than a spouse, usually children but sometimes others; and Is a single parent, either not married or married but separated, and has dependents.

Nontraditional students are faced with barriers of a different kind: work, family, financial and other personal obstacles. But when they succeed in attaining their educational goals, they are, perhaps, the most proud. Donna Talarico (personal communication, April 20, 2004, via Nontraditional Student Listserv)

The nontraditional characteristics suggest that there are many considerations in the lives of nontraditional learners as they attempt to reach their learning goals. Persistence in higher education for these learners presents unique challenges because for some it has been several years since they experienced the formal classroom.

Barriers to Persistence of Nontraditional Women Learners

The management of daily life by the nontraditional woman student becomes an important consideration when attempting to persist in school. "Once a woman has surmounted the obstacles which are preventing her from making a return to campus, she finds that there are still problems which have to be solved." (Scott, 1980, p. 11) For example, low-income women who return to college have fears about navigating the bureaucracy, fitting in, and facing rusty academic skills. (Women in Community Development, 2002)

Initial Barriers to Persistence

"Change thrusts us into chaos, and it takes time to reorder things and find a new route. Courage is mandatory." (McMeekin, 2000, p. 59) Difficulty in making a change to college frequently arises from the individual's need to adjust to the new and often more challenging social and intellectual demands which college imposes upon students. (Tinto, 1993) Adult learners tend to be achievement oriented, highly motivated and relatively independent with special needs for flexible schedules and instruction approaches for their developmental level. (Cross, 1980) Adult students find lack of an age cohort and limited social acceptability and support for their student status among the barriers to their persistence. (Benshoff and Lewis, 1992)

Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (2000) also reports that the challenges faced by most women tend to fall into three major categories: family responsibilities, employment and financial issues, and academic challenges. Academic

challenges include challenges of campus life. Kohler and Sapp (1999) write that every effort should be made to alleviate the pressure women feel to seek immediate financial gratification that might possibly sacrifice their long-term educational goals.

Nontraditional women attempting to master higher education find themselves in what educational researcher Vincent Tinto (1993) describes as a "foreign social landscape." Tinto explains that decisions to withdraw from college reflect the dynamic nature of the social and intellectual life of the student through daily interactions in college. This suggests that while attending college, women benefit from supporting relationships from family, friends and the institution especially during the initial college experience. Supportive relationships are essential for the persistence and intellectual development of students. (Tinto, 1993) Supportive relationships can also help with the cost and time barriers that adults most frequently mention as barriers to continued participation. (Wlodkowski, 1999, citing Van der Kamp, 1996)

<u>Situational and Institutional Barriers</u>

Situational barriers to obtaining an education lead the list of deterrents to mastering higher education. Lack of childcare or transportation, cost [of education] and lack of time [to study] are frequently mentioned. (Cross, 1981) "In most surveys lack of time [to study and attend class] vies with cost [of tuition and related college expenses] for first place among the obstacles to education. It is mentioned more often by people in their 30s and 40s than by those younger or older." (Cross, 1981, p. 103)

Institutional barriers of nontraditional women who have been out of school and engaged in rearing children, managing families and other activities find it difficult to secure the necessary information or to even know where to look in order to make

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informed decisions about higher education plans. In returning to the formal classroom, their concerns with the institutions they seek to access are generally grouped into five areas: scheduling problems, problems with location of courses, lack of courses that are interesting, practical or relevant, procedural problems and time requirements, lack of information about programs and procedures. (Cross, 1981)

For example, adult commuter students in community colleges tend to lead busier lives than traditional students. They don't have time to wander from office to office to accomplish a single task like getting their transcripts or adding a class. They want to be able to get in and out quickly." (Nontraditional Student Report, p. 3)

While other factors, such as motivation and commitment, can play a part in nontraditional learners' persistence, there are more specific problems relative to the nontraditional woman learner in higher education. Researchers have found that women's pursuits of studies are stressful not only socially, but psychologically too. (Gaskell and McLaren, 1991 citing Lovell, 1980; Tittle & Denker, 1980) "The fact that women have always had to struggle for education, particularly for adult education, is well documented. (Coats, 1994, p. 10, citing Purvis, 1980, et al.) "The role of education as a mechanism for change is recognized: 'Education is about nothing if it is not about change, the opportunity to grow, to develop, to enhance one's understanding and, possibly, one's place in the world.'" (Coats, 1994, p. 24, citing Crane, 1986)

For nontraditional women learners, systems of higher education can be intimidating and discouraging to those already lacking confidence to push through with their desires. Easy discouragement is a psychological barrier relative to nontraditional women attempting to persist in higher education.

Psychological Barriers and Women

"The sense of isolation and confusion as the student enters a new culture, the culture of higher education, can be a significant obstacle to the student's ability to work toward a goal." (Howell, 2001, p. 8) Adult education is beginning to realize that although for years its participants have been predominately female, the courses and programs have not adequately met women's needs and aspirations. (Gaskell and McLaren, 1991) This has caused added stress as women seek careers through higher education. The relationship between adult education and training and women is complex. (Gaskell and McLaren, 1991) However, most researchers agree that a primary obstacle for women who begin their higher education careers is lack of confidence in their own ability.

"Prior experience leads adults to evaluate themselves across a number of social and psychological dimensions that affect their collegiate experiences. These social, psychological and value dimensions are the various social conditions, the values and the psychological motivations that influence adults' abilities to learn and remain in college." (Donaldson and Graham, 1999, p. 29) "Learning is not just a psychological process that happens in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives, but that it is intimately related to the world and affected by it." (Merriam, 1993, p. 74)

These women have anxiety about their abilities as well as about the wisdom of coming to school. Much of the anxiety stems from what appears to them as the enormous gap between what they have been doing in the recent past, either working at semi-skilled or unskilled jobs, or in the seemingly non-intellectual world of child rearing, and the mysterious, intellectual world of books and ideas, term papers and examinations. The

personality characteristic that has to be overcome is a poor self-image on the part of these women. (Scott, 1990)

"Personal growth and personal change are the key features of this approach: What is important is that one of the aims of education should be to commence the process of getting to know the self. If the student begins to understand herself, her needs, her fears, her positive and negative aspects, she can then start to contemplate the prospects of making changes that will ultimately improve her life." (Coats, 1994, p. 24, citing Mann, 1988). The findings of another study (Dirkx, Smith and Amey, 2001) of under prepared adult men and women in community college suggest that the transformation that learners experience in how they see themselves is different for each one, and it is a complex matter. However, the report substantiated other research that learners begin to experience a sense of possibility and hope once in college. This is the essence of this study.

By examining how women perceive their experiences as they persist in higher education will further shed light on how they see themselves as learners while living their everyday lives. To understand what motivates these nontraditional women to persist as they do in achieving their educational goals, humanistic psychology provides further insight into the phenomenon of goal achievement as it relates to hopes and dreams. Humanistic psychology rejects the pessimistic psychoanalytic view of humans and focuses on how they succeed.

Humanistic Psychology and Goal Achievement

Humanistic psychology has made many contributions to understanding the nature of humans and their goals. Humanistic psychologists generally believe that all

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humans are growth-oriented, forward moving and concerned with existential choices.

They also follow that thought with the notion that humans will naturally choose to

expand themselves personally and socially if given the chance. (Nye, 1981)

<div align="center">Person-Centered Approach</div>

Psychologist Carl Rogers places a strong emphasis on the experiences of the

person as a way to understand them. (Hall and Lindzey, 1978) As the author of the

person-centered approach, Rogers says that "individuals have within themselves vast

resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes and

self-directed behaviors; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative

psychological attitudes can be provided." (Rogers, 1980, p. 115) Rogers' contention is

that growth occurs if the environment is ripe. The environment must be genuine or real,

it must be one where caring or prizing occurs, and finally the environment must contain

an element of empathy. (Rogers, 1980) This person-centered theory that discusses the

importance of context or environmental factors that facilitate growth and development

supports the qualitative approach used in this study of nontraditional women achieving

their educational goals. As the environment is a factor to consider while examining goal

achievement of individuals, this approach also contributes to the notion that it is valuable

to study those who are achieving their goals rather than those who are not achieving their

goals in an attempt to how they are able to persist in their aspirations. (Rogers, 1970)

Another psychologist, Abraham Maslow, whose contribution to understanding adults'

needs, wants, desires or motives has been very influential in adult education.

(Wlodkowski, 1999)

<div align="center">23</div>

Basic Human Needs and Their Hierarchy

Abraham Maslow made it his life's work to study why people "do" succeed rather than try to explain why they "do not" succeed. His work provides a foundation for discussion about this study because he examined the day-to-day needs, desires and activities humans required to live and live as they desired to live. Maslow reported that a person's former poor parental training, education and other social ills can be overcome if the individual is willing to understand and master obstacles in favor of making better choices. (Hall and Lindzey, 1978)

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation, specifically in the area of basic need fulfillment, provides some understanding about nontraditional women persisting in higher education. The basic needs and desires that Maslow describes are those all people must fill and attain, according to this theory. Maslow's pyramidal needs approach to explain basic needs and goal attainment illuminates understanding of what nontraditional women learners must do to keep moving forward toward their educational goals.

Contributions to This Study

Maslow's hierarchy describes in what order needs have to be met and mastered before higher and loftier ideals can be realized. His model is divided into five parts, as Table 1 on the next page shows. Human nature dictates that humans work their way up the to goal attainment, according to Maslow. (Hall and Lindsey, 1978) The theory helps explain what nontraditional women persisting in higher education experience.

Table 1 **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

Level	Need	Examples
5	Self-Actualization	Fulfill Potential
4	Esteem	Respect of Self and Others
3	Belonging & Love	Love and Be Loved; Sense of Belonging
2	Safety	Shelter, Security, Stability, Trust
1	Physiological	Food, Shelter, Clothing, Sleep

For example, the bottom two rows of the table, physiological and safety needs, are called the deficit needs. According to Maslow, deficit needs are called such because he believed that people are motivated to strive to get them if the needs are absent. According to Maslow, physiological needs are food, clothing and sleep, the basic daily necessities. If these needs are absent, human beings spend time trying to meet them. The same is true of safety needs such as shelter, home, job, money, and other types of resources. These are also considered necessities, and people who lack safety needs strive for these until they are met, according to Maslow's theory. (Reece and Brandt, 1990) For women persisting in higher education, the deficit needs would need to be maintained as women master the educational landscape to pursue a degree.

The top three rows of the table, belonging and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs, as Maslow calls the being needs, represent the ultimate goals of people in their natural growth and development. Contrary to the first two rows of deficit needs, the top three rows of needs---belonging, esteem and actualization---act as goal motivators by their presence. For women persisting in higher education, improving job

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and income status, finding a worthwhile and satisfying career, or becoming a positive family role model would represent the higher needs. According to Maslow's theory, these would help motivate women to complete college. These belonging, esteem and actualization needs refer to relationships, emotional well being, mental well-being, self-respect, self-esteem, recognition of others, fulfilling potential, working at capacity in a fulfilling way and reaching goals. (Reece and Brandt, 1990)

By the Table 1 example, the arrangement of the needs and their sequential fulfillment can help to support the notion that it is worthwhile to examine experiences of nontraditional women learners attempting to stay in school. According to Maslow's theory, the deficit needs would produce tension while, at the same time, the being needs produce a measure of well being. Maslow's descriptions of the physiological, safety, belonging, love and esteem needs become "cues" to understanding the experiences of nontraditional women persisting in higher education.

<u>Women Learners and Goal Achievement</u>

Students who are over the age of 25 and into their 30s and 40s tend to have more clearly defined goals as a result of why they decided to attend higher education. The American Association of University Women has found that generally women [on all economic and academic levels] attend college in the hopes to improve the quality of life for them and their families. For some, becoming a role model to their family and friends and having an impact on the community was a strong source of motivation. This supports Maslow's theory of being needs. Yet, for other women their challenging life experiences were credited for their motivation, discipline, endurance and increased

appreciation for the value of education in the light of overcoming difficulties. (Women in Community Development, 2000) This supports Maslow's theory of deficit needs.

Learning is defined as a "sustained, highly deliberate effort to learn knowledge or a skill." (Cross, 1981, citing Tough, p. 50) While women attempt to master their studies through learning, they must integrate all the other aspects of daily living into their 24-hour schedules. First-year leaving represents a very sizable part of all-institutional leaving. In a 1992 American College Testing survey, nearly 48 percent of full-time students at two-year public schools such as community colleges left during the first year. (Tinto, 1993, p. 14) This suggests that while many depart from higher education for any one or more of the variety of reasons mentioned herein, there are nontraditional women who are successful at persisting in higher education.

Justice and Dorman (2001) citing Morstain & Smart et al. about metacognitive differences between the traditional-age and nontraditional-age college students, explain that nontraditional students have different motivations from those of traditional-age students for attending college. In citing Ross (1988) they reported that the decision to return to college is often triggered by critical life events or reassessment of goals and priorities. But they went on to explain that relatively few studies have examined nontraditional students' motivation to achieve once enrolled in college. (Justice and Dorman, 2001)

To examine the perceptions of women about their experiences requires an approach that allows for a deeper understanding of what they encounter. This approach takes the form of natural inquiry.

