Community colleges may provide access and opportunity to acquire higher levels of academic education; however, the students' decision to persist from semester to semester is contingent upon the individuals' life circumstances. Community colleges are experiencing increased enrollment of nontraditional women, especially in vocational technical programs of study. Research in the changing characteristics of nontraditional female students will assist community colleges in realizing their mission, by providing direction with planning, implementing, and evaluating services designed to meet the needs of this segment of the student population.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn more about how nontraditional women overcome educational barriers in a community college vocational technical program of study. The researcher also sought to bring insights about the experiences of being an adult female returning to education at a rural community college. Research participants included 15 nontraditional women at Patrick Henry Community College in Martinsville, Virginia. Through semi-structured interviews, personal experiences of women overcoming educational barriers were explored.

The findings revealed that participants entered the educational experience with apprehension, but with a sense of determination to achieve their educational goal for their own self esteem and significant others in their life (especially their children). Participants reported barriers as: financial, conflict in role obligations, limited time, and self-doubt in academic preparation, which were overcome by determination and seeking assistance

through the Student Support Services program. Finally, participants suggested implementing a specialized, nontraditional female focused orientation course, on-site daycare services, and extended Student Support Services to meet the needs of this segment of the student population.

RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE NONTRADITIONAL WOMEN:

OVERCOMING EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS

by

Nancy S. Phillips

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges are experiencing tremendous change because of their
dynamic mission statements. Furthermore, community colleges have unique
characteristics situated to their particular geographical locality, making community
colleges distinct from four-year colleges or universities (Herideen, 1998; Padilla, 1999).
In particular, small rural community college environments often reflect the local culture
of the service region through their employees and students. Also, in the U.S. there are
more than double the number of rural community colleges than urban and suburban
community colleges combined (Katsinas & Miller, 1998), making these institutions a
useful focus for educational research.

Community colleges also reflect specific groups of students who experience
effects from the loss of jobs and legislative policy. Nearly 50% of students entering two-
year education are over the age of 24 (NCES, 2003), and approximately 56% of
community college students in the United States are women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).
This increased enrollment of nontraditional women is partly in response to displaced
workers. For example, adult women in rural geographical areas employed in
manufacturing are experiencing job loss. Some of these women are confronted with
decisions pertaining to enrolling in higher education and or seeking employment
(McAtee & Benshoff, 2006; Valadez, 2000). Nontraditional women are enrolling in

increasing numbers in community college vocational technical programs (Bragg, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003), and are recommended for focused research by Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002). Specifically, research in this area will assist community colleges in realizing part of their long-standing mission—to provide access and opportunity for all groups of people (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Herideen, 1998; Walter, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Authors (Padilla, 1999; Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, & Treviño, 1997; Shultz, Colton & Colton, 2001) agree that the changing characteristics of the entering student population have been overlooked in research and that educational institutions tend to continue operation with little focus on the social, academic, and cultural needs of their students. In addition, rural cultural research is one particular area thin in scholarship (Howley, 2004). Overlooking the needs of students combined with the scarcity of rural research establishes a need for further exploration in this area. Increased student diversity in community colleges shows a significant number of enrolled nontraditional women, especially those participating in vocational technical programs (Herideen, 1998).

Student experiences are concretely set within a particular institution and even within particular academic programs; therefore, there is an important need to study successful experiences of specific groups of students (Padilla, 1999; Padilla et al., 1997). Asking the question of what happens to certain groups of disadvantaged students at a particular institution resulting in their persistence is recommended as a topic for further study by scholars (Padilla, 1999; Padilla et al., 1997). Barriers to education have been

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cited as a major reason for nontraditional female students failing to persist in achieving their educational goals (Carney-Crompton, 2002). In addition, few studies were located by this researcher that addressed the unique characteristics of rural community college students.

Since nontraditional women are a growing segment of the community college student population, the problem is to explain how these students overcome perceived educational barriers in a rural community college vocational technical program. To clarify, the purpose of this study was to explore how these women (a) recognize barriers, and (b) devise strategies to overcome barriers, in order (c) to persist in achieving their educational goals. Explorations of experiences emerge from the nontraditional woman's perspective because reality exists in the perception of individuals.

Perceptions can be explored from individual and specific classifications, such as Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Therefore, using qualitative inquiry, I investigated the experiences of nontraditional women at a small, rural community college, specifically, Patrick Henry Community College in Martinsville, Virginia. I conducted personal interviews to gather information on actual experiences and to identify themes in overcoming barriers along with the perception of the campus experience from the viewpoint of nontraditional women.

Significance of the Study

Although community colleges may provide access and opportunity to acquire higher levels of academic education, this is only the initial stage in an individual obtaining an education. For community colleges, one mission outcome is to award

students with an associate degree. What occurs between matriculation and graduation has been called the "campus experience" (Padilla, 1999, p. 134). This campus experience influences the student's decision to persist from semester to semester. Persistence is the focus of this research study.

For clarification purposes, retention rate, attrition rate, and graduation rate are defined and briefly discussed. First, retention rate is used to identify the "percent of entering students . . . persisting in their studies at an institution" and is used as an effectiveness measure in accountability (Wyman, 1997, p. 29). Second, attrition-rate, "the complement of retention rate," is the rate at which students fail to persist in their course of study and are often referred to as non-completers (Wyman, 1997, p. 29). The retention-rate is closely connected to the graduation rate, since a student must remain enrolled in courses to meet program graduation requirements (Wyman, 1997). Once students have graduated, they have reached the set educational goal and therefore are considered as persisting. Although these various terms are related to persistence, they represent a different research focus from this proposed study.

The enrollment patterns of community college students are not static. For a more in-depth look at the enrollment patterns of community college students, the reader is directed to Hoyt and Winn's (2004) study entitled, *Understanding retention and college student bodies: Differences between drop-outs, stop-outs, opt-outs, and transfer-outs*. Indeed, some scholars argue that retention is not an appropriate outcome measure for community colleges because of the open-door policy (Dellow & Romano, 2002), lending support for the justification of excluding these terms from this study. In turn, this

supports the focus for the study of persistence—defined as enrollment in the following semester at the same institution and within the same program major.

Persistence in education often is accomplished through devising strategies to overcome perceived educational barriers in order to continue in the pursuit of achieving an educational goal (Padilla, 1999; Ponton, Derrick & Carr, 2005). Therefore, this qualitative exploratory study may assist community college personnel in evaluating the issues that nontraditional women experience when confronted with perceived educational barriers and yet still decide to persist in achieving stated educational goals. It is important to focus on successful students since this is the foundation for college student retention efforts (Padilla, 1999; Padilla et al., 1997). In addition, a follow-up of non-returning students is recognized as an important component in the study of persistence and is included in this research. Findings from this research project could assist with planning, implementing, and evaluating services designed to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of nontraditional women in rural community colleges.

I employed a qualitative approach to gather and analyze campus experience information from nontraditional women participating in a rural community college vocational technical program. The Chain-of-Response (COR) model helped guide the analysis of components related to persistence (Cross, 1981), while the Women's Ways of Knowing assisted with analysis from the female perspective (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). This exploration focused on how nontraditional women address the issue of identifying and overcoming perceived educational barriers in their campus experience. Themes and patterns from descriptions of individual perceptions,

regarding the process involved with overcoming barriers, emerged from the analysis of interviews from nontraditional women in a naturally occurring environment. Because this study is qualitative in nature, the findings are not directly generalizable; however, institutions with similar populations might find the results informative. The study contributes to the scholarship on rural community colleges. A concept map combining the COR model (Cross, 1981) and Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky et al., 1986) is presented here to provide a visual representation for the focus of this study.

Rural Nontraditional Women Vocational Technical Majors

Result

The purpose of this study was to explore this interactive campus experience process from the participants' perspective using WWK.

Rural Community College Information (f)

Importance of goals and expectations that participation will meet goals (c)

Opportunities and barriers (e)

Continued Participation (g)

Figure 1: Concept Map for Study

Definitions of Terms

Specific definitions of terms will assist with the clarification and the rationale supporting the need for this study. The following terms are listed alphabetically for ease

of reference:

1. Andragogy is the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 38).

2. Community can be conceptually thought of as "the binding together of individuals toward a common cause or experience" (Roberts, 1993, p. 36).

3. Community college is defined as "any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in sciences as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 5).

4. Connectivity is composed of "a sense of belonging due to a supportive and affirming atmosphere between a student and his or her surroundings" (Roberts, 1993, p. 37).

5. The disadvantaged student is "a student with . . . pressing difficulties," (Donlevy, 2000, p. 227).

6. An educational barrier is defined as a barrier that slows or prevents continued enrollment in an educational program; therefore, this type of barrier is defined more from the individual perspective (Cross, 1981).

7. First-generation student is defined as any student from a family where neither parent had more than a high school education (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004).

8. Integration is the "extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that

community or in subgroups of it" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54).

9. Learning is considered to be a process and a condition of the individual, specifically "learning is described psychologically as a process of need meeting and goal striving by the learners" (Knowles, 1980, p. 56).

10. Nontraditional student is considered to be a student over the age of twenty-four (American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 2000).

11. Persistence is when a student continues enrollment from one semester to the next (Tinto, 1999). Summer term is excluded in this definition of persistence due to the summer sessions' limited scheduling of classes. Other terms closely related to persistence, such as retention-rate, attrition-rate, and graduation rate will not be addressed in this study; however, these terms were previously defined and justification given for their exclusion.

12. Rural Community College is operationally defined by Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen's study (as cited in Vineyard, 1979), as a college that is "publicly supported, located in a population center of under 100,000 people, serving a vast geographic area, and having" a comprehensive program of study (2006, p. 642).

13. Vocational technical educational programs offer a sequence of courses directly related to preparing individuals for paid or unpaid employment, in current or emerging occupations, requiring training other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree (Mupinga & Livesay, 2004).

Research Questions

This exploratory study focused on nontraditional women enrolled in a rural community college's vocational technical program. In order to explore how these women recognize educational barriers and describe strategies used to overcome these barriers which resulted in the decision to persist with educational goals, specific research questions helped to guide the study:

1. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher education?

2. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in the identification of an educational barrier?

3. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to overcome an educational barrier?

4. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in choosing to persist with their educational goals?

5. How do nontraditional women describe their experience with rural community college support services in overcoming educational barriers?

In addition, this study uses a qualitative approach to better explore the topic from the individuals' perspective classified into the categories of Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky et al., 1986); along with the classification of perceived barriers based on the Chain-of-Response (COR) model (Cross, 1981). Specific research questions helped guide the direction of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

For the past three decades, the mission of the community college has been debated by scholars (Dougherty, 2006a). The community college has complex origins with complex missions resulting in an institution which will continue to be studied and debated by scholars because of their great numbers, their critical role in providing college opportunity, and their function of providing postsecondary vocational training (Dougherty, 2006b). In his analysis of this on-going mission debate Dougherty (2006a) identified a framework that contrasts four perspectives: (a) functionalism, (b) instrumentalist Marxism, (c) institutionalist theory, and (d) state relative autonomy. This review of relevant literature recognizes Dougherty's contribution to the study of community colleges and selects the theoretical position of functionalism as the main focus with which to guide this review of literature. The functionalism position is selected because Dougherty (2006a) states most community college advocates fit in this theoretical position.

Throughout the history of community colleges, it appears that these institutions attempt to remain focused on meeting local needs by responding to changes in educational demand. This requires community colleges to be flexible and comprehensive in their program offerings. As a result, some community colleges are referred to as

comprehensive community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). In this current era, community colleges face increasing educational expectations from various constituents such as business, industry, policymakers, and students. According to Cohen & Brawer (2003), one of the major functions of the rural community college is to provide vocational technical training that meet local workforce needs of business and industry. However, some scholars state the emphasis on vocational technical training is a result of the market force both from perspectives of consumer-choice and business domination (Brint & Karabel, 2006).

To establish the context for this research, this review of literature includes a brief historical perspective of the community college development in the United States, focusing on the community college mission and the community college vocational technical training programs. The review continues with a brief focus on features of current society to include an introduction to the post-industrial society, along with features of rural geographic areas. Then, in order to establish context for the research focus, this review presents an overview of adult learning theory, followed with a focus on Cross's (1981) Chain-of-Response (COR) model and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1986) model of Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK). The COR model and WWK serve to establish the context and connection between nontraditional women and campus experience relating to persistence from the individual female perception.

A review of the past five years for related literature resulted in the decision to expand the literature search further back to include ten years. This decision is made due to the lack of peer reviewed research located, from the year 2002 to the present, related to

the topic of nontraditional women in the rural community college setting. In addition, peripheral research is included to address the possibility of non-published research and in support of the assertion that there is a lack of existing published research focused on rural geographical areas. To further establish a complete and thorough review, related literature describing the current characteristics of community college students is presented, followed by a description of nontraditional women and student support service programs established with the purpose to assist disadvantaged students with meeting their needs to increase their persistence at community colleges.

Community College

Historical Perspective of Community Colleges

The development of the community college has been shaped by historical, economic, political, and cultural influences (Cohen & Brawer, 2003) in addition to local business concern for the direction of employability of the middle class (Dougherty, 2006a). Dougherty (2006a) takes the position that vocationalism is a terminal program established to deter lower socio-economic individuals away from seeking higher positions in the marketplace; however, other scholars have stated vocational program graduates are electing to continue their education beyond the two-year program with a debate ensuing over whether this trend is increasing or decreasing (Townsend, 2006).

The following historical summary highlights events that contribute to the development of the United States community college, while focusing on the evolving community college mission. Although debated by some scholars (Brint & Karabel, 2006; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 2006a, 2006b), three trends noted in the evolution of

community colleges are considered plausible. First, the community college was established to assist with educating the masses; second, the industrial society needed a trained workforce; and third, workforce needs change as the United States democratic society continues to evolve (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). This review of literature takes the perspective that these trends are plausible; while recognizing alternative trends representing community college evolution is possible.

Influences in the community college development. Community colleges were formed as a postsecondary educational option that provided students with the first two years of general education coursework required by universities, thus these newly formed institutions were named the junior college. There is a debate among educational scholars of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century pertaining to the establishment of junior colleges in the United States. Two individuals are considered as major contributors in initiating the junior college movement. First, in 1851 Henry Tappan put forth the idea that universities should be relieved of the burden of providing general education so that universities could focus attention on becoming research centers.

Second, in the late eighteen hundreds William Rainey Harper suggested modeling the junior colleges after the *German gymnasium* for the purpose of providing students with the first two years of a university's required general education. The mission of the junior community college was then first established. William Rainey Harpers' vision led to him receiving recognition as being the father of the Community College Movement (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). In the 1920s, the junior college began to evolve into a dual-purpose institution by offering transfer education and terminal or vocational technical

training programs (Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck & Suppiger, 1994). This dual program offering allowed the junior college to assist the community in providing highly technical skilled labor to meet the community needs. With the shifting focus to assist their local geographical community, the junior colleges began to increase rapidly in numbers. Soon afterward, The American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) was established, largely because the United States Bureau of Education considered American junior colleges to be of sufficient size and number to warrant a national association (Witt et al., 1994).

During the 1930s, colleges continued to grow in number, and students enrolled in the local college for job training to gain an advantage in obtaining employment during the Great Depression (Witt et al., 1994). The community college received legislative support for continuing operations, for example the G.I. Bill that allowed access to veterans who needed updated skill training (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). As the junior college continued to expand program offerings and gain recognition, the terminology began to change regarding its name. In 1936, there was a published article by Byron S. Hollinshead who called the junior college the community college to reflect the local community being served (Witt et al., 1994).

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), the onset of World War II and the industrial era of the 1940s resulted in the need for an industrially skilled workforce. In 1948, George F. Zook led a commission that emphasized an early vision of the comprehensive mission of community colleges found in *The Truman Commission Report* (Bragg, 2001). Therefore, the comprehensive college mission supports business and

industry's promotion of community education to provide trained workers, because local business and industry in turn serve the community. In addition, education is emphasized through the judicial system with decisions that favor community college growth, along with the expansion of community college programs to include vocational technical training. During the 1950s and 1960s, community college enrollment fluctuated in relation to certain events, such as the 1960s women's movement which resulted in an increase in enrollment for women. Basically, the women's movement made education socially acceptable for women who wanted to pursue higher educational goals.

Articulation agreements with universities to accept transfer students from community colleges, along with legislation establishing educational rights for people with disabilities, resulted in continued enrollment growth during the 1970s. In the 1980s, increased funding for community colleges allowed for sustained growth and opportunity, thereby allowing community colleges to serve a larger portion of the United States population. The recent proliferation in the use of technology in the 1990s increased the need for vocational technical programs with training in workforce skills and thus becoming a core educational requirement (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). This emerging economic trend is referred to as the post-industrial era by at least one scholar (Herideen, 1998).

Post-Industrial Society

During the 1990s, economic related factors influenced changes directly and indirectly in the United States community colleges. These economic factors are attributed to technological advances by some scholars and include: (a) the post-industrial

connection with community colleges, (b) governmental policy and community college

persistence linked to state funding, and (c) workforce preparation goals (Townsend &

Twombly, 2001). The following paragraphs offer a brief discussion of these three

characteristics relevant to this literature review.

Bragg, Levin, and Dougherty, along with other contributing authors, discuss

characteristics of the post-industrial era in the collected work *Community Colleges:*

Policy in the Future Context (Townsend & Twombly, 2001). Relevant points from these

contributing scholars are summarized here. Levin describes the post-industrial society

from a global context and states this age is both a condition and a process. Globalization

is a condition that shortens geographical distances and speeds up communication through

the advancements made in communication technology. Technology training is now

considered a basic workforce skill in the United States and many community colleges are

expected to provide this basic technology training (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Bragg and

Dougherty view United States community colleges as being situated academically in a

position to provide vocational technical training within their local communities. As a

result, community colleges provide individuals in their community with the opportunity

to acquire updated training skills. These individuals then enter local business and industry

in the form of a technologically skilled labor force. As a result of providing this trained

workforce, the community college benefits through increased enrollment which in turn

increases the allocation of state funding. The district states benefit from employing a

more educated workforce which is presumed to increase the productivity level of the

district states' contribution to the national economy. This brief but plausible description

of the post-industrial U.S. economy demonstrates the interdependence between social, rural community cultural, and economic relationships currently impacting U.S. community colleges, thus establishing a cycle of reinforcing events (Townsend & Twombly, 2001).

