QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF TIMELINESS OF PURSUITS OF HIGHER EDUCATION BY NON-TRADITIONAL FEMALE BACCALAUREATE STUDENTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

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(ABSTRACT)

This research reflects a qualitative exploration of the timeliness of pursuits of higher education by females who were classified as non-traditional students at Concord College in southern West Virginia. The researcher studied females, educated in West Virginia, who had completed at least 30 semester hours, and who were at least 25 years of age at the time of admission. The study focused on identifying several factors common to many non-traditional students, including the factors that influenced them to not pursue their education as traditional students, the factors that changed so they recognized higher education as a viable option for themselves, and the factors that influenced them, positively or negatively, in their perseverance to continue in an undergraduate program.
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This publication is also dedicated to my children, Bill, Elizabeth, Jo, and Jennifer. I hope that through my struggles they might also pursue their dreams through education. I hope that I will also be as much of an inspiration to my grandchildren Brandon, Dustin, Zachary, and Kaden (in a few months) as they are to me.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

Introduction

The participation of non-traditional students has become more typical on college campuses (Horn & Carroll, 1996; Gerald & Hussar, 1999). College participation by non-traditional students kept overall enrollment growing through the early 1990’s. In 1999, there were approximately 15 million persons enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education, or 7.9 percent of the entire adult population (Gerald & Hussar, 1999). This study will focus on the Appalachian non-traditional female student defined as the student who was at least age 25 at the time of her college admission, educated in West Virginia, has at least 30 or more semester hours completed and reflects any one or more of the other following criteria: 1) delays college admission until at least age 25; 2) attends part-time; 3) is economically independent from the parents; 4) has dependents; 5) works full-time while enrolled; 6) is a single parent; or 7) has a GED or high school equivalency certificate (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

This research will identify the factors that influence Appalachian non-traditional female students’ decision-making process to pursue higher education. In exploring the timing of the pursuit of formal education, the non-traditional student may be influenced by various factors including cultural acceptance for older students to pursue higher education, welfare reform which encourages the recipient to consider education as an alternative to continuing to receive welfare assistance, and defiance of traditional roles for women in conservative cultures.

The national welfare reform movement and its impact on economically depressed Appalachia may also be a factor for why non-traditional female students are pursuing professional degrees at this time. With the advent of Welfare Reform through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, more persons are being brought from public assistance into the workplace (“Welfare recipients,” 1997; Astin, 1998).

Recent demographic trends indicate that the impact of welfare reform in West Virginia has been more dramatic than upon the United States population overall. According to the 2000 census data, 16.8 percent of the population of West Virginia was living in poverty, in comparison to 13.3 percent nationally (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). In West Virginia in 2000, 22 percent of households received public assistance income or non-cash benefits (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).
These statistics suggest that a significant portion of the population of the state may be involved in the Welfare to Work programs.

The impact of welfare reform on females throughout the United States has predictably been more dramatic than upon males. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), of the approximately 17 percent of households in the U.S. that received public assistance income or non-cash benefits, 26.4% were female headed households while 13.1% were male headed households. The data also states that the average income deficit-- the difference in dollars between a family’s income and its poverty threshold-- was greater for poor families with a female householder with no husband present than for poor married-couple families. The pressure to move from welfare to the work force is thus being disproportionately borne by women nationwide.

In West Virginia, single women being weaned from welfare by welfare reform face cultural counter-pressures even more severe than those faced by women in an analogous position elsewhere. West Virginia is in the heart of Appalachian culture. Appalachian traditions are typically conservative and fundamentalist in nature, with a high value placed on family and kinship ties, as well as traditional roles for all persons, especially women (Harper, 1996; “Appalachia moving”, 1998; Plein, 2001). The traditional role for women includes child rearing, housekeeping, cooking, and other domestic tasks. Higher education is not included in that role.

Factors which generally impact students’ decisions to pursue higher education include their culture’s traditions or acceptable social standards. Other decisive factors include the general economic environment in a given locale and societal policies such as welfare reform mandates (Germain & Gitterman, 1995; UNICEF, 1997; Fong & Furuto, 2001; Plein, 2001).

This study will focus specifically on the factors impacting the decision to pursue higher education by female, non-traditional college students in southeastern West Virginia, which is served by Concord College in Athens, West Virginia, and the off-site campus in Beckley, West Virginia. Information will be sought to clarify the decision-making process of those female students currently enrolled and their reasons for not attending college as traditional students. This will include factors that encouraged college attendance at this time and the factors that influenced their decision to persevere in the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree.

The researcher also plans to evaluate the impact of the Appalachian culture’s conservative role for women in the pursuit of higher education. For the women who were
receiving welfare benefits, the researcher plans to note if welfare reform impacted their decision to pursue a higher education degree.

Background of the Problem

According to the U.S. Department of Education, the enrollment of non-traditional persons as college students is being studied nationally. The trend over the six-year period between 1986 and 1992 indicated the enrollment of non-traditional students increased between 1986 and 1989, then leveled off in 1992 (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Dortch, 1997), the projected percentage of change in women’s enrollment from 1995 to 2007 by age group will be as follows:

- 14-17 years  +106.5
- 18-19 years  +30.0
- 20-21 years  +26.2
- 22-24 years  +27.4
- 25-29 years  +27.7
- 30-34 years  +15.7
- 35 and older  +42.7

In all age groups, college enrollment of women is expected to grow faster than for men until 2007.

Various factors need to be explored to better understand the social or situational context in the pursuit of higher education by Appalachian non-traditional female students. These factors include: (1) statistical data regarding the character and educational status of West Virginia as a state; (2) the economic environment of West Virginia; (3) the development of welfare reform as mandated by the Welfare to Work program in the state; and, (4) the impact of Appalachian culture on women also exposed to other aspects of American culture.

Educational Status in West Virginia

In the year 2000, only 75% of the state’s population were high school graduates or higher in comparison to the U.S. average of 82%. In 2000, 83.4% of West Virginia women had completed high school. Only 14% of West Virginia’s population had obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher in comparison to the U.S. average of 25% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). However, full-time college enrollment (percent of the total population) increased from 1990 to 1995 from eighth in the country to ranking sixth (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997).
The dropout rate of students enrolled from 1985-1995 in public schools in the counties surrounding Mercer County, the home of Concord College and primary site of this study, was high. In 2000-2001, the dropout rates declined significantly. In 1991, the highest dropout rate in the state at 25 percent was in Summers County, bordering Mercer County to the northeast (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995). In 2000-2001, the dropout rate for Summers County was 2.9% (West Virginia Department of Education, 2002). According to the West Virginia Women’s Commission (1995), counties with dropout rates of 22% included McDowell County, to the west of Mercer County, and Raleigh County, to the north of Mercer. In 2000-2001, the dropout rate for McDowell County was 2.8% and 3.1% for Raleigh County (West Virginia Department of Education, 2002). In 1991, counties with dropout rates below 10% included Monroe County, to the east of Mercer County, and Wyoming County to the northwest (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995). In 2000-2001, the Monroe County dropout rate was 2.5% and 2.8% for Wyoming County (West Virginia Department of Education, 2002).

Statewide, the overall number of high school dropouts in West Virginia decreased from 24 percent in 1980 to 16 percent in 1990 (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995). In the 2000-2001 school year, the dropout rate for high school students was 2.9% (West Virginia Department of Education, 2002). The majority of students cited either dislike of school or lack of interest as the reason given for dropping out, although about 17 percent of girls cited either marriage, pregnancy, or both as their reason for dropping out (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995). Among West Virginia women over age 25 in 1990, approximately 66 percent had obtained a high school diploma or higher. This compares with the national average of 75 percent of women over age 25 that had at least a high school diploma (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995). In the 2000-2001 school year, 83.4% of women had completed their high school requirements for graduation (Caiazza, 2003).

Younger women were better educated than women in general in West Virginia. In the age group 25-34, 81 percent of West Virginia women were high school graduates or better. This number compared favorably with but still lagged the national figure of 86 percent of women in this age group (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995).

In 1990, 34 percent of West Virginia females aged 18-24 were enrolled in college. But when comparing urban and rural students, 46 percent of urban females in this age group were enrolled in college, compared with 25 percent of rural females. This urban/rural gap decreased
substantially when college graduates were compared. Of all women over age 25, 11 percent of urban and eight percent of rural women had at least a bachelor’s degree (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995).

Among all ages in 1990, West Virginia had the lowest percentage of college graduates in the United States, with the rural, southern coalfields of the state having the lowest rates of graduation. In McDowell County, less than five percent of females held a bachelor’s degree (West Virginia Women’s Commission, 1995). For rural Appalachian women, access to education may not represent a factor measuring “success” or it may be too difficult to pursue education because of travel time to educational institutions over the mountainous, rural terrain of West Virginia or other factors unknown at this point. One such factor may be the economic environment of the state.

Economic Environment of West Virginia

In 1995, 16.7 percent of the West Virginia population was below the poverty line, as compared to 13.8 percent of the United States population. This reflected a change in ranking from sixth in the country in 1990 to eighth in 1995 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997). In 2000, little change was noted in that 16.8 percent of the population of the state was below the poverty line, as opposed to 13.3 percent nationally (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

The average annual pay in West Virginia has increased from $20,715 in 1990 to $23,489 in 1995, but when compared to national average salaries, West Virginia dropped from 29th in the country to 37th. Personal income per capita (constant 1992 dollars) ranked 49th in 1996 and median household income (constant 1994 dollars) ranked 50th in 1995 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997).

According to the 2000 Census Bureau data, the median household money income was $27,432 as compared to the national median household money income of $37,005. These figures were based on 2000 inflation-adjusted dollars.

While West Virginia ranks 35th in the country in terms of resident population, it ranks 50th in the number of persons under 18, and 4th in the numbers of persons 65 and over (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997). In 2000, 15.3 percent of the state population was 65 years of age and older, while nationally this group reflected 12.4 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). The 1997 Census Bureau population projection has West Virginia’s population increasing by only 1% between 1995 and 2025 (to 1,845,000). In terms of population growth, this
represents the most stable resident population forecast in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Being fourth in the United States for the population over age 65, the projected stability of the resident population indicates there may be a long-term continuance of the representation of the population that is over 65. The focus of the state’s legislature or economic development programs may be on development of services or programs for those over age 65, who are typically not interested in employment, but leisure time activities or health care issues. The services this age group requires are usually minimum wage jobs such as personal aides, housekeepers, resort personnel, caddies, hospitality/service personnel, etc. These are not jobs leading to a professional career.

West Virginia’s economy has a certain rural stability with commercial banks which are increasingly being absorbed by mergers with corporations whose headquarters are outside the state. There are some signs that small businesses are moving in, lured by low costs and an eager workforce, but development is also limited by geography. There are few areas of the state unaffected by the beautiful, yet steep and abundant mountains of West Virginia (The Company Store, 1994; United States Department of Labor, 2002).

In July 2001, the unemployment rate in the United States was at a low of 4.6%. In December 2001 it rose to 5.8% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). In terms of employment rates, West Virginia ranked 50th in both 1990 and 1996 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). In West Virginia the December 2000 unemployment rate was 5.5%. By July 2001, the unemployment rate in West Virginia fell to 5.0% and fell further to 4.5% by December 2001 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002; WV Bureau of Employment Statistics, 2002). As the national unemployment rate rose from July to December 2001 by 1.2%, the unemployment rate fell by .5% overall in West Virginia and by 1.0% from December 2000 to December 2001 (WV Bureau of Employment Statistics, 2002).

The West Virginia unemployment rate varies by county and was as high as 14.1% in December 2001 after a high of 17.2% in December 2000 in Calhoun County. Some of the highest unemployment rates are in the central and southern parts of the state, which is the primary catchment area for Concord College, in Athens, West Virginia. Mercer County, the home county of Concord College, had an unemployment rate of 3.7% in December 2001 after a high of 4.7% in December 2000. McDowell County, a bordering county to the west in the heart of the coalfields, had an unemployment rate of 5.4% in December 2001 after a high of 8.3% in
December 2000. Monroe County, to the east, another bordering county, was 3.9% in December 2001 after a high of 5.1% in December 2000. Summers County to the north of Mercer County was 5.8% in December 2001 in comparison to 8.0% in December 2000. Wyoming County, northwest of Mercer County, was 3.9% in December 2001 after a high of 8.1% in December 2000 (WV Bureau of Employment Statistics, 2002).

One of the causes of relatively high unemployment in the area is lack of a broad industrial or manufacturing base, other than the coal industry, which has become mechanized and can produce the same amount or more of coal than in the past, but with fewer workers (Harper, 1996; “Appalachia moving”, 1998). The highest rates of employment are, in general, employment by the county school board, local or state government, or the health care industry (WV Bureau of Employment Programs, 1997). The largest types of occupations throughout the state are 28 percent management, professional, and related occupations; followed by 25 percent sales and office occupations; 17 percent service occupations; and 16 percent production, transportation and material moving occupations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

With continuing high unemployment rates throughout the state, increased development of the service and career professional sectors, and little development of jobs in industry or manufacturing, limited viable vocational choices are available. Also, the remarkably stable population forecast indicates that there will be few new opportunities for a burgeoning population group. Opportunities for gainful employment in West Virginia are obviously limited for persons without access to further education, making welfare reform problematic.

Development of Welfare Reform Programs

In the last two years, welfare reform issues have been widely discussed in the national and local news media. Welfare reform has culminated in the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWOR). “West Virginia Works” is the welfare reform approach in West Virginia. The program brochure states that a contract will be made between the client and the client’s case manager. This contract will include a detailed plan to get suitable employment, keep children in school, and maintain children’s health and other steps to help the family become self-supporting. Within 24 months of receiving assistance, clients must be in a work-related activity. Refusing or failing could mean losing benefits. Benefits will be limited to a maximum of 60 months by which time the client should be
self-sufficient. All single parents must cooperate to establish paternity and collect child support (West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, n.d.e).

Also due to PRWOR requirements, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program was changed to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in West Virginia. The guiding principles of welfare reform focused not on what needy families “are entitled to” or “entitlement programs”; instead, TANF focuses on helping families become self-reliant, by encouraging families to become self supporting and enhancing the well-being of their children. TANF helps eligible families with cash assistance, childcare, medical help, preparing for work and finding employment. The focus of TANF is employment, not entitlement. It requires teen parents (under age 18) to live with their parents or in an adult-supervised setting and requires all single parents to establish paternity and pursue collection of child support. The program is not drug tolerant. If the client is convicted of a drug felony, the person becomes ineligible for benefits (West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, n.d.e).

The resulting impact of welfare reform in West Virginia is encouragement of employment or training for clients. However, the premise of this reform is based on having an adequate number of jobs to employ persons involved with the Welfare program and the general community. According to the US Department of Labor (2002), jobs in West Virginia are currently stronger either in the service sector or the professional sector, than in factory or industrial work. The service sector represents mostly minimum or near minimum wages, making it difficult to support a family, while the professional sector represents a greater living wage but with a greater need for educational training. Access to a college education, with the tuition assistance offered through Pell Grants or other types of income-based financial aid, is included in the options available to those persons who are leaving the welfare system. Other options include vocational training, review for disability compensation where appropriate, and removal from the system if a welfare recipient is found to be ineligible for services or unwilling to work (West Virginia Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.e).

Women who wish to leave the support of welfare programs not only find social stigma from society surrounding them as former welfare recipients, but also pressure from the welfare system to meet certain program standards based on deadlines and benefit caps. Coupled with the limited job opportunities for gainful employment in the state as well as typical stressors inherent with marriage, parenting, and employment, this situation can be potentially overwhelming for the
person striving for independence from the welfare system. This is in addition to the stressors inherent in pursuit of higher education if the person opts for college admission. When Appalachian women opt for college admission, they must challenge centuries-old cultural trends.  

*Role of Women in Appalachia*

The role of women in the West Virginia culture is diverse and complex. They are part of the larger American culture which does not fully acknowledge the reality that women have been bound by more social restrictions and have consistently received less recognition for their work than men (Zastrow, 1996). Researcher Zastrow argues that in almost every known society, women have a lower status than men. Women have been regarded differently from men--not only biologically but also emotionally, intellectually, and psychologically. Double standards have existed for dating, marriage, and social and sexual conduct. American women traditionally are expected to be affectionate, passive, conforming, sensitive, intuitive, dependent, and ‘sugar and spice and everything nice.’ They are supposed to be primarily concerned with domestic life, to be nurturing, to instinctively love caring for babies and young children, to be deeply concerned about their personal appearance, and to be self-sacrificing for their family. Similarly, they should not appear ambitious, aggressive, competitive, or more intelligent than men. They are expected to be ignorant of and uninterested in sports, economics, and politics. In relationships with men, supposedly they should not initiate a relationship and are expected to be tender, ‘feminine’, emotional and appreciative (Zastrow, 1996).