Method of Inquiry

The qualitative approach to research is known as "naturalistic inquiry" because it explores the experiences of people in their everyday lives. "Because the analysis is so in depth, only a few individuals' situations are studied, although many contextual variables are considered." (Mayan, 2001, p. 5)

Certain topics or phenomena lend themselves particularly well to qualitative inquiry. In this study, the qualitative approach is appropriate because little is known about how nontraditional women perceive their abilities to persist in their educational goals. Qualitative inquiry allows for capturing meaning by collecting data in the form of feelings, thoughts, insights and actions. Further, qualitative inquiry is used "to describe a process rather than an outcome." (Mayan, 2001, p.6) This study describes a process rather than an outcome through the use of grounded theory, a way of organizing and classifying their descriptions in order to extract richer understandings of their experiences.

In summary, the focus of this study is how nontraditional women who are beyond their first year in higher education perceive their college experiences as they persist in reaching their goals in higher education. The personal narrative descriptions of nontraditional women, their perceptions about day-to-day life while pursuing higher education, reveal indications of strategies, themes and patterns relative to their success of staying in school. The rich story texts of their descriptions lead to a deeper knowledge of what they encounter as they manage families, home life and work. They balance a variety of responsibilities as they continue to pursue their educational goals.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of nontraditional women as they persisted in higher education while managing their daily lives. This chapter describes the method of inquiry and its rationale, the focus of the research, the study population, the sampling procedure, the collection of data, and how the data were analyzed. This chapter concludes with an introduction to the women in this study.

Rationale of Approach

Grounded theory was selected as the method to examine the data in this study because it allows for the examination of women's perceptions of their experiences from the descriptive to the conceptual levels of understanding. It evolves from a part to thewhole enabling the researcher to build propositions from identifiable schema. This type of development not only revealed individuals' experiences, but also generated pieces to a puzzle or uncover truths.

Grounded Theory

"Grounded theory is a study of individuals' reactions to their environment." (Creswell, 1998, p. 56) The centerpiece of grounded theory research is the development or generation of a theory "closely related to the context of the phenomenon being studied." (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 56) Therefore, grounded theory was an appropriate way to uncover how nontraditional women perceive they are able to achieve

their educational goals while managing their lives, and it applied the traditional grounded theory concepts.

Conceptual Ordering- Grounded theory involves conceptual ordering which was organized in this study according to classificatory schemes to make sense of the data. Data from sources such as interviews, observations, documents and records were collected and analyzed by a systematic process giving way to an emerging holistic picture. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)

Theoretical Sampling- Grounded theory involves theoretical sampling that was used to maximize the opportunities to make comparisons of happenings, events or incidences in the lives of nontraditional women in higher education in this study. Theoretical sampling happened continuously throughout the data collection process. "Theoretical sampling is data gathering driven by concepts derived from the evolving theory and based on the concept of 'making comparisons.'" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 201) "The developing theory guides collection and this allows grounded research to be both flexible and sensitive." (Richardson, 1986, p. 25) In the grounded theory process, sampling theoretically "means that sampling, rather than being predetermined before beginning the research, evolves during the process." (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 202)

In this study theoretical sampling became an important process while exploring new and uncharted areas of women's perceptions of their educational experiences where constant comparisons could take place. "Constant comparison is the heart of the process." (Dick, 2002)

*Paradigm Selection-*The paradigm in grounded theory is the perspective taken toward the data. Grounded theory process involves the paradigm as an analytic tool

devised to help integrate the structure with the process or the conditional context in which the phenomenon is situated. It helps link structure to process because structure or conditions create the circumstances in which problems, issues, happenings, or events pertaining to a phenomenon are situated or arise; whereas, process, on the other hand, denotes the action and interaction over time of persons, organizations, and communities in response to certain problems and issues.

In this study of examining the perceptions of nontraditional women as they managed their daily lives, there were four perspectives or paradigms considered: school life, home life, work life and family relationships.

Focus of the Research

The focus of the research for this study was examining the perceptions of nontraditional women as they persisted in their educational goals while managing their daily lives. The focus was held in place by the four paradigms of school life, home life, work life, and family relationships that framed the study. In order to examine the women's perceptions, it was essential to capture as many of their thoughts as possible as they described their lives from the four different paradigms. Therefore, the following research questions framed the study:

1. What do nontraditional women in community college identify as helping them persist in their education?

2. Do women's views of college they held before entering change after they have begun their course of study?

3. If women's views of college change, what significance do the changes have as they persist in school.

4. What do the women identify as the reasons for the change.

5. What do the women see as helping them persist in school.

The data drawn from the women is "real world" data derived from "real world" experiences of these nontraditional learners. While some existing hypotheses may remain, through this study comes possibilities for further study about areas of female populations in higher education.

The Study Population and Sample

The population for this study was female non-traditional learners in higher education. In defining the study population, the female gender was chosen because women are the higher percentage of learners in postsecondary education today (NCES, 2002), and they fulfill multiple roles as mothers, wives, learners, co-workers and family members.

The sample of women selected for this study was moderately to highly "nontraditional." According to the NCES (2202) nontraditional definition, a postsecondary student is considered nontraditional if one or more of the following characteristics apply: delayed college enrollment or does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that she finished high school; does not have a traditional high school diploma, but completed high school through a GED, correspondence courses, certificates or some form of alternative education; attends postsecondary at least part-time during the academic year; works full time or 35 hours or

more a week; considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid; has dependents other than a spouse, usually children but sometimes others; and is a single parent, either not married or married but separated and has dependents.

If a learner has only one of the above characteristics, NCES (2002) defines the student to be "minimally nontraditional." If two to three characteristics apply, the student is said to be "moderately" nontraditional. If four or more of the above characteristics apply to the learner, the learner is said to be "highly nontraditional," according to NCES.

Collection of Data

Before beginning the formal data collection process, a pilot test was conducted to measure the demographic material and the appropriateness of the interview process. Two nontraditional women who had completed at least one year of college were randomly selected from a database of 600 names. The interviews were conducted and adjustments were made for the final interview process. Application was then made to the Michigan State University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) for approval of the research project. It was approved in June 2004.

Data Collection Steps

The formal data collection process began in July 2004. It involved the following: Step one included a letter of recruitment. (See Appendix A) The letter was sent to four women randomly selected from a pool of 20 potential participants taken from student records of nontraditional learners who had completed a nontraditional program in higher

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education and were beyond completion of the first year of college. Step two was a Thank You letter confirming willingness to participate in the project. (See Appendix B) This letter was followed by a phone call to schedule the interview. Step three was the face-to-face meeting with the participant to conduct the formal interview, follow through with signed release forms and complete a data sheet. (See Appendices C and D)

The Sampling Procedure

A sample of convenience was selected from a nontraditional program database of 600 names at a northern Michigan institution of higher education. The nontraditional program's list of completers contained males and females. Since the database consisted mainly of female learners, an initial list of 20 women were easily identified as having completed at least one year of college. It was decided that 20 names would be a large enough sample from which to draw the interview subjects because it was a manageable number and was likely to be large enough to reach data saturation. Therefore, the names of 20 women were designated as the initial pool of potential participants.

Selection Process

To begin the participant selection process for this study, a college employee was named project coordinator. The project coordinator conducted the first phase of the data collection process without any intervention of the researcher. The coordinator was in charge of all names. Twenty names were randomly drawn from a list of 600. The coordinator haphazardly selected four names from the box containing the 20 names of potential participants. The coordinator then sent the Letter of Invitation to these four women explaining the study and inviting the learner's participation. Enclosed was a

stamped postcard addressed to the researcher which the learner would mail if she were interested in participating. (See Appendix A) When the researcher received a postcard, a Thank You letter was sent to the potential participant followed by a phone call to arrange an interview date, time and place. The Thank You letter confirmed what the study was about and included two university research consent forms as confirmations of confidentiality of their participation and stressing that the opportunity was available to quit participating in the interview at any time. (See Appendices B and C) In the event that an interviewee would quit at any time, another name from the list of 20 would have been randomly drawn by the project coordinator and the sampling procedure steps repeated. This situation did not occur.

Final Group of Participants

As each participant concluded her interview with the researcher, the project coordinator randomly drew another name from the box of 20 names and the process repeated itself until saturation of data was reached. In this study, saturation of data occurred after the 11th interview making it unnecessary to proceed with any further interviews

The Interview Format

The researcher, using a predetermined format, interviewed each participant. All of the interviews were tape recorded for accuracy. The interview tapes were transcribed immediately after each interview and destroyed four weeks after each interview. The researcher took some notes during the interviews, but most of those notes acted as prompts and were later expanded into memos. Memos in this study were written during the course of the entire data collection process. The memoing is part of the basic

grounded theory process. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) The researcher is the interviewer of record.

Semi-structured Interview-A semi-structured interview was used for this study. The interview format used a set of open-ended questions that were asked in a specific order. The open-ended questions selected for this study were intended to reveal how nontraditional women see themselves persisting in reaching their educational goals as they manage school life, home life, work life and family relationships. (See Appendix E)

Interview Questions-The interview questions for this study are "experience or behavior" questions to determine what the participants are doing and thinking in their daily activities to gain an understanding of how they see their lives. The questions to produce these data were arranged according to the paradigms outlined earlier as school life, home life, work life, and family relationships. In this study the paradigms were represented by the following interview questions:

1. Please tell about a typical school day.

2. Please tell about a typical day at home.

3. Now tell about a typical day at work.

4. Please tell about a typical day with your family members.

As each participant spoke about the four main areas, the researcher recorded her responses on 3 x 5 cards. Checking for accuracy, the researcher repeated to the participant her responses to question one, and then asked the following question of her:

5. Of these items you covered as typical in your day at school, how do you view these from a learner's perspective?

Then the researcher asked the same question about the responses for the days at home, at work and with family members. After the paradigms were completed, a different kind of inquiry was conducted to flesh out any other information about how the women perceived their lives as learners. This new inquiry took the form of the following questions:

1. Tell about some of the important times you have had in college as a learner.

2. Tell in what ways you believe your view of college has changed since you began taking courses.

3. Tell what you identify as the reasons for change.

The interview process took four weeks to complete. Interviews began July 1, 2004, and the 11th interview was conducted on July 30, 2004.

Analyzing the Data

Examining the data consisted of open, axial and selective coding procedures. These coding procedures were designed to allow categories of information to emerge from the data. These categories were conceptual representations of what was said descriptively as the women talked about their daily lives as learners. In the utilization of these coding procedures, a special Conditional Relationship Guide and Reflective Coding Matrix were used to work through and organize the data in this study. The open coding activity began with the researcher's use of questions about the data and the Conditional Relationship Guide.

<u>Conditional Relationship Guide</u>

In this coding process the use of specific questions were posed of the data and organized with the use of the Conditional Relationship Guide as shown in Table 2. The questions asked of the data were what, when, where, why, how, with what results or consequences. In this way the categories are contexualized visually. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)

Table 2 illustrates how the results of the researcher's examinations are recorded. It is a way to organize the emergent categories, their properties and their dimensions.

Table 2 **Conditional Relationship Guide Illustration (Scott, 2002)**

CATEGORY	WHAT	WHEN	WHERE	WHY	HOW	CONSE-QUENCE
	•	•	•	•	•	
	•	•	•	•	•	
	•	•	•	•	•	
	•	•	•	•	•	

There were four emergent categories in this study that were listed in the Conditional Relationship Guide. Through the use of specific questioning in each category, the results were listed below each cell labeled what, when, where, why, how and consequence.

To produce the characteristics of the interaction of the categories that were recorded in the guide for this study, the following questioning process was used as outlined by the creator of the guide, Karen Wilson Scott. (Scott, 2002)

The questions of what, when, where, why, how and with what results or consequences were asked of the data in all four categories pertaining to this study of

nontraditional women persisting in their higher education goals. For example, of the first

category, the "what" question would be asked of that data. "What is [name the category]

to the participants?" As this question is answered of the data and recorded in the cell

below the "what," the next question would be asked of the data: "When or during what

did the [name the category] occur?" The examination of the data continued in this

manner until all the categories had been examined and the answers had been recorded

through the use of the questioning guide. This Conditional Relationship Guide process

was used to conclude open coding. It was also used as a segue to complete the axial and

selective codings in this study.

Reflective Coding Matrix

Scott's (2002) colleague M.L. McCaslin (Scott, 2002) proposed the Reflective

Coding Matrix as a companion to the Conditional Relationship Guide and to better

implement the axial and selective coding processes of grounded theory research. The

Reflective Coding Matrix is a way to organize the results of open coding into theoretical

comparisons produced through axial coding. During this phase it is possible to follow the

sense of how the categories are grounded in data. Analysis follows two lines. "There are

(a) actual words used [by the women in this study] and (b) our conceptualization of

these." (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 126) Therefore, the categories are related to their

subcategories and demonstrate that this is "axial because coding occurs around the axis of

a category linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions." (Strauss and

Corbin, 1998, p. 123) In the Reflective Coding Matrix the consequences that were

descriptively recorded in the Conditional Relationship Guide are expressed as higher

concepts in the matrix as required by grounded theory research. The matrix provides a

way to link the axial and open coding processes. Table 3 illustrates the Reflective

Coding Matrix guide used to record data in this study.