A connection exists between legislative action and community college vocational technical program realignment. To emphasize the promotion of community college vocational technical programs, legislators enacted the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The WIA was initiated by legislators to promote traditional vocational technical training and retraining for dislocated workers and welfare recipients (Shaw & Rab, 2003). The debate over who is best served by the WIA—individuals or business and industry—has not hindered the increased enrollment in the community college vocational technical programs (Shaw & Rab, 2003).

The WIA legislation further establishes the complex interrelationships between the national post-industrial impact and community college education. Also, in 1998 Congress passed the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act) that provides funds to the states to help finance vocational technical education (Dellow & Romano, 2002) and business and industry still work with community colleges to achieve the goal of increasing a technologically skilled workforce. Zinser and Lawrenz (2004) concluded in their research study that community college workforce development programs are collaborating with business and industry to provide a highly skilled workforce specifically for the post-industrial job market.

Community College Mission

The continuing evolution of the community college reveals the changing mission statements that reflect the diverse and overlapping curricular functions provided by U.S. community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Community colleges tend to serve their local community in: transfer preparation, vocational technical education, continuing education, developmental education, and community service (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Curricular functions often overlap and take on economic, ethnic, and political meaning to reflect various changes in the local community colleges' service region. Throughout their continuing evolution, Vaughan (1995) states certain community college mission characteristics have remained predominate: (a) open access based on geographic, financial, and academic factors, and (b) a reputation for being student-centered and community focused.

Community colleges provide educational opportunity to their local population by geographical proximity, and community colleges provide vocational technical skills training for employability. Thus, U.S. democracy has been linked with the U.S. community college through geography (Gillett-Karam, Roueche & Roueche, 1991). According to the functionalism view, a dominant narrative in the United States is the opportunity for every individual to reach his or her greatest potential and barriers to an individuals' educational development taken away (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Community colleges offer open access as a major component of the community college mission even with reduced funding and overcrowding in community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Therefore, community colleges promote individual opportunity through educational

attainment, as a matter of social policy (Gillett-Karam et al., 1991; Walpole, 2003). After reviewing 30 years of research, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) acknowledge that the two-year community college has a positive impact on educational access and opportunity. Recently, researchers concluded that the level of postsecondary education of parents had a profound influence on the level of institution the individual selects for enrollment in order to achieve his or her educational goal (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Community colleges offer opportunity for an individual to gain employability skills through vocational technical programs. In a research study by Levin (2000), the researcher identified support for the community college program shift toward providing an educated workforce. In the same research, Levin (2000) interviewed community college personnel revealing a belief that the community college mission had not changed with the program shift. This belief was justified by the statement that meeting the needs of business and industry had been a component of the community college mission statement for decades (Levin, 2000). This finding supports the statement that community colleges are confronted with complex mission issues involving the colleges' program offerings, the colleges' local business and industry needs, and the colleges' diverse student population (Bragg, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kershaw, 1999; Pennington et al., 2006).

To focus on one segment of the diverse student population for research is supported and even recommended by scholars. For example, in their detailed study on local employability skills Howell, Carter, and Schied (2002) concluded that more research is needed in this particular area. The needs of businesses and industry may differ

from the learning needs of women; however since women have a financial need the expectation exists for women to at least partially meet the business and industry expectations for employability. Howell et al. (2002) provided results from their ethnographic research on the expectations of the new economic workplace from a gendered perspective, noting two overarching themes, first women and organizational change are growing in importance, and second the boundaries among work, family, and community are disappearing. In this particular study, the theme of women and organizational change is noted by business and industry to be positive by allowing women more decision-making responsibilities and educational opportunities; however, the women in this study are less positive, stating this change increases their workload and adds responsibility without allowing them a voice in the matter (Howell et al., 2002).

Since community colleges have complex mission issues, and since this review of literature focuses on vocational technical programs, the reader is directed to see Bragg (2001) for an in-depth summary of the historical literature of the community college access, mission, and outcomes, along with their interconnecting themes. To briefly summarize Bragg (2001), the study suggests that meeting the needs and goals of students, to include employability skills, should be the primary mission of the community college. In this current society, community colleges are shifting their program emphasis to skill training for meeting both individual and business needs, while maintaining their mission of open access and educational opportunity. The result of this focus means vocational technical programs at community colleges are growing in enrollment numbers along with

diversity and, as a result, are currently receiving attention from both internal and external constituents.

Vocational programs of study. Meeting local workforce needs through skills training implies that community colleges set service region boundaries; yet, these boundaries are more difficult to define in this technology era (Kershaw, 1999). The community college itself is a component of, and impacted by, this technological change occurring across the United States. Not only are vocational technical programs being developed that focus on the use of technology, but technology is entering every layer of community college operations. This is evident in the on-line registration process and the expanding distance learning programs.

Another complex issue dealing with the vocational programs and the current U.S. workforce is seen in the study by Valadez (2000), where the participants in the study did not gain employment after acquiring the vocational training because the local job market had reached a saturation point. Valadez's (2000) research findings support Katsinas and Miller's (1998) literature and trend analysis which show that graduates migrate out of their rural geographical area in order to obtain employment because the local region is flooded with a specifically trained workforce. Katsinas and Miller (1998), along with Valadez (2000), conclude that if vocational programs train students for employment, then job opportunities need to exist in the community for the student completing the vocational training. This assertion is based on the following line of reasoning: if vocational programs are graduating students who cannot find employment in their geographical locations then the community college is not serving the local needs of

business, industry, or students, and thus not fulfilling one of their primary educational mission statements.

Alignment of educational outcomes with student needs, goals, and expectations would contribute to community colleges remaining a valuable segment of the U.S. higher education in this current era (Bragg, 2001). Since enrollment patterns appear to have secured vocational education in the modern community college (Bragg, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 2003), research focusing on vocational education in the community college system and specific groups of students will provide a better explanation of the complex issues surrounding vocational technical programs in relation to student diversity and student needs.

Rural Community Colleges

It is a common belief that the United States represents all nationalities and that this diversity is reflected in the educational student population. While realigning their institution to address the needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Pennington et al., 2006), community colleges located in rural geographical regions also attempt to preserve their local rural culture (Katsinas & Miller, 1998). However, there is a lack of published rural research studies and this lack of scholarship establishes the need for more rural research to be conducted.

According to Howley (2004) practical rural educational research is almost nonexistent. Further, Howley (2004) states the lack of published rural educational research is due to a lack of understanding concerning rural issues on the part of researchers. Therefore, Howley (2004) presents his scholarship to assist in making future

rural education research more abundant, meaningful, and useful, through his introduction of rural issues.

More meaningful educational rural research would also help address specific rural adult learner needs. Rural and urban students do not have the same needs when they interact with a learning environment. For example, Fitzgerald and Bloodsworth (1996) found that urban students learn equally well using either rural or urban learning styles, or ways people learn which are more conducive to learning, but rural students do not learn as well using urban styles as they do when using rural styles. This finding supports the assumption that rural students have specific learning needs and Fitzgerald and Bloodsworth (1996) note that many rural college students, along with many professors, are unaware of the connection between learning styles and teaching strategies.

Individuals in rural geographical areas tend to form a sense of community from their current local issues through establishing a sense of connectivity (Roberts, 1993; Terrell, 1998). Often, rural community colleges serve as the focal point for rural communities. With approximately 732 rural community colleges in the United States (NCES, 2003), rural community colleges are situated in a unique position to serve as a research setting for the study of local issues. In addition, research conducted in rural community colleges could expand the existing scholarship focused specifically on rural issues.

To briefly summarize the community college section of this literature review, throughout history it is demonstrated that community colleges change to meet the needs of their constituents. Change occurs in an evolving pattern and tends to reflect various

changes within the community colleges' local service region, to include geographical, cultural, funding, technological, and economic areas. The current economic shift from an industrial to a technological focus has increased the need for vocational technical education with this direction receiving support from legislators. Technology, the main component of the post-industrial society, directly affects vocational technical education programs and presents unique challenges for rural community colleges.

Adult Learning

Overview

Adult learning is a complex area of study with an evolving body of literature (Rachal, 2002). Scholars have been contributing to the study and practice of adult learning for many years (Belenky et al., 1986; Brookfield, 1986, 2001, 2002, 2005; Cross, 1981, 2000, 2001; Gillett-Karam et al., 1991; Knowles, 1980; Pratt, 1988). From a review of adult learning theory, it is evident that adults do not learn in the same way as children. Instead, scholars have determined that andragogy—the study and practice of teaching adults—is an extension of pedagogy, the study and practice of teaching children (Knowles, 1980; Pratt, 1988). Pratt (1988) believes the typical adult learner is self-directed and autonomous, while Brookfield (1986) attributes adult autonomy to a level of awareness directed toward the range of alternative possibilities. Adult educators are advised to include pedagogy and andragogy in realigning practice with the learners' beliefs so that the learner will more actively engage in his or her own learning process (Pratt, 1988), and it is believed that engaged learners tend to complete their self-selected program of study because of a sense of connectivity (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

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Four features are specifically identified with adult learning: (a) adults work best in collaborative groups, (b) success comes when adults begin to exert control over their personal and social environments, (c) adults learn best when their focus of activities is determined by their perception of relevance rather than being externally imposed, and (d) adults learn best when they engage in action, reflection, further action, and further reflection (Brookfield, 1986). These adult learning factors emphasize the need for adult learners to establish connectivity with the following: classmates, college personnel, and their own individual educational goals. If adult educators can successfully accomplish a realignment incorporating the four features of adult learning (Brookfield, 1986), then educators can help bring about social change (Ross-Gordon, 2002).

Social change is related to social mobility based on financially providing a living standard higher than the individuals' currently held socio-economic level. This relates back to vocational technical skills training education. The focus in this realignment process means educators would first need to better understand adult learner perceptions of the campus experience and how these perceptions connect with the adult learners' educational goal achievement through educational persistence.

Chain-of-Response Adult Learning Model

There are seven components in the Chain-of-Response (COR) model: (a) self-evaluation, which is based on (b) attitudes about education, which lead to (c) the perceived importance of goals and the expectation that participation will meet these goals, with these perceptions being influenced by (d) life transitions, and these goals in relation to (e) opportunities and barriers, based on (f) information available, which results

in the decision to (g) continue to participate in the program of study.

To briefly clarify the components of the COR model, attitudes toward education contribute to an individual choosing to enroll in an educational program. Once the individual is enrolled, a process of self-evaluation focusing on perceived opportunities and barriers in conjunction with information contribute to the individuals' continued voluntary participation to achieve his or her educational goal (Cross, 1981). For a visual representation see Figure 2: The Chain-of-Response Model, also referred to as the COR Model (Cross, 1981, p. 124).
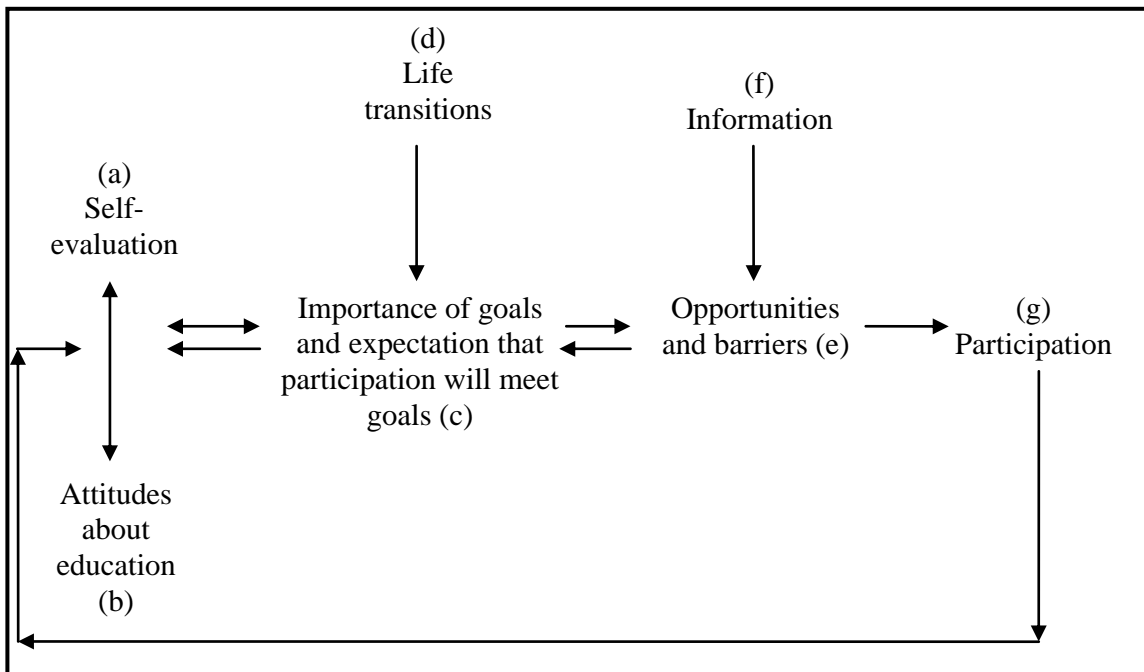
Figure 2: Chain-of-Response

The COR model has an expectancy-valence theory component where the importance of goals and the expectation that the goal will be met is reached through the

use of subjective judgment. The goal expectancy of the individual, if met, results in a high motivation to seek the desired reward. Expectancy is related to self-esteem and individuals with high self-esteem expect to be successful.

Life transitions are also taken into consideration in the COR model where an individual experiences change that calls for an adjustment. Some life changes may be dramatic, such as a loss of job or a divorce that act as a trigger for the individual to choose to enroll in an educational program. Once the individual takes action and begins an educational experience, barriers and opportunities contribute to the adults' decision to continue with the selected educational program of study. If the individual is strongly motivated, he or she will seek out information and or devise strategies to overcome barriers, while if unmotivated, the individual may fail to persist in his or her educational goal achievement. It is at the information point in the COR model that educational institutions may assist individuals through support services specifically designed to address the needs of the adult learner (Cross, 1981).

Cross (1981) included a focus on barriers to participation in educational activities. Cross's concept included three categories of barriers: situational, institutional, and dispositional. Cross emphasized the importance of not only knowing why adults participate in learning activities, but also why adults do not participate in learning activities. Cross's three classifications are derived from various research methods used to study barriers, such as asking people directly, studying what people do rather than what they say, and testing hypotheses through experimental design.

From a national study for the Commission on Nontraditional Study, Cross

presented the major findings under each category. A list of examples, ranked in order of importance by Cross addressed each of these three categorical barriers to adult learner persistence, within the following brief descriptions.

Situational barriers to adult participation in learning are barriers that come from the adult's situation in life at a given time. Some of the findings include: (a) cost, including tuition, books, and child care, (b) time, or rather lack of time to devote to the pursuit of education, (c) home responsibilities, (d) job responsibilities, (e) lack of child care, (f) no transportation, (g) no place to study or practice, and (h) discouragement from friends and or family members (Cross, 1981). The institutional category of identified barriers consists of practices and procedures that either exclude or discourage adults from participating in adult learning. Findings in this category include: (a) the adults' belief that they had to attend full-time, (b) the length of time required for program completion was perceived as a barrier, (c) inappropriate course scheduling to accommodate the adults' needs, (d) lack of information concerning program offerings, (e) strict attendance requirements, (f) unavailability of courses desired by the adult, (g) administrative enrollment process was perceived to be too difficult, (h) remedial education required before the adult could enter the program of interest, and (i) no credit allowed for experience and or currently acquired knowledge (Cross, 1981).

The third category is dispositional and relates to barriers of attitudes and self-perception about ones' self as a learner. Barriers under this category include: (a) a belief of being too old, (b) past poor academic performance leading to a lack of confidence in present academic ability, (c) lack of physical stamina, (d) dislike for studying, (e) dislike

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of attending class, (f) confusion of what to learn and or the outcomes from learning, and (g) a hesitancy in appearing too ambitious (Cross, 1981).

Of the three categories of barriers to adult learning persistence, the situational barrier is considered most important, but also the most difficult to solve from an institutional perspective. However, the second ranked barrier, labeled institutional, is directly within the institution's domain to address for possible solutions to assist students in overcoming these perceived barriers. Cross (1981) noted that even though the participants in the study did not specifically state a lack of information as being a barrier, evidence exists that adult learners do not have a clear, nor do they have a complete concept of opportunities available to them and thus indirectly identified a lack of information as a possible area for institutions to review. As the student population continues to grow in diversity, institutional barriers may become more of an issue in an attempt to retain adult learners.

Cross (1981) further suggested that dispositional barriers may be undervalued in their level of importance. Reasons given for this miss-ranking include: (a) the social desirability issue and a response bias in survey research that lowered this category's rank and (b) the method used in the data collection process which dropped a respondent from further analysis if he or she identified himself or herself as not interested in further education, thus limiting the overall analysis of the dispositional barrier data. Regardless of the type of barrier, strategies successfully used to overcome the barrier is a major determining factor in an adult deciding to continue in his or her educational program.

Using Cross's (1981) three classifications of identifying barriers, Bradshaw, Hager, Knott, and Seay (2006) found similarities with regard to the following issues: financial, academic, family related, self-confidence, and institutional administrative. Bradshaw et al. also noted unique findings with regard to: motivation, strategies for controlling costs, acceptance of an in-class atmosphere, diversity, family patterns, and study skills. Bradshaw et al.'s study focused on 32 university undergraduate women between the ages of 40 and 50 using a qualitative examination of their experience. Findings confirmed these nontraditional women experienced barriers and used coping strategies as they persisted toward their goal of achieving an undergraduate degree. One statement in this research deals with transfer agreements, which would suggest these nontraditional women transferred into the university possibly from a community college. The Bradshaw et al. study did not comment on how these participants' perceived barriers affected their educational decision-making process prior to their transfer into the university.

In summary, the Bradshaw et al. (2006) study supports the use of the Chain-of-Response (COR) framework for studying adult learner perceptions of their educational experience. Specifically, the COR model provides a connection between goal expectation, perceived barriers, and the decision to persist to achieve educational goals while allowing for the interpretative processing of external information provided by the individual.