Paradoxically, in the American culture at large, women are at the same time being encouraged to become more involved with all types of athletics, government, the military, engineering, law, the judiciary, fire fighting, medicine, accounting, administration, law enforcement, and upper and middle management (Zastrow, 1996). Gloria Steinhem (1994), nationally known feminist and supporter of the American women’s movement, challenged women’s stereotypical roles. She found that clinging to the past was the problem and embracing change is the solution. She reveled in being called a radical, feminist, and even unique. For some, these are the new American standards for women. However, she worked from a base founded in adequate self-esteem and self-confidence which many women—especially those in Appalachia have yet to develop.

Yet, contemporary Appalachian women are caught between the increasingly feminist expectations of the American culture at large and the Appalachian culture that espouses
traditional characteristics for its people, such as strong values of individualism and personalism; traditional and fundamental religious sects; arts, crafts, and regional music; language variation that has dialectical qualities; a strong extended family system; and a fierce sense of personal independence (Harper, 1996; “Appalachia moving”, 1998). Much of rural women’s community-based work has been viewed as an extension of their “housewife” skills or abilities. Income-generating projects to increase women’s purchasing power and personal autonomy in Central Appalachia are founded on the premise that women are not defined as workers, but as housewives (Seitz, 1995; “West Virginians pass”, 2001). Seitz states that Appalachia is characterized as a geographical and ideological place where loyalty to one’s family comes before loyalty to any other group or organizational principle outside of kinship bonds. Beaver (1996) believes that kinship satisfies contemporary Appalachian economic needs for people of the region. Kin provides the expected or ideal patterns of reciprocal aid and often share in labor, land, childcare, building, basic repairs, and other daily activities.

The question remains as to why non-traditional females, educated in West Virginia’s secondary schools and raised in the Appalachian culture, are now attending college in greater numbers. Not enough is known about this population to create appropriate support services or counseling services for these non-traditional students. Strategies needed to encourage greater numbers of this population to pursue a college education are also unclear.

Purpose of the Study

Research regarding the needs and roles of non-traditional female undergraduate students in West Virginia is sparse. This research will utilize qualitative methods to more clearly define the roles and expectations of women in West Virginia as they pursue higher education at Concord College and will also investigate the obstacles of being a non-traditional student. This information will assist Concord College, other West Virginia colleges, and other rural or economically depressed areas in addressing the unique issues this population presents to the higher education system.

Researcher Carol B. Aslanian (1995) conducted a series of interviews with staff and faculty members of Concord College on September 20-21, 1995, to study the status and potential of adult students at the college. Her overall aim was to examine activities related to the recruitment and servicing of adult students and to determine what actions in the near future could enhance enrollment among such students. She found that in the fall of 1994, students 25 years of
age and older made up 23 percent of the undergraduate headcount (approximately 520 of 2265 students). She found these older students had the following characteristics:

- 55 percent were full time students;
- 66 percent studied on the Athens campus only; 20 percent studied at the Beckley campus; and 14 percent studied at both locations;
- 60 percent received financial aid (as compared to 70 percent among younger students);
- 25 percent majored in Education; 14 percent in Social Work; 10 percent in Business; 5 percent in Psychology; and 5 percent in Travel and Industry Management;
- Adult students achieved an average GPA of 3.0 (as compared to 2.5 among younger students);
- 22 percent graduated in 1994-95 (as compared to 13 percent among younger students);
- 65 percent were female; and
- 93 percent were residents of West Virginia (70 percent were residents of Mercer and Raleigh Counties).

She stated in her report that the data demonstrate that adult students are good students, achieving better GPA’s and graduation proportions than traditional college-aged students. Furthermore, adult student enrollment at Concord is dominated by women and local constituents, most living in nearby counties (Aslanian, 1995).

This research study is aimed at yielding a clearer picture of the non-traditional, female, Concord College student and her needs. This information may then be used to impact programming or counseling to aid students in becoming successful graduates.

Rationale for the Study

Mental health counselors and college faculty and staff work with non-traditional female undergraduate students every day. It would be helpful to understand the attitudes, expectations, obstacles, hardships, behaviors, and facilitators of success affecting these women. Increased knowledge about this population can function as a catalyst to further dialogues, possibly increasing the empowerment of these women and the persons with whom they interact. Data would be helpful in understanding the family structure and dynamics and designing therapeutic interventions. An academician would be able to develop pedagogical interventions that can better assist the student in achieving her academic goals.
Theoretical Frameworks

When making the decision to follow certain career paths, a student may encounter many philosophical approaches in making that decision. Theoretical frameworks used in this research are an eclectic mix. They include the Learning Theories of Krumboltz, Mitchell and Jones’ Social Learning Theory (1976; Bandura, 1977); Lent, Brown, and Hackett’s Social Cognitive Perspective (1995, 1996); and Peterson, Sampson, Reardon & Lenz’s Career Information Processing Model of Career Choice (1991); and Economic and Sociological Theories of Hotchkiss and Borow’s Status Attainment Theory (1996). These are briefly outlined below but will be more closely reviewed in Chapter 2.

Some career development theorists assume career choices change throughout a person’s life. Learning theorists postulate that the effectiveness of a person’s social learning in interfacing with their environment can influence their career decision making process. The more successful a person has been in interacting with his or her environment, the more successful he or she will be in making sound decisions (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976; Bandura, 1977).

The Social-Cognitive Perspective (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1995, 1996) states that individuals are influenced by and influence their environments. The more a person believes in his or her own capabilities and that his or her life or career goals are valuable and attainable, the more apt he or she is to accomplish those goals.

Career Information Processing Model of Career Choice (Peterson, Sampson, Reardon & Lenz, 1996) states that knowledge is gained through accurate problem identification and use of critical thinking skills to make a career decision. However, the individual must be a competent decision-maker and able to use critical thinking skills accurately.

Status Attainment Theory proposes that mental ability and the socio-economic status of one’s family influences education, which affects the selection of career choices. The person observes the value education plays in the family, and follows similar paths and choices (Hotchkiss & Borow, 1996).

Because of these developmental issues, a person’s choice of vocation may be influenced by life experiences or life expectations. Educational pursuits may be entered to achieve career goals. An understanding of these concepts may be helpful for assisting the person selecting a career, or in knowing the patterns of non-traditional, female students to refine existing programs or develop new support programs.
Questions Guiding the Study

The study was guided by the following questions:

1) What factors influenced female non-traditional students not to pursue their education as traditional students?
2) What factors changed, leading to the decision to pursue higher education as a non-traditional student?
3) What factors influenced their perseverance in a baccalaureate program?

Significance of the Study

Many people labor under various misconceptions about Appalachia. The region is plagued by many cultural stereotypes which can create barriers to overcome. Life in Appalachia is thought by some to be negative and education deprived, where residents have no ambition to become financially successful or sophisticated. Additionally, women are sometimes thought to be disinterested in a career or higher education (“Appalachia moving”, 1998). All of these generalizations about Appalachia apply especially to West Virginia, the only state entirely encompassed within the boundaries of Appalachia.

Generally, research should contribute to knowledge, be useful, and meaningful to the relevant policy arenas, and be useful to practitioners (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). This research contributes to the knowledge base regarding non-traditional West Virginia female students in the pursuit of higher education, the impact of public policy on the student’s decision-making process, and identification of issues for practitioners working with these types of students.

Contribution to Knowledge

The findings in this study will help to better understand the needs and expectations of Appalachian women in pursuit of higher education. Women who have overcome disadvantage to become successful are thought to possess character attributes such as independence and maturity, benevolence, perfectionism, and perseverance, which can often work for, or against, the person (LePage-Lees, 1997). As Appalachian women are often classified as being disadvantaged, the contribution to knowledge will help identify the strengths and needs of Appalachian women in overcoming disadvantage. In Chapter Two, the characteristics and qualities of disadvantaged women according to author LePage-Lees (1997) will be discussed further.
Relevance to Public Policy

Information regarding the reasons that non-traditional female students give for not pursuing higher education as traditional students is also helpful in understanding cultural and gender issues. As these factors are more clearly understood, legislative or agency policies can be designed to address the needs of non-traditional students, resulting in a higher college graduation rate and thus a more highly educated citizenry.

Usefulness to Counseling Practitioners

Women who are pursuing higher education as non-traditional students will likely encounter many stressors in their environment. The impact of the changed roles of the women in family dynamics can be problematic to families and/or spouses. The economic impact of pursuing a higher education both in terms of increased financial burden due to college expenses and tuition and the possible job loss of a person pursuing a full-time educational program, can also be burdensome to the person and to the family (LePage-Lees, 1997). All of these issues may require therapeutic interventions either in individual or family counseling sessions.

Because the women of Appalachia may also view themselves as disadvantaged or atypical in comparison to traditional college students, self-esteem issues may also be evidenced (LePage-Lees, 1997). If self-esteem is not nurtured or developed, other disturbances, such as anxiety, depression, underachievement at school or at work, fear of intimacy, happiness or success, alcohol or drug abuse, spouse battering or child molestaton, co-dependency and sexual disorders, passivity and chronic aimlessness, suicide and acts of violent crime are possible (Branden, 1994).

Knowledge regarding this specific population will be helpful in determining therapeutic strategies useful in individual or family counseling, in identifying group counseling topics, in development of support programs, in development of financial aid packaging, in remedial education support programming, in developing knowledge of existing community resources for client referral, or other topics. Realization that the non-traditional female student may be experiencing multiple stressors may also be helpful for the practitioner in understanding the student’s life. Empowerment strategies in the context of traditional societal values may be developed once an individualized understanding of empowerment values is obtained from the student.
The usefulness of this study for counseling practitioners may extend beyond work with the population of non-traditional female students in Appalachia to include women in this category in other traditional cultures. To facilitate understanding of this study and its implications, definitions of key terms, the underlying assumptions, and the limitations of the research base will be clarified in the next sections.

Definition of Terms

**Non-traditional student** An individual who meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. delaying enrollment into post-secondary education until age 25 at the time of college admission,
2. attending part-time,
3. being independent from parents,
4. having dependents,
5. working full time while enrolled,
6. being a single parent,
7. or having a GED or high school equivalency certificate. (Horn and Carroll, 1996)

- Minimal non-traditional student status includes the presence of only one factor.
- Moderate non-traditional student status includes the presence of two or three factors.
- Highly non-traditional student status includes the presence of four or more factors (Horn and Carroll, 1996)

**Culture** resides in all learned behaviors. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (2003) defines culture as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations; the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious or social group. The primary concepts of societal pressure to conform and the body of learned behaviors also includes: systems of meaning, of which language is primary; ways of organizing society; and the distinctive techniques of a group and their characteristic products (Baseline Definition of Culture, n.d.). The way culture is taught and reproduced is an important component of culture. Because understanding is subjective, the way culture is taught and the way it is perceived may vary widely. Therefore, culture is in a constant state of change (Baseline Definition of Culture, n.d.)

**West Virginia culture** includes the culture of Appalachia. Even within the state, there may be variances in the cultural expectations of its members, based on historical or geographical influences. The northern counties of the state are near large metropolitan areas in other states,
and are influenced accordingly. The central counties of the state are mountainous and firmly within the Appalachian mountain range with little outside influence of industry, urban life, or convenient transportation or roads. The southern counties of the state are based in the coal fields and industries associated with the mining and shipment of coal. In the more economically developed areas of the southern region, there are additional influences of more diversified industries and tourism (Williams, 1997).

**Social status** pertains to a person’s position or rank in relation to others (Isaacson & Brown, 1997).

**Social role** is a set of expectations and behavior associated with a social position (Zastrow, 1996).

Assumptions

Assumptions underlying the study include:

1) The pursuit and attainment of higher education is beneficial to the non-traditional student.

2) There are concrete, or identifiable reasons, for not pursuing higher education as a traditional student.

3) There are concrete, or identifiable reasons, for pursuing higher education as a non-traditional student.

4) Many of the non-traditional females who are pursuing a higher education are economically disadvantaged.

5) All non-traditional female students will fall within the seven earlier identified categories.

Limitations

The sample population is small and reflects only a portion of the non-traditional female students on campus and at the off-site campus. Only one college in southern West Virginia is represented in the study.

1) The sample focuses only on non-traditional females, not male or traditional students.

2) The results may be overly interpreted due to researcher involvement with the sample, as she is a professor at Concord College and is an Appalachian female.
Although candidates for inclusion in this study will be sought from all academic divisions on campus, they may not accurately reflect all of the non-traditional females on campus. 

Students who are non-traditional but are not older than the average student will not be selected.

Overview of the Chapters

1) Chapter One includes the Introduction to the Study.
2) Chapter Two provides a continued review of the literature.
3) Chapter Three includes the methodology and process used in conducting the study.
4) Chapter Four includes the textual data, emergent themes, or possible variables involved in the study.
5) Chapter Five concludes the dissertation with discussion of the summary of findings, profiles of non-traditional students pursuing a higher education, and recommendations for program development and for further research.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The discussion of the literature includes information upon which this qualitative research study is grounded. These include gender-sensitive theories of social and career development and theories of career choice and development for persons in general, regardless of gender. In the next section, discussion continues regarding women, culture, and power; various cultural theorists’ perspectives and definitions of culture; and an overview of West Virginia culture. The next section includes identified considerations regarding women who have overcome barriers—real or perceived—to become successful in achieving an education and their chosen career goals. And finally, the last section includes the latest information regarding the trend for non-traditional college students in pursuing higher education.

Gender-Sensitive Theories of Social and Career Development

The foundation of modern theories of career development appeared in 1909 in Choosing a Vocation by Frank Parsons and was utilized primarily until the 1950’s. His model included (1) understanding one’s self, (2) understanding the requirements of the jobs available, and (3) choosing a career based on true logic. As the Twentieth Century advanced, more career development theories were developed and tested. Researching and exploring the complexities of society and the members of that society in adapting to the changes presented continues today. Even though more women began to enter the work force during World War II, and especially in the recent past, the selection of jobs for women was limited by either the individuals themselves or the companies where they were employed.

Differences exist among the needs and expectations of women versus males in the American and the world’s workplace. Women often restrict their career choices or under-utilize their abilities and talents, and frequently encounter the “glass ceiling” that limits achievement of higher levels of job responsibility and administrative roles. Women are underrepresented in many occupational fields and as a gender, enter low-paying, lower-status occupations, keeping themselves economically disadvantaged and managing multiple role demands (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Herz & Wootton, 1996). In contrast with men, women’s intellectual capacities
and talents are often mismatched with the caliber of occupation that they pursue (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980; Herz & Wootton, 1996). Despite similar intellectual ability, women are employed primarily in traditionally female occupations, and are over-represented in lower-level, lower-status, and lower-paying occupations (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). A long-standing myth is that women work for extra pocket money, not to support a family, so are not seriously attached to the work force (Atkinson and Hackett, 1998). Although women accounted for 46 percent of the labor force in 1995, American women earn, on average, 75 cents on the dollar compared to men (US Women’s Bureau, 1996).

According to a study in 1996 as reported in the International Review of Women and Leadership, researchers evaluated sex roles and leader emergence. Three items on the questionnaire asked respondents to rate the extent to which they and each of their group members (1) assumed a leadership role; (2) led the conversation; and (3) influenced group goals and decisions. This study indicated there was no significant correlation between femininity and any measure of leader emergence, but a significant correlation between masculinity and self-perceptions of leadership. Consistent with other studies, masculine and androgynous types were more likely to perceive themselves as leaders than other feminine types. More importantly, subjects rated “highly masculine” both perceived themselves and were perceived by others as emergent leaders.

Smith and Hutchinson (1995) determined in their study that 15 female management lecturers in academia believed that gender was an important issue in management and could demonstrate that the topic was an important component of all of their courses. Their research illustrated that those academicians willing to confront the gender issue via teaching and research frequently faced overt or covert hostility from peers and students since the topic was rarely perceived as a strategic business issue. They also found that a gendered management culture was clearly discernible within academic curricula with courses leaving the contributions and interests of women in society generally unexamined.

Health status improves as the level of income and social hierarchy increases. Income determines conditions such as safe housing and the ability to buy sufficient, nutritious food. The healthiest populations are those societies which are prosperous and have an equitable distribution of wealth (Pederson, 2001). According to researchers, Western medicine and psychology have often construed woman as the “other”, a defective and incomplete version of man. It would be
possible to find that women suffer from lower self-esteem, a sense that their own health is less important than their husbands’ and children’s, and a fear of insensitivity and ill treatment at the hands of physicians (Wolfe, 1994). Career selections may be made by women who believe they are inferior and subservient to men in the society, afraid to seek medical assistance, are not in good health, or believe their career selections are limited due to societal constrictions.

In general, career development theories have been criticized for their disregard for the impact that gender, race, or ethnic status play in determining career decisions (Brooks, 1984). Brooks (1984) stated that existing theories were formulated primarily to explain the career development of men, and since women’s career development is different from men’s, the existing theories are inadequate.

Women are often placed in the situation of not only deciding upon an occupation, but also to what degree her level of involvement will be in the workplace (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Herz & Wootton, 1996). The traditional roles of women are often in conflict with the expectations of a full-time or part-time employee (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Atkinson & Hackett, 1998). Studies by Spalter-Roth, Hartmann, and Shaw (2000) indicated that conventional employment (full-time, year-round wage or salary employment for a single employer) resulted in the greatest economic well being for the employee. Women who were employed less than full-time all-year, were most likely to have children under six and least likely to have the additional financial support of a spouse. These workers gained flexibility in hours, but clearly lost the additional income, health insurance and benefits that full time work could offer.