Table 3 **Reflective Coding Matrix Illustration (McCaslin, 1993 in Scott, 2002)**

Reflective Coding Matrix					
Major Category					
Properties					
Processes					
Dimensions					
Modes for Understanding the Consequences					

Selective Coding Considerations

Selective coding was the final phase of coding that explained the story line and

allowed for the selection of a major overall category common to the data. In this study of

nontraditional women persisting in higher education as they managed their daily lives, a

major overall category was identified as common to all the data. This single major

category led to the formulation of propositions about nontraditional women persisting in

higher education.

The Major Category

A major overarching category that could be accommodated for in the Reflective

Coding Matrix in this study emerged as the one thread common to all the data the women

produced through their interviews. This category became central to the study results.

"A central category has analytic power. What gives it that power is its ability to pull the other categories together to form the explanatory whole. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) The selection of the core category for this study met the criteria for choosing an overarching major category as proposed by Strauss and Corbin. (1998, p. 147)

1. All other categories can be related to it.

2. It must appear frequently in the data, within all or almost all cases.

3. Explanation that evolves is logical and consistent.

4. The name used to describe the category should be sufficiently abstract that it can be used to do research in other substantive areas leading to a more general theory.

5. As the concept is refined analytically through integration of other concepts, the theory grows in depth and explanatory power.

6. The concept is able to explain variation as well as the main point made by the data; that is when conditions vary the explanation still holds although the way in which phenomenon is expressed might look somewhat different.

Outcome Measures

All attempts were made to achieve reliability in this study through precautions taken in the development of the instruments, the interview questions, the use of the coding devices and other activities. It is understood that in qualitative study the subjective nature of the observations and explanations depend on the researcher's perceptions.

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Women Participants

There were 11 women interviewed for this qualitative study. Each woman reported a firm commitment to complete her educational goals. The names of the women have been changed to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality in the study. All women had completed one year of college at the time of their interviews, and one woman will receive her bachelor's degree in 2005.

Introduction of the Women

Laurene-At 42 years old, Laurene is remarried. She experienced domestic violence in her first marriage, and she sought refuge in a shelter while her two girls stayed behind with their father. She left the shelter for her own apartment and worked as a waitress as she struggled to make a difference for her two girls who had had a history with law enforcement before the ages of 18. She entered college as she was divorcing, but one year later she met and married a professional restaurant manager for a major corporation. Her current husband is very supportive of her education initiative, and they both continue to work with her two girls and vow never to give up on them. Laurene is not the first one in her family to go to college, but she is the first one in her family to obtain an associate's degree, and she is working on her bachelor's degree. Her siblings are very bright and resent her accomplishments.

Sofia-Her husband left her with two children, a boy and a girl. Sofia was struggling with finding housing when she entered college. Eventually, she secured a place for her and her family in the college's adult apartments. The idea of college was not expected in her family, and at age 38 her mother told Sofia she thought she was too old. Sofia wanted to be able to depend on herself and with only a high school diploma saw

nothing but a bleak future ahead without some sort of preparation. Sofia is completing her second year of college in Phi Theta Kappa academic honorary. In the summer of 2004 she was hospitalized with a rare form of cancer. She spent hours with oncologists who said the cancer was very rare rendering an uncertain prognosis. Prayers went up for Sofia. She continues her college classes under medical supervision and reports her children are doing fine and her classes and her health are going well.

Wanda-A very bright woman, at age 48 she questioned her sanity about coming to college, a dream she had always had. Wanda's 11-year-old is learning disabled, and her 22-year-old often helps with the home and childcare while Wanda is in school. Wanda has a desire to be skilled in technology, but although she makes good grades in her classes, she has been unable to commit to technology as she desires because she is unable to buy a home computer. Wanda likes to dance, and she has been known to frequent parties more often now that she's getting a college education.

Theresa-She cried throughout her first year of college when the least little thing would go wrong. At age 37, she has three children who attend public school. They often worried about the mental health of their mother until the second year when Theresa learned to roll with the punches. Divorced and working as a childcare provider, Theresa waits for the day she can step into a professional job. Her former husband wants to reunite as do the children, but she is hesitant about going back.

Joleen-If Joleen's experiences over the last two years were made for TV, no one would believe her story is true. Joleen's losses began when her father, whom she dearly admired, died. Her mother and father had been divorced for years, and Joleen was estranged from her mother because of it, but had regular contact with her father until his

death. After her father died, Joleen's special needs brother passed away three months later. It was during that summer of both losses that Joleen's doctor reported that she needed radical breast surgery because she had cancer. Joleen endured a radical mastectomy and heavy chemotherapy for the following nine months after which she completed reconstructive surgery. Her husband could not take the stress of Joleen's experiences and left her and their children. He moved to a different state to start a new life. Meanwhile, Joleen's divorce was finalized when she entered college for the first time.

Kolanda-She has about five years to complete her degree. Then she is moving out of state because that is when her husband, who almost killed her in a domestic violence incident, will be released from prison. Since her husband's incarceration the IRS took everything Kolanda had for back taxes. With just a high school diploma, Kolanda entered college. She lives with her parents who are not particularly happy about her college goals because they would like her to stay with them. She is terrified of being anywhere near where her former husband could find her because he said when they took him away, "When I get out I'm going to kill you."

Esther-A soft-spoken mother of two whose husband is a medical professional, Esther is experiencing her second marriage. Her first marriage produced no children, but she was afraid of him as he became more and more abusive. Esther is a bright woman and is torn between attention for her children and attention to her studies. The dual role has been frustrating facilitated by her husband's attitude of "Isn't what I make enough?"

Carole-She has one daughter ready to graduate high school, and Carole is a recovering alcoholic who has been in recovery 12 years. She has a passion for school,

and she considers herself her daughter's greatest role model. Poor and struggling with the tuition for the last year-and-one-half before her bachelor's degree, Carole will celebrate the day she steps into her first professional job.

Serenity-She has great support of a new husband she married in 2004. She commutes one hour to college each day, and she finds her classes more satisfying each semester. With treacherous winter driving, she never quit her studies. With an outgoing personality and winning smile, she feels liberated by the opportunity to attend college. Since her first husband is serving a long sentence in prison, her new spouse adopted her children.

Karmin-With two children of her own and one of her husband's, she is a very accomplished learner and was encouraged to attend college by two school administrators she worked for. They encouraged her to complete a degree. During her first year in college, her mother died and her child was diagnosed with behavioral problems. Although this was discouraging, Karmin has managed to stay the course.

Kelsey-She moved from Florida with her five children to escape the past. She was aided by a local women's shelter, and she obtained low-income housing and resources for her children. The shelter's personnel referred Kelsey to college because they saw potential in her. During her first year her grades were all A's. She was doing so well that her family members in Florida traveled to Michigan to check out her situation. At the time of Kelsey's interview she had obtained a lawyer to prevent her family members from causing her any more adversity so that she could continue on in school.

In summary, all 11 women exhibited extreme strength as they shared their stories about their perceptions of their lives while persisting in their educational goals. Their profiles are presented in tabular form in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3 the women represent a diverse cross section of moderate to highly nontraditional learners whose profiles give an indication of their circumstances as they pursue their higher educational goals. Their views about their daily lives and their goals in higher education produced data that led to findings that characterized similarities in their experiences.

As shown in Table 4 the women represent a diverse cross section of moderate to highly nontraditional learners whose profiles give an indication of their circumstances as they pursue their higher educational goals. Their views about their daily lives and their goals in higher education produced data that led to findings that characterized similarities in their experiences.

Table 4 **Women's Profiles**

			Children				Employment	College	Course of
Name	Age	Married	No.	Ages	Car	Housing	37+ hours	Credits	Study
Laurene	42	Yes	2	21, 23	Own	Rent	Nurse's Aide	68	Social Work
Sofia	38	No	2	10, 12	Own	Rent	Receptionist	30.5	Social Work
Wanda	48	No	2	11, 22	Own	Rent	Childcare	22	Secretarial
Theresa	37	No	3	10, 14, 17	Own	Own	Childcare	29	Pre-Social Work
Joleen	48	No	4	17, 19, 21, 24	Own	Own	Waitress	32	General Liberal Arts
Kolanda	38	No	0	NA	Own	Rent	File Clerk	31.5	Nursing
Esther	35	Yes	2	1, 4	Own	Own	Childcare	32	Liberal Arts
Carole	51	No	1	17	Own	Rent	House Cleaner	62	Social Work
Serenity	31	No	2	4, 7	Own	Own	Waitress	25	Accounting
Karmin	26	Yes	3	4, 6, 12	Own	Own	Receptionist	40	Visual Communications
Kelsey	34	No	5	5, 5, 8, 13, 17	Own	Rent	Childcare	32	Legal Assisting

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This study analyzed the perceptions of 11 nontraditional women as they persisted in higher education while managing their daily lives. Ranging in ages from 31 to 51 years old, these women work, manage family responsibilities and have been attending college for more than one year. They plan to complete their college educations and will be the first in their families of origin to do so. They are learning to learn because they want meaningful careers and lives that would allow them to improve their low-income status. Learning as a whole is a "social phenomenon" (Merriam, 1993, p. 75) where events outside the classroom affect what happens inside the classroom. These women have had their share of sorrow and continue to persist despite the sometimes obvious odds against them. How are they able to persist when others give up? This chapter will provide an overall discussion of the study results that help to explain how these women see themselves persisting in their educational goals.

Presentation of Findings

The findings of this study exemplify the common areas of focus the women perceive as significant while they pursue their educational goals. They talked freely about what the deciding factors were that facilitated their decision to enter college for the first time and what they were thinking and feeling at the time.

<u>Triggering Events</u>

There are three major events mentioned by these 11 women that moved them toward a final decision to attend college. While many of these women had always had a desire to better themselves through some type of college experience, they were clear about what finally pushed them to make the decision to attend college. These three events were divorce, domestic violence and/or death of someone close and disruption of a close relationship such as geographical move or illness.

All 11 of the women had suffered through one or more of these situations. For them, experiencing a loss became the precipitating event to try college. Of the 11 women interviewed, 10 experienced divorce, seven of the 10 divorcees experienced domestic violence as well, and seven of the 11 experienced death of someone close to them. Their own words best express what they were thinking at the time.

Theresa, a single parent with three, school-aged children, experienced her father's death and a bitter divorce within one year of her enrollment in college. Because she was centered on her own grief at the time, she sought to make a lifelong dream come true to help herself feel better. She states, "I thought I would always be happily married. Now that that's over, I'm concentrating on me being me. It's a constant juggle, and it's very, very hard sometimes, but I want to make something of my life."

Carole, a self-employed house cleaner and single parent of a teenaged daughter, said college had always been a secret wish. She and her daughter were financially destitute after a divorce and Carole's alcohol recovery program. When she began to make progress in her recovery program, she recalls, "I would not do it [college] at first because of self doubt. No other reason. And then I would say, 'We don't have food so

how am I gonna go to school.'" Seeing there was no future for her in cleaning houses for the rest of her life, she finally enrolled in college. "People were frickin' stunned. They [former husband, parents, siblings] would look at me like, 'There's a brain in there?' she added.

Laurene, who received her associate's degree in 2004 and currently is a junior at a major university, suffered domestic violence during the course of her 15-year marriage, and chose to enter college at the end of her divorce. She was making a transition from a women's shelter to her own apartment when she said college looked appealing to her because it would provide a "structure that provided safety in my otherwise former chaotic world of violence." She spoke of resenting being a waitress all her life, and commented, "If there was one thing I needed at that time, it was something I could count on. Having classes at regular times I knew what I was going to do. I wanted to make new friends in my new world [college]. When your world is full of chaos, you definitely need that." While all 11 women substantiated what the three women expressed, they all had hopes that better days were ahead because of their college experiences.

All 11 women could vividly remember starting their first semester of college at a time when life seemed the hardest. It was an emotional time, and they spoke freely about their thoughts and feelings, a result of how they were seeing their world at the time. Divorce, domestic violence, death and/or relationship disruption were the precipitating factors that led them to decide to enter college.

<div align="center">Thoughts and Feelings</div>

After the women had made the decision to begin their college educations and were in their first semester experiences, they recalled the thoughts and feelings they had

lingering from the triggering events. These were the same thoughts and feelings that were amplified by the nature of their first semester in college. The feelings that they expressed were common to all of them. The feelings included helplessness, fear, lack of confidence, and disorientation as they attempted to master higher education.

All the women similarly expressed Karmin's explanation of helplessness. She said, "You know you just feel like, well, you get discouraged because you're thinking about how you're thinking and about how you're gonna reach this and do that."