Women's Learning Overview

The assertion can be made that gender differences in adult learning exists from

Zusman, Knox, and Lieberman's (2005) study based on gender differences in learning; for example, these scholars' make the assertion that women students achieve higher grades than male students. A possible explanation for higher grade achievement by women could be that women experience more social support as mature adults, especially in the vocational technical program areas of study (Williams, 1997), but not all agree that social support is required. For example, nontraditional women tend to have higher GPAs regardless of social support (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002).

Research specifically focused on women's learning is evident in dissertation and thesis writing. Hayes and Flannery (1997) critically reviewed dissertation and thesis research that specifically explored adult women's perspectives on learning in higher education. Therefore, these researchers used the following search descriptors: women, higher education, adult education, and learning, in multiple combinations that resulted in the selection of 16 documents consisting of dissertation and theses research. Hayes and Flannery (1997) studied these documents and these researchers identified three broad categories of key themes: personal development, marginality, and ways of knowing. These three categories are reinforced in published research that focus on adult women's learning, such as Herideen (1998) and Belenky et al. (1986).

Personal development and perceptions of marginality are seen in life experiences and are reinforced in Herideen's (1998) extensive study that documents community college life experiences of nontraditional women in Brazilian and American colleges using what the researcher calls the critical mainstreaming theory. The critical mainstreaming theory emphasizes affective, cognitive, political, and economic

dimensions of the teaching and learning process, focusing on the community colleges' curriculum development process (Herideen, 1998).

Women's Ways of Knowing

The ways of knowing category, identified by Hayes and Flannery (1997), is more focused on academic learning and this category is well established in scholarly research. Belenky et al. (1986) devised the Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) and described the process through which women have distinctive orientations to knowing and learning that differ from men. Belenky et al. conducted research with 135 women to identify how women made sense of their experience. In WWK, a woman's perspective on learning is placed within five categories: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. Each of these five categories is reviewed in more detail to establish clarification and justification for using the WWK cognitive development theory in studying the ways in which adult women make sense of their educational experiences.

In the silence category, women are described as living in a profound silence and isolation using language only minimally to refer to their own actions. These women identify the use of language as something negative and tend to doubt their own capacity to hear and understand the words that others use. The women in this silence category do not question commands of perceived authorities, instead choosing to obey commands as they are given (Belenky et al., 1986).

Women in the received knowledge category are aware of other peoples' words and are thus subjected to other peoples' standards, directions and authority. These women

do not believe they are capable of creating ideas and must rely on the words of other people for self-knowledge in regard to academic learning. Their concept of ideas is dualistic, and they are perceived as either being true or false. According to Belenky et al. these women appear to value the objective over the subjective. In the received knowledge category, women are good listeners and although they may talk they do not connect speech with giving expression to the mind, thus they tend to listen to others for directions and for information.

Subjective knowledge is described as the inner voice and women in this category tend to listen to their own internal dialogue. Women classified as belonging to the subjective knowledge category believe their experience is the only reliable source of truth, and they do not necessarily believe what others say. Occasionally these women may define truth as feelings that come from within and ideas that come from without. In this category, the women believe the traditional gender role stereotypes where women value their inner voice of feelings and men are the external authority.

Procedural knowledge is described by Belenky et al. (1986) as the voice of reason. Women at this position realize that intuitions can be wrong and that levels of truth exist. Women in this category tend to search out reason because they believe truth is not immediately accessible. Constructed knowledge is integrated voices where knowledge is constructed by the knower. Education provides a perspective of reality that is blended with the woman's internal frame of reference, resulting in the woman having insight into how knowledge is constructed. Therefore, context is included in this constructed knowledge group, whereby women listen to all voices, including their own, and

simultaneously weave any difference in thoughts together to construct new knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986).

Community College Adult Learner Characteristics

Nontraditional Learner Characteristics. With adult learners becoming more diverse, identifying a particular set of learner beliefs becomes more complex. For example, first-generation college students may possess high-ability and be high achievers, as seen in Neumeister and Rinker's (2006) research, or first-generation students may be at a distinct disadvantage of possessing even the basic knowledge concerning postsecondary education (Pascarella et al., 2004). Being classified as a first-generation student, the adult is unfamiliar with how to plan his or her academic course selection and often rely on the advising service provided by the community college (Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation college students may have dropped out of high school and never received a General Education Degree (G.E.D.), which may place them in need of remedial education prior to enrolling in a college program of study. Byrd and MacDonald (2005) indicated three major identifying categories that contribute to college readiness for first-generation students: (a) skills and abilities, (b) background factors and life experiences, and (c) the nontraditional students' self-concept.

Overall, research studies directed at the impact of college environment on students' attitudes, values, and behavior show that students tend to gain a greater tolerance to individual differences (Astin, 1993, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The increased enrollment of first-generation students comes at a time when community college systems are short on funding and enroll students with increased needs

(Pennington et al., 2006). In addition, first-generation students are less likely to persist, and little is known about their college experiences, especially in comparison to college students not classified as first-generation (Pike & Kuh, 2005); yet, rural community colleges tend to have higher enrollment of first-generation college students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). This becomes even more important because students tend to group into smaller communities comprised of individuals similar to themselves (Astin, 1998).

Student Characteristics. Often the community college offers nontraditional students a second chance at acquiring an education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Kim (2002) believes the term nontraditional is too broad to discuss the adult characteristics stating the majority of community college students fit the general definition of nontraditional. For this literature review, nontraditional is defined as being over the age of 24 (AACC, 2000). However, this definition may overlap with other descriptive characteristics associated with nontraditional students. For example, Horn and Carroll (1996) identify nine characteristics of a nontraditional student: (a) being over the age of 24, (b) delaying enrollment in postsecondary education by a year or more after high school, (c) enrolling part time, (d) being an independent student, (e) working full time while enrolled, (f) having been married, (g) having any dependents, (h) being a single parent, and (i) not having a regular high school diploma.

To further address relevant research on nontraditional students, gender was removed from the literature review search process. As a result, several important features were observed. First, nontraditional students demonstrated a more active role than traditional age students in the classroom through their open participation in class

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discussions (Howard & Baird, 2000). Second, Palazesi and Bower (2006) examined

nontraditional students' value of the importance of the community college to alter their

self-view. Third, the "navigating conditions" for nontraditional students emphasizes the

value in the ability to move away from barriers and toward enablers (Palazesi & Bower,

2006, pp. 57-58).

This ability helps explain why nontraditional students are referred to as consumers

of education, rather than students by some scholars (Howard & Baird, 2000; Palazesi &

Bower, 2006). In a research study comparing metacognitive differences between

traditional-age and nontraditional-age college students, Justice and Dornan (2001) report

that nontraditional-aged students use two higher level study strategies: (a) they generate

constructive information, and (b) they demonstrate hyperprocessing, more frequently

than traditional age students, which tend to increase comprehension and tends to increase

integration of information.

Women Characteristics. A lack of employability skills required in the current

workforce may lead nontraditional women to make the decision to reenter higher

education to gain vocational technical skills to obtain gainful employment (Brookfield,

1986; Cross, 1981; Kasworm, 2005; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006). Few studies specifically

focusing on nontraditional women in rural community colleges were located in the

scholarly literature search process. An exception is Valadez's (2000) study. Valadez

(2000) conducted a case study exploring the achievement ideology of workplace skill

attainment and identified barriers for 13 African American women at a rural Southern

community college. Valadez's study focuses on the post-industrial economy and changes

in the vocational classroom to prepare students with skills needed to obtain employment. Valadez asserts that the participants not only endured barriers while enrolled, but also were confronted with the barrier of not finding a job in the rural geographical region for which they had received training. The focus of barrier identification centered on the perception of ethnicity and Valadez does not explore whether or how these nontraditional African American women overcame their perceived educational barriers.

Although, educational institutions in the United States have a long-standing history for providing educational opportunity for men and women, it was only after the women's liberation movement that the educational program enrollment, regardless of gender, became more acceptable (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Recently, enrollment of nontraditional women almost doubles that of men (Bradshaw et al., 2006); yet, gender inequity persists in both access to learning opportunities and in the experience of obtaining education (Fenwick, 2004). Increased gender enrollment changes in higher education continue to be a prediction for the foreseeable future (Fenwick, 2004). Specifically, the current economy of this post-industrial era is predicted to change in four directions: more gender-sensitive career education; sponsored vocational education for women; management education in gender issues arising from forces in the changing economy; and critical vocational education in both school and workplace settings (Fenwick, 2004). Although Fenwick's (2004) research is focused in Canada, it is the belief of this researcher that these findings can also be applied to the United States.

Drew and Work (1998) used a pre-existing database and quantitative methods to determine that there is no significant difference in gender-based perceptions of

experiences in the higher education classroom; yet, the researchers themselves suggest further studies be conducted to see if the pattern of results hold true by institution type and or by student field of study. Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2006) also selected a quantitative approach to analyze a national sample of community college students, and these researchers found that males and females order challenges differently, followed by a suggestion that this result be used as a baseline for further research. Various qualitative approaches have already been presented in this review, such as Herideen (1998), Hayes and Flannery (1997), and Valadez (2000). Regardless of the research approach, Fenwick (2001) argues that constructivism assumes experience to be bounded and concrete, and this concept is reinforced by Padilla's (1999) statement that students need to be studied in their particular institutional setting.

Lack of Rural Research

After conducting a search of published rural research, few studies were located, supporting Howley's (2004) and Pennington's et al. (2006) claim that published rural research is thin. Two research studies relating to rural areas were located: (a) Fitzgerald and Bloodsworth's (1996) study comparing urban, suburban, and rural students in regard to learning models, and (b) Valadez's (2000) study of educational barriers of African American women. In the Fitzgerald and Bloodsworth's (1996) study, the researchers noted that rural students are restricted in the effective use of learning models, with rural students demonstrating difficulty in the adequate use of urban or suburban learning models.

The second rural research study focused on nontraditional rural community

college women in a vocational technical program who were confronted with educational

barriers (Valadez, 2000). Because this study closely resembles the current research, a

more in-depth review is warranted. After reviewing Valadez's (2000) research, two

specific factors differentiate Valadezs' study from the current study: (a) Valadez (2000)

focused on a specific female ethnicity (i.e. African American), and (b) Valadez (2000)

used Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* in conducting his case study.

Student Support Services

Educational institutions attempt to address student needs through student support

services. This is especially true of community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). For

example, support services may provide tutoring directly focused on class content, such as

tutoring for developmental mathematics or assistance with writing assignments.

However, Lau (2003) emphasizes that the student has a responsibility in putting forth an

effort to actively seek out and contribute to community groups, including those

established by the community college. With the post-industrial society and the rapid

technological changes, support service programs need to reanalyze student needs

periodically and realign their support services to be more effective in meeting student

needs (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Kasworm, 2003, 2005).

Educators are challenged to study adults in formal learning environments, since

adult learner identities tend to be extremely complex and dynamic (Kasworm, 2003,

2005; Padilla, 1999), such as, differences between age, gender, and geographical regions.

Just as rural community colleges have unique adult learner characteristics which reflect

the local geographical culture, community colleges have unique characteristics that

reflect the beliefs of their surrounding service region (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Student services designed to enhance the nontraditional adult student to be successful in persistence include: (a) orientation, (b) academic and learning assistance, (c) career counseling, (d) personal counseling, and (e) student organizations (Kasworm, Polson & Fishback, 2002).

The purpose for providing institutional service support is the same, regardless of the type of support provided, and that purpose is to assist the student with making the decision to persist in achieving his or her educational goal (Townsend & Twombly, 2001). In fact, it is stipulated that support services are a major reoccurring theme identified as a contributing factor for the nontraditional woman's choice to persist (Furst-Bowe & Dittmann, 2001; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006: Weiss, 1999). Kasworm et al. (2002) stated that support programs, delivery systems, and instructional environments will determine the persistence rate of adult students through a sense of connectivity. Lau (2003) makes the recommendation that colleges work toward providing students with a meaningful learning environment, so that these students will become connected to the institution through developing a sense of belonging. Student success is largely determined in the early stages of enrollment due to the development of attitudes and impressions formed that influence the student's decision to persist to the next semester (Townsend & Twombly, 2001). This initial impression and the decision to continue enrollment is especially relevant for nontraditional adult women in rural community colleges.

Persistence

Educational access and opportunity offered by community colleges do not ensure that adult learners will choose to continue to participate in an educational experience. Community college research conducted by Tinto (1997) focuses on social and academic integration occurring in the classroom that reveals experiences may facilitate or hinder persistence for community college students. This finding is especially true in the persistence of nontraditional students since these individuals must evaluate the possible opportunities recognized from achieving a higher level of education against their outside role obligations (Tinto, 1997; Valadez, 2000), such as taking care of a family member, tending to children, or working full-time (Tinto, 1997).

If the characteristics of the student do not closely match the characteristics of the educational institution, the student may feel isolated and experience a lack of connectivity (Shultz et al., 2001). As a result, these students may fail to enroll in the following semester (i.e. fail to persist). Connecting is one of several essential elements required in establishing a sense of community (Roberts, 1993). In addition, matching student characteristics with educational programs is a complex process, which first requires an exploration of the group of student's unique characteristics. Scholars note differing cultures account for perceptions of differential treatment in the higher education setting that may explain the difference in college persistence between certain adult groups (Suarez-Balcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Portiollo, Rowan & Andrews-Guillen, 2003). This finding reinforces the diversity selection of nontraditional women in this research.

Reasons provided by students for their persistence is a major concern for educational planners who could benefit from more information to better explain the needs of their diverse constituencies and focus program services on meeting the needs of specific groups of students (Jacobs & Hundley, 2005). Ponton et al. (2005) found support for their statement that solving problems that interfere with learning will occur only after learning is a choice activity. These researchers developed a persistence-causal path whereby anticipation of future rewards leads to prioritizing learning over non-learning, which in turn leads to making the decision to learn, followed by solving problems that interfere with the learning process (Ponton et al., 2005). Cross's (1981) COR model allows for the initial decision by the student to enroll in a program of study to be determined by enrollment status, in addition the model allows for an interactive decision-making process leading to the choice of persistence. Campus experience (Padilla, 1999) is located within the three components of Cross' COR model: (a) student expectations, (b) perceived barriers, and (c) information, which lead to the student deciding to dropout or persist (Cross, 1981; Padilla, 1999; Tinto, 1997, 1999).

Persistence is an on-going concern for all levels of education (Bers & Smith, 1991; Tinto, 1997) and especially for community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), where adult learners have to fulfill conflicting role requirements. In rural community colleges, where more nontraditional women are enrolling in vocational technical programs, and since nontraditional women formulate their educational attitude in the early stages of their educational experience, the Fall semester was selected as an opportune time to explore how nontraditional women explain their educational

experience, with a check for persistence by verification of enrollment in the following Spring semester.

To summarize the adult learning section of the relevant literature review, adults are considered to learn differently than children. Cross's (1981) Chain-of-Response model for studying the nontraditional adult education persistence pattern, along with Belenky's et al., (1986) Women's Ways of Knowing to explain perceptions of the educational experience of nontraditional women from the individual perspective is discussed. Characteristics of the nontraditional student are addressed based on first-generation status, gender, and geographical location with institutional support services established to promote student persistence. These characteristics can be studied through the individual's institutional campus experiences (Padilla, 1999).

Chapter Summary

Comprehensive community colleges have a history of changing to meet the needs of constituents in their local geographical service regions to include business, industry, and students. Current economic shifts result in legislators' support for community colleges providing vocational technical training programs specifically designed for a technologically skilled workforce. Various life transitions, for example job loss, account for more adults returning to community colleges for retraining, especially women who experience job loss. Adult learning theory is discussed in this chapter with an in-depth description of Cross' (1981) Chain-of-Response (COR) model and Belenky's et al. (1986) Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK).

This review of literature noted that rural students may have different learning needs than urban students (Fitzgerald & Bloodsworth, 1996) and the need for institutional campus experience research is supported (Padillia, 1999). It is also noted that scholarly research situated in rural geographical areas is limited (Howley, 2004). Therefore, research focusing on rural adult learners would contribute to scholarly educational research and provide a better explanation of how these adult learners interpret their educational environment (Padilla, 1999). This research is timely because of current demographic changes and the emerging post-industrial society resulting in the need for communities to realign local issues with economic change. Specifically, this study of focusing on campus experiences is relevant, since it is reasonable for campus life experiences to present educational barriers that must be overcome by the student in order for the student to persist with educational goal achievement (Padilla, 1999).

From this review of relevant literature, a qualitative study focused on rural community college nontraditional women's experience in a rural community college setting can be explained by the women themselves. The following research questions guided this study: (a) how do nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher education, (b) how do nontraditional women describe their identification of an educational barrier, (c) how do nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to overcome an educational barrier, (d) how do nontraditional women describe their experience in choosing to persist with their educational goals, and (e) how do nontraditional women describe their experience with rural community college support services in overcoming educational barriers?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain knowledge through exploring

how nontraditional women experience educational barriers from their perspectives.

Specifically, the focus was on nontraditional women enrolled in a vocational technical

program at a rural community college. Permission to conduct this research was granted

by the Institutional Review Board of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and

by Dr. Max Wingett, President of Patrick Henry Community College in Martinsville,

Virginia (see Appendix A).

This chapter focuses on the study design, research participants, the procedure for

data collection and the method of data analysis. Further, this chapter addresses the issue

of trustworthiness in this study specifically focusing on (a) credibility, (b) transferability,

(c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

Design of the Study

Qualitative research techniques, particularly the collective case study (Yin,

2003a) using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B) with the researcher

serving as the instrument, were used to carry out this research. This collective case study

is also called a multiple instrumental case study by Creswell (2002). For consistency, the

term collective case study will be used throughout this research chapter. The collective

case study design was selected because it is appropriate to "provide insight into an issue"

(Creswell, 2002, p. 485). The issue in this study is the experiences of nontraditional women majoring in a vocational technical program at a rural community college.