The decision regarding when to begin the employee phase of a woman’s life may often be delayed by balancing the other facets of her life against it (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987). Collins and Hoffarth (2000) found that mothers relying on parental or child self-care were 2.2 times more likely to leave a job than mothers using center-based care. Mothers who did not have convenient access to a center-based program within ten minutes of their homes were almost twice as likely to leave a job as those who had a conveniently located program.

Although more women are employed outside the home, the assumption that the woman is still the primary caretaker of the home and family prevails. This can create confusion and conflict within the family, as well as in the woman’s perception of her appropriate management of responsibilities. Nearly 95 percent of women will participate in the work force at some time in their lives (Betz, 1994; U.S. Women’s Bureau, 1994). Over 61 percent of married women, and
70 percent of mothers with children under the age of 18, work outside the home (Betz, 1994; U.S. Women’s Bureau, 1994). Scarcity in affordable, quality day care and support services for working women result in women who are forced to go on welfare, take part-time instead of full-time work, and lose wages due to maternity and child care responsibilities, drastically lowering their earnings and future earning power (Atkinson & Hackett, 1998). Since there are no career development theories that comprehensively explain the complexities of career choice for women, more general career development theories will be explored.

General Theories of Career Choice and Development

Theories Based in Learning Theory

**Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory**

Krumboltz (1979), Krumboltz, Mitchell, and Jones (1976), and Mitchell and Krumboltz (1984, 1990, 1996) describe a social learning theory of career selection based on the behavioral theory of Bandura (1977) and others, emphasizing reinforcement theory. Krumboltz identifies four kinds of factors that influence career decision making:

1. Genetic endowment and special abilities, such as race, gender, talent, coordination, and physical appearance.
2. Environmental conditions and events that lie outside the control of anyone but that bear on the individual through the environment in which the individual exists.
3. Learning experiences, such as those situations in which the individual acts on the environment to produce certain consequences or those situations in which the individual learns by reacting to external stimuli, by observing real or fictitious models, or by pairing two events in time or location.
4. Task approach skills, or those skills that the individual applies to each new task, or problem.

Basically, the individual begins with only the genetic characteristics with which one was born. As the individual encounters environmental, economic, social, or cultural events and conditions, changes and corrections occur. Based upon the success or failure of these learning events, the individual continues development of skills and maturity (Krumboltz, 1979).

As the individual continues to learn from the successes and failures in his/her life, he/she learns to make decisions accordingly. Decisions regarding educational and occupational choices
can also be influenced by the individual’s past experience or modeling (Krumboltz, 1979). A successful achievement or positively perceived experience or action can influence an individual’s repeat of the action or stance (Krumboltz, 1979). Krumboltz (1979) further notes that the cumulative effects of learning experiences can influence a person to make a decision to enroll in a certain educational program or become employed in a particular occupation. School enrollment or employment is not a simple function of preference, choice, or interest but is influenced by diverse environmental factors.

As noted previously, personal experience or female role model interactions with schooling or career options may influence negatively or positively the perception that a certain goal is attainable for a female. These factors can be quite powerful in determining the student’s selection of attainable goals. As the women of Appalachia consider opportunities for themselves, the career or higher education options for them may also be influenced by the acceptance or rejection of certain options by the individual’s family or community.

**Social-Cognitive Perspective.**

Based in the socio-cognitive theory of Albert Bandura (1986), Lent, Brown, and Hackett’s (1995, 1996) theory parallels Krumboltz’s theory. However, it places more emphasis on self-regulatory thoughts, particularly those associated with positive expectations that are dynamic, fluctuating self-perceptions that individuals have about their ability to perform particular tasks. The central tenets of social cognitive theory are as follows:

1. The interaction of people with their environment is highly dynamic; the result is that individuals are at once influenced by, and influence, their environments.
2. Career-related behavior is influenced by four aspects of the person: behavior, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals, in addition to genetically determined characteristics.
3. Self-efficacy beliefs and expectations of outcomes interact directly to influence interest development. People become interested in things that they believe they can perform well which will produce valued outcomes.
4. Gender, race, physical health, disabilities, as well as environmental variables, influence self-efficacy development as well as expectations of outcomes and, ultimately, goals and performance.
(5) Actual career choice and implementation will be influenced by a number of direct and indirect variables other than self-efficacy, expectations of outcomes, and goals. Direct influences on career choice and development include discrimination, economic variables that influence supply and demand, and the culture of the decision maker. Indirect influences include chance happenings.

(6) Performance in educational activities and occupations is the result of the interactions among ability, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and the goals that have been established. All things being equal, people with the highest level of ability and the strongest self-efficacy beliefs will perform at the highest level. However, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations are altered continuously as individuals interact with their environment.

Lessons learned from childhood or in young adulthood are often cognitively illogical, but relied upon as truth. At one time, the perception may have been accurate, but may no longer be so. However, until the individual decides to relinquish the perception and pursue other alternatives or solutions, the perception will continue, even if inaccurate (Isaacson & Brown, 1997). The women of Appalachia may also have inaccurate perceptions of their roles and capabilities because of certain inaccuracies translated through past experiences.


The Career Information Processing Model of Career Choice (CIP) was first presented in 1991 by Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon and was revised in 1996 by Peterson, Sampson, Reardon and Lenz. Unlike Lent, Brown, and Hackett who relied on Bandura’s 1986 work, Peterson and associates focused on information processing.

Basically, CIP (Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, & Lenz, 1996) proposes that with regard to career decisions, people develop two types of knowledge: self-knowledge and knowledge about careers. Based upon adequate communication, analysis, synthesis, valuing and execution, the individual processes the information through accurate problem identification and critical thinking skills to make a career decision. The pivotal point of this theory is that the individual is a competent decision-maker and can utilize critical thinking skills for problem identification and resolution.

As has been earlier outlined, if women are not supported in developing their self-confidence and self-worth, adequate problem identification and resolution may be problematic.
They may not have been given the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to identify problems accurately, and feel they are competent enough to identify alternatives and solve the problem. In other circumstances, the individual may not have adequately developed the necessary skills. This should be a point of evaluation. Women of Appalachia may not have developed the skills or self-confidence to challenge the established conservative societal norms for women who wish to pursue higher education.

_Economic and Sociological Theories_

_Status Attainment Theory_

Hotchkiss and Borrow (1984, 1990, 1996) state that the publication of The American Occupational Structure (Blau & Duncan, 1967) marked the beginning of Status Attainment Theory (SAT). SAT proposes that mental ability and the socioeconomic status of one’s family influences education which in turn affects the occupation entered. Race and gender have been studied in determining the correlation with occupational attainment and earnings. Research has consistently shown that African-Americans earn less than whites (e.g., Saunders, 1995) and women earn consistently less than men (e.g., Reskin, 1993; Roos & Jones, 1993). Reskin’s research also suggests that males and females are largely segregated in the workplace and women are often relegated to occupations with lower earnings and status (Isaacson and Brown, 1997). As the socioeconomic status of many women in Appalachia is at or below the poverty level, this may influence if they see higher education as a viable pursuit for them. Without a college degree, women may be condemned to low-paying, non-secure jobs without a stable, developed economic future in a professional career. The next section discusses the impact of culture on women and their development of socioeconomic power.

_Women, Culture, and Power_

What is culture? Why is it important to know the role of women in that particular culture? What role does power play? These are a few questions guiding the continued exploration.

The essential feature regarding culture is that it is learned (Maraglia, Law, & Collins, 1996). Three factors that shape the body of learned behaviors include systems of meaning, of which language is primary; ways of organizing society, from kinship groups to states and multinational corporations; and the distinctive techniques of a group and their characteristic products (Miraglia, Law, & Collins, 1996).
Beliefs and values are inherent in the determination of the culturally appropriate mores of behavior in the culture. Belief systems involve stories, or myths, whose interpretation can give people insight into how they should feel, think, and/or behave. The most prominent systems of beliefs tend to be those associated with formal religions (Miraglia et al, 1996). Value systems differentiate right feelings, thoughts, and behavior from wrong feelings, thoughts, and behavior. Value systems can and very often do grow out of belief systems (Miraglia et al, 1996).

Principles that are intermeshed with this definition of culture include:

1) If the process of learning is an essential characteristic of culture, then teaching also is a crucial characteristic.

2) Because the relationship between what is taught and what is learned is not absolute (some of what is taught is lost, while new discoveries are constantly being made), culture exists in a constant state of change.

3) Meaning systems consist of negotiated agreements—members of a human society must agree to relationship between a word, behavior, or other symbol and its corresponding significance and meaning. To the extent that culture consists of systems of meaning, it also consists of negotiated agreements and process of negotiation.

4) Because meaning systems involve relationships which are not essential and universal (the word ‘door’ has no essential connection to the physical object—we simply agree that it shall have that meaning when we speak or write in English), different human societies will inevitably agree upon different relationship and meanings. This is a relativistic way of describing culture (Miraglia et al, 1996).

Clifford Geertz’s Definition of Culture

In defining culture, Clifford Geertz often referred to the anthropological work of Clyde Kluckhohn’s, *Mirror for Man* (Geertz, 1973). Geertz included the following components that he felt best described culture:

1) the total way of life of a people

2) the social legacy the individual acquires from his group

3) a way of thinking, feeling, and believing

4) an abstraction from behavior
5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in
fact behave
6) a storehouse of pooled learning
7) a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems
8) learned behavior
9) a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior
10) a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men
11) a precipitate of history
12) a behavioral map, sieve, or matrix.

Geertz believes that once human behavior is observed, then the focus becomes determining the
importance of the observed action. He argues that culture is public because meaning is publicly
understood and practiced.

Dominance of Patriarchal Societies

After reading these postulates by cultural theorists, the assumption would be that men and
women are equally exposed to all facets of culture. But the roles that each gender, age, race, or
ethnic group assumes are determined and enforced by that culture. There are some examples of
matriarchal societies such as the Iroquois culture or early Hawaiian culture, but they are greatly
outnumbered by the patriarchal society structures. The vast majority of patriarchal societies have
systematically limited the power of women in their social, political, and religious institutions
(Miraglia et al, 1996). Even though in many countries women’s rights have been improved and
strengthened, women continue to be under-represented politically, under-compensated
economically for equal work, and restricted in many major religions from access to positions of
authority (Miraglia et al, 1996). Without equal access to resources and power, women continue
to struggle in developing themselves.

Unfortunately, the needs of women for basic survival as well as an education are great,
nationally and globally. As demonstrated by the following statistics, women are often seen by the
global community as expendable or at least relegated to a subservient role, often restricted
through violence. Worldwide, the United Nations International Children’s Education Fund
(UNICEF) is evaluating and creating imperatives to address the problem of women who are
unable to work to support themselves due to lack of education and training. In the article,
*Girlhood: A Perilous Path, UNICEF (1995)* documents the following:
Millions of women are missing. There is no outcry--no newspaper headline demanding action; no interviewer berating those responsible. These women were not victims of some horrendous war, flood, or famine. They simply didn’t survive the perilous path of girlhood. They were the girls who had less health care, less food, less education, less value, than boys. The end result is that there are somewhere between 60 to 100 million fewer women than there should be. And this attack on women often starts in the womb.

The education of girls in any country including the United States is important for economic reasons as well as social development. The economic well-being of a country is enhanced by a fully-employed, well-trained, educated workforce. The Gross National Product of a country can be improved by participation of the country’s female work force through self-employment, participation in the marketplace, and non-market and home production. The education of women can directly impact infant and child mortality, immunization, and life expectancy. Further, educated women generally marry later, and are more likely to practice family planning. By increasing a woman’s ability to earn an independent income, education increases women’s status in the community and leads to greater input and skill in family and community decision making. Education also empowers women through the basic knowledge of self-worth and rights as individuals (UNICEF, 1992).

The Progress of Nations 1997, is an annual UNICEF report detailing the progress of countries toward meeting a set of goals for reaching basic human needs. It says that violence against women and girls is a major obstacle to social and economic equality in the world. The violence ranges from female genital mutilation (FGM) to dowry killings to female infanticide to domestic violence. The 1997 report argues that women are held back by poor education, economic dependence, limited political power, limited access to fertility control, harsh social conventions, and inequality in the eyes of the law. Violence is a key instrument used to keep women shackled (UNICEF, 1997).

Even the theoretical position and pedagogical nature of the church can be powerful in controlling roles and societal expectations for women. In the Papal Letter to Women issued in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, Pope John Paul II continued to reinforce traditional roles for women. He specifically thanked women for being mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, homemakers, and the traditional role of being a woman. He paid homage to the position that women have held in history, and apologized for the lack of
global knowledge about their accomplishments. He reflected that the role of motherhood is often penalized rather than rewarded, with little protection against discrimination for those women who choose to assume roles of wives and mothers. He also stressed an urgent need to achieve real equality for women in terms of equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic state. He acknowledged the role that women have played and will play in correcting the serious problems of society. He reinforced the traditional roles of men and women in relationships, by referring to the Story of Creation (Catholic Resource Network, 1997).

The Pope continued in the address to the Conference, that the Church sees in Mary the highest expression of the “feminine genius” (Catholic Resource Network, 1997). Even though this message was complimentary of women in roles of employment and society, the overwhelming message continued to stress the traditional roles of women. The message was delivered by the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church, but it could also have been delivered by many of the fundamentalist Christian churches in America. The message suggests that women are to be kept in their place, where she is assumed to be provided for by men of the society. But often the men of the society are not empowering, nurturing, compliant, or reliable. (Collins & Hofferth, 1997).

West Virginia Culture

West Virginia culture is the focus of this research. It is heavily influenced by the Appalachian culture, which is a region of contrasts. It includes tradition versus progress, stability versus growth, regional versus international markets, agriculture versus industry, and family versus the individual (Tatum, 1998). Much of Appalachia is designated as a high-poverty area, but there is a wealth of culture, human strength, and a spirit of perseverance (Tatum, 1998). More than 45% of the U.S. population lives within a 500-mile radius of West Virginia (WV Tourism Commission, 1998). West Virginia is a conservative, traditional state. The state of West Virginia lies primarily in the Appalachian mountain range, as opposed to other states in the Appalachian Mountain Range that have only small portions of their state isolated by the mountains. Nearly 80% of the entire state is covered by forests, limiting space for industry or manufacturing (WV Tourism Commission, 1998). Approximately 64 % of West Virginia’s population lives in communities with less than 2500 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Twenty
of the state’s fifty-five counties are completely rural (Oberhauser, 1995). The “Bible Belt”, which reflects the importance of fundamentalist religion in the everyday lives of the residents in a particular area, is very strong in the South and Midwest, and especially in the conservative, traditional Appalachian Mountains (World Book Dictionary, 1990). The traditional roles of women are stressed and culturally reinforced. These roles typically include discouragement from participating in the formal work place and instead reinforce more socially sanctioned roles in child rearing and housekeeping. If employed, women are more typically hired in low paying sectors of the work force (Oberhauser, 1995).

Appalachian cultural traits generally include a mistrust of “outsiders”, fear of the “system”, the conscious exclusion of specific groups in a bureaucracy, a tradition of self-sufficiency and “taking care of one’s own”, as well as geographic and social isolation (Tatum, 1998). Women within the culture may also face additional barriers such as extreme poverty, lack of transportation, lack of child care, inability to pay for services, family violence, and lack of self-esteem (Tatum, 1998). Agencies within the culture may also function with preconceived conceptions or biases regarding the individual within the Appalachian culture, and may be unwilling to alter agency policies to be more responsive to the needs of the population (Tatum, 1998). People of Appalachia show an overwhelming kindness, humility and eagerness to please, are increasingly equipped for occupations and showing a willingness to work, are loyal, close-knit, and law-abiding, but are generally seen as industrial peons, not entrepreneurs (The Company Store, 1994; U.S. Department of Labor, 2002).

Three-quarters of West Virginians own their own homes (The Company Store, 1994; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), so the desire to live in the state is strong. There are extended families throughout the area that often represent the ties that are strongest to the Appalachians. If Appalachian people migrate to other areas, they seem to always think of returning to Appalachia (Harper & Lantz, 1996).

Coal once ruled the state economically. In 1948, 125,000 men—(as women were barred from working in the mines at that time) [Oberhauser, 1995]-- worked in the deep mines of West Virginia. Now 22,000 persons, including women, are employed in the deep mines, and earn about $700 a week (The Company Store, 1994; U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). These jobs are dangerous, difficult, and scarce. The mines have become mechanized, and mine as much tonnage of coal as in the 1940’s which represents half of America’s current coal exports, but with many
fewer miners. Chemical plants, heavy manufacturing, service industries, government and tourism are other leading employers in the state (The Company Store, 1994; U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). Central West Virginia was historically dominated by agricultural subsistence activities along with some extractive industries, while southern West Virginia was an important coal mining region (Oberhauser, 1995). The state of West Virginia is completely within the Appalachian Mountains which encourages stagnation of the economy due to the geographic isolation from the rest of the country (Barone, 1990).