Esther, a wife and mother, also expressed helplessness. She was attempting to leave the negative of the past to try to make a better economic future for her family. She recalls the first semester. "Any work I did that first semester I didn't give myself credit for. I felt helpless and lost."

Fear was freely talked about among the 11 women. "When I first started back I was anxious, scared and fearful," said Laurene. She had been out of a formal classroom for 25 years. " I didn't even know if I had the ability to go [to college] as far as learning was concerned. It was very stressful," she added.

Kelsey, single mother of five, in her comments, illustrated what this study was about. "Coming back for the first time when you're older you get scared. I mean, I meet so many like me who come to school, then drop out." Wanda, who is one of the oldest of the 11, said, "In the back of my mind I always loved school and learning, but when I started I was afraid." Joleen, who had more than her share of life's problems including divorce, also expressed how she felt going to college for the first time. "I was afraid of failing at one of life's accomplishments again."

Lack of confidence was also a common phenomenon among the women. Sofia, a single parent with a major health issue, was experiencing negative reactions from her mother who told her she was too old to go to college at age 38. Sofia commented about her first-semester feelings. "I was pretty intimidated by it all. I wondered if I was the only older person in college. Pretty much I was lost, and I thought, 'Can I really do this?'

Theresa was very candid about her feelings when she related, "Feels like crazy. I cried a lot the first semester. Lack of confidence. Fear of not doing well. Just exhaustion from thinking about it all." Kolanda, who was irritated with her parents' attitudes toward her situation, added these thoughts, "It's harder than I thought it would be, but it will open doors."

Carole recalled, "I was overwhelmed the first year. I think I was inches from the door. I had so much self-doubt. I was carrying so many issues and problems that adding school seemed too much."

However, Serenity, who had started over in life with a new husband and supportive children, said it took some time for her to figure things out. "When I started I was at the bottom of the heap. After I put my ex-husband in prison, I had court battles. I felt suspended in air. I was numb." All the women echoed her comments.

Uncovering Perceptions

The tool in Table 5 shows how the women's responses were categorized in this study. It shows how their perceptions were examined to better uncover how they see their lives.

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Table 5 Conditional Relationship Guide Results

CATEGORY	WHAT	WHEN	WHERE	WHY	HOW	Conse-quences
Commitment to Relationships (Relationships)	• Dealing with parents • No husband support • Discouraged by parents • Encouraged by others • Co-workers understand/ or don't • Jealous sister • Proud children	• Growing up • Now for my kids • Teenage parent years • Sickness in family • Help with math • Help balancing classes • Missing classes	• Family growing up • Family today • At work • Trade babysitting • Trade shifts at work • In school • With instructors	• Children depend on me • Out of need • Friends' approval • Mother's approval • To get things done • Get ahead • Be needed	• Better mom • Hope for change • Influence parental attitudes • You-help-me-I'll-help-you attitude • Mentoring	Choice
Ability to Adapt (Environment)	• Keep going • Still wanted dream • Always wanted school • Never giving up • Want to keep college friends	• Times of adversity • Threats to peace • Changes in relationships • Divorce • Domestic violence • Death • No housing • No daycare • No car • Mother's opinion	• In school, classes • At reunions • At home • At work	• To keep going • To stay in school • To do something • To show mother • To show kids • To do the impossible, the unexpected	• To keep something wanted, desired • To survive • To feel better • Call on counselor • Ask friends • Ask parent	Percep-tion
Response to Adversity (Events)	• Doing something • Finding peace • Being with friends • Going to school to escape	• Death • Divorce • Domestic violence • Losing finances • Losing job • Sibling fights • Car trouble • Homeless • No daycare	• Personal life • With family members • Mother • School • At home with children	• To stay in school • To avoid family members • Mother's attitude • To survive	• Seeing why they happened • Avoiding reoccurrence • Temporary escape • Hoping for a miracle	Percep-tion/ Belief
Relating to Background (Culture)	• Poverty • Middle class values • Unreliable family • Uneducated parents	• As adults looking back • New relationships • Trying to escape old life	• Creating new life now • Trying to make life different	• Always a part of you • Negative family members • Remember goals	• Avoid those who pull them down • Stay away from falling back into rut	Belief/ Growth

The Conditional Relationship Guide in Table 5 was used to organize the responses that could be attributed to the women and to provide a means to demonstrate the four major categories or areas of interest in the lives of these women. This tool allowed for a clearer picture to emerge about what the women were describing as their experiences while pursuing their education.

Response Categories

The four major response areas represented as categories in Table 4 most often represented what the women were describing as they discussed school, home, work and family. The four areas where the women's responses fell most often were in the categories of Commitment to Relationships, Ability to Adapt, Response to Adversity and Family Background Influence. All four of these categories could be identified as common to all the women as they spoke about how they saw themselves in their daily roles of parent, child, friend, co-worker and sibling.

These four categories showed how their responses were classified and were the subjects that appeared most often. As the women talked about their lives, most often they would refer to relationships, their abilities to adapt to changing circumstances, their responses to the adversity in their lives or to their childhoods or families of origin. Their childhoods or families of origin were expressed as how they related to their backgrounds.

However, Commitment to Relationships emerged first as a category through the constant comparative approach (Creswell, 1998) used to compare and contrast all the categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions.

<u>Commitment to Relationships Category</u>

Commitment to Relationships emerged as a category relative to the women's experiences. This category reflected how the women saw themselves in the roles they played as parent, wife, child, friend, co-worker and sibling. The women talked about long-term relationships of choice and long-term family of origin relationships. Some of the relationships they mentioned were negative ones. They included work and school relationships as well as their relationships with their own children. The responses included comments about a variety of relationships.

What did commitment to relationships mean to these women? For Laurene, commitment to relationships meant sticking by her children because it was her children and her siblings that she talked about most often. She said, "Children live what they see. All of a sudden my children, who had watched their parents fight on a daily basis, use abusive language, and watch their mother work while their dad did nothing, began to take notice of me." She added, "I am able to share more with my girls. There's a lot more to communicate about." Laurene also mentioned her family of origin and the problems associated with those relationships. "Being raised with a single parent and the first one out of eight children to go to college is a heavy load to bear. I was raised to believe that we are basically breeding material. My sisters were guarded, not too friendly."

For Sofia commitment to relationships meant keeping in touch with those around her in school. "I'm in class with a variety of different ages, and it's being an older

student that really helps. I think they look up to me." What commitment to relationship meant to Wanda centered on her children, especially her oldest son who is proud of her. "My oldest son is kind of shocked that I did it. I've always told him that I could do it, so could he. He just smiles."

Sofia's idea of commitment to relationship centered on the nurturing environment of school and her instructors. Her instructors have been very supportive of her endeavor. "Just nurturing, that's what they are." That word just keeps comin' up over and over again. They just support you. Kind of like a mom. And you can say, 'Bag this, I'm going to quit' and they say, 'We have people in our classes with as many insecurities as you, and they are not half as academically strong.'"

Joleen's responses illustrated that co-worker relationships were important to her as a learner. She tried to balance her co-worker relationships with her school goals, and she expressed it like this, "My friends were like 'oop—can't invite Joleen out for lunch or dinner; she has school!'"

For Kolanda, relationship commitments included her parents. She does not understand why, after what she's been through relating to domestic violence, her parents wouldn't be more supportive. "That's been a challenge for me," she said of them. She says they see her as, "you're going to be this other person, and you won't need us anymore. I feel that a lot, and it's frustrating to me."

While Esther felt insecure and perceived herself as not doing as well as she had liked but had an A-minus GPA, she expressed disappointment over feeling "torn between being a homemaker/wife and being a student and wanting an education because it's purely me. My parents never did anything with their lives and they didn't encourage us

to. My mom is depressing. My dad is overbearing, and so all she ever did was be at home. It's so depressing." To Esther positive instructor-learner relationships took some getting used to, while how her parents related to each other was to be avoided in her own life.

Carole talked about her siblings and her relationship to them and how she saw them today. She has a favorite aunt, who unlike her mother, befriended her and sends her notes of encouragement all the time. "I have very few family members. We have a very small family. I have one older brother, one younger, and a sister. The younger one is a homeless drug addict; the older one is single and a professional. He doesn't communicate with me or any of his siblings. My sister is 55 and working in the same factory since she was 16, and she can't stand my success." Carole continued, "But I have an aunt, my mother's sister, who encourages me. My aunt said to me of my mother, "She hates your success. Can you believe it? My own mother."

Serenity has a new family with a new future, but she said after she changed her life, her mother became a new person. "We are really close now, but it wasn't always like that because of my ex-husband. But through it all my mom was there for me. When I was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa the whole family went, my kids and husband-to-be. He's the one that says the kids and my school are important. I make sure I take care of him too."

Karmin said her husband is very supportive and his relationship with their children is important to her. "He cooks dinner. He helps with laundry, he...I don't know how I could do it without him."

Finally, Kelsey, who has three school-aged children living with her, struggled with cutting ties with her family of origin because they discourage her college success. Because she lacked so many crucial relationships growing up, she focused on building new ones in college. "I try to do things with my kids when I'm not in school. This is so important to me now. When I grew up I was in foster care for like three-and-one-half ears of my life, so I was disconnected from the whole family routine until I was 15. I've had a rough life." She continued about relationships, "I got away from my abusive ex, and now it's my mother. She's in my world now tryin' to take over. She's abusive to me. It hurts so much deeper when it's your mother."

In conclusion, all the women talked freely about what commitment to relationships meant to them. They were able to express what they thought.

When or during what situation did commitment to relationships occur? By the data their interviews produced, it was possible to tell "when or during what time period" in their lives commitment to relationships occurred. For most of the women it was when they were growing up, when sickness occurred, or when they needed help with school that they felt they needed someone to "be there" that did not occur. The women also mentioned that when outside events threatened their ability to stay in college, they turned to the new relationships that had the "be there" test. Most of the women remembered that they were often emotionally and mentally abandoned as children.

Laurene talked about her childhood in this way: "Growing up was chaos. When I needed someone, no one was there. Now I have my children and my husband when I need them." Sofia said of her co-workers, "I work in a receiving room and here at the college too. My friends at work know what I'm about, and they liked to be the bosses.

Sometimes I miss my job for school. I think they understand. But I like the one [job] at the college better. It's a lot more structured atmosphere, and the people are great to work with. They support me when something goes wrong in my life. I'd rather be here than anywhere else."

Wanda said her sons are her number one priority. She supports them and they support her when the chips are down. "We take care of each other."

"I was pretty much in a coma on the couch," said Theresa in explaining how things go in her life when everything needs attention at once: her children, extended family, and her schoolwork. "It's during these times that I turn to my new friends I've met in classes. I have Darby, and I have an instructor. Both really encourage me."

For Joleen, faith in God is what sustained her. When she talked about her negative relationships and when she talked about her positive relationships, she mentioned her commitment to God. "I reach for prayer. God is in my life so I don't have a problem giving it [problem] to God. I give him everything: heartaches and successes. He's who I reach to."

Kolanda thought she was the "black sheep" in the family. She saw herself as different from her parents and her brother. She, too, worked at the college and said the people at the college were the most supportive when she needed it. "When I need help with math, when I need a word of encouragement, they are there."

Esther was troubled by her marriage relationship only when it related to school. Her husband was supportive in every other way, but school seemed to bother him. It's during those times that commitments were important. "I can't rely on my mother-in-law to baby-sit the kids when I go to class because I think she feels the way he [her husband]

does about school. Why am I doing this?" She says she turns to her friends when this occurs. "They help me try to understand, but they also tell me not to quit school either."

Carole said that she has grown so much in the past few years that the only time she found herself on the phone asking for help was when her income dropped. "I'm low-income anyway, so when it drops you know it's bad." She turned to her professional counselor for words of encouragement and to several women's groups that have raised funds for her college completion goals. "Those women mean more to me than anything."

Serenity's perception of when she relied on established relationships was illustrated by her comments. "I try to be a perfectionist as a student which doesn't always work. I didn't always call my teacher, but I got used to it, and now I'm the type that will carry through with this."

"I rely on my husband," said Karmin. "No matter what I need help with, I get it." Kelsey was a teenage parent and because she felt no one had been there for her all her life except for now, she credited her new relationships at the women's shelter and her new relationships she has formed in college as those she relied upon when she needed them.

"I have the Women's Resource Center, and I have my friend, Michelle. She's the closest person to me. My brother is second closest, because I had a real tight situation not so long ago and he pulled me out of it, so I mean it depends on what it is and if it consists of money, and thank God it didn't."

In conclusion all of the women could express when in their lives that commitment to relationships occurred and what meaning that had for them. Each response was unique but related to the concept of relationships frequently.

Where in the women's lives did their commitment to relationships appear? In further examining the data, the women's responses showed that they were citing frequently where in their lives commitment to relationships were appearing as meaningful. All the women recounted that in their lives they perceived commitment to relationships appearing at times with regard to school and also in their families. Two of the women expressed it most succinctly for all of them. "I talk to Professor [name], and she always supports what I do. Even when I'm not in her class, she's there for me to help," said Wanda. Joleen's expression about her five children summed up others' thoughts and feelings. "Family was important to me, and I know they were always proud of me with whatever I did, and I saw my success then through what I did for my family as a whole."