In a qualitative design the researcher attempts to explore in-depth from the participants themselves through interconnected themes, such as: (a) naturalistic inquiry, (b) inductive analysis, (c) holistic perspective, (d) qualitative data, (e) dynamic systems, (f) unique case orientation, (g) context sensitivity, and (h) design flexibility (Creswell, 2002, 2003). Qualitative research techniques are appropriate when published research is thin on a particular topic and thus the research study is exploratory (Creswell, 2003). The case study is appropriate when a bounded timeframe is planned for the study (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2003a). This study was limited to the Fall 2007 and the first part of the Spring 2008 semesters, supporting the selection of a case study design. Specifically, case study research focuses on one or more individuals where (a) the "case (or cases) used to illustrate the issue" are "bounded" by time, and (b) information is collected using a variety of data collection procedures (Creswell, 2002, p. 485). In addition to the individual interviews, demographic data were collected from the participants, including each participant's secure college identification number. Each secure identification number was used to triangulate and verify data provided by the corresponding participant, and to determine the participants' Spring 2008 enrollment status.

Research Participants

A purposeful snowball sampling technique was used for identifying persons to contact for possible participation in this study. Purposeful sampling was selected in order to include nontraditional women who have enrolled in a vocational technical program of

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study at a rural community college. This purposive sample allowed for participants that (a) were not currently enrolled in a course being taught by the researcher, (b) specifically selected on the basis of gender—female, (c) age—those over the age of 24, and (d) women who had declared a vocational technical major. The rationale for this type of sampling technique was employed in order to ensure an adequate number of participants. Specifically, to obtain the narrative data required to cover the issue of nontraditional women's campus experience in relation to educational barriers. Heterogeneity of nontraditional women within the sample is intended. For example, participants differ by age, ethnicity, and vocational technical program selection.

I selected fifteen participants to adequately provide a sufficient quantity of data and to permit the completion of the study during the timeframe allotted. Specific tasks included: (a) the data collection, with confirmation of demographic data provided by participants, (b) transcription of the interview data verbatim, and (c) analysis of the interview data with member checks and demographic summary analysis. Selection of the first five participants included students who met the above stated criteria and were referred from vocational technical faculty. From these five participants, the additional ten participants who also met the established criteria were identified and initial contact information was obtained. The researcher contacted each individual via a campus meeting, through the campus secure email system, or through the campus phone system. Once the prospective participant had been contacted and had agreed to an initial individual meeting with the researcher to hear the purpose of the study, an invitation to consent to participate was extended to each individual. After agreement to participate was

obtained, each participant was read the oral presentation by the researcher (see Appendix D) and then signed the consent form (see Appendix C), which was witnessed by a librarian. Participants who signed the consent form were provided contact information for: (a) the researcher, and (b) the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). The researcher explained to the participant that this contact information was provided in case the participant had questions regarding the study. The consent form also included permission to audiotape the interview sessions, with a follow up verbatim transcript of each interview to be provided for data analysis. In addition, the participants were assured verbally and in writing that their confidentiality would be maintained by the researcher. To assist with confidentiality, each participant selected a self-identified pseudonym and each participant is referred by this pseudonym on the audiotape and within the research analysis, results, and discussion sections of this document.

The participants in this study ranged in age from 25 to 57, resulting in an age range of 32 years; a mean age of 38 with a standard deviation of 9.85 years (rounded to two decimal places). Eleven participants classified themselves White; two participants as African American; two other participants stated they considered themselves of mixed descent as follows: one African American and White and the other African American and American Indian.

Three participants reported a major of administrative assisting, with two of these specifying they were majoring in legal assisting and thus they were not included in the administration of justice program. Three participants reported a major of administration of justice, with one of these individuals having a double major and being concurrently

enrolled in the nursing program. Two participants declared a major of educational assisting. One participant declared a major of business technology, specifically accounting; and seven participants stated they were majoring in nursing. The result of a total of sixteen reported declared majors is explained by one individual with a double major in administration of justice and the nursing program concurrently.

It is important to address another participant entered in the database as majoring in the nursing program who declared she had changed her major from nursing to science, but the change had not yet been entered into the educational database. This change in major now classifies this student as being enrolled in a transfer program rather than in the vocational program of study; however, because the participant's campus experience up to the semester in which the interview had been conducted was derived from the nursing program, her comments and data were included in this report. None of the participants were identified as majoring in either the general engineering or in the industrial electronic programs of study. Additionally, no information system technology major agreed to participant in the research.

Educational attainment prior to current enrollment at PHCC ranged from some high school (n=2), high school diploma (n=5), General Educational Development (G.E.D.) diploma (n=4) and another participant stating she was planning to obtain her G.E.D. soon; some college experience (n=1); one-year certificate (n=1); two-year technical or transfer (n=1); and 1 participant who declined to comment on prior education obtained. This last participant also declined to state a reason for electing not to disclose this particular information.

Of the participants interviewed, 14 of the 15 reported receiving some form of

financial aid. The use of Student Support Services (SSS) ranged from no use (n=3); 1-5

hours/week (n=3); and 6-10 hours/week (n=4). The five remaining participants stated

they used the Student Support Services but not on a regular basis. Instead these

individuals went by to speak with a counselor when and if they felt the need for advice or

reassurance. The SSS offer programs which provide academic, financial, and other

assistance, such as personal counseling, to disadvantaged students. The three participants

who reported they did not use any service proved by the SSS acknowledged they were

aware of the program offerings. One participant stated she simply did not have the time to

use the services provided by SSS.

Thirteen participants persisted in their major; one participant persisted but

changed her major from nursing to science; and one participant graduated, thus achieving

her educational goal. The summary data are presented in Table 1 with each participant

identified by a pseudonym.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Major	Level of Education	Financial Aid	Support Services	Persist
Jane	45	White	Edu. assisting	G.E.D.	Yes	6-10	Grad.
Sally	41	White	Bus tech.	H.S. Grad	Yes	0	Yes
Miranda	36	White	Adm. assisting	H.S. Grad	Yes	0	Yes
Kayli	25	White	Adm. Justice	G.E.D.	Yes	1-5	Yes
Twitty	28	*African Am. / White	Adm. assisting	2-yr degree	Yes	1-5	Yes
Corrine	44	African Am.	Nursing	Some H.S.	Yes	6-10	Yes
Dawn	25	White	Nursing	G.E.D.	Yes	1-5	Yes
Honey	25	African Am.	Adm. Justice / Nursing	H.S. Grad	Yes	1-5	Yes

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Name	Age	Ethnicity	Major	Level of Education	Financial Aid	Support Services	Persist
Cherokee	57	*African Am. / Am. Indian	Edu. assisting	**	Yes	6-10	Yes
Wilson	31	White	Adm. assisting	Some H.S. G.E.D. soon	Yes	1-5	Yes
Tara	50	White	Nursing	1-yr cert	No	1-5	Yes
Pia	46	White	Nursing	Some college	Yes	1-5	Yes
Rita	39	White	Nursing / Science	G.E.D.	Yes	1-5	Major
Jo-Real	35	White	Nursing	H.S. Grad	Yes	0	Yes
Harley	43	White	Adm. assisting	H.S. Grad	Yes	6-10	Yes

* Mixed ethnicity
** Declined to report prior education

One student failed to enroll in the Spring 2008 semester by the end of the last add day. When this individual was contacted to find out why she had not enrolled, she informed the researcher that she had reached her educational goal. She stated that at the time of the interview she was unsure whether she would pass her Fall 2007 coursework successfully and therefore did not know for certain whether she would be graduating in December. This participant was kept in the study because the operational definition of persistence includes achieving the educational goal, and graduation is considered as the end result of persistence.

Another participant was confirmed to be enrolled in the Nursing program, however, during her personal interview she revealed to the researcher that she had changed her major to Science, but the paperwork had not yet cleared the admission office so it did not show in her official academic record. I decided to keep this individual in the study because this participants' contribution during the interview session reflected her educational experience from the vocational program of study perspective as she relayed

her experience in the Nursing program and had not experienced more than two months in the Science program, at the time the interview was conducted.

Research Site

Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC), a rural community college located in South Central Virginia, was selected for the site location at which to conduct this research. As an employee of PHCC at the time this research was conducted, the researcher had access to premises and participants. Permission to conduct research at PHCC was obtained from the President of the College (see Appendix A) and the Internal Review Board of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

PHCC is one of twenty-three community colleges in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). PHCC is geographically located in south central Virginia, near the North Carolina border. This college serves the City of Martinsville, and the surrounding counties of Henry, Patrick, and Franklin. PHCC meets the definition of a rural community college based on the following criteria, the college is: (a) publicly supported, (b) located in a geographical region of less than 100,000 people, and (b) serves a vast geographic area by offering a comprehensive program of study.

The vocational technical department at PHCC includes programs of study which can be classified in one of the following fields, listed alphabetically: (a) administrative assisting, (b) administration of justice, (c) business technology, (d) education assisting, (e) general engineering technologies, (f) health technology, (g) industrial electronics technology, and (h) information systems technology. Each of these main vocational technical programs may contain one or more specializations; however, degrees of less

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than two years of study, which include certificates, are excluded from this list and from this research.

Procedures for Data Collection

Since the researcher is the primary instrument in conducting this study, it is important to address some background information concerning the researcher's experience. I have conducted semi-structured interviews previously under the guidance of faculty at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and also in educational practice to contribute to work-related data gathering and analysis, and therefore I have experience in such methods of data collection. I currently also serve on the PHCC Assessment and Evaluation Committee, which is a four-year appointment assigned by the PHCC President.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol to help guide the interview process (see Appendix B). Individuals were selected based on the criteria stated above, from the Fall 2007 semester at Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC). Any individual identified as being enrolled in a course taught by the researcher was excluded from being contacted to participate in the study, due to a possible conflict of interest. Five individuals who met the above criteria were recommended by vocational technical faculty and contact was made with these five individuals through their secure VCCS email system accounts. Each of these five women recommended other women to participate in the study. After verification that these additional women also met the acceptable criteria stated above, they were contacted and extended an invitation to participate in this research study.

Each individual was scheduled a private interview appointment in the campus library meeting room. Each participant was given a twenty dollar monetary compensation for her time required to participate in the interview process. Prior to starting the audio recorder, the researcher requested the participant to self-select a pseudonym, which was used throughout the study. A code sheet linking the participant to her self-selected pseudonym was kept as a guide to assist with the data analysis and database triangulation verifying demographic data and enrollment status. Demographic background was gathered from the participant at the time of the interview (see Appendix E) and the participant was requested to provide her unique student identification number to be used in the follow up confirmation of enrollment and status of educational major for the Spring 2008 semester. Each participant was given the option to decline providing her unique identification. No participant refused nor hesitated in providing her identification number to the researcher. The unique identification was kept separate from the demographic information sheet and all audio recordings and paper documents were stored off campus in a locked file cabinet at the private residence of the researcher. These documents will be kept for three years after the conclusion of this research then destroyed via electronic erasure for the audio recording and shredding of the paper documents.

The researcher audio recorded the interview sessions which followed the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). Interviews ranged from approximately forty minutes to a little over ninety minutes in length. At the conclusion of the audio-recorded interview session the participant was provided with the researchers' contact information in case the participant should think of something to add, or if she wanted

more clarification concerning the research study itself. After the interview had concluded and the participant had left, the researcher logged first impressions and thoughts in field notes. After obtaining signed confidentiality agreements from two transcriptionists, the audio recorded interview sessions were separated and given to the transcriptionists to be transcribed verbatim with the self-selected pseudonym identifying each participant. The transcriptionists did not keep or make copies of the recordings. The transcriptionists provided the researcher with all printed and all electronic copies of the transcribed audio recordings. These transcripts, in conjunction with the demographic data sheets, were used in the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Information gathered through the interviews is analyzed both interpretively and inductively as recommended by Creswell (2002, 2003). The naturalistic inquiry research paradigm uses inductive analysis, identifying patterns, themes, and categories that are derived from the data and which have emerged out of the data (Creswell, 2002, 2003). A thorough reading and rereading of the interviews transcribed verbatim were conducted by the researcher. A coding process described by Creswell (2003) was used to organize and present the data gathered from the interviews: from text data, segmenting sentences and paragraphs into categories and labeling categories with a term, where the term was derived from the language of the participants. This segmented data was then analyzed and compared against the five classifications of Women's Ways of Knowing and the three classifications of the Chain-of-Response (COR) model of student perceived barriers. Qualitative inquiry requires that data analysis be dynamic since it is a process that

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evolves from the data collected. Therefore, the transcriptions and field notes were used to identify common themes using the constant comparative method of coding as an integral part of the data analysis process.

Participant demographic descriptions provided for a more complete and thorough analysis of the data as well as to document the heterogeneity of the participants. Descriptive participant demographic information is organized in table format and presented in the results section along with the interview results. This demographic information includes a breakdown of: (a) age categories, (b) ethnicity, (c) vocational technical major, (d) education level and first-generation status, (e) the use and level of student support services, and (f) whether the participant persisted by enrolling in the Spring 2008 semester and remained in her selected major.

Trustworthiness

To discuss trustworthiness of this research the following conventional areas of concern are addressed: (a) internal validity or truth value, (b) external validity or applicability, (c) reliability or consistency, and (d) objectivity or neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of these criteria are considered important for establishing trustworthiness of a research project and are therefore discussed as each component relates to a naturalistic inquiry. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the naturalist view of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are equivalent means for addressing the corresponding terminology of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. To establish criteria for soundness or trustworthiness for this naturalistic research, each of these criteria are discussed below.

Credibility

In this study, the researcher is considered to be the instrument used in collecting the data. Therefore, to assist with establishing credibility the researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). In addition, the researcher audio recorded the interviews and the recordings were transcribed verbatim by two transcriptionists who provided both printed and electronic copies to the researcher for subsequent data analysis. From the data analysis, themes were constructed using the participants' own language and subsequently reviewed by five of the participants who checked the themes for: (a) accuracy in content, and (b) accuracy in interpretation. This member checking process was carried out to ensure the researchers' interpretations were credible and confirmable. These five participants were given the opportunity to clarify the researcher's summarized themes and interpretations, as well as to provide feedback.

The process of member checking can be either formal or informal and can occur continuously; therefore, the researcher submitted a summary of themes via the secure VCCS email system and received each participant response in writing through the secure VCCS email system. This method of using member checks to validate constructions from the data analysis process is approved by educational researchers in order to establish credibility (Creswell, 2002, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was selected because this method is considered the most crucial of the techniques for establishing credibility and because the establishment of credibility also assists with the establishment of dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

To establish transferability, the researcher employed a purposeful sampling technique targeting rural community college nontraditional women participating in a vocational technical program area of study. In addition, thick descriptions from the interview sessions and results from the constant-comparative method of the data analysis are provided in the following chapter of this document. The inclusion of the participants' thick descriptions will allow the reader to evaluate and make transferability judgments as stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Dependability

The issue of establishing dependability for this research is partially addressed through establishing credibility through member checks, as stated above. To reinforce the issue of dependability the investigator used a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B), and verbatim transcripts for data analysis. The investigator used the constant-comparative method to identify themes with a focus on the inclusion of all participant voices in the results followed by conducting the five member checks. In addition, the demographic data provided by the participants were triangulated through the secure campus database using the participants' unique identification number, and subsequently followed up with a check for Spring 2008 enrollment status. The campus database verification for enrollment was performed after the last day to add classes for the Spring semester, (i.e. January 14th, 2008) to ensure the inclusion of a possible late enrollment by a participant. The researcher conducted a follow up of one participant who failed to enroll in the Spring 2008 semester and also a follow up of another participant

who failed to remain enrolled in her selected vocational major. The follow-up results are presented in the next chapter.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability for this study, the interview audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the constant-comparative method of data reconstruction. The researcher used the constant-comparative method of data reconstruction by using the language of the participants to develop themes which were then verified through the process of member checking. The demographic data sheet was checked and compared with the educational database to confirm reported data for triangulation, and to confirm enrollment and declaration of major for the Spring 2008 semester. Themes can be confirmed with participant email correspondence and demographic analytical notes taken by the researcher.

Chapter Summary

This chapter indicates the methods used in conducting this qualitative collective case study to explore the issue of how nontraditional women perceive and overcome educational barriers in a rural community college. This study is bounded by: (a) time, to the last part of Fall 2007 and the first part of Spring 2008 semesters, (b) individuals, nontraditional women in vocational technical majors, and (c) place, to a rural community college (PHCC). Fifteen participants were purposefully selected for the study.

To establish trustworthiness of this research, and thus to establish confidence in the truth of the findings, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed. The constant-comparative method of data analysis is used to identify

themes using the language of the participants with five of the participants selected to

conduct member checks for accuracy in content. Consistency was addressed through

member checks and throughout the research process. Objectivity was a major focus of the

researcher while conducting the personal interviews and in reporting the findings from

the data analysis. Meticulous processing of the data assists in the process of establishing a

sense of trustworthiness for this study.

In establishing applicability the results are addressed based on Yins' (2003b) uses

for case study research. For example, this study was directed toward adding to the body

of literature concerning rural community college nontraditional women and the

exploration of their experiences in overcoming perceived educational barriers.

Classification of the participants in the five categories of Women's Ways of Knowing

and identification of perceived educational barriers based on the three categories of the

Chain-of-Response model for persistence are supported through thick descriptions in the

results section of this document.

The general purpose of exploring rural community college nontraditional

women's experiences in overcoming educational barriers were approached through

conducting a semi-structured interview from the participants themselves and performing

an educational database search for confirmation of reported demographic data and

enrollment status. The specific research questions for this study include: (a) how do

nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher education, (b) how

do nontraditional women describe their identification of an educational barrier, (c) how

do nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to overcome an

educational barrier, (d) how do nontraditional women describe their experience in

choosing to persist with their educational goals, and (e) how do nontraditional women

describe their experience with rural community college support services in overcoming

educational barriers? Results addressing these research questions are presented in the

following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report data obtained during the research

interviews. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain knowledge about the

educational experiences and persistence of non-traditional women participating in a

vocational technical program of study in a rural community college. The demographic

data was analyzed first to check for compliance to the stated participant research focus.

The data was then analyzed by separating into classification groupings. The data was

analyzed in relation to the research questions. I concluded the data analysis with

identification of emerging themes and patterns to address recommendations for practice

and future research.