West Virginia Higher Education Chancellor J. Michael Mullen recently stated that West Virginia ranks last in the United States in adults with bachelor’s degrees in a survey reflecting data from 1960 to 2000 (Hawkins, 2001). The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy figures from 1997 reflect that in West Virginia an average of 4960 teens between 15 and 19 are pregnant. Of these, 1730 pregnancies are in girls between 15 and 17 and 3230 pregnancies are in teens 18 and 19 years of age. This reflects that though nationally teen pregnancies are declining, in southern West Virginia the rates are increasing. West Virginia is industrially under-developed, isolated, conservative, and rural, as is most of Appalachia. West Virginia ranks last in the United States in the number of state residents holding undergraduate degrees, and has a rising teenage pregnancy rate. Because of many of these factors, West Virginia women may be classified as disadvantaged. The following section relates the characteristics and adaptations of disadvantaged women.

*Disadvantaged Women*

The term disadvantaged can describe many situations in life experiences. For some, it may mean surviving in a dysfunctional home or environment. For others, it means surviving physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse or neglect. For still others, it may mean being raised in an environment that is not supportive of self-development and growth. For some, it may mean continuing the cycle of early marriage and/or parenting. Children born to teenage mothers typically have a lower birth weight and are more medically fragile than babies born to more mature mothers. These women may have inherited and passed on certain traits, as defined by Werner and Smith (1983) in their studies.

Werner and Smith (1983) studied children who were born with a low birth weight, and then raised in a less than optimal environment. Their study included a two-year, a 10-year, and
an 18-year follow-up. Their study supports the conclusions that children who overcame disadvantage have these characteristics in common:

1) An active, evocative approach toward solving life’s problems, enabling them to negotiate successfully an abundance of emotionally hazardous experiences
2) A tendency to perceive their experiences constructively, even if they caused pain or suffering
3) The ability, from infancy on, to gain other people’s positive attention
4) A strong ability to use faith to maintain a positive vision of a meaningful life
5) A tendency to be more active, more flexible and more adaptable even in infancy

Pamela LePage-Lees (1997), *From Disadvantaged Girls to Successful Women*, interviewed 21 women she classifies as being disadvantaged. That is, they lived in either a poor working-class or lower-class family as a child, were first generation college students, and experienced at least one type of familial dysfunction or traumatic childhood stress (physical and or sexual abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse or mental illness, severe illness). For LePage-Lees, many of the 21 women interviewed in her study demonstrated similar qualities. She found they were independent and mature for their ages, which made them more interested in an independent (adult) style of education. However, many of their teachers or counselors did not recognize their need for assistance, and, as a result they received inadequate counseling in high school and college. Most were reticent to talk about their disadvantage, feeling there is always someone more disadvantaged. The term “disadvantage” had been often linked to low achievement, and the term had taken on racist connotations. Interestingly, these women were accustomed to hiding their disadvantage, particularly in the academic environment, and they believed that this subterfuge had been important to their ultimate success. At the same time, they believed their disadvantage ultimately helped them in their careers by strengthening them and giving them insights and motivations others lacked.

Many of these women, as girls, were often precocious but not seriously problematic to their families or communities. They described themselves as “teacher’s pets”. In a study completed by Myra and David Sadker (1994), “nice girls” often receive what they described as “apple polishers’ grades” while lagging somewhat behind on achievement tests. Their findings indicated that for girls, it was important for them to be recognized and reinforced in elementary school. This was coupled with the conclusion that it was disappointing for these girls to realize
that “being a good girl” would not be sufficient to make good grades and receive positive attention from teachers. The ability to make teachers happy was often more important to the students than learning the information. (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

As adults, many of the women in the study were often ambivalent about their self-confidence. The spectrum of self-confidence ranged from arrogance to complete intimidation by persons in authority, such as teachers or college professors. But ultimately, they would attempt tasks even when faced with potential rejection. They perceived themselves to be different than those around them in college, they felt out of place, viewed themselves as imposters, and thought they were less well prepared than the other students whom they perceived to be more advantaged than themselves (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Many of the women were also perfectionists. This trait helped them to achieve high honors and prestigious careers, but hampered them academically. The instructional methods often used in the classroom were appropriate for most of their classmates, but not for themselves. Because of their advanced maturity and independence in school, they were taught like the other students, which often proved to be ineffective for them. Many of the classroom techniques encouraged exploration of new ideas and techniques, with success not guaranteed. Because these students were also dependent on receiving approval or positive feedback from their teachers, or the schooling process in general, there was often disappointment. Criticism of their attempt, or being told a more effective approach than the one they utilized, was intolerable (Sadker & Sadker, 1994; LePage-Lees, 1997).

To determine why disadvantaged persons succeed, Wells (1989) reported a study that interviewed 30 white adult males and females and 30 African American adult males and females who labeled themselves as being successful after a childhood of disadvantage. Their findings indicated that these persons were successful because they:

1) were willing to confront obstacles directly rather than indirectly
2) were more likely to turn failure around to their advantage
3) were better trained for failure
4) had an internal locus of control
5) were self-sufficient
6) were strongly motivated to achieve
7) were reward oriented.
As many of the persons interviewed for these studies were adults, there appeared to be strengths they had developed since their childhood that had been positively utilized for their futures. Perhaps enrollment in higher education might be one of the pursuits they felt they could now pursue as they had developed strategies for success. The following section relates data regarding non-traditional students’ enrollment in higher education and the factors such as being an adult learner or living in a rural setting that might influence the pursuit and achievement of an undergraduate degree.

Non-traditional Students’ Enrollment in Higher Education

The data from the National Center for Education Statistics of the US Department of Education in 1996 included information regarding private, not-for profit 4-year colleges and public 2-year institutions, but implied information regarding public 4-year college enrollment of non-traditional students. The document explained that changes in enrollment relative to institution type can provide some indication of whether institutions are successfully reaching out to less traditional students in order to maintain or increase their enrollment. Between 1986 and 1992, for example, the proportion of moderately non-traditional students who were enrolled in private, not-for profit 4-year colleges (both non-doctoral and doctoral) increased while the proportion of highly non-traditional students enrolled in these institutions remained stable (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

Enrollment Trends

Horn and Carroll (1996) further explained that a majority of undergraduates in all three National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) surveys (1986-87, 1989-1990, and 1992-93) were classified as non-traditional. The trends indicated that the proportion of moderately non-traditional students (primarily older than typical, attending part time, and financially independent) increased over time from one in four undergraduates in 1986 to nearly one in three (31 percent) in 1992. The proportion of highly non-traditional students, on the other hand, declined from 26 to 23 percent between 1989 and 1992.

There was discernible growth in the enrollment of moderately nontraditional students in 4-year institutions (e.g. from 31 percent in 1986 to 39 percent in 1992). This was especially true for private, not-for-profit, 4-year non-doctoral institutions where the proportion of moderately
non-traditional students rose from 15 percent in 1986 to 22 percent in 1992 (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

With regard to individual non-traditional characteristics, there was a generally increasing trend in the enrollment of older-than-typical students (from 54 percent of undergraduates in 1986 to 59 percent in 1992). Similarly, the proportion attending part time rose from 38 percent to 42 percent for the same time period (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

The proportion of undergraduates who worked full-time while enrolled or had dependents increased between 1986 and 1989. The rates either leveled off or declined between 1989 and 1992. The proportion of undergraduates who were single parents remained the same from 1986-1992. Enrollment of students who were recipients of a GED or high school equivalency certificate declined (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

**Persistence and Attainment of Nontraditional Students**

Non-traditional students were much less likely to earn a degree within five years of beginning their post-secondary education, and far more likely to have left school without returning than were their traditional counterparts. Students who were only minimally non-traditional were much more likely to have earned a bachelor’s degree (42 percent) than were moderately or highly non-traditional students (17 percent and 11 percent, respectively).

With regard to timing of departure, non-traditional students were more than twice as likely to leave school in their first year as were traditional students (38 percent versus 16 percent). However, for students who persisted to their second year, non-traditional students’ rates of attrition were much closer to the rates of traditional students (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

**Women, Work, and Social Change**

As women continue to evolve in empowerment and in the workforce, there are three identified reasons for more women to leave the home and enter the workforce. First, economic pressures on families, necessitating a second income for family support was instrumental in women seeking work or training. Second, there was the spreading societal expectation that women should move from working at home to working in the marketplace, especially after the children have left home. Third, there was the increased desire on the part of many women to lead an active, productive life in the economic mainstream. This was especially true for better-educated women (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Atkinson & Hackett, 1998). More commonly,
society may state that men and women are social equals but have different roles, both equally valuable. But upon closer inspection, another variant of sexist ideology is revealed. Women’s special place and special roles invariably turn out to be inferior and devalued. In American society, feminine characteristics lead women “naturally” to the “women’s jobs” of beauticians, secretary, child care worker, and waitress, and away from such masculine work as physician (Atkinson & Hackett, 1998). Given women’s restricted earning capacity due to inequities in pay, expected benefits and retirement, females headed 27.8 percent of the families in poverty in 1999 (Greenstein, Primus, & Kayatin, 2000).

According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (1996), education is the single most important factor affecting earnings. Improved access to education is most likely due to other federal civil rights legislation, as well as to a generally rising standard of living that has enabled people to invest more in education. For women, the most important economic change has been a dramatic increase in their labor force participation.

However, only about one-tenth of the Fortune 500 companies have women filling as many as one-quarter of the corporate officer positions (Francis, 2001). This situation persists despite the fact that women demonstrated greater leadership skills than men in a recent five-year corporate study. Women managers outperformed men in 17 of 20 leadership skills studied, including planning, coaching, communication, empowerment of employees, and resourcefulness (Sappenfield & Day, 2001).

Adult Learners in American Society

America has become a learning society. We have become a society in which adults learn everywhere, in formal educational settings and in institutions where education is not the primary function such as the workplace, churches, prisons, libraries, museums and the armed forces. Most adults do not learn for the sheer pleasure of learning new or more complex information, but for applied knowledge or to cope with some change in their life. Learning can precede, accompany, or follow life transitions. Transitions, and the learning needed to accomplish them, occur unevenly in several areas of adult life. Transitions may involve career changes, family or leisure transitions, and art, health or religious transitions. The predominant reason for adult learning is to acquire occupational skills (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; United States Department of Education 1997; Stallman & Johnson, 1996; Horn & Carroll, 1996).
Adults, whose lives are changing more often, learn several things simultaneously, because their life is complex and integrated with others. They often learn career skills and will seek out qualified teachers in schools and colleges for training. They more often learn in formal educational institutions, but due to the investment of time and money, expect the learning to be credible and reputable. Due to life changes, the learning is usually centered on developing a skill or education to cope with the need precipitated by the transition. However, this may not be the only stress the person feels. There may be several areas of the person’s life that are also indirectly impacted by one event (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; United States Department of Education 1997; Stallman & Johnson, 1996; Horn & Carroll, 1996).

According to Kim and Creighton (1999) all adult education has grown steadily over the past three decades, increasing to 46 percent in 1999. Adult education programs include English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education, Credential Programs, Apprenticeship Programs, work-related courses, and personal development courses. Divergently, enrollment in higher education has remained relatively constant at 7.6 percent to 7.9 percent of the adult population prior to the 1999 interview. This reflects that participation in adult education was approximately four times the enrollment in higher education in 1991, and six times the higher education enrollment in 1999 (Gerald & Hussar, 1999).

Higher education enrollment is projected to see a 13.5 percent increase in enrollment from 1997 to 2009. There is also an 8.4 percent increase expected in obtainment of Bachelor’s Degrees from academic year 1996-97 to 2008-09 (Gerald & Hussar, 1999).

The impact of rural settings on education

According to Sherwood (1989), alternatives, or choices in educational options, may be limited due to the sparseness of the rural population. Motivating minority students toward higher education achievement has been an issue also complicated by the rural setting. Those students who do not speak English well or at all, may also have difficulty finding appropriate educational services in a rural setting. Special populations, such as the disabled, the gifted, the juvenile offender, or others with special education needs may become frustrated with the rural setting. There may be few alternatives, and the strain of providing these services may be prohibitive for the human and financial resources of schools or school districts (Sherwood, 1989).

Many policy makers believe those high rates of adult literacy to be a condition of rural economic development. Their focus often goes to addressing the literacy question regarding the
segment of the population occupying the lowest socioeconomic status. If this segment of the population can become literate or trained, then they will become a financially contributing part of the economic base of the community, rather than a drain on limited financial resources. In the United States, many poor citizens live in remote rural communities (Ferrell, 1990). However, the citizens that could benefit the most from literacy programs are often reluctant to use the programs and are often the least likely to participate in these programs (Quigley, 1990). But they may still benefit financially from these programs even if they don’t participate in them. The persons who do participate in the programs become better educated or trained, and move up to more demanding occupations or jobs. This leaves the lower level jobs available for less skilled or less experienced workers (Cameron, 1987). There are still others who feel that literacy is a birthright and is a worthy end in itself. If the adult learner can see literacy as worthy in itself, then they may be more likely to continue to maintain and develop their literacy, and thus their quality of life (Ferrell, 1990).

Summary

Factors that may influence the non-traditional student to pursue or not pursue higher education have been explored in this chapter. How the students perceive themselves and the selection process they use in determining the opportunities they believe they can further develop were outlined and discussed here. Chapter 3 will explain the methodology that will be utilized in assessing the impact of these factors on making career decisions.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of factors that impacted the educational pursuits of West Virginia female, non-traditional students enrolled at Concord College, on the Athens and Beckley campuses in West Virginia within the context of Appalachian culture. It also determined what services or programs had been or would be helpful to the student, and what factors made the student feel that pursuit of higher education was helpful to them in achieving their career goals. This chapter discusses the methodology of the research.

Type of Research

Robert Emerson (1983) defined qualitative field research as the study of people in their natural environments as they went about their daily lives. He stated that qualitative research tried to understand how people lived, how they talked and behaved, and what captivated and distressed them. More importantly, it tried to understand the meaning people’s words and behaviors had for them.

W. Lawrence Neuman (1994) proposed that the qualitative researcher acquire an insider’s point of view while maintaining the analytic perspective or distance of an outsider. Researchers should use a variety of techniques and social skills in a flexible manner as the situation demanded. They should see events holistically and individually in their social content and understand and develop empathy for members in a field setting, not just recording “cold” objective facts. The qualitative researcher notices both explicit and tacit aspects of culture.

This research study was an exploratory design. Exploratory designs are appropriate when certain social issues have been identified but the understanding of them is relatively limited. Exploratory design begins the process of inductive knowledge building about a problem or question (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996). Little information was known regarding non-traditional students in Appalachia, specifically students attending Concord College in southern West Virginia. This study identified the factors which influenced female, non-traditional Concord College students to pursue higher education.
Research Questions

The research questions focused on:

1. What factors influenced female non-traditional students not to pursue their education as traditional students?

2. What factors led to the decision to pursue higher education as a non-traditional student?

3. What factors influenced their perseverance in a baccalaureate program?

The study involved the identification of Appalachian non-traditional female students, as well as identification of the factors that changed over their life span encouraging a later pursuit of an undergraduate degree. In addition to identifying these factors and categorizing the students in terms of the number of other factors that characterize the students as non-traditional, the study also determined the number of years the students had been pursuing a degree. A qualitative analysis provided the most appropriate approach for determining these factors.

Selection of the Sample

The population was non-traditional females, with sample selection based on their being at least twenty-five years old at the time of their admission to college; educated in West Virginia, to control for exposure to the Appalachian culture as stated in the literature review; and enrolled in classes at Concord College, on the Athens or Beckley campuses. The operational definitions of the other characteristics that constituted non-traditional student status included seven factors, as cited in the literature. These factors included (1) delaying enrollment into post-secondary education until at least the age of 25 at the time of their admission to college, (2) attending part time, (3) being legally and financially independent from parents, (4) having dependents, (5) working full time while enrolled, (6) being a single parent, or (7) having a GED or high school equivalency certificate. Non-traditional status was defined and based on the presence of one or more of these seven possible non-traditional characteristics in a progressive manner. Minimal non-traditional student status included the presence of only one factor. Moderate non-traditional student status included the presence of two or three factors. Highly non-traditional student status included the presence of four or more factors (Horn & Carroll, 1996). Remaining consistent with the descriptions of these factors as outlined in the literature review enhanced reliability of the study.
The Human Subjects Review Board at Virginia Tech was contacted for approval of the research study (see Appendix A for the sample request for approval form). Concord College does not currently have a Human Subjects Review Board. Included in this request for approval was a cover letter to the students requesting an interview with the identified students, as described below (see Appendix B for the sample letter). The letter stated the nature of the study and when the researcher would call the student to arrange for a face-to-face interview. The letter also included a space for the student to indicate willingness to participate in the study. The possible interview times could be checked by the respondent and mailed back. A telephone call was made to the potential respondent by default if she did not mail back any choices.