In summary, these two women said best what all the others expressed about where commitment to relationships appeared most often in their lives. They all referred to their relationships at home and at school.

Why did commitment to relationships occur in the lives of these women? All the women felt that this was naturally occurring phenomenon, especially for women, that they would be concerned about reliable relationships. They mentioned their children, their friends, their families of origin; but Kelsey summed it up for all the women. "Everybody needs somebody sometime."

As the women sought to pursue their educational goals, they became more and more aware of the importance of relationships. They began to develop an opinion about how to benefit from the relationships in their lives.

How did the women use their commitment to relationships in their lives? The women primarily talked about their own mothers and how they wanted to be the mom they never had. Laurene had always felt estranged from her mother, and she wanted a close relationship with her own girls. "If I could come from that [her family of origin] to be a productive family member, a productive mom, something I never had, through the power of education, then there's nothing my girls couldn't do either. I guess I felt like I had a lot more to add to the word 'family.'"

Sofia also wanted to be the mom she never had in the way of support for her boy and her girl. Her mother was critical of her when she began college. "My mother wasn't really for it. Thought it was pretty much silly. Whatever my kids decide to do I'm supporting them, within reason of course."

Her mother abandoned Wanda when she was a teenager. "I was raised by a Southern father, so, you know, that kind of made his views different." By the absence of her mother, she wanted more for her sons. "I know me in college is good for them."

Theresa said although she never heard directly from her mother about any kind of support for her going to college, she had to imagine that she liked what she was about to do. Theresa now focused on her three children. "If it encouraged them, if it showed them that they can do it, then it's even more worth it."

Joleen told about what happened with her mother when Joleen was managing crises in her life and considering college. "I got a letter from my mother and she disowned me and didn't want anything to do with me or my children. So I was coming out of everything [that had happened to her] and did some soul searching. If I could be a success, imagine what it would do for my children."

Carole said, "One Christmas my mother sent my daughter and I a gift. Tucked in the side of the package was one of her little notes. It was so demeaning and critical. She just can't leave us alone. My friend said, 'You're never gonna get what you want from those people, Carole.' People would tell me that all the time. It's not that way with [her daughter] and me."

Of all the women, Kelsey was very vocal about her mother. She had been seeing a professional counselor once a week because of her mother, and each time Kelsey visited her counselor and brought up thoughts of trying to reconcile with her mother, because after all she's her mother, Kelsey said her counselor commented, "Maybe you need to see the abuse wheel again." Kelsey added, "It's like in our family if someone tries to break out a family member comes and tries to rescue you again. For me it's my mother. This last time to get me to quit college, she took me to court to get my children. She called me an unfit mother."

In summary, of all the areas the women spoke about, commitment to relationships was the most fluently mentioned. When the women talked about relationships, they often gave examples about the ups and downs they were experiencing. They spoke freely about what was going on around them.

<u>Ability to Adapt Category</u>

The women talked about the ability to adapt or accommodate to their circumstances in their environments that were frequently upset by events they sought to control. This category represents how the women perceived the events in their lives as they experienced college for the first time hoping to accomplish their dreams. This evening out or balancing the day-to-day ups and downs was one reason they pursued

college because they believed it would structure their days and bring order to their lives long enough for them to improve their status.

What did the ability to adapt or accommodate their circumstances mean to these women? For Laurene adapting meant remembering her lifelong dream during hard times. "I knew I had the ability to do college. I had longed for the mental stimulation for so long, and now here it was. Was I going to give that up? No." Sofia saw adapting in much the same way. "I always wanted school. I had some college friends and I see myself just like they do," she said.

To Wanda adapting meant taking care of material things. "I can fix my own car, washing machine. I got a new place to live now. I had to. When I was sitting in my rocking chair to read or study, I had to keep my feet up off the floor because the mice would crawl up my leg. They'd crawl on you at night when the lights were off, and it got worse. When they got to doing it when the lights were on, I said I'm getting out of here. So FIA helped get us a new place." Wanda moved to new, low-income housing and she credits her college attendance with giving her social workers faith in her future.

Theresa explained that accommodating to her circumstances means that every minute is scheduled. "Prioritize. Prioritize. Prioritize," she said. "I work, I do school. I have three children. That takes organization, and when I want to give up, I don't. I can do one more day."

Joleen saw her life become very structured with work on days she wasn't in school. She also spoke about priorities. "I've worn so many hats that I have to put on my 'school day' hat first." Kolanda said, "From 7:30 [a.m.] till midnight, my days are ordered. Come home. Do homework. Run errands. Crash into bed at night."

Esther said, "You plan. You have to. I wanted to do college, and so it was important for me to control what was going on in my life. So I planned out each day." Carole said, "I've been in college a while so I know what I have to do. I'm so close to the end now that nothing will stop me because I see my dream."

Serenity said that adaptation and accommodation meant planning and keeping rigorous schedules. "It has been running from morning to afternoon, from like 9 to 4. Then sometimes I have a class till 10 o'clock at night. I rush there, rush home, rush to work. It's constant, but I've learned how to keep going. You just do it."

Karmin said, "It helps to start out small; don't expect much. Then you can increase your goals. When you take things step by step, it's a whole lot easier to do." To Kelsey, she sees that she has no choice but to adjust to whatever her circumstances are while she's in school. "I have no choice. I have no choice. I have to do something with my life to make some kind of future for my children, so I have to work it out. That's all there is to it."

When or during what situation did the ability to adapt or accommodate their circumstances appear in these women's' lives? All of the women, who spoke freely about the times of adversity, agreed that threats to their personal peace, loss of family and friends and even jobs, daycare, transportation and housing spurred them to working these things out in their lives in order to persist in their studies. Laurene, in speaking to her changing surroundings, said, "When your world is full of chaos you definitely need peace." She said, "School gave that to me so whatever else happened, I had to work it out."

Theresa said, "See I'm gonna cry about this again right now. The stress is so tremendous. Go. Go. Go. Not much gets done when I'm in school, but I have a counselor I've been seeing who helps me give up the cleaning house in favor of doing schoolwork right now because it's the schoolwork that's gonna get me out of my rut."

"I have to throw off everything else," Joleen said. "I have to just throw them off and concentrate on school." Kolanda related, "I think I struggle with the immaturity level of the students in my classes. Younger people and me being older. I have to spend a lot of time in class, and I get frustrated with classes where the majority of students are just there, not to learn, just there. The poopy stuff that comes with immaturity."

"When I have trouble getting to class, when my mother-in-law won't take care of the kids, that's what I have to get by." said Esther. "Yes, my life is busy," said Serenity, "but I do the best I can." Karmin said, "When my mom died I had to step back and take a breather."

For Kelsey, she was always working things out so that she could continue on in her studies. "Oh, the overwhelming everything," she said. "When the kids aren't cooperatin', the house isn't clean, I got a final comin', or whatever. That is pretty much all the time."

Where in these women's lives did the ability to adapt or accommodate their circumstances occur? All of the women were unanimous in their answers about where they have to use their adaptation skills. But Joleen expressed it best when she said, "I don't care what day it is; I don't care where I am or who I'm with. I'm always having to adjust at home, with the kids, at school, in classes, at work. You name it. I do it."

All of the other 10 women agreed with Joleen on this matter. Adapting to circumstances seemed for them to be a way of life.

Why did the ability to adapt or accommodate their circumstances occur in the lives of these women? All of the women agreed that they had to adapt or accommodate whatever came along. Laurene said, "I have to keep going." Sofia said, "I want to prove my mother wrong." Wanda related, "It's a lifelong dream. I still love doing this [school]." Theresa spoke about her family. "I guess I've always had to be the first one to do anything in our family. Why, I don't know. I'm the youngest, and I'm always breaking new ground with them. Now my older sister is getting a divorce, and she has decided to do college. Imagine that."

Joleen said, "I need this for me, and for my kids too. You have to focus on the goal." Kolanda commented, "I have to finish here. My ex-husband will be out of prison before you know it." She also said, "I want to show my parents they're wrong."

Carole felt she had to learn to adapt because of her daughter. "She's such a cool kid. To experience what she has...She went to Europe with her band last year. I used my tax return money to send her. I just cleaned more houses." Mediating among the competing parties of children, work and school, Serenity said it this way: "I eat on the run. I spend quality time with my children. I wish I could quit work, but I can't right now. I've managed to keep my 3.5 [grade point average of a 4.0] in accounting." Kimberly said she wanted to shock her family [of origin] into believing she was accomplishing something. "I'm prepared to do the impossible."

How did the women use their ability to adapt or accommodate the circumstances in their lives? "I go work out," said Laurene. "I have to do something physical." Sofia

spoke about being practical and not examining what she does. "I don't examine myself all the time. I pretty much am laid back. I don't need something in my life to make comfort."

Wanda said, "I want to keep my school option open." Theresa related, "I call my counselor. Soon as I feel I'm losing it, I call her." Joleen said, "I have to think positive. I have to. With my cancer, I cannot entertain anything but health in my mind. So it spreads to everything else. Just stay positive. I feel better. That can be the difference between life and death my doctors tell me."

Kolanda said, "I just tell my parents 'stop brooding.'" She continued, "I'm going to show them $8 an hour as a secretary is going nowhere. They know that's true." Esther said it this way: "I have friends. I'm always mentioning my friends, I know. But it's true." Carole believed adapting meant surviving. "It's pure survival skills, baby. Being able to deal with all this [unprintable] is the name of the game."
Karmin was prepared to do anything to keep what she had. "I have a support system and people I can rely on to give me the confidence to at least try and try again."
Kelsey added, "Times change and this too shall pass, you know."

In summary, the women saw their ability to adapt or accommodation to their circumstances in their environments as an important part of their being able to achieve their educational goals. They perceived a college experience one day would lead to a calming effect on their often-stormy lives. They felt the college experience would improve their lives in every way.

Response to Adversity Category

The Response to Adversity Category became another area of interest the women

pointed to when discussing their desire to complete college. This category reflected how they perceived the turbulent events in their lives and whether that discouraged or encouraged them as adult learners.

What did response to adversity mean to these women? "Doing something, doing anything but going back to the past," said Laurene. "I look at it this. When he [ex-husband] tries to get to me through the kids, I just say, 'I've outgrown that.'" Laurene's response when the unexpected happens that makes her angry is "not so much the smoking anymore. That's eased off. I generally have a couple cups of coffee and listen to the birds in the morning."

Sofia said, "sleep." Wanda likes to party and dance, and so she expressed her feelings about stormy times this way: "We have fun. Sometimes I go out with my friends, male and female, by the way. Nobody special right now, but when the kids are around we like to go swimming, you know, we play out in the yard, or we build a campfire, a big campfire out in the backyard. We like to play."

Theresa said, "There's something that happens all the time. I think when is it gonna stop?" She expressed her frustration with job. "Not enough help; doing more than my fair share; cranky customers that blame me for the prices, for the can machines not workin'. But on the other side of that, the other women I work with, there's a bond there. I think. You know, we're all friends and there is a support system there. I like the slower times when I can talk to them more. I think it helps."

Joleen thought going to school helped calm her down. Even before her day began between 6 and 7 a.m., she seeks spiritual calm. "I take a walk, um, so I'm a walker, so

I'm always exercising first thing in the morning because that gives me the energy and empties my head, and I've learned that's very important."

Kolanda liked what she was doing. She thinks she has gotten rid of most of her stormy times, for a while anyway. She put it this way: "I like what I'm doing. I like the pace. I know that I'm working toward something deeper [college education] so that's enough for me right now."

"I have my friends," said Esther. "They are single and I'm married, but we have the same needs. I see their needs; they see mine. I mean we both need the same sorts of things. Being married makes no difference."

Carole will receive her bachelor's degree in August 2005, and she saw adversity in her life this way: "I'm not there yet. I have no money most of the year. I'll be so glad to have money someday. It's always something when you don't have money. There's no room for emergencies, and we usually have about one a year. I'm like, well big shock. Even though I know we're always just that close, it's always a big shock when some crisis happens, and I haven't got the bucks to pay for it."

"I go to school and study," said Serenity about her tough times. "I know if I'm there I'm working on something positive." Karmin added, "I try to use things as positives. I try, you know."

Kelsey spoke about hard times like this: "My whole life has been week after week of something or some kinda upset. My counselor had to help me see that wasn't normal. Now I can see things better when they happen, and I know things happen, but now I can reject them. My counselor helps me do that."

When or during what situation did the response to adversity occur in the lives of these women? For Laurene it was "threat to personal peace. Now that I have it I guard it like crazy." For Sofia, the stress of two jobs, two kids a health problem and classes could close in at any time. "When everything I have to do is too much, I just go home, lay down and sleep for a while. Then I feel like I can go on."