Specifically, the first section of this chapter describes demographic and

characteristics of the research participants. The second section presents classification of

each participant into one of the five categories of Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK),

in addition to the three categories of barrier identification based on the Chain-of-

Response (COR) model. In the third section responses to the research questions obtained

from the interviews are presented with quotes from the actual participant transcripts. The

fourth section of this chapter presents emerging themes from the results of interview

questions regarding participants: (a) recommendation to another nontraditional female

planning to reenter college, (b) recommendation for the use of Student Support Services,

and (c) comparison of the rural community college to other familiar institutions of higher education.

Participant Classification

Classification of the participants in the Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) and the Chain-of-Response (COR) model, assisted with the exploration of the results of this research. When the data consists of adult descriptions of perceived barriers, it is helpful if the participant is viewed from a known perspective, such as the Women's Ways of Knowing. This classification process may also assist the researcher in reaching a deeper understanding of the data. Classifications included all five categories of Women's Ways of Knowing and all three categories of educational barriers from the Chain-of-Response model; however, predominant classifications emerged. One participant was classified as silent; received knowing (n=2); subjective knowing (n=8), with the eighth participant reporting overlapping characteristics of both subjective and procedural characteristics; procedural knowing (n=3); and one participant was identified as demonstrating characteristics from the constructed knowing category.

For the three educational barriers I classified: situational barriers (n=15), dispositional barriers (n=8), institutional barriers (n=2), and all three barriers (n=2). All 15 participants commented on situational barriers. The participant distribution of these WWK and COR barrier classifications is presented along with the participants' first-generation student status. Ten participants, representing two-thirds of those interviewed, reported they were first-generation students. The following table summarizes the participant identified by a pseudonym.

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Table 2
Participant Classification

Name	Classification		First-generation
	WWK	COR	
Wilson	Silent	Situational Dispositional	Yes
Sally	Received	Situational	Yes
Miranda	Received	Situational Dispositional	Yes
Jane	Subjective	Situational Dispositional	No
Twitty	Subjective	Situational Dispositional Institutional	No
Dawn	Subjective	Situational Institutional	No
Cherokee	Subjective	Situational Dispositional	Yes
Tara	Subjective	Situational Dispositional	Yes
Pia	Subjective	Situational	Yes
Harley	Subjective	Situational	Yes
Rita	Subjective	Situational	Yes
Kayli	Procedural (Separate)	Situational	No
Corrine	Procedural (Separate)	Situational Dispositional	Yes
Jo-Real	Procedural (Separate)	Situational	No
Honey	Constructed	Situational	Yes

Silent. In the Silent category of WWK, Belenky et al. (1986) described a woman in this category as in a state of denial of self with dependence on the authority of others. Characteristics of this category include: (a) feelings of being 'deaf and dumb', (b) experiencing disconnection, (c) obeying the 'wordless' authorities, (d) maintaining the woman's place, and (e) conceiving the self as being seen but never heard (Belenky et al.,1986, p. 26). One individual, Wilson, was classified in the Silent category of WWK. One of her initial statements prior to the oral presentation and consent form signature was that "if big words were used" she would "not be able to understand anything." This statement was made by Wilson, and was placed in the field note entry at the time of her interview. During the interview session, Wilson, a 31 year old first-generation

Administrative Assistant major, did not use language that connected with a learning

focus; but, rather she expressed her interest in having fun and letting the Student Support

Services personnel, her two mentors, and her advisor deal with barriers or problems that

affect her choice to persist with her educational goals. Specifically, Wilson made the

statement, "they'll [SSS] actually let you have fun time instead of, you know, just

constantly books in the head." In addition, when she was asked how she would deal with

overcoming an educational barrier, Wilson said,

> I wouldn't throw a fit or anything . . . I'd just take it as their opinion and
> go to somebody else for theirs . . . I haven't had a bad experience yet and
> everything's been fine so far so everything is, you know, going to
> schedule . . . and I still got more semesters I have to go so I'm looking
> forward to the semesters but I hope nothing goes wrong.

When Wilson was asked to describe how she remained motivated to succeed she

stated, to "get a job and then help my husband out with all the bills and stuff plus you

know, tend to the kids." This statement may indicate that Wilson is limiting her focus to

the actual, to the concrete, to the specific, which are characteristics of the silent category

of WWK (Belenky et al., 1986). The WWK silent classification portrays women who

have relatively underdeveloped representational thought; the ways of knowing available

to them are limited to the present (Belenky et al., 1986). When Wilson was asked what

support services she had used, she stated,

> SmartThinking, I've used SmartThinking and then I brought my paper up to the
> Writing Center and they readjusted, you know, not readjusted but fixed the
> problems that I had after I've used SmartThinking and ah which that helped me a
> lot and um as far as other support services, I'm in Student Support Services, so

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that's –that's pretty good too and I like how they do the fun things.

Wilson seems unsure of her word choice and does not report a clear understanding of the SSS, other than being "in it." In identifying and classifying educational barriers, Wilson states she had to wait for all three of her children to attend school full-time before she could return to school herself (situational) and that she was "scared to death that . . . she was not going to understand [the material covered in the class content]" (dispositional). As Belenky et al., (1986) stated, it is typical for silent women to take on the traditional responsibility of caring for the children and to express feelings of fear or lack of understanding of words.

Received Knowledge. As previously stated in chapter two, the review of literature in the adult learning section, the received knowledge category of WWK describes women who "listen as a way of knowing" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 46). Two participants were classified in the category of Received Knowledge: Sally a 41 year old first-generation Business Technology major, and Miranda, a 36 year old first-generation Administrative Assistant major. Both Sally and Miranda voiced a perspective of listening to other people for truth and not obtaining truth from their own experiences (Belenky et al, 1986). Sally repeats what she has heard from her parents, rather than stating her own position. Sally states,

> I look at it like this, my nanna always told me you can do anything. . . and
> . . . my daddy always said don't ever let anybody tell you you cannot do it.
> . . and . . . some of the teachers need to learn to take over the class . . .

Belenky et at., (1986) stated that received knowers express a belief that truth comes from authorities and the higher the authority position the more true the statements that emanate from that source. It is therefore understandable that Sally would want the teacher, the authority figure, to 'take over' the classroom. Sally repeated several times that she wanted the teacher to "take over the class" and "not let them [younger students] over rule her [the teacher]." Sally also indicated that she trusted authorities, when she said a person in the financial aid office advised her that someone else (at another educational institution) had attempted to fill out a request for her to receive a loan. Sally had visited another educational institution, but she reported that she did not enroll. Sally stated, "I would have never dreamed of anything going on like that." As Belenky et al. (1986) state received knowers "think of authorities . . . as sources of truth" (p. 39).

Sally identified strictly financial barriers (situational) and stated that financial aid should provide only financial assistance that does not require a loan to the extent that students would not have to pay back any money (i.e. free education). However, another statement by Sally questioned whether financial situations are perceived as a barrier because Sally stated "she was not sure about barriers" and that she "tunes them [barriers] out." These statements seem to suggest that Sally is searching outside of herself for knowledge which she then repeats, yet she has not progressed to the point of hearing her own inner voice. This would explain Sally's difficulty in identifying an educational barrier.

Miranda, a 36 year old first-generation student, chooses to listen to other students who told her she was having difficulty with her computer class because it was the

teacher. These fellow students said the teacher had a reputation for being really hard on students so Miranda said it must be true, ". . . 'cause I haven't had a problem 'til this semester . . .;" however, later in the interview when Miranda was asked about the services of SSS, she stated, "I haven't had any problems, I mean, if you have problems, that's when you use it [SSS], I guess." Miranda states,

> . . . it's hard for me to get it [computer concepts] . . . computer class is just really got me messed up. I mean, I was shaking the other day because it was just something I couldn't get and I just done got aggravated with the class. It's been hard.

Miranda specifically identified situational barriers of (a) working 20 hours a week, (b) taking care of her three sons by herself, and (c) having to sacrifice meals for time to attend school. Miranda also referred to dispositional barriers, specifically related to technology and computers, when she stated

> computer class . . . I think the problem is because, well most of them [classmates] are younger people and they grow up in computers and when I took typing in high school, it was on a typewriter, it wasn't, we didn't have computers so it's just harder for me to get . . . I didn't grow up around them and I really don't care a whole lot for 'em myself.

Miranda associates the class content with the teacher, in dualistic terms. For example, when Miranda talks about her law class she said,

> . . . most of my law classes are taught by the same teacher and he is about the best teacher I've ever had anywhere. I mean he's really good and you know who I'm talking about, I guess, I should say his name but he's a really good teacher and I've really enjoyed his class a lot.

It is conceivable that Miranda, a received knower is not prepared for the hands-on computer class, yet enjoys lecture-based classes. Even though Miranda seems to be further along in the WWK than Sally, Miranda still accepts the opinions of others as a way of knowing. This would suggest that Miranda has not yet accepted her own ability to learn and know truth from her internal voice.

Subjective Knowledge. In the subjective knowledge category of WWK, the female recognizes she has an inner voice and she is searching for her own identity (Belenky et al., 1986). As Belenky et al., (1986) state, "[t]ruth now resides within the person and can negate answers that the outside world supplies" (p. 54). The majority of the participants were classified in the category of Subjective Knowers. Eight women were classified in this category and one of these women demonstrated both Subjective and Procedural characteristics (the next category in the progression of women's ways of knowing). The seven participants consisted of Cherokee, Jane, Twitty, Dawn, Tara, Pia, and Harley, with Rita being the eighth woman who demonstrates characteristics of both Subjective and Procedural ways of knowing.

Cherokee, a 57 year old non-first-generation Educational Assisting major reported "searching for information on bulletin boards" and states she "didn't listen" to her husband's advice to take math first but instead listened to herself because she knew once she got far enough into her studies she would be successful [in the math as well]. When Cherokee was asked how she remained motivated to succeed, she states,

> I've made up my mind to come to school and really the job situation here is not
> that good so I needed some further education and I've always wanted to be a

teacher and to teach elementary school. So I have kept those things in like the front of my mind so whenever I may run into something I don't understand I always try to focus on my goal that I've set . . . it's just me deciding within myself that I am going to do this.

Cherokee added, ". . . you just have to motivate your own self because sometime when there is nobody else to motivate you, you just have to motivate yourself." Cherokee is listening to her inner voice and is relying on her experience for what "feels right" to her. Listening to her inner voice, Cherokee relies on her experience, and going with intuition or what feels right to make decisions to succeed, which are characteristics of Subjective Knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). Overall, Cherokee reported being comfortable with herself and perceived her age as assisting her with this self perception. As Cherokee states,

> I became comfortable within my own self. I am just comfortable in who I am. You know it may have been there all the time and I just hadn't tapped it or I just didn't need to use it but now at this stage in my life it [has] just kind of grown with me.

Cherokee identified situational barriers, specifically family and financial barriers. Situational barriers are barriers presently identified in context with the individual's life situation. Cherokee described her perspective on her life situation as follows:

> [h]aving a family you have to kind of put their needs in with your needs and almost to a certain extent you almost lose yourself in trying to get them settled before you can go on and do the things that you want to do and it's been a struggle just keeping gas in the car.

Dispositional barriers are a self perception of abilities. Cherokee has a self concept of being capable of acquiring the educational knowledge if she puts forth the necessary effort. The dispositional barrier is perceived by Cherokee in a unique manner, as she stated,

> Smartness don't have nothing to do with it. . . I just don't consider myself a smarty. It is just that I make up my mind to do something . . . like they say, 'put my hand to the plow' of doing it, I will figure out this is what I'm going to do and I study and think on it because once I start I'm not stopping until I finish regardless of how long it might take.

Jane, a 45 year old non-first-generation Educational Assisting major made the statement, ". . . it's not really been school, it's been therapy." Throughout her interview, Jane laughed often and stated she thinks there is a "right way" of doing things while she also stated that she avoids confrontation and intimidation whenever possible. Since Jane considers there to be a "right way" of doing things and since she views school as a form of therapy (personal perspective), Jane is not just receiving truth from an outside source, but also on a personal level.

For women entering into subjective knowing, "truth is grounded in the firsthand experience of others most like themselves" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 60) and since Jane avoids confrontation and intimidation, it would appear that Jane is looking for social contact from individuals who 'think' like her. When Jane relays her experience with an algebra class, it seems that Jane believes her and her teacher think alike,

> . . . algebra was a big obstacle and I went to the math lab and they were very good there and very helpful. My teacher was really helpful too and I just [took] it step-by-step and I tried not to get overwhelmed. I get test anxiety so that was hard to

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deal with (laughter), but my teacher told me if you need to get up [and] leave the room for a second and get a drink of water and come back it's okay, and I took her advice and I did well in the class.

Jane's barriers consist more of an emphasis on dispositional barriers, such as self doubt and self questioning related to her ability to learn at her age, followed by a brief mention of financial constraints (situational). For example, Jane states "[w]hen I was laid off from work I was very excited to come back to school, but when I started to think about it, I tried to worm my way out of it [reentry to college]."

Twitty, a 28 year old non-first-generation Administrative Assistant major, made the comment that she, "like[s] to prove people wrong" and that educational achievement is all about "having several backup plans." These statements from Twitty can be associated with the transition from "silence to a protesting inner voice" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 54). Twitty also compared her college experience with her high school experience,

> I look back now, we just had our ten year high school reunion a couple months ago and I'm like 'man' when I first came to school, it was a joke. You know, I did what I had to do but I wasn't really that serious about it. Yeah I got 'As' and 'Bs' but now I'm more serious about my school and I actually read the chapters and do what I'm supposed to do.

As her self-identified barriers Twitty mentioned time (situational) and stated she "like[s] to procrastinate a lot" (dispositional). Twitty also discussed her physical barrier:

> . . . [m]aking sure I can get my chair through the doors and on the elevator and now that we're doing all these renovations, the campus is not as accessible as it really needs to be . . . the disable [disability] van needs to

come back on campus . . .

As Belenky et al., (1986) indicate, "[a]lthough they have not yet realized the power of their own minds and are reluctant to generalize from their experience to advise others, they begin to feel that they can rely on their experience and what 'feels right' to them as an important asset in making decisions for themselves" (p. 61).

Dawn, a 25 year old non-first-generation Nursing student reports that she "violated all the rules [college entrance]" and her decision to return to college was "done in one day" because she "got mad" at her supervisors at work. Dawn wants to "flee, get away, move" so that she and her children "can't be found." Dawn described her abusive relationship with her boyfriend and stated, "when he [boyfriend] has a bad day, I really just try not to say too much of nothing." Although this comment first seems to place Dawn in the WWK category of silence, further comments reveal that she is making a choice to remain silent while in the relationship and she reveals her plan to leave the abusive relationship as soon as she completes her program of study. Belenky et al. (1986) state the decision to move back to a previous Women's Ways of Knowing category is common practice.

Additionally, many subjective knowers "had parents or husbands who belittled them or squelched their curiosity or chastised them for questioning" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 57). The statement Dawn made concerning her anger toward her supervisors at work, which resulted in her violating all the rules and returning to college, would seem to support the subjective knowing characteristic of listening to her own "inner voice"

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(Belenky et al., 1986, p. 51). When Dawn was asked to talk about her personal

challenges, she states,

> I guess just going without sleep (laughter), 'cause I put all my kids to bed and
> then I'm up 'til two and three in the morning studying not knowing how much
> I'm retaining and it . . . it's just floating around somewhere. [Then] getting here
> on time, being able to make good grades, thankfully I still am making 'As'; I
> don't know how much longer that's gonna last.

As the interview was concluding, and Dawn was asked if there was anything she

wanted to add, she states,

> I probably will, later tonight. I do that when I . . . when I'm sitting there studying
> (laughter) trying to concentrate, something'll enter my mind and I'll . . . I'll just
> sit there like, 'where'd that come from?' and I have to write it down so I can
> remember it later.

Dawn believes the financial restrictions of not being allowed to work while in the

nursing program, along with the time constraints of providing childcare and dealing with

family circumstances (her mother attempted suicide and her brother is serving in the U.S.

military in Iraq), prevent her from having time to commit to her studies and force her to

remain in an abusive relationship, which she states "my teachers have been really good to

talk to as well as I know they have counseling services." Belenky et al., (1986) state, to a

subjective knower it does not seem that parents nor society "support risk taking in

women" (p. 65).

Time constraints are repeated throughout the interview with Dawn. When Dawn

was asked about her use of the Student Support Services, she states,

I know that I'm eligible but I haven't applied for it and that again is because of my time constraint, I just can't find time to fill out the paperwork. I know that sounds horrible but (laughter), I just don't have any time.

Dawn identified an institutional barrier, specifically related to her nursing major: the nursing program does not offer program classes through the summer session, thus delaying her from achieving her educational goal.

Tara, a 50 year old first-generation Nursing student perceived herself from a contrasting perspective with "men" and "youngsters" and attributed this to possibly being just the predominant belief of her family. For example, Tara stated,

> . . . [i]t's always on women to provide childcare, men [are] just sort of there . . . I am a caregiver . . . it seems like women in general, it always falls on them. Any problem, any health problem or even money problems it seems like it always comes back on women in my family any way. . . and . . . the only negativity I hear is from youngsters.

This description provided by Tara would seem to reveal that she may be in the transition stage to subjective knowing, since she admits the acceptance of a woman's role may be different in other families because youngsters are voicing their negativity concerning the traditional woman's role. By these statements, Tara is questioning this "woman's role," while indicating some anger at her family situation. When Tara was asked how she remained motivated to succeed, she states,

> I suppose that maturity has a lot to do with it. I think where as being younger [students] don't have the same ethic and also it is a generational thing to being born when I was born. . .I don't see how these youngsters miss classes and try to keep up. I don't understand it. I have to be there. It's just the way it is.

Classification of barriers for Tara included lack of financial support (situational) and "trying to get up to speed" with the technology and the use of computers (dispositional). Tara states, "[i]f I think I am going to get or have problems I immediately seek help."

Pia, a 46 year old first-generation Nursing student, used her own perception to "make sense" of a complex world environment and said that what seemed to make sense to her "don't work for nobody [else]" while laughing at her own comment. Pia revealed underlying perceptions in several of her statements. For example, when she was describing how she dealt with a financial aid officer when an error had occurred in her financial aid process, she stated that she went

> . . . back and forth and arguing with 'em. I says I can understand if you made the mistake but it should not have taken you a month and a half to find that mistake . . . it shouldn't have if you're on top of it like you're supposed to be . . . they [financial aid personnel] didn't particularly like my look at things but I was polite about it (laughter).