Working with the Concord College Computer Center, the researcher identified female students from the campus database whose birth dates indicated they were at least age 25 at the time of their admission and whose college admission applications indicated that they were educated in West Virginia. Students were typically classified as non-traditional in college records if they were at least age 25 at the time of admission. Since West Virginia is the only state that is completely within Appalachia, it was felt to be a reasonable venue to measure the impact of Appalachian culture on the student. This process identified the age of the non-traditional student, but allowed identification of other characteristics. The first question on the interview guide regarding the age of the student at the time of admission verified the sample’s accuracy.

Once these students were identified, their indicated major classified them by academic division at Concord College. There are six academic divisions at Concord College including Business and Economics; Education, Library Science, and Physical Education; Fine Arts; Languages and Literature; Natural Sciences; and Social Sciences. Five students from each division were to be randomly selected by the Computer Center for contact by the researcher to establish willingness to participate in the study. A minimum of two students per division was considered acceptable for participation in this study, for a sample of 12 students.

As is explained further in Chapters 4 and 5, this plan was not feasible. Twelve students were selected, but not two from each division.

Data Collection Procedures

Using a questionnaire format as the long interview guide (see Appendix C for a sample instrument form), the researcher determined the participants’ demographic characteristics including their indicated academic major; primary campus; age; student class; race; marital
status; date of college admission; anticipated date of graduation; and county of high school attendance. The questionnaire was validated through a pilot study to test the questionnaire’s inclusiveness and clarity.

To better understand the intent of gathering the demographic information, the following rationales were offered. The identified major of the student ensured that the researcher could identify the academic division each student represented. The location of the primary campus of the student may be helpful in programming issues such as the use of the facilities of one campus over another, or with which campus the student identified themselves. This may be helpful in determining the focus of development of support programs for non-traditional students who utilize one campus over another. The age of the student was important for determining how much older this population was than the average student and how far she had advanced in her educational pursuits. The student’s class identification indicated if the student was a sophomore, junior or senior. The identification of race indicated what proportion of the study identified with certain racial or cultural groups. The student’s marital status was identified to help define the student’s social role. The date of college admission and the date of anticipated graduation provided information regarding the student’s perseverance in accomplishing her educational goals. The name of the county where the secondary education was received was helpful for establishing that the student received her secondary education in West Virginia.

The researcher selected the sample to reflect the enrolled female student, educated in West Virginia, who had completed at least 30 semester hours, and who was at least 25 years old at the time of college admission. The researcher also determined how many of the seven defining characteristics the non-traditional student met. To better understand the student’s experiences, the researcher asked what factors led to the decision not to attend college immediately following high school. The researcher identified the obstacles and strengths influencing the student’s decision to attend college and why she continued to stay in college. To address programming issues such as tutoring services, availability of daycare services, scheduling of night classes over daytime classes or other more creative scheduling plans, or supportive counseling services focused on non-traditional students, the researcher identified college or community services and programs that proved helpful, or might be helpful, in pursuing educational goals. The question regarding whether the student was the first generation of their family to attend college assisted in identifying if social learning was a factor in the student’s pursuit of higher education. In asking
about the student’s career plans, the researcher hoped to identify why the student felt a college education would be helpful for achieving her career goals.

Questions regarding if the student felt that her community or culture influenced her decision about pursuing higher education addressed the social learning or cultural restrictions the student may have experienced. In order to better understand the decision making process regarding career and education, career development theories, learning theories, and other theoretical frameworks described in Chapter Two was explored, looking for possible explanations for the students’ behavior.

Face-to-face interviews with the researcher were used exclusively. The researcher made the arrangements to meet with the respondent and complete the informed consent forms (see Appendix D for a sample informed consent form). The researcher, who has training in interviewing, tape recorded the interview session as the interview guide was completed. This allowed the researcher to record the information as accurately as possible. By later comparing the taped session with the interview guide allowed the researcher to determine if any differences were noted in interviewing. This comparison minimized distorted information. The opportunity to record the interviews on audiotape was invaluable in understanding the students’ meanings to questions as they could be replayed at the researcher’s convenience to aid in determining meaning in context.

To influence the rate of completion of the study, follow-up calls were made after letters were sent out to potential participants to determine the participant’s willingness to participate in the study. Arrangements to set an interview date and time were done by the researcher in the follow-up call, when necessary.

Advantages of in-person interviews included the chance to probe for clarifying information, to gain supplemental information such as non-verbal communication, to individualize data collection, to use existing interviewing skills and to achieve a high rate of completion of the study (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996). Disadvantages of in-person interviews included the influence of the interviewer resulting in distorted information, potential for recording errors or only partial information, and the expense of hiring a skilled interviewer (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996).

After the data collection procedure began, the original plan of identifying five students from each of the academic divisions became impossible to complete. Due to the lack of qualified
students per division to participate in the study, this plan was abandoned. A total of twelve students’ responses were developed, with the number of students representing the Education Division being prominent. This is explained further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Methods of Analysis

Once all of the data was gathered by taping the interviews and taking notes during the interview, the researcher read it in total, even pausing between readings to ensure objectivity in determining the content of the data. The researcher kept a journal of the interviews, recording questions, comments, and other important data. Inclusions in the journal entries were the date of the entry; initial identification of the categories; labeling of headings that described the primary category or concept being considered; and notations regarding the thinking process that moved the analysis from description to interpretation. As themes emerged from reviewing the data, they were coded by using a one or two word heading that best described the responses (Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, 1996).

The data was re-read to determine if there were major themes or trends. Category names were assigned to groups of similar meaning units. A code was assigned to the category for easier notation and chronicled, refined, and reorganized as necessary as the data analysis progressed. The data was progressively coded to a more abstract level to identify similarities and differences between the categories to detect themes or temporal or causal relationships within the data (Tutty et al., 1996).

Journal notations outlined the process for exhausting the categories (Tutty et al., 1996). Journal notations included the researcher’s process for determining certain categories and reorganizing the data into progressively larger themes and notation of those themes (Denzen & Lincoln, 2000). Through the journaling, the researcher identified negative stereotypes or biases used in analyzing or interpreting the data (Tutty et al., 1996).

Summary

This chapter described the research questions, sample selection, data collection and analysis methods used in the methodology of the study. The population studied was the non-traditional female, educated in West Virginia, who completed at least 30 semester hours, and was at least 25 years old at the time of admission to college. Using techniques familiar to qualitative researchers, the data was analyzed and categorized to determine not only the other non-
traditional characteristics of this sample, but the influence that Appalachian culture and their family educational history may have had in determining the educational and career choices these students made for themselves.
CHAPTER 4
DATA GENERATION

Introduction

This chapter provided a discussion of data generation and demographics of the sample participants. Data obtained from the 12 interviews is discussed in terms of the three research questions. The chapter is divided into the following sections: 1) Data Generation, 2) Demographics, 3) Analysis of the Research Questions, 4) Summary.

Data Generation

How the data was generated is discussed in this section. The four criteria for inclusion in the study were that the respondents: 1) were female, 2) were educated in West Virginia, 3) had completed at least 30 hours, and 4) were at least age 25 at the time of their admission to college. As indicated in Chapter 3, the researcher worked in conjunction with the Concord College Computer Center to generate the names of potential respondents. After two data runs, names were exhausted, and it was determined that the premise of having two respondents from each of the six divisions represented at Concord was not feasible. With the approval of the researcher’s committee, this selection criteria was abandoned. As long as the student met the four criteria, the academic division they represented would be noted but not used as a measure. The results indicated that five respondents were Education majors, three were Business majors, two were Social Science majors, and a Fine Arts major and a Natural Science/Math major, respectively. There were no Languages/Literature majors.

Initially, the respondents were notified by letter that the researcher would be calling on a certain date and time to talk to them about arranging an interview with them, if they were interested in participating in the study. Only four interviews were arranged in this manner, as most persons contacted were not eligible for the study as they had attended college more than once with one of their admissions being after age 25, could not be contacted, or were not interested in participating in the study. The researcher then contacted the potential respondents by phone to determine if the participant was eligible for the study and was willing to participate in the study.
The researcher met with each of the participants at their shared convenience. At the time of the interview, the participant signed an informed consent form, asked questions, and agreed to be audio-taped. The researcher took notes during the interview which she compared to the transcription done later to check for accuracy. The researcher also compared the audio-taped version of the session to the transcription to check for accuracy.

Demographics

From the twelve interviews completed, ten students identified the Athens campus as their primary campus having a combination of daytime and evening classes, while the Beckley campus has only late afternoon and evening classes. The average age of the students in the study was 39, with the youngest student being 28 and the oldest student being 57. There were three sophomores, six juniors, and three seniors who participated in the study.

All twelve participants identified themselves as being Caucasian. This is not surprising as 95% of the West Virginia state population is identified as Caucasian (US Bureau of the Census, 2000). Eight of the twelve students were married, two were divorced, one was widowed, and one was engaged.

The earliest college admission date for the respondents was 1975 and the latest was 2003. One student was taking only two classes per semester and was not sure of her graduation date. Four students were planning a graduation in 2004 and four in 2006. Three students anticipated graduation in 2005.

The least amount of time in college was two years and the most was 31 years in pursuit of a Bachelors Degree. The average amount of time in pursuit of an undergraduate degree was 10 years.

Five of the counties in the primary catchment area for Concord College admissions were represented in this study. The counties were McDowell, Mercer, Monroe, Raleigh and Wyoming Counties. They are all in the southern part of West Virginia.

In terms of the literature on non-traditional students, five of the students in the study were moderately non-traditional, meaning they possessed 2 or 3 characteristics of the non-traditional student. Seven of the students in the study were highly non-traditional, meaning they possessed 4 or more characteristics of the non-traditional student.

Only three of the students were attending part-time and all twelve were financially and legally independent from their parents. Ten of the students had dependents and most of the
children were school age or older. The number of the student’s dependents ranged from no children to four children. The ages of the students’ dependents ranged from 11 months old to 23 years old. Seven of the participants worked full time and only two participants were single parents. Only one of the participants had a GED, the rest had high school diplomas.

Analysis of the Research Questions

The study was designed to answer the following three research questions:

1. What factors influenced female non-traditional students not to pursue their education as traditional students?
2. What factors led to the decision to pursue higher education as a non-traditional student?
3. What factors influenced their perseverance in a baccalaureate program?

Analysis of Research question one

Research question one asked, “What factors influenced female non-traditional students not to pursue their education as traditional students?” This issue was addressed by the second question on the instrument which asked, “Why didn’t you come to college immediately following high school?”

The themes that were extracted from the answers to question two are as follows: 1) Pursuit of traditional roles for women, 2) No connection between job opportunities and college preparation, 3) the student’s perceived sense of being unprepared for college, 4) financial aid needs, and 5) a desire to live elsewhere.

Pursuit of traditional roles for women.

The first theme was the pursuit of traditional roles for women as noted in the responses “I was married and had other priorities” and “I was in love and wanted to get married” and “I married in my senior year like many of the people in my area. That’s what was expected.”

No connection between job opportunities and college preparation.

The next theme was there did not seem to be a connection between jobs for women and college preparation as reflected in the statements “I knew school wasn’t for me and I thought I could make a living out there”, “I wanted to work first”, and “College was never stressed to me
by family, friends or school personnel. I knew that there was college but my goal was to finish high school and start working and I just did not realize the importance of it until later in life”.

*The student’s perceived sense of being unprepared for college.*

There was also the student’s perceived sense of being unprepared for college as reflected in the statements “[I didn’t attend college directly from high school because of] marriage and children and an inferiority complex. I was afraid of it [college] at that age”, “I didn’t comprehend math well in high school and I knew that anywhere in a college career that it would be necessary and it just took me a long time to grow up and realize that was a bear I had to face and do battle with”, “I feel like I was too immature. If I had [attended college] I probably would have flunked out” and “I was not prepared by the high school and it was a bit overwhelming”.

*Financial aid needs.*

There were financial aid needs mentioned such as “Lack of funding. Actually, that was the thing, the money”. One of the students stated that her parents told her when she was in high school “We don’t have the money [for college], it’s not going to be possible”. Some of the students felt they did not have adequate information regarding the application process and financial aid from their high school counselors. One student felt that completion of a high school education was the focus before-- now it is more on college. She said

It has been pounded into me ever since I was a little girl to go to school, go to school, go to school, so you can get a decent job, go to school. Then it was just a high school education. [Now] you can’t do anything without [at least] a high school education.

*A desire to live elsewhere.*

A desire to live elsewhere as noted by “I wanted to get away from West Virginia. I wanted to leave the state.” Most of the students in the study did not state this reason. Most of them married and stayed in the state, but if they left it was because their spouse was transferred to another state.

*Analysis of Research question two*

Research question two was “What factors led to the decision to pursue higher education as a non-traditional student?” Questions three, four, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen on the instrument addressed this question. The themes that were extracted from the answers to
these questions were 1) acknowledging a desire for increased knowledge and use of technology, 2) developing enough maturity and self-confidence to pursue the rigors of higher education, 3) the influence of support systems, 4) being a positive role model, 5) learning there are manageable ways to deal with financial problems, 6) securing a financial future, 7) personal satisfaction and growth, 8) the pursuit of higher education is valued more now.

In answering question four on the instrument, the question was “Did the Welfare to Work Program influence your decision to pursue higher education? All twelve respondents answered “No”. In this study, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs were not part of the participants’ lives.

**Acknowledging a desire for increased knowledge and use of technology.**

Jobs are changing so the need to keep up with technology was epitomized by the story one of the students told regarding walking into her local library. As she told the story, she said, The library had [gone] to computers and the lady looked at me and said well ma’am you’ll have to log on and search for the book that way. I just turned around and walked out. It scared me to death. I realized that I was being left behind. That’s when I first enrolled in a business course to learn computers, to learn to type and learn DOS, [and take] some accounting and business classes.

**Developed maturity and self-confidence in the pursuit of higher education.**

Strengths included a desire for increased knowledge and enough self-confidence to pursue it as seen through this statement. “Probably I had built up my confidence [as a non traditional student]. I knew that I could do it if I attempted to do it [college level work]. I knew I had to prepare myself for employment.” Low self confidence was noted by one student in the statement “[I had] a lot of self doubt. I didn’t know if I could still do it after all these years”.

**The influence of support systems.**

Supportive family and friends were helpful in assisting the student in attending college at this time. One student said in response to the question that her strength was “My husband and the children. He is very positive that I can do this and my children want mommy to go ahead and become a teacher. They know that’s what I want.” Another student said “[The factors that influenced her to pursue higher education were] my friends and family. They helped me decide
to go back because I asked my kids approval first. They have done [well], they have helped out a lot. Friends have been there for me and encouraged me.”

Overall, six students indicated they were the first in their family to attend college and six students indicated that other family members had either completed a degree or attended at least one semester of college. Seven students indicated their family had influenced their decision and five students indicated their family had no influence on their decision. Many students felt supported and encouraged by their families. One student stated “When I decided to go, they have supported me in every way they could. They bring me up here [to college] or come and get me when I want to come home. They spend their own money to come and get me.” Another student said

For about six months I probably brought it up in conversation. At first, they were surprised and then as time went on and I continued to tell them I was interested, they became very supportive and encouraged me to go. My parents have supported me actually over the years even early on in my marriage, saying we’ll still pay if you would like to go [to college]. They still wanted me to go so they were encouraging but they just always let me make that decision.

For other students, relatives who attended college were admired. One student indicated that they influenced her in “probably just the fact of knowing it [the fact they went to college]. Another student indicated a relative went to college and influenced her in that she did what she wanted and she is on her own. She went [off to college] and I was just so proud of her. She went to college and stayed up there. It was really hard because she is the baby and she was far away. She stayed up there though, did her classes, did excellent [work], and she graduated in the field she wanted. She just inspired me to do it and of course, my mom, because she went back like I am now.

One student felt that once she was exposed to options, more options became possible. She said “I heard everyone talking about go ahead and get that BA, further your education. You are going to have more opportunities open up. So once I got in, yes [more options became available].” Another student stated she “enjoyed learning and meeting new people. It’s a way for me to have ‘me’ time.”

One student was drawn into college through the Head Start program for her children. She said, “They [Head Start personnel] came to my house one day and they asked me ‘is there
anything we could do to help you in your family?’ I said well, first you can give me a million dollars, then you can send me to college. They said [we] can’t do the million dollars, but we can hook you up for college. I just looked at her funny. I didn’t realize about the Pell grant and how easy it was to get in. It just floored me.” Another student said she had not received any help through college or community agencies, while another student indicated it was her “personal goal…to get that degree. [The drive that] keeps me wanting to get the degree I guess is what actually [is] what’s keeping me here”.

Students felt the pressure to follow traditional expected roles, but found that through the development of self-confidence through maturity, the need to improve their knowledge to either apply for employment or for job advancement, and supportive friends and family they could resist the pressure to follow traditional paths. One student said:

I was expected to be a wife and mother and nothing more. Education was not necessary. My dad is 91 years old and he still doesn’t know why I go to school. He is proud of the fact that I have but he doesn’t know why it is so necessary. It was not only my immediate family-- it was my ex-husband’s family, my neighbors, my friends at the time. ‘You have everything a woman could ever want’, I heard that so many times. ‘You are married, you have a nice home, a husband that works every day and children. Why do you want more,’ they questioned me? The whole entire environment was that way. I call it the old school. I’m from the new school and I don’t know how I got mixed up with that bunch. I want to add, too, that it sounds like a real negative, but in the long run, once I decided to do it and did it, they were not negative. They didn’t encourage me, but they accepted it.