Dealing with teachers who struggled with Wanda's special needs child put her over the edge much of the time. "When it comes to teachers telling me what's wrong with my kid, that's when I get...well, one day I got a call and actually had to leave class. My son had a meltdown. He locked himself in the bathroom for two hours and wouldn't respond, wouldn't talk. When I got there, you could see through like the little frosted glass door, you could like make out his shape, and he was sittin' in the corner with his arms around himself rockin' back and forth. That broke my heart."

Theresa could break down at any time. Her counselor told her she was grieving the loss of a dream, a perfect marriage and family. Theresa said, "The little things seem to get me down. I told you right here right now if I start talkin' about this stuff I can cry on the spot."

Joleen said, "My dad died February 28; my brother Steve died March 5; my lumpectomy was shortly after that. When those results came back, my husband Tom left me and the girls. I did chemo the rest of the year. And you ask about the hard times? Loss, I guess it's loss. That's all been hard."

The adverse events in Kolanda's life concerned school. She was divorced and has no children, just her parents with which to deal, so she expressed her hard times this way:

"When I'm in transition, I just feel like I'm shifting gears here, and I'm not in full speed yet. Yes, I'm shifting gears from one part of my life to another."

"My husband nagging," is how Esther expressed her hard times. " I hope he never hears this," she said, and then added, "It's about other things I should be doing too, and sometimes I think I should be home taking care of babies instead of here at school." Carole struggled with transportation. She had what she called a "clunker car." Women in her community raised money and bought it for her to go back and forth to school. While she was appreciative, it has been four years since they purchased the used car. She said, "It's hard to run to my car, scrape off the snow, try to defrost it and get to that six o'clock class. I'm usually hungry, and there wasn't time for anything, and I just pray the car doesn't break down."

For Serenity sometimes a response to adversity was needed when her daycare fell through. Even though her mother helped her from time to time, she still had to have outside daycare. "Especially in the winter time, when there's snow, and I have over an hour's drive to class I need to have somebody with my kids; they're too young yet to leave. I just pray on the day's I need her [babysitter] she won't cop out."

Karmin said, "Losing my job, actually leaving my job at the schools, really left me blue. I know I can't stay there forever; it's a grant. They were so encouraging about me getting my own degree, but I still miss being there. I know it's a long way to get my degree to get another situation like the one I had."

Kelsey had been homeless. She knew it could happen again and said, "I've packed up my kids and been runnin' away from things all my life. The hardest is when I

feel like that's all I can do to escape my mother. Stand up and fight. Stand up and fight. Stand up and fight your mother?"

Where in these women's lives did the response to adversity occur? Most of the women repeated many of the same responses over and over again when they recalled adversities and hardships. Their responses covered their personal life, family members, children and school instructors. Joleen summed it up for all of them when she said, "I don't know if it's my age, or what I've been through, but bad times are just gonna happen in your life. Everyone has them. I learn something. I learn so much. It's not that I learn to dodge them; I learn that hey they're gonna come, but each time they do it gets easier, and I say, 'I'm not listening to that [bad event]; I'm just not."

Why did the response to adversity occur in their lives? "I want to stay in school," said Laurene. "I want to finish my bachelor's." Sofia offered, "It's taken three or four years to show that I can do it, but now I know I can, and I'll finish."

Wanda said, "I work at bein' a good student, and I like it. I'm a 4.0, but I work at it. I like the feeling, that's all." For Tammy it was not becoming what she used to be. "I still see women like I was before, lots of women. I can wait and stay and screw up my whole life waiting. I'm not gonna do it."

Joleen's response to adversity occurs because she doesn't want to fail. "I guess I don't want another sense of failure." Kolanda said, "I knew I couldn't stay that way, the way I was in the past. I knew things had to change."

"Oh yes, I think I do have much self-doubt," said Esther. When I do it's when my husband nags and my kids say 'don't go.'" Carole said she remembers the women who pushed and prodded her to go to college. "When they kept saying it was registration time

at the college year after year, and I finally did it and now they're my biggest supporters, how could I let anything stop me from getting my degree?"

"Because I've always run when I get in abusive situations or toe-to-toe with somebody I'm scared of, even mom, then I run, you know," said Kelsey. "But not now. Here I feel secure. This is my stable surroundings. I can imagine goin' to another college. You have to have a new support system, and I'm not starting over," she added.

How did the women use response to adversity in their lives? The women used response to adversity to help explain what was happening to them. They expressed that they had a deeper insight into what they were allowing in their lives. Some seemed to figure it out by themselves, while others had the help of professional counselors. A few of the women revealed their thinking about this matter.

"There's a difference between respecting someone and being controlled by them," Laurene said. "I think I've learned the difference." "I've improved my outlook on life," said Wanda. "One good thing seems to lead to another," she added. "I used to say it's easy for people to say 'that's a choice.' But now I know it is," said Theresa.

"I look at things a lot different than I used to," said Joleen. "Now I just believe." Kolanda said, "I'm still healing from a difficult divorce, but I know I was weak. Now I'm strong."

"I'm trying to avoid the same-old, same-old," said Esther of a stormy past with her family. "I can choose to make things different." Carole said, "You need to learn how to receive. Before all I did was give, give, give. Now I know life is give and take. Someday I'll do the same for somebody else."

The women felt they had learned something through experiencing adversity, but they spoke about it as a reference to their very structured lives that the college curricula had provided. For many, school schedules provided the structure they had never had with any regularity in their childhoods.

<div align="center">Family Background Influence Category</div>

In relating to their backgrounds, the women expressed their views about how they had been shaped by their families of origin. This category expresses how the women viewed the culture of their childhoods as they grew into adulthood and how they perceived it to be an influence on their lives today.

What did family background influence mean to these women? "Poverty," said Laurene. "We were all girls raised by a woman with no self worth," she added. "If she didn't believe in herself, how was she going to encourage her girls?"

"Pretty much my parents discouraged our standing out in anything," said Sofia. "I never understood that, why we had to tiptoe around the world." Wanda said it this way about her mom abandoning the family, and her dad falling terminally ill when Wanda was in high school. "I dropped out of school in the middle of the 11th grade to take care of my dad who was dying," Wanda said. "It was something I had to do because who was going to do it? I was left on my own, homeless, and so I never had a good feeling about any of my childhood."

Theresa spoke of her childhood with her sisters: "It was all of us clamoring to be heard. It was like we were non-people. Is that because we were girls?" Joleen said that she remembers little of her childhood because she married young and had five children right away. Now she thinks about her children's experiences growing up and compares

them to her experiences. "We had middle-class values. Everyone was very cued into to what everyone else was doing," she said. "You, you're a level one mother, you're a level two wife, you're a level three friend," she said. "Like you don't go out and get rated, but in the end you know if you fail, everyone's gonna know you failed. So I find myself wanting to be so different than where I came from."

With Kolanda, it was growing up in a household with uneducated parents. "I hate how they think. I hate how they don't give me credit for what I'm doing. I avoid them every chance I get," she stated. "Seeing them now reminds me of growing up so I've been dog sitting and helping out a friend which has been a blessing," she said. "My friend is going to Europe for two weeks, and whew! I can house sit now," she added.

"I couldn't count on my parents," Esther said. "Look at how we all turned out. We've spent a good part of our lives trying to make sense of things. My mom did daycare, and my parents did foster care," she explained. "They threw all their lives into these kids. We were ignored because they felt sorry for those kids. Now all the kids are gone, and what do they have. She no career and my dad isn't much of a support person, and she's no support to him, so I look at that and say, 'That there's my motivation."

Carole said, "Need I say more? My family is unreliable. They're downright abusive. They've been that way all their lives, and they're pissed off that I'm not buying into it anymore." Karmin felt said about her childhood. Her parents were divorced, and she said, "My mom never had any money, and she was sick constantly. She never was able to work and help any of us," she stated. "I was glad to leave home."

Kelsey's home life was stark. She recounted what had happened to her. "I was in foster care for three-and-one-half ears of my life, so I was disconnected from the whole

family routine till I was 15," she explained. "When I came back, I started dating. I wanted to marry my boyfriend. I was 16. My mother said, 'You're not living with him; you're marrying him because you'll be pregnant and unmarried.'" Kelsey continued, "So she made me marry him. She he ended up with custody and all this crazy stuff when we got divorced because I was never ready to be married."

Kelsey continued her story. "I was better off not married. Then I coulda, woulda had the baby and been free without all that hassle. I went through a lot of crap, you know, and it was a very hard life."

When or during what situation did family background influence occur? By the data their interviews produced, the influence occurred during times of crises such as death, divorce, domestic violence situations, losing a job, fights with family members or during material losses. Kelsey added understanding with the way she expressed her views that were representative of all the women. "Anytime something bad happened, like when my brother died, it created stress; it brought out the worst in all of us," she commented. "But we all pulled together or tried to anyway." But later she added, "When I'm fighting with my sister, it's hard to forget where you came from. It's so painful."

Where in the women's lives did family background influence appear? The women seemed to be aware of this happening when they were with their own children. "When I'm in my apartment studying, and I see my children sitting on the couch reading, I remember the times I used to spend at my grandma's," said Sofia. Esther commented about her family of origin. "There was never any expectation of school whatsoever," she said. "I don't recall my parents ever caring about what I did in school. I want my own kids to know I care about their school." Kolanda's personal life reflects where family

background influence plays a part. "I keep a journal. I went back and read it recently, and I am always talking about how I'm not going to do things like my parents."

Why did family background influence appear in the lives of these women?
For all the women remembering where they came from was a motivator to stay in school. Joleen expressed it for all the women. "You try to make your life and your kids' lives better. You don't want them to emotionally suffer like you did, so you go to great lengths to make things different." Karmin said, "I know to quit school means I'm in danger of going back and having everybody [in my family] say 'I told ya so.' I would have to depend more on them if I did that, and I'm not willing to do that." For Carole it was her mother's attitude that is the reason why her family background influence appears in her life. "My daughter will say 'Mom, you sound like granma' and I say 'Oh my god, anything but that," Carole added.

How did the women use their family background influence in their lives? All these women used their backgrounds as an incentive to stay in school for fear of returning to the past with all its heartaches. They wanted to avoid a reoccurance of the past. Serenity summed it up for all the women when she said, "I am on my way to the future I always dreamed about, and I'm not lettin' nothin' get in my way. All I have to remember are those days when I thought I was goin' to get killed." Laurene probes for reasons why she experienced such a turbulent past. "I know I was as sick as my family members," she explained. "After counseling I could finally see how I was adding to the problem." For Wanda it was hoping for a miracle. "I always thought someday it'll happen for me."

In summary, once these women had experienced college, the influence of their families of origin became more apparent to them as they made their way toward their

higher educational goals. All the women felt that education would make up for their past lives.

One Overarching Theme

In order to move toward more specific findings in this study, a second analytical tool was used, and the results of using this study tool are shown in Table 6.

Table 6   **Reflective Coding Matrix Results**

Reflective Coding Matrix					
Core Category	*Power of Relationships*				
Properties	**Gain**	**Loss**	**Purpose**	**Perception**	**Growth**
Processes	Achievement	Conviction	Choice	Belief	Development
Dimensions	• Being helpful feels good • Focus on what's important • First in family to succeed • Children proud • Proves can be done • Self-worth	• Felt sad • Felt helpless and no hope • Felt it was good/ bad at same time • Loss can mean gain • Lack of confidence • Fear	• Make something of myself • See myself achieving • Hoped I could go to college; I'm there • I knew I was smart • Want to be respected • Will succeed	• Relations can help or hurt • Throw out old/keep new • Have to help others • Faith in God • Believe it's possible	• Sacrifice can pay off • More times, more success • When people help everybody wins • Gain a degree • Lifelong learning • Gets better and better
Modes for Knowing Consequences	Can reach goal over time/ Persistence	Can use pain for gain/ Multitasking	Can persist at succeeding/ Flexibility	Can remember the past to believe for the future/ Positive attitude	Can do personally what was once a hope/ Persistence

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To further analyze the women's experiences to move toward an overall expression of how these women perceive their experiences, The Reflective Coding Matrix shown in Table 6 was employed. This matrix was used in conjunction with the Conditional Relationship Guide as shown in Table 5. The matrix in Table 6 displays the higher-level concepts of what the lower-level descriptions of Table 5 represent. It is a bridge and allows for the women's comments to be categorized as higher-level interpretations. As the matrix allowed the study to uncover one core theme, it also produced explanations of that theme as illustrated in Table 6 and by the women's own comments. One overarching theme emerged in this study.

<u>Power of Relationships Major Theme</u>

Repeatedly, while examining the women's expressions of their abilities to adapt, while examining their responses to adversity and while examining their descriptions of their families of origin, the word "relationship" became attached to many meanings and levels of their thinking as it pertained to their perceptions. As this study progressed from the descriptive to the conceptual stage of understanding, the "relationship" concept became a link and connector to all other parts of the study data. Therefore, Power of Relationships emerged as the major theme of this study.

The 11 women in this study referenced relationships frequently as they sought to understand the consequences of their actions. Their responses to and perceptions of the events that happened to them in the past and during their college experiences gave them a way to understand what they were experiencing as they sought to reach their educational goals.