From this statement it seems Pia is capable of expressing her own opinions while also accepting that multiple truths can occur. This same perception, which can be seen as bordering on anger, is also directed toward other students when Pia states,

> I have run 'cross a few students that kind of act like they're better than anybody else . . . I'm sorry but you're no better than I am . . . you may learn easier out of a book . . . you may have the time to sit down and study . . . in my case, I don't.

From listening to her own voice, acknowledging the existence of multiple truths, and being able to express anger at perceived mistreatment, Pia

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demonstrates that she has entered the subjective way of knowing. In addition, Pia

can rely on her experience and "what feels right" as an important asset in making

decisions for herself (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 61). Pia states,

> If you've got barriers there, try to work around 'em as much as you can
> and if you got family support, it's great. If you don't and they keep trying
> to put you down, ignore 'em and seek whatever services, or whatever help
> you can to do it even if you can only do a few classes at a time. If you
> have to do it whether on-line, night classes, whatever, go for it, because
> the more education you have, the better off you are, job wise, personal
> wise, educational wise . . .

Pia revealed situational barriers including her multiple role obligations,

"tending to a home," "working full-time," caring for her husband who was "very

ill," along with providing care for her young children and an older child who was

disabled, while also attempting to take care of herself and keep reliable

transportation to "make all of the doctor visits." Pia arrived forty-five minutes late

for her scheduled interview due to a "medical emergency" and she appeared

exhausted. Pia is classified in the subjective category because she relies on her

own experience and what feels right to her as described by Belenky et al., (1986).

As her pseudonym suggests, Harley, a 43 year old first-generation Administrative

Assisting major, has no reservation when expressing her personal affiliation with

motorcycles and even shared with the interviewer her pride in obtaining her motorcycle

license. Instantly I was reminded of the story of Inez who ". . . saved her money to buy a

motorcycle to prove to all that she could learn by herself and for herself" (Belenky et al.,

1986, p. 52). Likewise, it would seem that Harley's actions can be interpreted as her

possessing a sense of self confidence and defiance toward the more acceptable roles of a woman's place (Belenky et al., 1986).

Harley, perceived authority figures as having certain responsibilities especially in the classroom. She compared her age with younger students in relation to education, as follows:

> [t]his semester has been a little more stressful with the new ones coming in, the younger generation coming in mixing with the classes. That's been a little bit rough because they are a little bit disruptive. The ones [students] that's here to learn, they seem to be treated worse than the ones that are just here to be here. . . trying to do our work and with the disruptiveness of the other younger generation you just want to pull your hair out. . . the teachers have to take control . . .

When asked about how she overcame problems, Harley listens to her inner voice, while accepting different views concerning instructor feedback,

> . . . being up front with my instructor. If I thought that something was wrong I would confront them with it. . . and I just try to find the good in all of it. I know it is critical—criticism. They [instructors] have to tell me what I did wrong and stuff, so I try to turn it into the positive end, . . . but if I think I'm right I'm gonna tell 'em that I think I'm right.

In addition, Harley would advise another adult woman who is planning on returning to the college classroom to

> . . . get your patience up before you go in . . . you got to have patience or you are not going to make it . . . do it because you want to do it, not because someone else is telling you to.

In reference to barriers, Harley states she is "handicapped" (situational), but she wants to express her independence, even to her physical limitations, and does this by saying ". . . 'cause where I have lupus and cancer I hurt" but ". . . I don't use it as a handicap . . . I don't try to anyway." Harley is conveying the message that "truth is personal and private" a characteristic of subjective knowing according to Belenky et al., (1986, p. 74).

Rita, a 39 year old first-generation student, officially in the Nursing program stated she has now changed her major to Science, because of a disagreement with the Nursing instructors. Specifically, Rita reported,

> I wouldn't back down and they [nursing instructors] don't like people to challenge them and I am very much strong on will and strong minded and was not gonna let somebody mess me over on a grade.

Rita has a specific gender perspective in relation to geographical standards, when she stated ". . . women face a lot more challenges because of the role that is expected of them." Rita continued,

> [s]outhern women are raised to believe that their place is in the home as the wife and the mother and the caregiver. You can still be a wife a mother, a caregiver and still have success in the job field. I think sometimes though women instructors have a little bit more empathy for women and what they have to do in their lives with children and work and house than the men [instructors] do.

This depiction of gender comparison may indicate Ritas' view of "failed male authority" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 57). When asked about how she dealt with problems,

Rita reveals she is relying on her own experience and "what feels right" to her (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 61). Rita states,

> . . . the first time I came here, the problem was actually with instructors judging you and not known you . . . on top of that the grades were fine, the GPA was great, the work was done just like it was supposed to [be], but they had this perception that you was to fit in this certain mold and if you did not look like what they thought you should look like or dress like they thought that you should . . . you're condemned . . .

Rita still has some remnants of dichotomous and absolutist thinking in her assumptions about truth which Belenky et al. (1986) classify as subjective knowing. For example, Rita believes, "there should not be any exceptions for no one." Yet, later in the interview Rita states, instructors should get

> . . . to know someone before you judge them or . . . try to find out what's going on with that person . . . if something [is] interfering with their class or whatever. If they seem like they got a little bit of an attitude, maybe there's a reason behind it and maybe just being able to talk to someone about it might disperse what's going on 'cause . . . everybody's got things going on in their life and nobody knows what's going on with the other one unless you ask.

Clearly, Rita is expressing a "personal, private, and subjectively knowing or intuited" perspective (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 54). Rita is confronted specifically with situational barriers and reported working three jobs, serving as a caregiver, trying to work and pay bills and go to school and take care of the kids by going home and cooking and cleaning all without a [family] support system. Belenky et al., (1986) state subjective knowers "ultimately come to disregard the knowledge and advice of remote experts" and "insist on the value of personal, firsthand experience" (p. 68). This is revealed in Rita's

own words, ". . . you do what it is that you have to do, there's just no [other] options . . . if you want to succeed then you just keep on pushing as hard as you can possibly push until you figure it out."

Rita recognized that things are not always as they seem and that truth may occur on different levels, a characteristic of procedural knowledge, specifically the subcategory of separate knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). However, it appears that this recognition is still unclear in Rita's perception, therefore Rita may be transitioning to procedural as a way of knowing but this cannot be substantiated with the present transcribed data. Since Rita demonstrates both Subjective and Procedural characteristics it was decided that she was in fact in transition, but more in the subjective classification of Women's Ways of Knowing.

Procedural. Procedural knowledge is characterized by demonstrating a skill of carrying out procedures for the goal of obtaining and communicating knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986). In addition this category of WWK is subdivided into: (a) separate knowing, and (b) connected knowing. To clarify, separate knowing bases knowledge on critical thinking and a sense of suspicion of ideas, including ideas from the self (Belenky et al., 1986). Connected knowing bases trustworthy knowledge from personal experiences and since an individual can only approximate another persons' experience these knowers accept that they will only have limited knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986).

Typically, it is separate knowing that is taught and valued in higher education. Truth "lies hidden beneath the surface, and you must ferret it out" where "[k]nowing requires careful observation and analysis" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 94). Three participants

were placed in the subcategory of separate knowing under the main category of Procedural Knowledge: Kayli, Corrine, and Jo-Real. No participants were classified in the connected subcategory of procedural knowledge. Procedural knowledge is the "voice of reason" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 87), and typically more male-oriented.

Kayli, a 25 year old non-first-generation Administration of Justice major, questioned whether the teachers actually were teaching her "effectively" and also questioned whether assignments were "really something to learn or if it is just some busy work." Kayli still elected to complete the work assigned to her by her teachers, thus demonstrating that she had critically thought about the assignment and figured out what the teacher wanted, she then provided the appropriate result. This conflict between the absolutist dictates of the authorities and Kayli's own subjectivism is a characteristic of procedural way of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 88).

When Kayli was asked during the interview if she wanted to add anything, she replied

> . . . that is one I have to think about . . . I guess if you wanted to get into more detail about specific teachers . . . some that actually seem to care about whether you get your work done and then some that I don't know if they really check your work or not . . . but I don't know what kind of question that could be because you couldn't go through a whole list and ask if you had this teacher and have they taught you effectively . . .

This line of reasoning would indicate that Kayli realizes there are different experiences that contribute to knowing. However, Kayli did not indicate that her critical thinking extended to what the teacher could be experiencing; therefore, the subcategory

of connected knowing could not be confirmed for a classification of WWK for Kayli. However, Kayli indicates she includes objective, impersonal procedures for establishing truth (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 102), when she discusses day care on campus, "this might sound crazy and I don't know if they do it at any other ones [colleges] but if there was a school with a daycare on it that would be terrific."

Kayli cited situational barriers of financial and especially time constraints. She described registering for distance learning classes to save gas money and at the same time allow her to remain home with her new-born. Basically, Kayli used her skill in obtaining knowledge to continue with her coursework, while also allowing herself to spend time with her new baby.

Corrine, a 44 year old first-generation Nursing student, described herself as "very curious" and after serving as the Student Government Association (SGA) President and lobbying in Washington, D.C. for a bill to keep community college tuition the same for students planning to transfer to a four-year college or university, Corrine had to analyze her purpose for being at PH and she decided it was to get her education, so she elected to step down from being the SGA President. What places Corrine in the procedural knowledge category is revealed in how she describes this decision-making process to resign from serving as the SGA president. Corrine states, "I stepped down because I had to really think about . . . my purpose coming here [PHCC]" and "I had to step back and focus on . . . my career . . . and that is what I am doing." Corrine seems to be expressing a "sense of control", which Belenky et al., (1986, p. 96) state is a characteristic of separate (procedural) knowing.

Corrine demonstrates that she evaluates her own experience and questions outcomes when making decisions; thus reinforcing her classification into the separate subcategory of procedural knowing.

Corrine stated that when she came to college she "was born." Here is her description of her journey:

> [a]lways growing up I was told that I couldn't do it. I was told that I wasn't college bound . . . I went to a private school in New York and the nun told me that I wasn't college bound. She sent a note home to my mother . . . my mother agreed – old fashioned. It was not her fault you know . . . I always told them I want to go to college . . . that always stayed in my head. I mean at least twenty-five years . . . then . . . when I came to PH . . . I was crying and tears were coming down my face and it was so painful for me. I get chills when I talk about it . . . all the time . . . I get so sentimental . . .

Corrine does mention that her mother was "old fashioned"; and this would indicate that Corrine has accepted the concept of separate knowing where truthful knowledge comes from experience and therefore her understanding of her mothers' opinion could at best be limited. This indicates Corrine is viewing the past more objectively than subjectively, indicating a desire to reach an understanding of her mothers' opinion that she was not college bound. Corrine states she believes her mother's acceptance of the nun's report was based on her mother's experience. This "harmonious level of understanding" is indicative of separate procedural knowing (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 101). Corrine disagreed with both the nun and her mother's assessment of her academic abilities, and "assumes that everyone" including herself may have been "wrong," which categorizes Corrine as a separate knower (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 104).

Corrine is also classified in the subcategory of separate knowing because she uses critical thinking skills and refers to herself as a "very curious person," and states "I always want to know [things] and I walked around campus . . . [I] did a lot of research [before deciding to enroll at PHCC]."

Corrine identified her daughter "who is nine" as being "smarter" than herself as a (dispositional) barrier because her daughter helps her with her homework and Corrine said it should be reversed with her helping her daughter with her homework. Corrine also identified financial constraints (situational).

Jo-Real, a 35 year old non-first-generation Nursing student (acceptance pending) stated her husband's abandonment of her and her five children was a good thing because it motivated her to go back to school where "she had always wanted to be." This statement at first appears nonchalant. However, as Belenky et al., (1986) state "[s]eparate knowers' procedures for making meaning are strictly impersonal" (p. 109). Jo-Real described her perception of decision-making as weighing outcomes and making the best decision under the circumstances; while attempting to maintain balance in her life roles, an objective approach to decision-making (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 98). Jo-Real described her reaction to returning to school:

> I was so nervous that I was going to be this old person in school. I felt
> [like it was] my first day of high school. When I first came here I made
> my sister come with me and that was last Fall. I told her to pull over I was
> going to throw up . . . and I physically threw up . . . my professors told me
> . . . they wouldn't do it [attend college being a single parent with five
> children] . . . so they're proud of me.
> Jo-Real described using critical thinking skills, along with her personal

experiences, to make decisions; which indicates Jo-Real is placed in the subcategory of separate knowing. It is possible that Jo-Real could be in or at least entering into the connected knowing subdivision of the procedural category; however this is not substantiated from the review of her transcript.

Jo-Real reported her perception of encountering barriers. Specifically, situational barriers were reported as financial constraints but more importantly time constraints and maintaining balance between all of her life roles was a challenge. She reported being "so tired, just exhausted;" yet she stated she also served as co-president for the SGA during her last two semesters at PHCC.

Constructed. To summarize the constructed category of WWK, the following female characteristics are included: (a) articulate, (b) reflective, (c) self-conscious, and (d) recognizing her own ability to influence other people (Belenky et al., 1986). All of these characteristics are identified in Honey. Honey is a 25 year old first-generation student double majoring in Administration of Justice and Nursing who stated she had to "dig down deep inside and ask" herself why she was going to college while accepting the responsibility for taking care of her mother both financially and physically. Honey reported viewing life as a challenge, while stating she was not angry or resentful at how things had directed her choice of leaving her four-year college to return home and take on the caregiver role to her mother. Honey expressed her desire to help others and stated ". . . it only takes one word, one voice of one person to be heard and one word can change a person's whole life."

Honey experienced situational barriers which were identified from working two jobs while taking care of her mother who had previously suffered a stroke. Here is her description of her first semester at PHCC:

> . . . when my mom was sick I had just started my jobs, and I had just started my semester here at PH, everything was running back-to-back, you know, I took on a full load of a house payment, house insurance, car payment, light bill, water bill, and all. I'm gonna be honest with you, I couldn't afford books so I got a tutor, I got with the professors, I borrowed old books—just because a book is old, it doesn't mean you can't learn from it. . . just wipe the dust off and read it. . .

Honey also volunteered to be available to come to the interviewer's classes to talk with students about making the choice to continue their education. Honey recognizes that she has the capability to influence people, exist in a world with conflicting views, and was able to reflect and accept herself, all classified as a constructed way of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). Honey is self aware and thinks through situations, as she states "you've got to understand yourself in order to understand what you're talking about . . . that's why I wanted to study a double major."

Honey constructs her thoughts about trust between a patient and her future self in a role as an RN,

> . . . [if] I got that person's life in my hands and they put all their trust in me, I got to prove to them that I can be trustworthy . . . 'cause if I was to get in school and just, pass by, say oh well I passed and go on . . . then when I get to a[n] actual job site or become an actual RN and they [patients] go into cardiac arrest, I'm not gonna know what to do . . . I don't want that on my shoulders . . . [s]o that's what motivates me to really get into my field and to really want to study . . . I want to know what I'm doing when I'm doing it . . .

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Honey also is a double major. She decided to learn about law so she could better understand the legal ramifications of her nursing program. This indicates that Honey is looking forward and includes a wide perspective with regard to her career goals.

The analysis and classification of the participants into the groupings of Women's Ways of Knowing assist with the further analysis of the data in relation to the research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher education?

2. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in the identification of an educational barrier?

3. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to overcome an educational barrier?

4. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in choosing to persist with their educational goals?

5. How do nontraditional women describe their experience with rural community college support services in overcoming educational barriers?

Each of the research questions is addressed and results reported in order. The summarized themes and patterns received confirmation for accuracy and content from five of the research participants. This member checking process was performed by Jane,

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Corrine, Honey, Cherokee, and Jo-Real.

Research Question 1

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher education? The participants were asked to describe events in their educational experience from their perspective. Two major themes emerged: reentry to higher education was (a) stressful and (b) a worthwhile experience producing a sense of accomplishment. A recurring theme was the description that the experience could be stressful because of unknown expectations, such as keeping up grades, meeting financial obligations, and meeting deadlines (both at home and at school). For example, Rita stated,

> . . . you're gonna need someone to vent to because it does get emotional, it does get stressful . . . any kind of support system that you can find whether it be inside the school system or outside the school system, take advantage of it.

All fifteen participants reported the educational experience was worthwhile and stated they had gained a sense of accomplishment from the experience. Harley expressed the sentiment that other participants confirmed when she said, "I've enjoyed every experience I have had here [at PHCC], good or bad I've still enjoyed it and looked forward to coming everyday."

Research Question 2

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in the identification of an educational barrier? To address this research question, three types of barriers identified in the Chain-of-Response or COR model (situational, institutional, and dispositional) were used in conjunction with the participants' descriptions. The participants were asked to

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talk about general challenges and to describe how these challenges had affected their educational experience. In addition, participants were asked about barriers or problems encountered while being a student at PHCC and to describe how they dealt with such problems. All fifteen participants stated situational barriers related to either financial constraints or time constrains. Cherokee said, ". . . you just have to motivate your own self because sometime when there is nobody else to motivate you, you just have to motivate yourself" and concerning financial constraints she added, "it comes down to just basic things like keeping gas in the car."

Eight of the fifteen participants stated dispositional concerns related to age and their uncertainty of being able to learn the material. For example, Jane reflected back at the time she was reentering college and she stated, "I think my age was a factor, because I [thought] I was going to come to this school and it's all going to be 18 year olds and I'm going to be a sore thumb sticking out" and "I was scared to death. . . I didn't think I could learn it [algebra]."

Two participants stated institutional constraints: (a) the Nursing Program not scheduling any classes through the summer session, and (b) with the building renovations, disability access was limited. Dawn stated she would like for the Nursing department to offer courses toward the nursing degree during the summer term so she could continue with her studies without having a summer break. In addition, Dawn wanted the nursing degree to be extended from the two-year to a four-year program so she could continue her studies without having to change educational institutions. Twitty pointed out construction on one of six main buildings on campus had blocked the

automatic door and that she could not get her wheelchair in to that particular building.