Another student said

I think being the first person in [my family to go to] college, my family was always real concerned in that they wanted us to go to college to do better than themselves. But I believe it was just the culture of my school that encouraged many of the students [to go to] college. I kept putting it off, thinking I’ll go next year.

Another student stated that being a student with kids was her main obstacle. “It was really hard to come back with children”. Yet another student had difficulty in dealing with her perceived expected commitment to her children. She said,

Being a mom [and a student with a long commute was her biggest obstacle]. I mean, especially the field I’m going into I have a constant guilt trip because I feel like I am
always worried that I put my own children on the back burner right now so later I can help somebody else’s. It is like an internal conflict. The hardest thing is to still make sure that I am a mom first which causes many nights of no sleep. Not starting homework until 2 in the morning and getting back up at 4 because I make sure that they have had their activities. We do their homework first and with the [two hour] commute each way makes it a little rough.

Some students expressed concern that balancing a desire for good grades with their traditional responsibilities was a constant strain. One student stated:

Time constraints and keeping up with the school work in a manner [to support] high grades. To keep up with that and also to keep up with things at home [was a problem]. Staying each semester was a bit of an obstacle.

Yet another student said that “there really wasn’t any [problem] after I got started. Another student felt the parents were negative or didn’t stress college at any point for her. She said:

As a matter of fact they were a little bit mad because I am [going to college]. Because I had the kids and I needed to stay home and take care of them even though I had to work anyway. My kids are great with it. They said you should have done this when you got out of high school.

Unsupportive spouses and support systems were described by one student in that “The finances were an obstacle, [along with] an unsupportive spouse and having three children at varied ages. It was just socially not acceptable for a mother to do that in my little world”. One student thought her parents felt that the student should continue on in an exclusively parental role. She said “The only negativity I have gotten from anybody has been from my parents. Everybody else has been ‘gung ho’, stick with it, and if I can help you let me know. My parents are negative because I have the kids.”

Another student stated that professionals in the field she was studying encouraged her. She said:

I work with teachers and that’s the field I’m in. They’ve helped me a lot with my classes because I had two hard classes this past year. They critiqued my papers and gave me suggestions. They helped a lot with keeping me going, constantly saying You’re going back, you’re going back, right? Yes, I will.
Being a positive role model.

Some participants were focused on setting a good example for their children. One of the students stated that “I wanted to set an example for my child since I had no one to set an example for me.” Another student said:

I knew it would be difficult to encourage my kids to go [to college] if I hadn’t experienced the same and done well without it. Just seeing the jobs that are available and the difference in the types of jobs you can get with and without [a college degree].

One student wanted more than what she grew up with in her community. She said she felt influenced by her community “Because [of] social and economic problems, [being from a] very poor county, and a desire to make a difference in what was there.” Another student said “Once my children were in school I saw some things in the community, many I approved of and some that I didn’t and it’s hard to sit back and say this needs to change if you’re not willing to jump in and help change it.” One student felt that an educated community helps increase community options as she felt “there is a need for medical professionals in my community” and she planned to study to be a doctor. Another student said:

The area where I live, drugs are a really big problem. I think the more people that are educated and can get out of that type of lifestyle and thinking that lifestyle is the only way, [the better]. It will be better for the entire community as a whole.

Learning there are manageable ways to deal with financial issues.

Obstacles noted by the respondents included having enough money to support the family and pay for college. One said “working full time, lack of funding, and taking care of family” were the issues she was concerned about. One student felt that financial aid helped make a new reality possible. She said “Had I not had financial aid, I wouldn’t be here today. There is just no way I could have paid for tuition straight out. It does give a person the opportunity to be able to repay it.”

Another student said that financial problems were problematic for her, but He [her ex-husband] paid for the first couple of semesters and he thought I would quit, that I wouldn’t succeed. During those two semesters, I …found that financial aid was available for me through the government. I also received a couple of scholarships when I transferred from a community college. I don’t know if I’m just fortunate or if it’s there
and people just don’t realize that it is because so many people say I can’t, I can’t. You can. I can. I did.

Securing a financial future and positive career choice.

Students also identified a need to secure their financial future. This was identified through statements like “Hopefully I can get my degree and I can get a better job.” and the story one student told about her dad. She said

As I was growing up he [dad] wanted me to go because he didn’t want me to struggle the way he did. But by the time I was old enough to make my own decisions, I didn’t feel it was the right choice for me. He had always told me [about college] because he worked in the coal mines. He said you know it was day to day making ends meet, never being with your family. He said he didn’t want me to go through that too.

Career goals were another aspect of securing a financial future. In response to the question, “What are your career plans?” answers were varied. Responses ranged from working outdoors as a Park Ranger; teaching in public schools, special education, technology, or prisons; working in advertising; focusing on using intellect and creativity, not heavy lifting; accounting; osteopathic school; or not sure.

Another student stated there was a conflict of interest with employment, as “I wasn’t there [at work] the normal 40, 45 or 50 hours a week like I previously had been.” Time management and change of roles was another obstacle as depicted in this statement, “My husband is self-employed and I do the bookwork for the business and was always there for my kids so it was an obstacle to change my lifestyle and make time for that [college].”

Question eleven on the instrument was “Why do you feel a college education will be helpful to you in achieving your career goals?” Most responses were that a college degree was required for the job. One student stated “The career I want can only be obtained with a college degree” and “To work as a teacher, you must be licensed, so it is necessary”.

One student felt that her knowledge and skills were improved so to not limit options or advancement through the statement “There are no other opportunities without it [a college degree] except minimum wage dead end jobs” and “I was successful without the degree but it just really was not what I wanted to do” Other students stated “You have to have a college background [to teach] and I want to be fully prepared for when I am in a class for any situation
that may come up” and “If I am ever going to have my own business, I need to have that [knowledge] for management skills.”

*Personal satisfaction and growth.*

Other students talked about personal satisfaction and growth. One student said “It has really stretched me as a person, the whole college experience”. One student felt it was not her community that had an influence on her, but the accomplishment of personal goals.

*The pursuit of higher education is valued more now.*

Not having enough education is now seen more clearly as a negative. One student stated that not having an education created a ‘socio-economic problem, seeing what happens to people that don’t get an education”. Another student stated that as she grew up, higher education was just really not discussed. Even in high school. I hear now counselors [are] trying to get the kids ready for college and they start helping them fill out the applications. [When I was in school] I was never told when an ACT test was going to be given. It just wasn’t a major thing. Out of my graduating class, I know of three [students] that have a college degree out of my entire graduating class. Now, there are several of us that are going back. It was funny to go to our 10 year reunion. Many of us are now taking classes and [it was shocking] to find out that only three of [my classmates have already graduated]. Back then it was, you got married, you had kids and you stayed home and took care of them. That’s just how it was.

One student felt that the culture may have held her back indirectly. She said, “Because of growing up and not really having anyone to influence me to pursue higher education, which is the reason it took me later in life to realize the importance of it.”

Another student said:

I think everybody needs an education no matter how far they go. Even if they just go to high school and stop, at least they hopefully have the common sense of it or at least the basics to get started in life. Coal mining is a big thing I know, but that’s not the big thing now. It’s not so much [about the coal industry] anymore; it’s a lot of different things.

Another student said “You are not really looked down upon without a college degree, but it’s something that is promoted now in our culture”.

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Analysis of research question three.

The third research question was “What factors influenced their perseverance in a baccalaureate program?” Questions five, six, and seven on the instrument address this question. Participants’ responses included 1) feelings of personal pride in accomplishments, 2) looking ahead to changes in the family life cycle, 3) financial incentives, 4) financial assistance and institutional support, 5) use of community resources, and 6) statements about desired services.

Feelings of personal pride in accomplishments.

Strengths include feelings of personal pride in their accomplishments. One student stated, “When I first came I wasn’t sure after being out of school almost 20 years if I would be able to do the work. Then after I had my first 2 semesters that were 4.0, it was like, I can’t quit now.” Another student said, “I just found out that I was a very good student and I knew I had it in me to be that way. It just felt good to succeed and I wanted to keep doing it” and “I will be the first college graduate in my family.”

Changes in the family life cycle.

Other students were looking ahead to changes in the family life cycle. “Once you get into it [academics], you’ve got a lot invested and you know that someday the nest is going to empty...” and influencing the future by stating:

I just want to teach the little kids, because I have seen so much of stuff they get left out of or stuff they fall behind on that I think I can help them with. Getting my degree is the only way I can do that officially.

Another student, in looking to the future and assessing her ability to support herself, stated:

My family [is my greatest strength] in that I want to show them that I may have started at a later time but mommy’s going to follow through with it. I also feel I need to have a back up in case something would ever happen with my spouse I would be able to financially support myself and my children.

Financial incentives

Obstacles included one student stating financial concerns were an incentive for her. She “didn’t want to live in poverty for the rest of [her] life” and another student stated, “I have two
kids to raise and things don’t get any cheaper”. Another student stated that “once you get into college, you don’t realize how long it takes to get hours earned.” This encouraged the student to continue in her pursuits, in that it took her so long to achieve the credits, she did not want to relinquish the pursuit of higher education.

_Financial assistance and institutional support._

In response to the question “What college or community services have been helpful for you in continuing your education?” participants mentioned Concord programs such as Student Support Services, financial aid/scholarships, and individual encouragement by professors. Most students were appreciative of financial aid and scholarships, as noted by the student who said, “Concord helped with scholarships”. Staff in the financial aid office, Student Support Services, and the Beckley Center were mentioned as being helpful to the student.

Vocational Rehabilitation services were highlighted as being instrumental in helping students complete their college education. One student stated:

It’s not that I’m stupid or anything, I’m just a little slower than everybody else [due to dyslexia]. They [Vocational Rehabilitation] pay for college. They pay for my books. They have paid to help my car so I can get here. I don’t take it lightly when I call them. The location of where the student lives and where classes are held was an issue as she stated, “I have a two hour commute”. One student had transportation problems as she stated, “At one point, I had no car that was working”. She also noted that Vocational Rehabilitation services had paid for the repairs to her car so she could continue her educational pursuits.

Some students were able to access partial funding for classes through employers. One student commented that:

Where I worked, there was some partial funding [of tuition and books] if I went to class on my own time. I took advantage of that so that I could better myself within the employment field because if you took certain classes that could assist you in what you did with your job, it was [viewed] as a positive.

Two students mentioned other schools, such as Southern West Virginia Community College and Mountain State University, as educational settings that assisted them in beginning their college experiences. For most students it gave them a chance to begin to think about their college experience as a realistic option. One student said the counselor “…at Southern [West
Virginia Community College] was a big help. She helped in telling me that you could apply for this and you could apply for this and you can do this. She was just a lot of support there.”

*Statements about desired services*

Question seven on the instrument was “What college or community services or programs would be helpful for you in continuing your education?” Most of the students indicated needing help with financial aid. Several students indicated there “should be a scholarship for older students”. Other students indicated a need for help with “tuition and books,” and “travel expenses”. One student indicated if she “had a wish list it would be for classes and college not to be so expensive”.

A few students indicated a desire for “services just for us [non-traditional students]”. A desire for a “support group or mentor” was described as:

…someone who has been through it and can tell us what to expect and encourage us into not thinking we are so silly in the long run. We may have questions that we may feel are just absolutely ignorant or we would be laughed at [if we asked the question].

Some participants mentioned that they would like to see more of the services through Student Support Services, especially the trips that increased their exposure to other places and experiences. One said “a lot of people here in the state have never left the state and it’s to give them some culture, teach them some manners. We see some great stuff”. One student felt the “student government is geared for the younger sect and I don’t think we are represented there... [There should be] some sort of inclusion [for the non traditional student] in the student government”.

Some students felt that “internet classes would be helpful” and a desire for “web based programs that I could do from home because of the commute”.

*Summary*

The factors that influenced female non-traditional students not to pursue their education as traditional students included the pursuit of traditional roles for women, no connection between job opportunities and college preparation, the student’s perceived sense of being unprepared for college, financial aid needs, and a desire to live elsewhere.

The factors that were identified as factors that led to the decision to pursue higher education as a non-traditional student included acknowledging a desire for increased knowledge
and use of technology, developing enough maturity and self-confidence to pursue the rigors of higher education, the influence of support systems, being a positive role model, learning there are manageable ways to deal with financial issues, securing a financial future, personal satisfaction and growth, the pursuit of higher education is valued more now, conflict of interest with employers, time management, and location and reliable transportation.

The factors that influenced the student’s perseverance in a baccalaureate program were feelings of personal pride in accomplishments, looking ahead to changes in the family life cycle, financial incentives, use of community resources and statements, and eclectic statements regarding desired services that might be helpful to the baccalaureate student.
CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter summarizes and interprets the research findings. Recommendations are made for further research, public policy, and for student services and counseling practice.

Criteria for Non-traditional Students

This qualitative study focused on the factors that influenced female non-traditional students to pursue higher education. To obtain the sample, women enrolled in classes at Concord College in West Virginia were selected if they met the criteria of being non-traditional. The four criteria were 1) being female, 2) being educated in West Virginia, 3) having completed 30 hours and 4) not admitted to college until at least age 25. Statistics cited in the Horn and Carroll (1996) studies indicated national enrollment of non-traditional students increased, Dortch’s (1997) studies indicated that nationally both full-time and part-time college enrollment increased, and the data from the US Census Bureau (1997) indicated that college enrollment in West Virginia also increased. Even a previous study by Aslanian (1995) of the Concord College enrollment indicated that 23% of the total college enrollment was age 25 and older and 65% of these identified students were female. The researcher did not expect any difficulty finding non-traditional female students to interview. But in the study, the first three criteria were easily met, but the fourth criteria seemed to be more difficult to meet.

As seen by the first data run, of the 237 names listed, 57 were automatically disqualified for the study as not representing an academic division, were known by the researcher, or reflected they were pursuing a Master’s Degree. Of the 180 left, 40 women were contacted with only 5 of those being eligible and willing to participate in the study as they met all four criteria. The remaining 35 students met the first three criteria, but not the fourth as they had attended college at an earlier date, then dropped out and were later readmitted. The data was exhausted with only five students being eligible to participate in the study. An additional second data run generated enough data for a more complete study.

In the second data run, the researcher received data using the same criteria, except with special emphasis on the student’s first admission to college being at age 25 or older. This
resulted in 56 names with 14 being automatically disqualified for the study as not representing an academic division, were known by the researcher, or reflected they were pursuing a Master’s Degree. Of the 42 students left, 19 persons were contacted with seven being eligible and willing to participate in the study. The remaining 12 students again met the first three criteria, but not the fourth due to an earlier admission to college. The five students from the first data run and the seven students from the second data run became the subjects of the study.

In terms of the literature on non-traditional students, five of the students in the study were moderately non-traditional meaning they possessed 2 or 3 characteristics of the non-traditional student. Seven of the students in the study were highly non-traditional meaning they possessed 4 or more characteristics of the non-traditional student. This indicates these students were coping with many factors that could be detrimental to their academic pursuits; however, they appeared to be managing the pressures. According to the studies by Horn and Carroll (1996), students who were only minimally non-traditional were much more likely to have earned a bachelor’s degree (42 %) than moderately or highly non-traditional students (17 and 11 %, respectively). In this study, all of the students were either moderately or highly non-traditional students, but they had not yet graduated. In terms of this study, these students were in the minority for anticipated graduation.

Findings

Many of the students in the study felt overt and covert pressure to continue in traditional roles. Depending on the support the students received to pursue higher education and their belief in the premise that higher education is valuable and can lead to tangible results like job security and higher pay, students can be influenced in their pursuit of higher education. However, as they matured and became more self-confident in their abilities and intellect, they were willing to break through the barriers that cultural factors, modeled in their families and communities, had placed around them. Most spoke of wanting to be positive role models for their children and the children they may be influencing through their work or community. So for the next generation, there may be more support for the pursuit of higher education.

The participants were comfortable with pursuing traditional roles of marriage and childbearing, but appeared to be less confident in pursuit of higher education. The connection between jobs and higher education was weak in their value base, but with maturity, they felt that they could accomplish their higher education goals. Surprisingly, the Welfare to Work program
appeared to play no role with this group of students according to the students’ statements in the survey. However, non-traditional students who were social work majors were disqualified from this study as they were known to the researcher. One might infer that many students are drawn to social work because of interventions of social workers in their lives, so this may be a population that might be studied later.

As the literature noted through the study done by Wells (1989) regarding perseverance, people who became successful after a childhood of disadvantage were often willing to confront obstacles directly; were able to turn failure into advantage; were able to cope with failure; had an internal center of control; were self-sufficient; were strongly motivated to achieve; and were reward oriented. The students in this study exemplified many of these qualities. They saw higher education as a way to increase their career or earning possibilities or improve their communities through their work rather than just enjoying the benefits of being an educated person (Wells, 1989).