The women, through their descriptions, supported the major Power of Relationships theme through five basic processes that could be identified in the second phase of this grounded theory study. These are shown in Table 5. They are achievement, conviction, choice, belief and development.

Achievement

Each study participant held the belief that achievement involved relationships. Each held the view that being first in the family to succeed in obtaining a college diploma, having children proud of them and feeling an increase in their worth as individuals were all gains. Three of the women's comments illustrate these findings.

Laurene said, "I will be the first to graduate college. Someone believed in me that knew I had the ability. Someone saw me different than I saw myself. If I was going by what I saw, I would not have gone to college at all."

Sofia said, "My kids are so proud of me, and that makes me feel so good. It took me a while to believe in myself, but when I saw they did, it was easier. The farther along I get, the more belief I have in myself. The stronger it comes. There is no turning back now." Wanda added, "Like I said I love being a student. I've improved my outlook on life. My education obviously is a priority, and I hope it continues to be come fall."

They understood that goals could be achieved over time, and these achievements could come by persistence. Laurene said, "I learned to keep going." Sofia said, "I know how to keep going." Wanda said, "When I look back, I see what I've done so I can keep going easy enough."

The women agreed that focusing on what's important proved that what they had embarked upon could be achieved. They had persistence.

<u>Conviction</u>

The women each held a conviction that relationships were also connected to loss as much as achievement was also connected to gain, both of which involved dealing with relationships in their lives. Each held a conviction that some of their former relationships produced feelings of sadness, helplessness, lack of confidence and fear, and that these relationships permeated their lives at times. While all 11 women had experienced some type of loss, two of the women's comments represented what all 11 said. They expressed sorrow about losses in their lives. One talked about using the losses to produce gain in her life, something they all also alluded to.

Joleen said, "After the funerals of my dad and brother and after my husband left when he found out I had cancer, I felt so sad. I never really felt sorry for myself; I just felt so sorrowful how life can be sometimes."

Theresa tried to comfort herself about her divorce soon after by dating another man. Her involvement with this man also ended. "It added stress," she said. "I was trying to avoid the pain of my first marriage. Trying to work on another relationship with somebody who was even probably more insecure and damaged than the person I had been with. It was a disaster. I knew better. It's a wonder I didn't quit [school] after that," she reasoned. But then she offered this: "If you can find somebody supportive, that's doing the same thing you are or going through what you're going through that can say, 'Hey, we're gonna make it; we're gonna make it.' You know, a female support system, then you can make it on your down days. In a way when I lost a mate, I learned what really matters now. Loss is gain. Isn't that a famous saying?" The women had experienced heartache and sorrow, yet they saw that somehow pain could lead to gain.

"When you're at the bottom like I was, what do you have to lose?" said Kelsey. "It just makes sense to try to make sense of everything so you can fix your life." The women agreed that losses are universally experienced, but being down did not necessarily mean they were out of luck because they saw themselves as having the ability to choose their courses of action.

<div align="center">Choice</div>

The women each held the belief that they had choices and that these choices were linked to relationships. They held a view about the purpose of their choices. They saw the purpose of their choices as making something of themselves, seeing themselves as achievers, living their dream, confirming they were smart, feeling they were respected and helping them to believe that they would succeed.

"It's rough; it's not easy," said Kolanda. "But I'm going to make something of myself. It's not always the smartest one, but the one who puts forth the most effort that wins. You can't go it alone."

"I want to achieve my college degree," said Esther. "I don't' want to depend on anybody. By anybody, I mean my husband. I do depend on my friends a lot." Carole said, "I see myself as an achiever. I'm almost done with my degree, so I can say that. When I get it I have to thank a thousand people for being there along the way."

"Now I know I can do it," said Serenity. "Before it was 'you're a nothing, nobody.' Look at me now. I'm livin' it. I got myself to know that I am better than that, and that I can achieve what I want to achieve. You have to have the right people around you." Karmin said of her female support system: "They look at me, and I see respect. They keep encouraging me and telling me I'm worth it."

They also came to the conclusion that they could persist at succeeding. Kelsey expressed her thoughts this way: "So success begets success, really. I've always said that. That is if you don't give up. You can't give up. You have to keep on keepin' on...Did I say that before?" All 11 women had something to say about how their beliefs had changed over time.

<center>Belief</center>

The women each held beliefs that were linked to relationships. They believed perception played a part in their beliefs. They saw that their perceptions ran two ways. They saw that either relationships could hurt or relationships could help their situations while they maintained attendance in college.

"Now I see better, and I can make better choices for my life," said Laurene. "Once you see it, you don't lose it. Even if you have a bad first marriage like I did, you don't always see what's going on at the time. You're blind to it. But after the fights scared me to death, and I got out of there, I began to see how low my feelings of worth were. I knew it with my head that I shouldn't be feeling that way, but it didn't all come together for me until I was in school [about her past].

Relationships sometimes meant throwing out the old to make room for the new. This was not a belief they always had held, but became a belief that came as they mastered college. Laurene said, "I was in a safe place [in school], and so I could think about what happened without collapsing. With [name of new husband], things are so clear, and he is so supporting that I am making the most of my education still, and I the way just keeps opening up."

<center>83</center>

They also saw relationships as motivating, something that could help them succeed in their goals. They saw positive relationships as helping others.

Sofie loves the job she has at the college as an aide. She said, "Helping other students has been really good for me. That's how I can help myself." She works as a writing aide, and she expresses her delight this way: "I like them leaning on me for help. I didn't think I'd be much help at first, but it's amazing how much I've learned in writing."

They saw faith in God as a relationship too. While Joleen had suffered her hardships in a shorter period of time than the others, she had more to say about her faith in God. She, like the others, saw that her belief in God had become a positive sustaining force in her life. She said, "Faith in God. I talk to him everyday now. It's a way of life. At first when I found out I had cancer, I talked with him one whole weekend! I thought for sure he understood that I had other things in my life, like my husband leaving, and that I couldn't have cancer in life too. It just wasn't the right time."

The 11 women all felt that remembering their pasts could help them believe for the future. Carole's comments expressed what all 11 women had concluded: "All I have to do is remember where I've come from, where I was headed, and I have no trouble believin' for the future." Carole with all other 10 women shared common views about their growth and development and how they perceived these views relating to relationships.

<div align="center">Development</div>

The women held the view that their development involved relationships. They experienced growth when they saw sacrifices in relationships could pay off. They

experienced growth when they saw the more they could say "no" to negative relationships, the stronger they became. Kelsey's comments represented the women's views.

"I know moving away from my family [of origin] was hard, but that's the only way I can do this [college]," said Kelsey. Her professional counselor agreed that she should distance herself from her family until she is strong enough to deal with them. "When I'm going to classes, I feel the strongest because every instructor I've had cares about me, especially once they know my situation."

The women experienced growth when they saw themselves developing new positive relationships. They experienced growth when they saw positive relationships were helping them to achieve their goals. "Now that I know, college isn't that threatening. It's the other things in your life that can do you in," said Theresa about her development. "I've met so many great people here; it's my new family."

Joleen said, "Outside school, there isn't much that I can really feel says 'keep going.'" But Joleen later said, "I realized that all the people who give me hope are on this campus. The president asked me to speak to a community group because he likes my attitude and thinks I represent what's good about [college name]. I can agree with that."

"Don't you feel like you have to stay in a bad marriage because you can't support yourself," Kolanda said. "There is help out there to get an education to be on your own so you don't have to endure you know...have the self-confidence or self-esteem to get past that, because the help is there, and I found it by myself."

They became confident experiencing growth as time went on. They concluded that what was once a hope was actually achievable through persistence in pursuing their highest dream, a college education.

Carole said, "I'm in with some strong women now. They are such great examples for my daughter. They have been wonderful to me. Because of them I've learned about life." She concluded, "what was once not even in my mind, then just a hope will be reality soon. That will be the day."

"You can slowly build your confidence," said Serenity. "It doesn't all have to be in one day." Karmin found that "if you give yourself little goals along the way, it's a lot easier to attain 'em, and you can feel like you're doing something."

Kelsey's comments summed up the women's views:

"I'd like to tell women all they have to do is take that first step," she explained. "It doesn't have to be humongous. I mean my first step was just, you know, telling someone that I didn't have a place to live. Can you please help me? And they took me in. There was a chain reaction, and then someone said the word 'college.' Hence, 10 years later I feel better about myself and my situation. I've gone through my semesters in college successfully, and it's probably gonna take me a little bit to graduate, but, you know, look where I came from." And then Kimberly added, "As long as you're makin' progress you just keep goin'. Never ever stop. Little steps at a time, you know. It works."

The conversations with the 11 women illustrated the depths and heights that they experienced; yet they persisted in their one dream, to complete their college education. They had learned that their beliefs guided their choices, and they believed that always choosing positively would carry them to their desired end.

Summary

This study found that in the higher education experiences of these nontraditional women that commitment to relationships, ability to adapt to their circumstances, the response to adversity and the influence of their family backgrounds all played a part in how they saw they were able to persist in their goals. Their responses also revealed that the power of relationships was the overarching theme of their lives as they began and followed through with their educational goals.

As the women described their experiences, they substantiated that there were barriers to their persistence that existed before and during their first-semester college experiences. They mentioned relationships in their families of origins that became threats to their progress. They mentioned specifically the negativity of their mothers as influencing their daily lives. While losing daycare, housing, transportation or jobs were also barriers, they showed that they had developed a way to see that they could overcome these barriers through the new relationships they had formed in school.

Over time they were able to see the positive relationships they had developed with their own children, with their college instructors and other informal mentors along the way. These new relationships appeared to be enough motivation for them to see that sticking with these would help them overcome the negativity that often tried to snap them back into the past. They could describe the consequences of negative choices that would lead them back to the past. [See Table 4] They could better determine what were negative relationships, not very supporting, and what were positive relationships, very supporting, as they made their way through school.

Even when they were threatened with losing transportation, housing, daycare and jobs, they learned to see there was a positive outcome by the choices that they made in who they asked to help them. They see these as the reasons they were able to persist in their studies.

The women's experiences give credence to Maslow's Heirarchy of Needs theory that says when the physiological and safety needs of an individual needs are met, an individual will be able to experience belonging and love needs. As the women persisted in school, they began to see they had a sense of belonging and felt for the first time esteemed. The only time they thought about quitting school was when their basic needs were threatened, but they were able to overcome those threats. In the Maslow Hierarchy, self-actualization cannot be reached except through the fulfillment of the lower needs. This study illustrated that as the women gained more experience in college, their confidence to call on people they could trust to support them, helped them see their circumstances for what they were. They could then make wiser choices for the first time in their lives. They saw that this feeling of achievement propelled them further on. While they described adversities that still loomed in many of their lives, they were able to see that they were not as threatening as they once were because the women had gained self-confidence and had learned to distance themselves from relationships that would threaten their goal of a college education.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The perceptions of 11 women were examined in this study. They described their daily lives as they persisted in reaching their educational goals. Even though at the time they made their decision to go to community college they felt powerless, lost and disoriented in their lives, they attempted the experience anyway knowing that this effort, like so many others they had made, might too prove void. They had all just experienced or were in the midst of personal dramatic and soon-to-be intellectual changes. However, over time and much to their delight, they found a way to stay in school.

Why were these women able to persist in their achievement of higher education goals when others like them are unsuccessful? What do these women have in common that might help explain the reasons for their success? Apart from what the women do for themselves, does the institution play a role in their persistence?

Summary of Findings

The rigorous methodology used in this study revealed that a combination of factors on several different levels of experience and in several areas of the women's lives, including the college faculty, were contributors to their success. Initially, when the data were classified, patterns revealed that the women had these general areas of focus in common: Commitment to Relationships, Ability to Adapt, Response to Adversity and Family Background Influence.

But as the processes of this study's methodology progressed, much more information was revealed with respect to the women's ability to persist in their goal. As the overall arching theme of this study---Power of Relationships---came to light, specific strategies and characteristics of their persistence were revealed that help explain their success. The overall Power of Relationships theme found here is referred to in another significant study about women learners.

The Women's Ways of Knowing Project reported that "For many women the 'real' and valued lessons learned did not necessarily grow out of their academic work but in relationships with friends and teachers, life crises, and community involvements." (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1997, p.4) This study goes on to say that many more women than men "define themselves in terms of their relationships and connections to others." (P. 8)

While the above findings are corroborated in this study as well, this one further revealed how the Power of Relationships came to emerge as the overall theme to explain the women's persistence. As they continued on in college, they shared the following beliefs that they later came to recognize as important to reaching their educational goal.

Achievement-They believed that achieving their college goal involved relationships. The positive relationships that would help them succeed were the ones with their children and the new campus friendships they formed that included faculty and campus personnel.

Conviction-They each held the conviction that relationships were connected to loss as much as achievement was connected to gain. To these

women, recognizing that there would be both loss and gain in relationships was key to their understanding. Many of their parents and siblings did not support their college goal. They came to understand that that would be part their goal attainment and led to their next common belief, choice.