Twitty also remarked that the institution needed to bring back the disability van for

transportation and that she had not found out why PHCC had discontinued this service to

students with a disability.

Research Question 3

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to

overcome an educational barrier? The participants were asked to describe barriers or

problems they had encountered and to explain how they overcame these barriers and to

describe how they remained motivated to persist with their selected program of study.

The response was to seek assistance through teachers, through contact with the Student

Support Services (SSS), and to gain support from support groups such as classmates,

family, and friends. This recurring comment, to seek assistance, crossed all three types of

barriers. The participants seemed to agree that help was available, but the student would

have to find the source. For example Tara decided after the first meeting of her math

class that she was going to need help, so she went to the Student Support Services tutor

immediately after the first class meeting to setup time to work with a tutor. She reported

that other students began asking her how she was able to understand the material so well

and she told them about working with tutors. Corrine said just talking with her counselor

helped her overcome her barrier of being told that she was not "college bound."

Research Question 4

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in choosing to persist

with their educational goals? The participants were asked to describe motivation factors

and how they overcame problems with coursework. Seven of the fifteen participants specifically stated they wanted to set an example for their children, to demonstrate to the children that they could also succeed in achieving a college degree. A pattern emerged from all 15 participants, which summarized the belief that achieving educational goals would provide a better lifestyle for themselves and their dependents, along with gaining a sense of personal accomplishment and increased self esteem. Miranda wanted to "make a better living for [her] three boys," while Jo-Real stated she wanted to get a better job to provide for her five children since her husband had abandoned them. Kayli stated, "I know that if I don't have a degree that there are no jobs around here. They're all disappearing and if I don't keep myself in school, then I probably won't have a very good job." Cherokee supported this line of thought with her comment, "the job situation here is not that good so I needed some further education and I've always wanted to be a teacher." Some participants also expressed an increase in their self esteem. Jane is quoted as saying learning is "a big deal to me because I accomplished something that I didn't think I would ever be able to do and I guess that was a big pat on my back for myself." Corrine expressed amazement in herself after passing a math test, she stated, "I can't believe that I passed . . . I can really do it [learn] . . . I felt so determined to go on [continue with coursework]."

Research Question 5

How do nontraditional women describe their experience with rural community college support services in overcoming educational barriers? The participants were asked specific questions regarding their knowledge and use of the Student Support Services

(SSS). Twelve of the 15 participants reported using the Student Support Services (SSS). Of these 12 participants, all reported positive experiences from a variety of services provided, such as tutoring (including SmartThinking – an online tutoring service), counseling, mentoring, financial support such as the purchase of books, supplies, transportation, and even providing the student with loaned textbooks and laptop computers. Participants also spontaneously suggested additional services they would recommend to assist the nontraditional adult female student. The major themes from these suggestions include (a) an orientation class specifically for nontraditional female students, (b) establishment of a childcare facility on campus, and (c) more counselors specifically familiar with the nontraditional female student situation.

Other Emergent Themes

To conclude the interview analysis, open-ended questions asked of each participant were reviewed for themes from the participant responses. The questions included advice the participant would give to another adult woman planning to return to college; any other things about attending PHCC that the participant wanted to share; if the participant could compare their PHCC experience with another higher educational institution; and if any questions could have been asked that would have helped the participant describe her experience more effectively. From these questions the following themes emerged.

First, there was an emergent theme of an overwhelming determination to achieve an educational goal with all 15 participants stating basically the key was to stick with it because it would be worth the sacrifice in the future. Kayli stated, ". . . just don't give up.

It can get hard if you have kids and if you work, which I do, but just don't, don't stop

going 'cause it is tough. Stick it out and go anyway and concentrate."

Corrine stated she was determined to "stick it out" because it took her "25 years to get

here."

Second, there was the consistent theme of the positive advice given to other

nontraditional women who were considering reentry to higher education. Again, all 15

participants said they would tell another nontraditional woman to return to college. Third,

12 participants reported favorable responses from services they had received from the

Student Support Services (SSS). Three of the participants stated they had not visited the

SSS department but they were aware of the services and would seek assistance if they felt

they had a need.

Fourth, the perception of six participants compared PHCC positively with other

institutions of higher education they had attended, which would indicate the college is

responding well to student expectations. For example Cherokee stated she drove from

out-of-state to attend classes at PHCC and the majority of the nursing major participants

stated, the nursing program had the best reputation for preparing nursing students to pass

the Nursing exam. Nine participants reported PHCC as being their first encounter with

higher education and thus they could not provide a comparison. The fifth and final

identified theme is education being viewed as a means to a better way of life through a

higher standard of living and career advancement. This recurring theme was unanimous

with all 15 participants agreeing and even reinforced the theme of determination to

persist in achieving educational goals.

Determination

All 15 participants reported a strong self-determination to succeed with their educational goals. Comments from Tara to "just find a way" and "stick with it" are a few of the repeated comments demonstrating the emergent theme of determination. For example, Rita stated "you just do what it is that you have to [do] . . . if you want to succeed." The theme of determination is also supported by the data with all participants persisting into the Spring 2008 semester.

Positive Advice

It was unanimous that all participants would recommend other nontraditional females to enroll and gain the experience of attending college. Overall, the response was the same from all 15 participants, but is best described by Jane who stated, "I guess first of all, don't be afraid to take a chance . . . that you can accomplish things that you never knew you could accomplish if you only put forth the effort . . . if you never try you will never know."

Jane also stated, "I just really . . . have enjoyed the experience. And I've enjoyed the knowledge too. Learning new things and [meeting] new people and the chance to be able to go out and do something that I never thought I would be able to do."

Student Support Services

Some of the counselors in the SSS were viewed as becoming life-long friends and confidants of some of the participants. As Corrine put it,

> I couldn't have done it without her [SSS counselor] . . . I have a great counselor. She is my mentor for the rest of my life, whether I'm in California being a nurse

or whether I am a traveling nurse, I will call her and let her know that I'm doing fine or just [ask her to] give me feedback on life.

Other participants attributed the SSS personnel and the services they provide as being the pivotal point that provided a way for them to decide to persist with their educational goal. For example, Pia stated she only returned to pursue an educational degree because a SSS counselor kept after her to get back in school.

College Comparisons

A comparison of PHCC with other educational institutions may assist with the analysis of meeting the perceived educational expectations of nontraditional women. Six participants had attended a higher educational institution prior to attending Patrick Henry Community College. Of these, only two participants had completed a program of study from another institution. Twitty received a two-year degree, and Tara received a one-year certificate. All six participants compared the friendly, helpful attitude of PHCC personnel and the beauty of the campus location as a positive experience surpassing their experience at the other college. Pia said the friendly personnel of PHCC had made the campus experience enjoyable. Yet, Rita reported a negative experience with some faculty which resulted in her changing her major from Nursing to Science:

> . . . multiple incidences where girls were made to cry, they were put down, they were made to feel stupid, made to feel inferior . . . if you went to ask questions you were made to feel like an idiot . . . I'm too old for the headache, I'm here to get an education and a degree. I'm not here to fight up against someone just so that I can get this.

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Education as a Way to a Better Life

A consistent theme that education would provide a way to achieve a better life was unanimous and emphatic with all 15 participants. The participants accepted the belief that education was the way to improve their socio-economical status by acquiring a more advanced career with a higher standard of living. In addition, each participant wanted to feel the sense of accomplishment from succeeding in reaching an educational goal. Dawn summed up the entire sentiment for all participants when she stated, "[i]t's short term pain . . . long term gain."

All participants stated they could not think of any additional questions that would have assisted in describing her experience more effectively than the ones asked during the interview process. Each participant was provided with the researcher's contact information if she wanted to add comments later. One participant did contact the researcher through the campus email system after the interview had concluded with an added comment. Jane shared her perception of the commute to campus as a possible barrier (situational), especially since the price of gasoline had recently increased. Jane recommended setting up a carpool for students who were enrolled in the same program of study contingent upon their class schedules coinciding.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presents the academic experiences of 15 nontraditional women participating in a vocational technical program at Patrick Henry Community College. The Women's Ways of Knowing and the Chain-of-Response model, along with the research questions provide a structure for organizing the information provided during the personal

interviews. A deliberate attempt was made to ensure the inclusion and representation of all research participants' "voices." It is determined that one participant (Sally) was least represented. A review of this individuals' transcript revealed that no further information could be gathered. Sally was classified in the WWK category of received and when her transcribed interview was reviewed, it was determined that no further information could be obtained from the interview session. It appeared that Sally was listening during her interview, which timed as the shortest duration of all 15 participants. In addition, it was determined that the transcribed interview notes repeated what has already been attributed to Sally in this document.

Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of this research. Recommendations for practice and further research are also included in chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter restates the research problem, reviews the methods used in the study,

presents a discussion of relevant findings, provides recommendations for practice and for

future research, and formulates conclusions. The purpose of this study was to explore

how nontraditional women in vocational technical programs of study at a rural

community college (a) recognize barriers, and (b) devise strategies to overcome barriers,

in order (c) to persist in achieving their educational goals. The study focused on

perceptions regarding the experiences of being an adult woman returning to an

educational environment at a rural community college. The Chain-of-Response (COR)

model was used to classify barriers (Cross, 1981) in conjunction with the classification of

Women's Ways of Knowing (WWK) (Belenky et al., 1986) to gain insight and

understanding of the perception of nontraditional women in a rural community college

environment.

As explained in chapter 3, the study reported here is a collective case study of

fifteen nontraditional female students majoring in a vocational technical program of study

at a rural community college, specifically Patrick Henry Community College in

Martinsville, Virginia. As a collective case study, this research primarily used a

qualitative approach, through a semi-structured individual interview process. The

personal experiences of nontraditional women were explored to identify perceived

barriers and motivators which prompted these women to persist in their educational

goals. In conducting this exploration the classification of each participant in the

categories of Women's Ways of Knowing and the Chain-of-Response model for barrier

identification provided organization and guidance. Themes from the participant

perspective regarding perceived barriers and how these women overcame these barriers

to persist toward achieving their educational goals emerge from the research. Verification

of self-reported demographic data and Spring 2008 enrollment status were obtained

through the secure campus educational database. Personal experiences of perceived

barriers and descriptions which prompted these nontraditional women to persist in their

educational goals were explored and reported through thick descriptions.

Summary of Findings

A summary of the findings based on the data analysis presented in Chapter 4 is

offered in direct relation to the research questions provided in Chapter 1.

Recommendations for practice and further research followed by conclusions are

presented below.

Research Question 1

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher

education? Apprehension and fear of the unknown prior to first beginning classes were

perceived as one recurring theme from the 15 participants. However, early in the

participants' college experience, some participants realized they were "accepted" and

were not singled out as being too old to attend college. They found more nontraditional

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female students attending college then they had originally thought, which allowed them to be more at ease in the college campus environment. Another recurring theme classified in the dispositional category of the COR model of barrier identification, is the participants' apprehension of their ability to "do the [educational] work." These participants reported their apprehension soon subsided when they began to receive good grades, along with positive feedback from faculty. The apprehension these nontraditional women experienced in reentry to higher education is considered to be typical (Kasworm et. al., 2002); however, the adjustment to a college campus environment and the development of a sense of connectivity appears to vary with institution type (Ross-Gordon, 2002).

Research Question 2

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in the identification of an educational barrier? Participants were asked to describe events they perceived as presenting a barrier to them accomplishing their educational goals. All 15 participants identified at least one of the three types of barriers typically encountered by the adult returning to higher education as presented in Cross's (1981) Chain-of-Response (COR) model of barriers. These types of barriers include: (a) situational barriers (money issues, role demands, life situations), (b) institutional barriers (course demands and scheduling), and (c) dispositional barriers (self perceptions regarding academic ability). Participants in this study reported all three types of barriers. One individual, Tara called barriers "obstacles" and explained that she viewed a barrier as impenetrable while an obstacle was just something to go around. The conclusion from these participants' perspective was

to expect barriers to be present in the pursuit of an educational degree and to just "deal with it." All 15 of the women identified at least one situational barrier, 2 participants identified at least one institutional barrier, and 7 participants identified at least one dispositional barrier. Situational barriers were the most frequently identified with all 15 participants citing this type of barrier. Two institutional barriers related to wheelchair access and the non-course offerings over the summer session for the Nursing program were reported. Seven dispositional barriers were identified resulting in approximately half of all the participants in the study.

Research Question 3

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to overcome an educational barrier? Participants were asked how they resolved a perceived educational barrier. Participants reported feelings related to determination ("just do it"), assistance ("find someone to help you"), and goal achievement ("it will be worth it in the end"). The participants cited the college Student Support Services as a resource in providing assistance to overcoming perceived barriers. Another resource cited by at least one participant included faculty who took the time to refer the student to certain offices on campus. For example, Rita stated her teacher provided information on how she could apply for a work-study position on campus to help out with financial constraints.

Research Question 4

How do nontraditional women describe their experience in choosing to persist with their educational goals? Fourteen of the participants stated they just "find a way" or they "ask for help." While one participant, Wilson said she had not been confronted with

a barrier, but if she were she would let her advisor, her two mentors, or her appointed

Student Support Services counselor deal with it for her.

Research Question 5

How do nontraditional women describe their experience with rural community

college support services in overcoming educational barriers? All 15 participants were

familiar with the Student Support Services (SSS) and the majority (i.e. twelve out of

fifteen) had utilized some service provided by this department. The participants'

responses were positive with regard to the services and the SSS personnel. Corrine stated

one counselor in the SSS would be her "lifelong friend," a person she would remain in

contact with long after she completed her program of study at PHCC. Several participants

suggested SSS provide a counselor specifically trained for dealing with nontraditional

women issues, while other participants suggested an orientation program to assist

nontraditional women with the stress and adjustment of returning to the classroom. An

orientation program designed with the adult student in mind, along with a continued

support system is confirmed in research as an essential component for student success

(Kasworm et. al., 2002).

These findings would indicate that nontraditional women attending a rural

community college experience an initial apprehension and fear of reentry into the college

setting and if an orientation program were established at the college campus this initial

barrier would seem to be less of a deterrent for the reentry process. This finding

reinforces Townsend and Twombly's (2001) finding that the initial impressions of

students are the most important in determining their educational persistence. In addition,

the various roles and responsibilities these women encounter present barriers to their

persistence in achieving their educational goals. These women are determined to

overcome these barriers because of their belief that achieving their educational goal will

provide a higher standard of living for them and their children. This particular finding is

important, because research has demonstrated that this belief may not materialize. As

Valadez (2000) found in his research, rural community college graduates had to relocate

in order to gain employment because no jobs existed in their geographical area for their

program of study.

Discussion

Generally, there are several factors that can be drawn from the five research

questions posed in this study. First, nontraditional female students in this study initially

experience apprehension over their age and their ability to be academically successful as

they transitioned into college and age and ability are classified in the dispositional

category of the COR model (Cross, 1981). Reentry into a higher educational setting

typically brings apprehension, especially since reentry is often associated with a major

life change, such as the loss of job or following a divorce (Cross, 1981). It is interesting

that the participants questioned their ability to be academically successful, since research

indicates nontraditional women tend to have higher GPAs than other student population

segments (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Further, some women stated they feared age

would interfere with their ability to interact with traditional-aged students and thus affect

their ability to be successful in reaching their educational goal. In some participants'

descriptions of their experience, the younger students were perceived to be "disruptive"

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and this behavior interfered with the participants' achievement of their educational goals in the classroom setting. However, other participants found that the younger generation accepted them and recognized there were more nontraditional female students in the classroom then they had originally anticipated.

Second, situational barriers (multiple role obligations, financial constraints, and time constraints) were perceived by the participants, specifically time and financial constraints. For example, nontraditional women are time conscious, which is a finding that is supported in current literature, especially for commuter students where time is considered a limited resource (Jacoby, 2000). In addition, the demands of college often conflict with family and home responsibilities resulting in stress and competition for time and energy.

As Kasworm (2003) stated, "adults are time-focused on adult life demands" (p. 8). The financial constraint was an interesting finding based on the database confirmation that 14 of the 15 participants were receiving financial aid, with some participants receiving financial aid from several sources, while these participants were also working at a full-time job. According to Kasworm, et al., (2002), adult students have reported that their largest stressor is having the financial ability to attend college. Since situational barriers come from the adult's situation in life at a given time, adult females tend to reenter higher education programs out of a necessity to improve their standard of living; however, multiple role obligations (Fairchild, 2003; Jacoby, 2000), combined with time and financial constraints may prevent nontraditional women from persisting with their educational goal achievement (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002).

The participants in this research expressed a strong determination to address these time and money constraints, without stating specifically how they resolved particular issues. This determination to overcome obstacles and to be academically successful has been noted by others in the adult learner literature (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992; Donaldson & Graham, 1999). Overall, the major response from the participants was to do what they could and to rely on support systems both at home and on campus. According to Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), "social support can be a major buffer enabling adults to cope with stressful situations. It can be provided by intimate relationships, family members, networks of friends, or by institutions. A paradox of support systems is that at the very time they may be most needed, during major transitions such as divorce, widowhood, or a long-distance move, they may be most in jeopardy" (p. 132). The participants in this study reported finding support mainly from the institutional Student Support Services personnel and their classmates more so than from family members.

Third, institutional barriers were also perceived by the participants (course offerings and building access for wheelchairs while building construction was underway). In addition, participants recommended that the institution establish a childcare facility on campus. The participants indicated that a childcare facility on campus would improve their persistence and thus their educational goal attainment. This suggestion was even reinforced by Tara who stated she did not have children but she could see how many nontraditional females would benefit from such a service. "Lack of childcare is a problem for young parents", and was originally considered under the category of a situational

barrier by Cross (1981, p. 98). Now childcare appears to be making a transition to the institutional category of the COR model, at least as perceived by the participants in this research. For institutional barriers, Townsend and Twombly (2001) stated initial impressions are important; therefore, college campuses need to be cognizant of student needs with regard to course scheduling and in regard to the role obligations of nontraditional female students. College campuses already operate under disability access guidelines so the issue of wheelchair access, an institutional barrier, becomes a legal compliance consideration.