Discussion

Gender-sensitive theories of career development

In terms of career development theories, the literature indicates that women often choose low-paying, lower status occupations, keeping themselves economically disadvantaged and burdened with multiple role demands (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987; Herz and Wootton, 1996). This was certainly the role for many of the women in this study. Most of the women in the study were in non-professional roles, but through education hoped to improve their economic status and income stability as well as increase their personal satisfaction with their life and career. Looking to the future, they realized that the amount of income determines conditions such as safe housing and the ability to purchase sufficient, nutritious food which can impact their long term health and vitality.

The literature reflects that the traditional roles of women are often in conflict with the expectations of a full-time or part-time employee (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987; Atkinson and Hackett, 1998). This study reflected the same conflict in the students’ lives. The students talked of having to balance the demands of work, their family, and the additional demands of school work. They felt they were disappointing someone in this process, but also felt they had to display a “superwoman” approach to try to maintain the level of involvement they had traditionally
displayed in addition to maintaining good grades. As the literature noted, even though more women are employed outside the home, the assumption that the woman is still the primary caretaker of the home and family prevails (Betz, 1994).

**General Theories of Career Choice and Development**

Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 1979; Krumboltz, Mitchell, and Jones, 1976; Mitchell and Krumboltz, 1984, 1990, 1996) states that individuals build on their genetic characteristics and modify their behavior or value development through sequential cumulative interaction with environmental, economic, social, or cultural events and conditions. The respondents in this study chose their paths in life based on the experiences of relatives or friends, or those valued by the respondents. Some thought that they were influenced by their families and communities in choosing certain acceptable options for themselves. In some cases, the respondents defied the expectations of their families and communities to follow the traditional roles of wife and mother by setting new goals for themselves after achieving certain maturity levels or believing higher education would help them achieve new goals they set for themselves.

The Social-Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1995, 1996) is founded on the premise that lessons learned from childhood or in young adulthood are often cognitively illogical, but relied upon as truth. Until the individual changes his or her perceptions and pursues other options, the individual will continue with these perceptions as being accurate. It is implied that as individuals mature they may change their perceptions and definitions of truth and act accordingly. As seen in the study, in their early life the participants saw achievable options for their life limited by the choices they felt were available to them, but as they matured and grew in their understanding of the choices that were possible, higher education became more feasible for them.

The Career Information Processing Model of Career Choice (Peterson, Sampson, and Reardon, 1991; Peterson, Sampson, Reardon, and Lenz, 1996) is based on developing two types of knowledge. One type of knowledge is based in self-knowledge and the other is knowledge about careers. As stipulated, if women are not supported in developing their self-confidence and self-worth, adequate problem identification and resolution may be problematic. As demonstrated in the study, many of the women were not supported in the development of knowledge regarding available careers and educational levels. This gave them a faulty perception of available options from which life choices were made.
Status Attainment Theory (Hotchkiss and Borrow, 1984, 1990, 1996) proposes that mental ability and the socioeconomic status of one’s family influences education that in turn affects the occupation entered. As many of the students indicated, they were raised by families who were in the middle to lower income strata and they viewed that income as a reasonable goal to achieve. As the students matured and their life experiences were broadened, they realized there were more options available to them. That knowledge inspired them to pursue higher education.

Effects of culture

West Virginia is a conservative, traditional state. Individuals and agencies, institutions, and groups within the culture may also be working with certain preconceived conceptions or biases regarding attainable goals for certain individuals (Tatum, 1998). School personnel within the culture may have preconceived, faulty concepts about the role for women in the pursuit of higher education. As the students noted, the information shared with female students in high schools regarding higher education is now more complete than it was when they were in high school. This suggests that changes are taking place in the Appalachian culture.

Recommendations

Four categories of recommendations are given in this section. First, recommendations for public policy are described. Second, recommendations for career education are offered. Third, recommendations for student services in higher education are preferred. Fourth, recommendations for further research are suggested.

Public Policy Recommendations

Financial aid availability emerged as the most pressing issue for non-traditional female students. Many felt the number and amount of scholarships should be increased to more completely cover the costs of their tuition, books, and fees. Many relied on Pell Grants, and other financial aid. Some were able to work with their employers to cover the costs of their education by enhancing the jobs they were already doing, or by training for positions they would be eligible for once their education was complete. Evaluations of area employers could be done by the college through the community research programs on campus or commissioned to do the studies by local employers or state employment programs to determine the types of jobs
available, and offer educational programs that would address those needs. In that way, employers could help shoulder students’ educational costs and in return have a more educated, competent workforce. Scholarships or grants specifically targeting non-traditional students could be pursued with local employers.

In developing other sources of tuition assistance for non-traditional students, existing tuition supports for traditional students should be explored and adapted to the needs of non-traditional students. Tuition supports are given to high school seniors who maintain a certain grade point average throughout high school such as the PROMISE scholarship (PROMISE scholarship, n.d.) which offers tuition coverage for college if the student maintains a 3.0 GPA. This program is available to traditional students based on their high school academic performance with scholarship renewal opportunities for their college performance to encourage them to pursue higher education and to stay in the state as an educated, employed taxpayer. Legislation could be proposed to offer tuition supports for non-traditional students who maintain a certain grade point average throughout their college experience. There are currently few tuition supports beyond basic financial aid that are available for the non-traditional student unless they are pursuing education in occupations that have low female participation such as engineering or science, or are low-income (Caiazza, 2003). As more non-traditional students are drawn into pursuing baccalaureate degrees for career advancement, financial supports should be offered to these students to encourage them to pursue higher education and also stay in the state as an educated, employed taxpayer.

Public policy changes need to be made with the Welfare to Work programs. More connections with the Welfare to Work programs could be developed to ensure that all options are being offered to assist the client in moving from welfare roles to employment through pursuit of higher education. Welfare to Work programs and Pell Grants are based on income eligibility, so higher education may become affordable for low income students. This would help clients move from the welfare system to gainful employment, and assist the client with establishing a stable income source and more job opportunities, which can translate to independence and access to social and career advancement.

**Student Services Recommendations**

The women interviewed for this study indicated various levels of stress in their
lives. Some issues were identified with the pursuit of academics such as feeling unprepared for college, the stresses of changing family roles, and balancing family life with work and academic expectations. Some of the women had a history of poor self image and a lack of self-confidence that may have improved enough to allow the pursuit of a baccalaureate degree, but may reappear when dealing with other issues. The need for individual counseling and support groups might be something the student would benefit from as life events unfolded. Some of the students indicated that having a peer group to relate to on campus would be helpful by having a mentor explain class and campus expectations and to share feelings with others who are experiencing the same insecurities. Because they may be new to the culture of higher education, or have been out of school for many years, basic support and guidance for students might be helpful in retaining them in the college system. The use of existing campus services could be emphasized in the freshman semester to conduct career planning activities to assist students in identifying career options.

New expectations and demands may be felt by the non-traditional students as they experience role changes created by changing jobs and job expectations, family life cycle shifts, and advances in socio-economic status. These students may overcome one hurdle to be faced with new ones that may test their newly developed self-confidence. Their expectations of themselves and their families may also change, even beyond the expected family life cycle shifts. The students may expect their spouses and children to also push the boundaries of their traditional roles as they did and may have to deal with the disappointment of their loved ones perhaps choosing lesser goals. For any of these stressors, counseling support could be helpful.

Counseling strategies for the non-traditional student might include Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy to assist the student in challenging irrational thinking about the demands they may impose on themselves and reframing their understanding of the issues so that they do not use “awful” or “catastrophic” as adjectives to events that are really “not preferable”. Also, to ensure the students’ level of involvement in new situations is successful, assertiveness training may also be needed to encourage the student to fully participate in communication exchanges. To cope with the anticipated levels of stress created by balancing family, academic and employment needs and expectations the student may also work with the counselor to learn and practice relaxation exercises. Relaxation tapes may be made available for the student, but self-
hypnosis and guided imagery may also be taught to the student who can use those techniques in any appropriate venue.

The increased development of internet or teleconference classes could be encouraged and developed to entice students to participate in the educational process, without having the long commutes that deter some students in their pursuit of higher education. The delivery of education in the state must become more creative and technologically based to encourage the increased participation of many of its citizens in the higher education process.

**Career Education Recommendations**

According to the literature, disadvantaged women—like the women of Appalachia—often have to overcome problems with self-esteem. If self-esteem is not nurtured or developed, many issues such as anxiety, depression, underachievement, and other social maladies can occur. As was noted in the study, once the students developed more self-confidence, they were able to accomplish their goals, often defying cultural values and norms. They proved themselves to be quite capable of balancing many responsibilities. More programs to address development of self-confidence could be developed for the school systems to help ensure that future generations are more adequately psychologically prepared for pursuit of their careers.

Most of the students were studying for predominantly female dominated jobs such as teaching, but not all disciplines were represented. Three students were studying for male dominated jobs such as physician, park ranger, or computer programmer, while two students were studying accounting, rather than more female dominated, bookkeeping. Programs to encourage students to consider all types of careers should be encouraged in the school systems. Use of existing campus services could be reinforced with the student in choosing career paths.

**Further Research Recommendations**

The researcher would like to see further research done with the students who enrolled, attended a short time, dropped out, and then returned. This might give other insights into the needs of the non-traditional student who was not as successful as the students in this study had been in coping with the demands of wife, mother, employee, and student.

Research may also be done to further explore the changes that appear to be occurring in the secondary school systems. Anecdotally, it appears more options are being offered to high school students with increased emphasis on higher education. It will be interesting to track the changes that may be developing in Appalachian culture.
Research could also be done to further evaluate the needs of the non-traditional students that are enrolled in classes on campus. For the student who attended a short time and may be considering dropping out, research could be done to determine their needs and develop retention programs to encourage their continued participation in classes.

Research may also be considered to compare the experiences of non-traditional females with non-traditional males on campus. It may be helpful to evaluate if there experiences are comparable or dramatically different.

Research may also be done to explore the impact of the student’s pursuit of higher education with their families and communities. Many of the students in the study hoped to share their positive experiences regarding the pursuit of higher education and influence their own children, children in their communities, or in their capacity as a teacher or other professional involved with children’s programs to encourage the children to also pursue higher education as an attainable goal. The results may help explain the impact that social learning has on the next generation.

**Summary**

There appear to be many topics to further research. Later, this study might be repeated to measure the impact of time and program development on the next generation of students pursuing higher education. As the students in this study indicated, they felt the future for their children was filled with many opportunities, including access to higher education.
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APPENDIX A

Request for Approval of the Study
Outline for Protocol

Justification of Project

This research reflects a qualitative exploration of the timeliness of pursuits of higher education by females who are classified as non-traditional students at Concord College in southern West Virginia. The researcher plans to study females, educated in West Virginia, who are at least 25 years of age at the time of admission and has completed at least 30 semester hours. The researcher plans to focus on several factors, including the factors that influenced them to not pursue their education as traditional students, the factors that changed so they recognized higher education as a viable option for themselves, and the factors that influenced them in their perseverance to continue in an undergraduate program. The researcher noted the other characteristics that can define non-traditional status that the student may also possess.

Human subjects must be involved in this research, to obtain a better understanding of female, non-traditional, Appalachian undergraduate students. This information is important in planning higher education programs, supports, and success strategies. As non-traditional students are the fastest growing segment of the population pursuing higher education, it is important to understand their needs and expectations of higher education.

Procedures

The subject pool will be female students who are enrolled at Concord College in southern West Virginia. They must be at least 25 years of age at the time of admission, and must have received their secondary education in West Virginia. They must have also completed 30 semester hours. For the purposes of this study only 12 students will be selected through the database of Concord College.

The researcher will work with the Concord College Computer Center to identify students who meet the criteria. Once identified, the researcher will contact them by letter to ask if they are interested in participating in the study and the date and time they will be contacted by phone. When they are contacted, they will be asked if they are interested in participating in the study and an interview date and time will be scheduled. If they are not interested, they will be thanked politely at that point and removed from the researcher’s database. The potential respondent will be told that the interview should last approximately 1-2 hours.

The researcher will follow a structured interview questionnaire to ask the participants questions about their personal history in identifying why they were pursuing higher education at this time. (See attached.) The researcher will offer to meet the respondent in a place agreeable to both, preferably the college campus. The respondent and researcher will meet only one time, and the session will be audio-taped and later transcribed. Measures will be taken to protect the respondent’s identity by not using their names anywhere in the report, except on the master
roster of respondents. An agreement will be signed with the respondent to acknowledge the data will be published and used publicly, but their identity will remain anonymous.

**Benefits and Risks**

There are few risks to the individuals participating in the study. The review of life events may stir emotions regarding the course their life may have followed or not followed which may have potential to be problematic. The benefits are that the student may recognize the course of their life is in a positive mode as the student is developing their intellect and increasing their career possibilities by being enrolled in higher education even though their life may have taken a circuitous path. If there are problematic emotional responses, the respondent will be referred to the Counseling Center on campus. This is a student benefit of no cost to the student.

As this is qualitative study, the benefits of understanding the needs and experiences of this population will be helpful in developing programmatic or pedagogical interventions or supports. As the non-traditional student segment of the population is pursuing higher education in greater numbers, it is important to understand their experiences, obstacles or strengths.

**Confidentiality/Anonymity**

The respondent’s questionnaire will be given a code after it is completed. The master roster of the questionnaire’s codes will be kept in the researcher’s possession. The material will be evaluated using the code number as the identifier, not the respondent’s name. Only if the respondent wishes to be contacted later regarding the results of the study, or if there are additional questions that the researcher must ask, will the respondent’s name or identifying information be used.

Audiotapes will be made of the sessions to ensure accuracy of the information written on the questionnaire. The audiotapes of the sessions will be transcribed and will be kept in a secured place to provide evidence of the translation of the data. The tapes and transcripts will remain in the researcher’s possession. Once the study is completed, the tapes will be erased to destroy them after an appropriate amount of time. The transcripts will remain with the study for future evaluation and use if necessary. The respondent will have signed a release recognizing the fact the data will be published and used publicly, but with the respondent’s identity remaining anonymous.

**Informed Consent**

The potential respondent will be sent an informed consent form with the initial mailing asking if the student wishes to participate in the study. Once it is determined that the student wishes to participate in the study, the informed consent form will be discussed further and signed at the meeting with the researcher. This will give the respondent ample time to think about their involvement in the study and their willingness to reveal personal facts about themselves anonymously.
August 4, 2003

Dear Concord Student,

I am Bonnie Dorsey, Assistant Professor of Social Work at Concord College in Athens, West Virginia. I am also a doctoral student in Counselor Education at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. I am conducting a study on the Concord College campus regarding West Virginia female, non-traditional students and their pursuit of higher education. The study will examine why these students did not attend college following high school, the identification of obstacles or strengths that influenced their decision to attend college at this time, and identification of obstacles or strengths that influenced their decision to stay in college.

The database at Concord College indicated that you are female, that you were educated in a high school in West Virginia, were admitted to Concord when you were at least age 25, and have completed at least 30 hours. I want to include you in my study if you are interested in participating. The interview should last approximately one hour on the Concord campus or an alternative place acceptable to both of us. The interview will be audio-taped. Your identity will be protected and your responses will be coded so that any statements you make are not traceable to you.

Please return the enclosed forms in the envelope provided indicating you are interested in participating in the study with the date and time you would like to be interviewed. Please review the informed consent document and we will discuss this form at the time of our meeting. If you do not respond, I will contact you on Monday, August 18, between 6:00PM and 9:00PM to speak to you on the phone about your willingness to participate in the study and to arrange an interview time. If you need to contact me, I can be reached at 304 384 5215, 304 384 9007 or at shorterb@concord.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in my study. Hopefully this research might be of help to other non-traditional students in the future.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Dorsey
Assistant Professor of Social Work
Phone: 304 384 5215, 304 384 9007
Email: shorterb@concord.edu

Name ____________________________________________
Address _______________________________________
Phone _________________________________________
Email _________________________________________

The researcher, Bonnie Dorsey, will contact you on Monday, August 18, 2003 between 6:00PM and 9:00PM to arrange an interview time with you. If this time is not convenient, please contact her at 304 384 5215, 304 384 9007 or at shorterb@concord.edu as soon as possible to arrange another date or time.

Please Check One

_____ I am willing to participate in the study and do not need to be contacted by the researcher. I am available to be interviewed on
(Date) ___________________________ at (Time) ____________________.

_____ I do not wish to participate in the study and do not wish to receive a call from the researcher.
APPENDIX C

Questionnaire Instrument

Student Code_________

Interview Guide

Major ____________________________     Date of college admission_____________
Primary Campus____________________    Anticipated date of graduation___________
Age______________________________     West Virginia county (ies) where
Class___ ________________________        secondary education was received._______
Race______________________________   ____________________________________
Marital Status_______________________

Interview Questions

1. Which of the following characteristics do you feel describes you?
   a. Have you delayed enrollment into college resulting in being at least 25 years or older?  
      YES/NO
   b. Are you attending college part-time?   YES/NO
   c. Are you financially independent from your parents?  YES/NO
   d. Do you have dependents?  YES/ NO   What are your childcare arrangements?__________________________
   e. Are you working full time while enrolled for classes? YES/NO
   f. Are you a single parent?  YES/NO How many children?____ Ages__________
   g. Do you possess a GED or high school equivalency certificate?   YES/NO
      Why didn’t you graduate?__________________________
   h. Are you legally independent from your parents?   YES/ NO

2. Why didn’t you attend college immediately following high school?

3. What factors (obstacles or strengths) influenced your decision to attend college at this time?
   Obstacles:

   Strengths:
4. Did the Welfare to Work program influence your decision to pursue higher education? 
   Yes/ No 
   If yes, how?