Choice-They found that they did indeed have choices and that these choices were linked to the positive relationships that had a part to play in their success. If they chose positive relationships, they stayed above the storm; if they chose to placate negative family members, it threatened their goal attainment.

Belief---They saw their own perceptions and how these perceptions played a part in their belief systems. They recognized that what they believed about their current relationships could either hurt or help their success.

Development---They saw themselves getting stronger when they could say "no" to negative relationships and "yes" to positive ones. They saw how letting go of a negative relationship could mean hanging on and achieving a college goal.

Other Observations

There were several other interesting observations that should be noted in this study. First, these 11 women all had existing negative relationships with their mothers. While they were vocal about their mothers, they did not mention fathers. One mentioned her father briefly, but others did not include fathers in their descriptions of their lives.

They all were financially at risk and were balancing meager budgets while in school. While they began by defending their family of origin members for the most part, they changed their views about these family members as very good supports to what they were trying to accomplish. Once they had a positive experience at the college level, they could become visionary about their own futures. The study began with questions that framed research.

Questions Answered

When this study began, five questions were posed. At this study's end, all five were answered.

1. What do nontraditional women in community college identify as helping them persist in their education? These women identified reliable, positive relationships as helping them persist. They were definite in their belief.

2. Do women's views of college they held before entering change after they have begun their course of study? These women's views changed from negative to positive about their higher education abilities after they had experienced college for a semester. They gained this insight in looking back at their experiences.

3. If women's views of college change, what significance do the changes have as they persist in school. Their changed views significantly affected their own outlooks from negative to positive about the likelihood of their success. As time passed, they became more and more positive.

4. What do the women identify as the reasons for the change. Again, the women identified positive relationships as the reason for their changed views. After examining their experiences, they began to anticipate positive choices for their future.

5. What do the women see as helping them persist in school. These women see value in securing positive relationships to aid persistence in their college goal attainment and that securing positive relationships is a personal choice. They experienced the difference between making choices that would carry them to their goals and making choices that would threaten their persistence.

Implications for Women and Counselors

These findings suggest to women hoping to attain a college degree, who have suffered many of the same life experiences as the women in this study, they can succeed in attaining college goals. As they focus on their studies and make a conscious effort to develop new positive relationships on campus, what once appeared to be an intimidating environment can become a comfortable one to aid in their success.

By replacing old, discouraging relationships with newly formed positive ones, times of trouble with academics, family and other life matters can be managed through faculty and peer support systems. Professional and academic counselors can help explain to their clients what to expect psychosocially as they begin new academic lives. Fear is expelled through knowledge, and the more women learners know what to expect, the better their experiences and chances are at reaching their goals, according to the women in this study.

These women persisted in their educational goals because they made the right choices and recognized that they did. In recognizing that they did, they saw that they had personal power to affect their otherwise clouded lives. They saw that they could this through education. Was it luck? Was it background? What came first, the decision or the positive connections that they made. The one idea that resonates throughout this study as a fact is this: They had the power of relationships working in their favor.

Implications for Community Colleges

Women's Ways of Knowing researchers wrote as a result of their long-term study, "Looking back on our experience and talking with other women inside and outside the classroom reinforced our feeling that education and clinical services, as traditionally defined and practiced, do not adequately serve the needs of women. When scientific findings, scientific theory, and even the basic assumptions of academic disciplines are reexamined through the lens of women's perspectives and values, new conclusions can be drawn and new directions forged that have implications for the lives of both men and women." (p. 8-9)

When the women in this study began to experience what they saw as good grades, supporting faculty members and staff, positive instructor feedback, new peer relationships, their outlook began to change from negative to positive. They more than once cited faculty and staff as important to their experience. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that institutions can and do effectively play a part in the persistence of nontraditional women adult learners seeking college goals.

Institutions can recognize that highly nontraditional women coming to campus for the first time can be better supported by helping to structure the women's first experience so that there is opportunity to develop as many positive connections as possible.

Recommendations for Institutions

Any one or all of the following ways could facilitate the role of the institution in the persistence of nontraditional women adult learners in higher education:

1. Create first-semester cohorts so that the institution could help the kinds of relationships that need to be built. For example, managing the women's initial college experience by providing mentors, study buddies and other kinds of relationship connections would help these learners complete their college goals.

2. Include presentations about nontraditional women learners and the need for relationship building in faculty and staff meetings. Becoming alerted to the first-semester nontraditional women learners who will be seeking to develop new positive relationships on campus is essential for all faculty and staff on campus.

3. Develop a mentor program that not only includes faculty, but also older more mature adult women learners on campus who are succeeding at their college goals. This relationship connection will help the new learners succeed.

4. Create a nontraditional student office on campus that is a gathering place for commuter nontraditional adult women learners who can use that site as a resource in many ways as they master higher education for the first time. A

site such as this will make it easier to connect with other nontraditional adult women learners to benefit from new peer relationships.

Future Areas of Inquiry

As a result of this study's findings, the following are recommended for future research.

1. Focus on the mother-daughter relationship, and its impact on persistence of college goals. More information is needed about the mother-daughter relationship as it relates to higher education.

2. Focus on the father-daughter relationship, and its impact on persistence of college goals. More information is needed about the father-daughter relationship as it relates to higher education.

3. Focus on the educational institution's student services and how it serves the nontraditional woman learner. More information is needed about the department's impact on persistence.

4. Focus on the influence of a nontraditional woman learner's college experience on her children. More specific research into this area would benefit community as well as institution practitioners.

All of these areas of focus are possibilities for future research studies and could provide valuable insights into the experiences of nontraditional women as they persist in their higher education goals.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A INVITATION LETTER AND CARD

Valerie Winans
Northwestern Michigan College
1701 East Front Street
Traverse City, MI   49686

Date

Name
Address
City/State/Zip

Dear _____:

You are invited to participate in a research study that is designed to help understand what women experience while reaching their educational goals.

Attending college for many women holds challenges in their personal and professional lives. Deciding to attend and stay in school to reach personal and professional goals takes effort and commitment.

Because you are still in school, we are inviting you to be interviewed about your college experiences. Researcher Charlene Lutes, in partial fulfillment of her PhD at Michigan State University, is conducting the study. I, Valerie Winans, the project administrator, am handling the selection process of names independently. I selected your name randomly, and Charlene does not know that you are receiving this letter. If you do not wish to participate, you simply do not send the card. Only if you return the enclosed card will she be aware that your name was selected.

Should you agree to be interviewed, your session will be planned sometime between July 1 and July 25 and will range anywhere from one to three hours in length. It will be conducted in the Northwestern Michigan College M-TEC Conference Room, 2600 Aeropark Drive, Traverse City. There will be a $25 stipend paid you after the interview.

But first, to proceed fill out and mail the enclosed self-addressed, stamped post card. Charlene will then send you a thank you letter explaining the next step with the formal Consent Form that outlines the confidentiality of your participation. It also explains that you may withdraw at any time. Meanwhile, if you wish you might call me at (231) 995-2247 with any questions before you send the card. Thanks for your consideration.

Regards,

Valerie Winans
Project Administrator
Enclosure: Self-addressed, stamped reply postcard

APPENDIX A INVITATION LETTER AND CARD

Front: Charlene A. Lutes
                                  3554 Lone Lookout Road
                                  Traverse City, MI   49686

Back:

_____Yes, I would like to participate in the research project
NONTRADITIONAL WOMEN PERSISTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION TO REACH
THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS. Please contact me for further instructions.

_____

Name

_____

Address   City/State/Zip

_____

Phone   day   night

Best time to reach me is:

APPENDIX B THANK YOU LETTER

Charlene A. Lutes
3554 Lone Lookout
Traverse City, MI   49686
(231) 938-5977

Date

Name
Address
City/State/Zip

Dear _____:

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my study: *Nontraditional Women Persisting in Higher Education to Meet Their Educational Goals.*

I will call you to set up a convenient time for your interview anytime between now and July 25 and to explain the step-by-step process that ensures the confidentiality of your participation. Your interview will be held in the Northwestern Michigan College M-TEC Conference Room, 2600 Aeropark Drive, Traverse City. Enclosed are two copies of the required Consent Form: one for your records and one for mine. Please read it carefully, and I will discuss with you personally what it means so that all your questions can be addressed before you agree to the interview. Also before the start of the interview, I will review it with you again.

Meanwhile, remember you may withdraw at any time during the study, and please feel free to call me at any time with any questions. My home phone is above, and my work phone is (231) 995-1971. My cell number is 642-1339.

Again, thank you so much for your involvement in this important project. I will call you soon.

Sincerely,

Charlene A. Lutes
Researcher

Enclosures: 2 Informed Consent Forms

APPENDIX C INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form
Nontraditional Women Persisting in Higher Education
To Meet Their Educational Goals

You are being asked to participate in a research project studying non-traditional women's perceptions about experiences in reaching educational goals in community college. This study is being conducted by Charlene A. Lutes, a doctoral student in the Michigan State University Department of Agricultural and Natural Resources Education and Communication Systems.

The purpose of this study is to understand what women do to persist in higher education to meet their educational goals. I will be asking you questions about your own experiences regarding college. The interview will take from one to three hours, and it will be tape recorded for accuracy purposes.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You may stop the interview at any time, and you may refrain from answering any or all questions. You may withdraw at any time without penalty. Your identity will remain confidential at all times. Any information used from your comments will be presented anonymously. Upon completion of the data analysis, your interview tapes will be destroyed. This consent form gives us permission to tape record and use your comments without revealing who you are, where you live or work. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

If you have any questions regarding this study, contact either Charlene Lutes at 231.995.1971 or by email at clutes@nmc.edu or Charlene Lutes' dissertation advisor, Professor Joe Levine, who can be reached at 517. 355.6580 EXT 220 or at Levine@msu.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact--- anonymously, if you wish--- Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCHRIS) at 517.355.2180 or at uchrihs@msu.edu Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. He can also be reached by regular mail at 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824. There will be a $25 stipend for your participation that will be sent to you within two weeks after your interview.
Consent Statement
By signing below you agree that you have read the above information and have had an opportunity to ask the researcher questions. Your signature below shows that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. **You will receive a copy of this form for your records.**

_____
Signature   Date

_____
Print Full Name

_____
Street Address   City/State   ZIP

APPENDIX D PARTICIPANT DATA FORM

Participant Data Form --Demographics

Subject Code _____Date_____

Age _____

Marital Status

_____divorced/separated   _____married

_____widowed   _____not married, but living together

Children

_____yes _____how many _____ages

Dependents who Live with You

_____parents   _____brothers/sisters _____grandparents

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

Transportation

_____ your own vehicle   _____borrowed   _____public transportation

Housing

_____own your home _____apartment_____rent/lease _____other

Employment

_____unemployed   _____work full-time   _____work part-time
                                    _____hrs per wk   _____hrs per wk

Education

_____public/private K-12 _____last grade attended _____type of high school
completion: GED_____correspondence course _____alternative school

Enrollment in Community College

_____year when first enrolled _____completed how many semesters to date

_____how many credits are you taking this semester

_____how many have you accumulated to date

APPENDIX D PARTICIPANT DATA FORM

What is your_____

PROGRAM OF STUDY

Check all that apply:

___had delayed enrollment or did not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that I finished high school

___do not have traditional high school diploma, but completed high school through adult education, correspondences courses, certificates of some sort or a GED

___attends college part time for at least part of the academic year

___work full time or 35 more hours a week

___consider myself financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid or through my tax returns

___have dependents (children, aunts, parents, etc.) other than a spouse

___am a single parent or widow

___am married but separated

___am 25 years of age or over

COMMENTS:_____

APPENDIX E INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

FIRST FOCUS OF INQUIRY

First, four major areas will be explored with appropriate probing/encouraging.

(1) Please tell me about a typical school day.

(2) Please tell me about a typical day at home.

(3) Now tell me about a typical day at work.

(4) Please tell me about a typical day with your family members.

After these four major areas have been explored, the interviewer will return to the

responses from the first major area and ask:

(5) Of these items you covered in your typical day at school, how do these relate

to you as a student?

(6) How do you see yourself as a student?

Next the second major area will be probed:

(7) Of those items you covered in your typical day at home, how do they relate to

you as a student?

(8) How do you see yourself as a student from the perspective of home life?

Nest the third major area will be probed:

(9)   Of those items you covered in your typical day at work, how do they relate

to you as a student?

(10)   How do you see yourself as a student from the perspective of work?

Next the fourth major area will be probed:

APPENDIX E INTERVIEW GUIDE

(11)   Of those items you covered in your typical day with family members, how

do these relate to you as a student?

(12)   How do you see yourself from the perspective of a family member?

SECOND FOCUS OF INQUIRY

(1) Tell me about the times when you did not think you would make it in college.

a. Did you have many times like that?

b. What did you do?

(2) Tell me about the wonderful times you have had while attending school.

a. Did you have many times like that?

b. What triggered those?

(3) Tell me in what ways you believe your view of college has changed now that

you are successfully attending college.

(4) Tell me what you identify as the reasons for change.

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