Fourth, since barriers are perceived from individual perspectives it becomes important to attempt to view the individual more clearly and objectively. In order to accomplish this each participant was categorized using the criteria of Women's Ways of Knowing. From this categorization a better understanding of the adult female perspective was analyzed. For example, an adult female categorized in the Silent WWK may need for a counselor to provide step-by-step direction on how to deal with each perceived educational barrier, while a woman categorized in the WWK Constructed category could work independently and even assist other students. An interesting finding from this classification process was identified when Wilson was placed in the Silent category, while Honey was placed in the Constructed classification. It was noted in the classification of these two individuals that Wilson (Silent classification) is 31 years old, while Honey (Constructed classification) is 25 years old. This would confirm that perception is a result of experience, rather than age (Belenky et al., 1986), while reinforcing the statement that adult learning is a complex area of study (Rachal, 2002).

The participants in this research were very forthcoming with the information they shared. Although they were busy with deadlines, personal obligations, and school schedules, they expressed a desire to be helpful and wanted to provide me with a clear understanding of their campus experience. One thing that surprised me was just how determined and enthusiastic all participants were when they expressed their life-long desire to attend college and how they would strongly encourage other nontraditional women to just "go for it!"

The findings reveal that different perceptions of overcoming barriers to educational persistence may be important for nontraditional females to succeed in rural community college settings. Rural community college personnel should be cognizant of these needs in order to best help all students persist and achieve their educational goals. It would seem that Padilla's (1999) argument that "information is locally derived and locally relevant" and "successful students can be identified for a particular campus" (p. 131), is indeed the case at this particular rural community college.

Implications for Practice

The following recommendations for practice are based on the findings and conclusions addressed in this chapter. To specifically address the needs of nontraditional female students enrolled in a rural community college vocational technical program of study, several institutional practices may provide assistance to increase persistence: orientation, providing access to a specially trained counselor, childcare facilities on campus, and increased support systems. Cohorts could be formed in the orientation course which could serve as a support system, especially for first-generation students.

Student services designed to reinforce the nontraditional adult student to be successful in persistence include: (a) orientation, (b) academic and learning assistance, (c) career counseling, (d) personal counseling, and (e) student organizations (Kasworm, Polson & Fishback, 2002).

In order to facilitate the success of the nontraditional female student, community college programs and student services can address the concerns of this particular group of students. One of the most pertinent concerns is the initial fear of reentry to the higher education setting, which could be addressed through an orientation class. The orientation class could be setup using the cohort model providing emotional support and practical assistance such as carpools. Rice (2003) described a variety of approaches to adult learner orientation. The participants in this research also indicated that childcare services could be provided so that access to education would not conflict with outside role obligations. The participants even described how the Early Childhood Assisting educational program could offer this service and stated this would provide the students in the Early Childhood Assisting program with hands-on experience.

An orientation class specifically designed to meet the needs of nontraditional women students at the rural community college level should be implemented. Nontraditional women could self-select and enroll in the course. The philosophy and mission of such an orientation program should include: (a) providing an orientation experience to assist the nontraditional female student with the transition of reentry to the college campus experience; (b) fostering an atmosphere of accessibility and sensitivity to nontraditional female student issues and providing tools for academic success; and (c)

facilitating a campus experience of support and a learning opportunity. The orientation program goals could include identification of the characteristics of the nontraditional female student (strengths, weaknesses, developmental issues, and transition issues, along with motivators to persist in educational goal attainment); the establishment of campus networks for this population; provision of academic success information; and general campus information could also be provided. Campus-wide involvement could include the offices of student support services, admission services, division deans, and other nontraditional females to act as peer mentors. Course topics for the orientation class should include areas pertinent to this group of student needs. Based on the findings in this research this orientation would help alleviate the nontraditional female students' apprehension of reentry to the college campus.

A comprehensive, developmentally-based childcare service facility located on the college campus would help adult female students with their role as a caregiver to their children. Not only would it open the college doors to all prospective students with small children, it would also help prevent students from missing classes when children are home (i.e., when inclement weather closes public schools). Students enrolled in the Early Childhood Assisting program at the college could complete practicum internship hours in the childcare center. By providing a childcare facility on campus, nontraditional female students who must care for their children would have more incentive to enroll in a program of study, knowing their child or children would receive the care they need.

Training sessions or workshops to assist faculty in understanding the needs of nontraditional female students could be a part of professional development opportunities.

This could be accomplished during in-service activities and offered as concurrent sessions that occur at the beginning of each semester in January and August. As Padilla (1999) stated, it is important to inform faculty, and other personnel, as to what can be done to help students persist. Findings from this research project revealed nontraditional female students have the belief that if they should encounter a barrier, then they should seek assistance from faculty or other personnel at the college. Therefore, the college employees need to have the training and skills to address the needs of the student.

A Student Support Service counselor who specializes in the special needs of nontraditional female students may be especially beneficial at rural community colleges, since this student population is comprised largely of first-generation students who seem to rely on college support systems. This recommendation is supported by the majority of the participants being first-generation college students who do not have access outside of the college campus for guidance. The counselor could meet individually with students as an initial contact and in follow-up sessions. The counselor could also act as a liaison to faculty. Additionally support services for nontraditional female students could include job and career services designed to meet the needs of this student population. Career services could address student concerns about entering or changing a career as an adult and provide current information on their employment outlook in a chosen occupation, especially since it appears these students have the belief that achieving an educational goal will improve their standard of living.

Seminars and workshops (such as time management, stress management, etc.) on topics of interest could also be made available for the nontraditional female student

population. These workshops could be scheduled for both day and evening students. Workshop information could also be made available online for students whose schedules do not permit on-campus participation. This may address the issue of multiple roles and responsibilities nontraditional women report as a perceived barrier to achieving their educational goals. This recommendation is based on the findings that stress, even positive stress, needs to be addressed by the nontraditional female student. In addition, time constraints were identified as a constraint for nontraditional students who find themselves balancing multiple responsibilities which sometimes result in sacrificing their needs in order to care for others.

Information that would inform the public of the average age of students attending the college should be disseminated to the community explaining opportunities available to nontraditional adult women considering returning to higher education. This could be accomplished through newsletters, press releases, flyers, and informational workshops at prominent community locations and may attract more nontraditional women to enroll by lessening their apprehension about what to expect, addressing both perceived situational and dispositional barriers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest a number of areas for future research. A quantitative study involving a survey with a larger sample of nontraditional women would provide a more in-depth look at the similarities and differences among the nontraditional female rural community college population. The factors that affect persistence to overcome educational barriers of this population segment could be

discovered through a qualitative approach such as research interviews or focus groups or through conducting more in-depth interviews with multiple follow-up interviews are presented in this section.

Factors related to persistence could be analyzed in a quantitative study in order to learn more about which factors are most important for persistence of nontraditional female students. Research questions could include: (a) does the type of program affect academic persistence (academic persistence operationally defined as continued enrollment from semester to semester while remaining in the selected program of study) for nontraditional female students? (b) do financial aid awards affect academic persistence for nontraditional female students? (c) do nontraditional female students who report more campus interactions and contact with Student Support Services persist more frequently than those who report fewer interactions?

A study using focus groups with larger numbers of recent adult female graduates could provide insight into nontraditional female students' experiences after the completion of an academic program. It may be an opportune time to study these experiences at the time these female students apply for graduation, thus conducting research before the participants leave the college campus. In contrast, a community focus group of nontraditional females could address perceived barriers which prevent this segment of the population from taking the first step and enrolling in a community college program of study.

A study involving nontraditional female students from multiple community colleges from around the region would allow a comparison of issues and concerns of this

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student population and may be extended to transfer programs of study, then compared

with the vocational technical program results. Colleges which could be included would

represent the rural community colleges from the Virginia Community College System

(VCCS).

A study with nontraditional women at four year institutions could also provide a

comparison of their needs and the needs of nontraditional women students at the two-year

community college. A study of this kind could further highlight relationships (similarities

and differences) between the experiences of the rural community college nontraditional

female student and the university nontraditional female student. An area of focus for this

possible research may target first-generation nontraditional female students.

A mixed method approach with identification of factors which affect persistence,

followed with a focus group to discuss the identified factors could provide a more in-

depth understanding from the participants' perspective. In addition, a follow up interview

could be conducted with graduates, to determine their perspective on how their

educational experience contributed to their career goals.

Conclusions

Nearly 50% of students entering two-year education are over the age of 24

(NCES, 2003), and approximately 56% of community college students in the United

States are women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). This increased enrollment of

nontraditional women is partly in response to displaced workers. For example, adult

women in rural geographical areas employed in manufacturing are experiencing job loss.

A life change is identified as a motivator for an adult to reenter higher education (Cross,

1981). Nontraditional women are enrolling in increasing numbers in community college vocational technical programs (Bragg, 2001; Cohen & Brawer, 2003) with the recent enrollment of nontraditional women almost doubling that of men (Bradshaw et al., 2006). This trend is expected to continue in the foreseeable future (Fenwick, 2004); yet, gender inequity in access to learning opportunities and education experience is being reported (Fenwick, 2004).

Community colleges have a long-standing mission to provide access and opportunity for all groups of people (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Herideen, 1998; Walter, 2001). Accomplishing this mission becomes especially important when barriers to education have been cited as a major reason for nontraditional female students failing to persist in achieving their educational goals (Carney-Crompton, 2002). Each of the women in this study readily identified barriers they encountered in their pursuit of higher education. These barriers might have derailed them from their goals, but instead all participants continue to persist or else achieved their goal through graduation. Since rural community colleges are experiencing increased diversity in student enrollment, the results of this research will contribute to a realignment plan tailored to meet specific needs of one group of students, nontraditional women who have identified barriers to achieving their educational goals. It is all about learning and meeting the needs of the nontraditional female student. Learning occurs when a student is engaged and connected to the learning environment (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), while connectivity is necessary to bring about social change (Ross-Gordon, 2002

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APPENDIX A

PERMISSION LETTER

Patrick Henry
Community College

Office of the President

September 24, 2007

Ms. Nancy Phillips
Associate Professor of Mathematics,
  Business, and Information Systems Technology
Patrick Henry Community College
P.O. Box 5311
Martinsville VA 24115

Dear Nancy:

I hereby grant permission for you to conduct research for your dissertation at Patrick Henry Community College. I understand that the research will be done via personal interviews with students.

Sincerely,

Max

Max F. Wingett
President

MW:jg

P.O. Box 5311, Martinsville, VA 24115   (276) 656-0202   FAX (276) 656-0303   mwingett@ph.vccs.edu
645 Patriot Avenue, Martinsville, VA 24112   (276) 638-8777   TDD (276) 638-2433   www.ph.vccs.edu

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Describe the events in your educational experiences so far for this semester.

2. As an adult female coming back to school, describe how you remain motivated to succeed.

3. Talk to me about personal challenges? How have these personal challenges, if any, affected your educational experience here at PHCC?

4. Have you been able to overcome problems with coursework? If so, could you tell me how you did this?

5. What barriers or problems have you encountered to being a student at PHCC? Why do you think this was a specific problem for you? How do you deal with these problems?

6. What support services, if any, have you used at PHCC? What can you tell me about the effectiveness of the services you have used? How did you find out about these services?

7. What are some additional services that the college could provide that would be helpful to you and other students like you?

8. What advice would you give to another adult woman who is planning to return to the college classroom?

9. Are there other things about coming to PHCC that you want to tell me about?

10. We have talked about PHCC, have you attended other colleges as an adult student? If so, in what ways were your experiences at (the other school) similar or different?

11. I have tried to ask you questions that I thought would be important in understanding your educational experience at PHCC. Could I have asked a question that would have helped you to describe your experience more effectively?

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT
SHORT FORM WITH ORAL PRESENTATION

Project Title: *Rural Community College Nontraditional Women: Overcoming Education Barriers*

Project Director: Dr. Deborah Taub

Participant's Name _____
Nancy S. Phillips has explained in the preceding oral presentation the procedures involved in this research project including the purpose and what will be required of you. Any benefits and risks were also described. Nancy S. Phillips has answered all of your current questions regarding your participation in this project. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Dr. Deborah Taub at (336) 334-4668. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by *Nancy S. Phillips* by calling 276.656.0237. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participant in the project.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by *Nancy S. Phillips*

_____ _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____ _____
Witness to Oral Presentation   Date
and Participant's Signature

Investigators and data collectors may not serve as witnesses. Subjects, family members, and persons unaffiliated with the study may serve as witnesses.

_____ _____
Signature of person obtaining consent on behalf of   Date
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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APPENDIX D

ORAL PRESENTATION

<u>PURPOSE</u> The purpose(s) of this research study is to 1) explore how nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher education, 2) explore how nontraditional women describe their identification of an educational barrier, 3) explore how nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to overcome an educational barrier, 4) explore how nontraditional women describe their experience in choosing to persist with their educational goals, and 5) explore how nontraditional women describe their experience with rural community college support services in overcoming educational barriers. The study will help in explaining needs of nontraditional women and provide insight for administration in how programs and services at the community colleges can be created, developed, and or enhanced.

<u>PROCEDURES</u> The steps include: answering questions in a one to two-hour interview that will be audio-recorded. The audio tapes will be transcribed. Your name will not be identified and your pseudo-name will be used in the final paper. You also will be asked for your Patrick Henry Community College (PHCC) student identification number so demographic information from the educational database can be obtained to include: age, vocational technical major verification, and whether you enroll in the Spring 2008 semester and remain in your selected major. In addition, you will be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire that asks about your first-generation student status, along with your use and the level of support services you have participated in during your course of study at PHCC.

<u>POSSIBLE RISKS</u> There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study some discussion I the interview may result in emotional discomfort. You may choose to not answer questions and you may also request that the tape recorder be turned off.

<u>POSSIBLE BENEFITS and COMPENSATION:</u> There is a $20.00 monetary compensation for the time required for participating in this interview. The possible benefits from participating in this study can be described both on a personal level and as providing benefits for society. Personally you may benefit from the opportunity to reflect on your educational experiences, since you will be allowed to voice your educational experience from attending PHCC during the personal interview. Benefits to society may result from findings from this research project which could assist with planning implementing, and evaluating services designed to meet the needs of nontraditional women in rural community colleges, in addition this study will contribute to rural research.

<u>CONFIDENTIALITY</u> Every attempt will be made to see that study results are kept anonymous. The tape from the interview, transcripts of the tape, the demographic worksheet, and educational database results will be labeled with your pseudo-name, not your real name. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet for 3 years after then of this research at the private residence of the student researcher. At the end of the tree years all electronic digital data will be erased and all paper documents will be shredded. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

Pseudo-name: _____ Age: _____ Major:_____

Emplid: (optional, if provided will be kept confidential and separate from this sheet)

Education Prior to PHCC:

Some High School _____ G.E.D. ____ High School Graduate _____ Some College _____

One-Year Certification _____ Two-Year Technical Degree _____ Other
_____

Credit and financial information:

Number of credits currently taking ___ Are you receiving financial aid: Yes____ No _____

Currently identified major _____

Education of Family Members:

Did your mother go to college? Yes ____ No _____ If so, did she obtain a degree?

     Yes ____ No ____ What level did she complete? _____

Did your father go to college? Yes ____ No _____ If so, did he obtain a degree?

     Yes ____ No ____What level did he complete? _____

Did a brother or sister go to college? Yes ____ No _____ If so, was a degree obtained?

     Yes _____ No ____ What level was completed? _____

Educational Support Services:

     Have you used any of the support services here at PHCC? Yes ____ No _____

     If so, which ones?_____

     If so, how many hours per week do you spend with support service personnel?

     1 – 5 hours _____ 6 – 10 hours _____ 11 + _____

Persistence:

Did participant enroll for the Spring 2008 semester at PHCC? Yes ____ No _____

If not, phone number to contact participant for follow up question: Can you tell me why you did not enroll in PHCC classes for Spring semester 2008? Phone number
_____

If yes, did participant remain in the same major for the Spring 2008? Yes ____ No _____

APPENDIX F

CROSSWALK

Research Question	Source (data with which to answer the question).	Method (the data were used to . . . .).
1. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in reentry to higher education?	Interview protocol #'s 1, 8, 9, 10, 11	Recursive data analysis of the transcribed audio-recorded interview sessions to code and synthesize to explain women's perspective of educational barriers.
2. How do nontraditional women describe their identification of an educational barrier?	Interview protocol #'s 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10,11	Recursive data analysis of the transcribed audio-recorded interview sessions to code and synthesize data.
3. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in devising strategies to overcome an educational barrier?	Interview protocol #'s 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11	Recursive data analysis of the transcribed audio-recorded interview sessions to code and synthesize data.
4. How do nontraditional women describe their experience in choosing to persist with their educational goals?	Interview protocol #'s 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11 Secure on-line PeopleSoft Database using students' Emplid.	Recursive data analysis of the transcribed audio-recorded interview sessions to code and synthesize data.
5. How do nontraditional women describe their experience with rural community college support services in overcoming educational barriers?	Interview protocol #'s 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 Secure on-line PeopleSoft Database using students' Emplid. Demographic data sheet for descriptive statistics.	Recursive data analysis of the transcribed audio-recorded interview sessions to code and synthesize data.

APPENDIX G

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March 1, 2008

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Cross, Kathryn Patricia, 1926-   1555424457
    Adults as Learners.
    Bibliography: p. 265
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1.   Adult education. 2. Continuing education.
I.   Title.
    LC5219.C744   374   80-26985
    ISBN 0-87589-491-7
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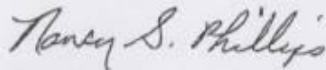permission in writing from the publishers.

Specifically, I need permission to include a copy of the Figure 4. Chain-of-Response
(COR) Model for Understanding Participation in Adult Learning Activities located on
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School requires that I receive written permission to use any and ALL figures or
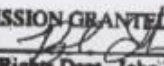diagrams.

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The current title of my dissertation (subject to change by committee recommendation) is *Rural Community College Nontraditional Women: Overcoming Educational Barriers.*

Contact Information: Nancy S. Phillips
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                      645 Patriot Ave.
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                      Fax: 276.656.0320

Thank you for your consideration in reviewing this request,

Nancy S. Phillips

Nancy S. Phillips
UNCG Graduate Student and
PHCC Faculty

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