5. What factors (obstacles or strengths) influenced your decision to stay in college? 
   Obstacles:

   Strengths:

6. What college or community services or programs have been helpful for you in continuing 
your education?

7. What college or community services or programs would be helpful for you in continuing 
your education?

8. Are you the first person in your family to attend college?  Yes/ No 
   If no, who
9. Did they influence your decision to attend college? Yes/ No
How has your family influenced your college attendance?

10. What are your career plans?

11. Why do you feel a college education will be helpful to you in achieving your career goals?

12. Do you think your community influenced your decision regarding higher education? If yes, how?

13. Do you think your culture influenced your decision regarding higher education? If yes, how?

14. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Informed Consent for Participants
In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project  Qualitative Exploration of Timeliness of Pursuits of Higher Education by Non-Traditional Female Baccalaureate Students in West Virginia

Investigator  Bonnie Dorsey,  Faculty Advisor: Dr. Hildy Getz

I. Purpose of this Research Project
The purpose of the research is to explore why female, Appalachian students, aged at least 25 at the time of their college admission and enrolled at Concord College with at least 30 semester hours decided to pursue higher education at this time. The focus is multi-faceted, including identification of the factors that influenced these students to not pursue their education as traditional-aged students, the factors that changed so they recognized higher education as a viable option, and the factors that influenced them in their perseverance to continue in an undergraduate program. Twelve students will be selected to participate in this study.

II. Procedures
You will be asked a series of questions from a developed questionnaire. The questions will ask about why you didn’t attend college immediately following high school, and what factors (obstacles or strengths) influenced your decision to attend and persevere in college at this time. Specifically, you will be asked about your family’s background history with higher education and whether the Welfare to Work program influenced your decision to pursue higher education. The interview will last from one to two hours, with rest breaks if needed. The sessions will be audiotaped, but your identity will be protected.

III. Risks
The questions the researcher will ask are about your history and the decisions or challenges you faced to pursue higher education. This may spark memories of past experiences or decisions you made in your life. These memories may be troubling to relive and you need to make the researcher aware of any difficulties you are having in answering the questions. If you need assistance in dealing with these feelings, the researcher can tell you about the services available to you through the Counseling Center on campus.

IV. Benefits of this Project
Your participation in this project will provide information that may be used to improve programs or services on campus for students who have similar experiences to your own regarding the pursuit of higher education. This may help others to understand your unique experiences and needs.
You may also be surprised how much you have overcome to pursue your education and the obstacles you have managed to accomplish your goals. It may be a point of personal pleasure to acknowledge your accomplishments to this point.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality
The individual results of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your written consent is required for the researcher to release any data identified with you as an individual to anyone other than personnel working on the project. The information you provide will have your name removed and only a subject number will identify you during analyses and any written reports of the research.

The sessions will be audiotaped. The tapes will be stored securely, used only by the researchers or transcriber. If the researcher wishes to use a portion of your audiotape for any other purpose, they will get your written permission before using it. Your signature on this form does not give them permission to use the audiotape in any other way. However, you do give permission for the information to be published with your identification protected. You are requested to refrain from discussing your experience with other people who might be one of the other eleven participants.

VI. Compensation
Your participation is voluntary and unpaid.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw
You are free to withdraw from this study at any time for any reason.

VIII. Approval of Research
This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and by Concord College.

IX. Subject’s Responsibilities and Permission
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and I know of no reason I cannot participate. I have read and understand the informed consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

______________________________  ___________________
Signature                        Date

______________________________  ___________________
Name (Please Print)              Contact: phone or
Contact: address or email        address (OPTIONAL)
Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Investigator: Bonnie Dorsey  
Office Phone: 304-384 5215, Home Phone: 304-384 9007  
Assistant Professor of Social Work, Social Work Department  
Dept Phone: 304-384 5353, E-mail: shorterb@concord.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Hildy Getz, Office Phone: 540-231-8194  
hgetz@vt.edu

Department Head: Dr. David Alexander, Office Phone: 540-231-5642

Review Board: David M. Moore, Office of Research Compliance, CVM Phase II  
(0442), Office Phone: 540-231-4991

cc: the participant, Bonnie Dorsey
VITA

NAME: Bonnie Dorsey, ACSW, DCSW, LICSW, Ph.D
ADDRESS: HC78 Box 509, Athens, West Virginia 24712
TELEPHONE: (Office) 304 384-5215
(Home) 304 384-9007
(Fax) 304 384-6091
EMAIL: shorterb@concord.edu

Approved Provider of Clinical Social Work Counseling Services with Medicare Blue Cross/Blue Shield Champus and Others

EDUCATION

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia
Ph.D.
Counselor Education
1996-2004

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
MSW
1984-1988

Concord College
Athens, West Virginia
BSW
1972-1976

ACCREDITATION

Certified as a PRIDE trainer for Foster Care Trainings
January, 1999

Completed Comprehensive Exams for Ph.D. Program (ABD)
May, 1998

National Association of Social Workers Board
November, 1994 – Present

Certified Diplomate in Clinical Social Work (DCSW)

Member of Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW)
May, 1990 – Present

WV Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW)
November, 1994 – Present

Certified as a Qualified Clinical Social Worker (QCSW)
August, 1994

Accredited in Functional Independent Measures: (FIM) Scoring
Renewable

Certified in Basic CPR
Renewable

Approved Medicare Provider for Clinical Social Work Services
Present

Approved Workers Compensation Provider for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Services
Present

Approved Blue Cross/Blue Shield Provider for Clinical Social Work Services
Present

Approved Champus Provider for Clinical Social Work Services
Present

Approved Provider for other Private Insurance Companies for Clinical Social Work Services
Present
EMPLOYMENT

DATES: August. 1995 to Present
AGENCY: Concord College, Department of Social Work
        Athens, WV 24712  (304) 384-5215
POSITION: Assistant Professor of Social Work
DUTIES: • Teach undergraduate Bachelor of Social Work classes as directed by the Department of Social Work Director
         • Have taught Introduction to Social Work (an introductory course to social work), Social Welfare Policies and Services I and II (social welfare policy classes), Group Dynamics and Group Processes (an introductory class to group work), Social Work in Health Care, Human Behavior in the Social Environment II, Interventive Methods in Social Work I and III, Field Placement Supervision, and Human Diversity
         • Co-chair of the Social Work Curriculum Committee
         • Development of a new history of social welfare policy course in compliance with CSWE standards
         • Development of an Introduction to Community Service class open to all majors
         • Advisement of undergraduate students in compliance with the Social Work Departmental policies
         • Co-Instructor with a Biology Professor for Honors Class discussion of Genetic Engineering Issues-- Spring 1997
         • Member of the Social Work Department Admissions Committee
         • Advisor to the Social Work Organization-- Fall Semester, 1995
         • Advisor to the Triangle Student Association, Phi Alpha Honor Society and Alpha Phi Omega
         • Teaching evaluator for three colleagues in the Social Science Division (August, 1998-Present)
         • PRIDE trainer and site coordinator for Mercer, McDowell and Wyoming Counties, 1999 to Present
         • Other projects as assigned by the Program Director
SUPERVISOR: Dr. John David Smith,  Director of Social Work Program (August, 1998 - Present)
            Mr. Buford Young,  Director of Social Work Program  (August, 1995-August, 1998)

DATES: January, 1997 to Present
AGENCY: Concord College, Bonner Scholars Program, Member of WV Campus Compact
        Liaison for Community Service
        Athens, WV 24712  (304) 384-5215 or 384-6009
POSITION: Executive Director (Quarter-time Position)
DUTIES: • Oversee and Direct the Concord College Branch of the Bonner Scholars Program and WV Campus Compact Programs
         • Provide supervision to the Bonner Program Specialist
         • Provide supervision for preparation of accountability reports to the Bonner Foundation
         • Member of WV Campus Compact
         • Liaison for community service programs on campus

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- Preparation of the WV Campus Compact newsletter (Spring Semester, 1997)
- Director of WV Campus Compact (until 10/97)
- Organize and facilitate the semi-annual meetings of the WV Campus Compact meetings (until 10/97)
- Facilitate the partnership of Concord College in a national consortium focused on development of community research projects

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Jerry Beasley, President of Concord College

DATES 1988 to Present
AGENCY: Options
HC 78, Box 509
Athens, WV 24712 (304) 384-9007
POSITION: Private Practice
DUTIES:
- Contracted with Bluefield Regional Medical Center Home Health agency for supervision of Social Services Department
- Provide supervision to one temporary social work licensed person
- Counseling Services
- Casemanagement
- Continuing Education Presentations
- Per Diem Contracts for Clinical Social Work Services with local psychiatrists’ offices, Home Health, etc.
- Public Speaking Engagements
- Develop connection with area Physicians’ offices to offer Clinical Social Work Services at the Physicians’ offices
- Develop connection with area Attorneys’ offices and other agencies to offer rehabilitation, casemanagement and counseling expertise

SUPERVISOR: Independent Private Practice

DATES: April, 1994- July, 1994
AGENCY: NovaCare Southern Hills Rehabilitation Hospital
120 Twelfth Street
Princeton, WV 24740 (304) 487-8117
POSITION: Case Manager
DUTIES:
- Discharge Planning
- Develop Outpatient Policies and Procedures in compliance with JCAHO, CARF, and Medicare standards
- Further develop the system to accommodate casemanagement into an existing system
- Develop forecasts of the patient’s bill based on the Physician’s orders and the therapists’ approaches and applicable charges
- Connection of community resources as appropriate

ASSOCIATE: Lisa Caldwell, Casemanager
DATES: October, 1993 to April, 1994
AGENCY: NovaCare Southern Hills Regional Rehabilitation Hospital
120 Twelfth Street
Princeton, WV 24740  (304) 487-8000
POSITION: Supervisor of Family Services
DUTIES:
- Provide supportive, adjustment counseling to patients and families involved with Brain Injury, Chronic Pain, and General Rehabilitation
- Develop the Family Services Program
- Develop and facilitate support groups
- Develop and facilitate family education programs
- Develop billable Social Work Counseling Services
- Recognized Field Placement Instructor
- Recognized In-service Trainer
- Extensive program development experience
- Member of the Board of Directors of the WV Head Injury Foundation and Associated with the Virginia Head Injury Foundation
- Member of the Appalachian OH-9 Home Health Advisory Council
SUPERVISOR: Dr. Larry Rutledge, Director of Psychology, Director of the Brain Injury Program

DATES: March, 1987- October, 1993
AGENCY: Southern Hills Regional Rehabilitation Hospital
120 Twelfth Street
Princeton, WV 24740  (304) 487-8000
POSITION: Director of Social Services/ Program Management
DUTIES:
- Discharge Planning and Program Management responsibility
- Developed team conference formats and other Program Development tools in compliance with Program Standards
- Experience with Brain Injury, General Rehabilitation, and Outpatient patients and families
- Instrumental participation in JCAHO and CARF surveys
- Developed the Rehabilitation Manual with the Director of Nursing
- Member of the Administrative Staff, Clinical Operations Group, Medical Records Committee, Quality Improvement Committee, Utilization Review, Admission Screening and Staffing
- Facilitation of team conferences; encouraged use of FIM scoring by therapists and documentation of staffing
- Evaluation of patient psychological/ social status, with recommendations, and documentation in the patient’s medical record
- Provide family education concerning patient diagnosis and its impact on the patient’s functioning
- Provide weekly update concerning patient progress or problems to patient and family
- Coordination of family training and conferences concerning patient progress
- Counseling available to patients and families to assist with their adjustments or concerns
- Consultation and action concerning problematic connection of durable medical
Support group facilitator and organizer
• Responsible for supervision of Social Services Department
• Supervision of two staff Social Workers
• Recognized Field Placement Instructor
• Contact with external insurance casemanagers for patient updates for extending the estimated length of stay and for discharge planning purposes
• Knowledge of Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance guidelines
• Patient Advocacy
• Referral to community resources such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Home Health, Medicaid, etc.
• Recognized in-service trainer
• Member of the Board of Directors of the WV Head Injury Foundation and associated with the Virginia Head Injury Foundation

SUPERVISOR: Terry Maxheimer, Administrator

DATES: August, 1990-1991
AGENCY: Humana St. Luke’s Hospital
1333 Southview Drive
Bluefield, WV 24701
POSITION: Consultant to Social Services
DUTIES:
• Periodic screening of Social Services interventions for recommendations of more effective strategies of documentation
• Evaluate Social Services Quality Assurance plan and data collection
• Assist with development of casefinding mechanisms
• Assist in providing education concerning community resources, therapeutic interventions, etc.

SUPERVISOR: Rick Puckett, R.N.

DATES: August, 1989- February, 1992
AGENCY: Orthopaedic Center of the Virginias, Inc.
311 Courthouse Road
Princeton, WV 24740
POSITION: Contract Part-time Social Worker
DUTIES:
• Complete psycho-social evaluations and follow-up with any patient referred by orthopaedists Dr. Branson, Dr. Belcher, or Lori Lovern, RPT
• Consultation and action concerning problematic connection of durable medical equipment
• Evaluation of patient needs and referral to appropriate community resources
• Provide counseling as needed to assist patient and/ or family in coping or adjusting to changes due to patient status change
• Pre-op evaluations to determine patient discharge needs or plans after elective surgery and assist in formulating a discharge plan
• If appropriate, follow-up will be provided to further evaluate patient status or needs on an ongoing basis
• Post-op evaluations to connect community resources or provide counseling as needed
• Complete referrals and assist in providing the documentation for referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Security Disability, Home Health, Nursing Home Placement, etc.
• Evaluation of insurance coverage needs and options

SUPERVISOR:  Lori Lovern,  RPT (Registered Physical Therapist)

DATES: August, 1989- August, 1991
AGENCY: Earl J. Hager Renal Unit
Route 2, Box 255
Bluefield, WV 24701
POSITION: Contract Part-time Social Worker
DUTIES:
• Evaluation of patient psycho/ social status, recommendations and documentation in the patient’s medical record
• Evaluate patient needs and provide referrals to community resources
• Provide counseling if needed to patient and/ or family
• Provide or make available to patient or family information about the dialysis routines, restrictions, or other educational information as needed
• Assist in coordinating formation and replenishment of the Renal Patient Emergency Fund
• Assist appropriate patients as needed in becoming eligible for placement on Kidney Transplant Center waiting list
• Complete appropriate forms for American Kidney Fund, Medicaid, medication assistance, nursing home placement, home health services, durable medical equipment, etc.
• Evaluation of insurance coverage needs and options

DATES: October, 1985- March, 1987
AGENCY: Region I Area Agency on Aging
P.O. Box 1442
Princeton, WV 24740
POSITION: Social Services Coordinator
DUTIES:
• Preparation of annual program proposals concerning Title XX monies, the Senior Advocate program, and assisted in preparation of other program proposals as needed
• Supervision of five employees, over a six county area (three employees providing primarily Social Services, and two employees providing Senior Advocate paralegal services)
• Administrative management through the completion of monthly and quarterly reports or records as stipulated by contracts or grants
• Technical assistance to six county senior citizen’s programs as needed
• Regional Coordinator for the Silver Haired Legislature

SUPERVISOR: Sharon Hondos, AAA Director
DATES: April, 1983- October, 1985
AGENCY: Southern WV Regional Health Council
Route 2, Box 382
Bluefield, WV  24701
POSITION: Medical Social Worker
DUTIES: • Home visits in two West Virginia counties, and three Virginia counties to provide Home Health Social Services
• Provided counseling and concrete linkages to Home Health patients and their families
• Cleared patient insurance coverage for Home Health Services or arranged private pay agreements
• Assisted at the Renal Dialysis Center with arrangement of concrete linkages and counseling
• Assisted in the clearance of patient insurance coverage of dialysis service
SUPERVISOR: John David Smith, Director of Social Services

PUBLICATIONS

REFERENCES
References are available upon request.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Assistant Professor of Social Work, Concord College, Athens, WV. 1995 to Present
PRIDE trainer using nine modules and other information instructing potential foster and adoptive parents about becoming parents of at-risk children, 1999 to present
Site coordinator for Mercer, McDowell and Wyoming Counties, 1999 to Present


“Fundamentals of Clinical Supervision” a day long continuing education seminar for area supervisors of counselors and social workers, September, 1997

“Communication”, Hospice of Mercer County Training for Hospice Volunteers, Periodic presentations

“The Family’s Role in Traumatic Brain Injury”, WV Head Injury Foundation and West Virginia Hospital Association Presentation on Traumatic Brain Injury, May 7, 1993


Many other smaller presentations to varied groups composed of different educational backgrounds.