

DISPLACED WORKERS: CONTINUING THE STORY
THE EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AND THE NEW
WORK FORCE

A Dissertation
by
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Submitted to the Graduate School
at Appalachian State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2016
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Reich College of Education

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Abstract

DISPLACED WORKERS: CONTINUING THE STORY THE EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AND THE NEW WORK FORCE

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The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of the workers who have been displaced, transitioned to community college where they earned a degree, and then joined the new work force. Specifically, the research explored how the participants' identities were affected with each transition and how each transition was successfully negotiated. Previous studies have examined the numerical data associated with displacement. Only a few studies have included qualitative data. This qualitative study filled a gap by striving to expose a more personal story from three displaced workers in a rural county in western North Carolina. Two semi-structured interviews with each candidate allowed the researcher a glimpse into the lived experiences of each participant. The application of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis allowed for a case-by-case and a cross-case analysis which yielded eight emergent themes: 1) manufacturing work since a teenager; 2) erosion of job security in manufacturing; 3) supporting relationships; 4) appreciating services; 5) building connections; 6) offering advice; 7) transferrable work ethic; and 8) gender work identity. The results can be used by community college employees who work with non-traditional students

and other community resource personnel who assist displaced workers. The findings also contribute to the growing body of literature about student identity of non-traditional students. Future research might seek to understand the experiences of displaced workers and other non-traditional students who did not complete the community college degree.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I must acknowledge that the strength and mental capacity to complete this project while caring for a family, participating in church responsibilities, and working full time was a bountiful gift from God. On many occasions, I felt that one relationship or another suffered while I was striving to meet this personal goal of becoming a first-generation college student who persisted from an associate degree in community college through the highest university degree available. My husband and son have tolerated my often intolerable moods as I struggled to find time to work on the project or suffered from little sleep. They have eaten many fast food meals and hopefully found that the time they spent together without me was important to their own relationship. Many family and friends have encouraged and supported me through this journey. To them, I hope to one day say ‘thank you’ in such a way of which they are so deserving.

In addition, I must acknowledge the efforts of the many faculty members who have escorted me along this course knowing that without each and every one’s touch I would not be completing this degree. Dr. Jim Killacky offered me the opportunity to pursue the doctoral degree. Dr. Vachel Miller, who was our cohort director, often pushed me beyond my comfort zone but we all know that is where the growing begins to happen. At one point during our cohort classes, I realized that Dr. Miller believed in me more than I believed in myself. Now, Dr. Miller will see me cross the finish line and hopefully know that his work is good and his efforts are greatly appreciated. Dr. Audrey Dentith became my dissertation chairperson in my eleventh hour after many struggles with committee membership. She has been persistent in keeping me on course toward my goal. I appreciate her efforts and the time she has given to my project. To other faculty members who have facilitated classes or served in my

dissertation process, from the first encounter with Dr. Barbara Bonham in 1993 to Dr. Les Bolt who served on my dissertation committee from afar, I hope that you know your work is important and that it makes a difference in the lives of your students. I will take this work and do great things so you will each be proud.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who have worked in manufacturing. I personally know manufacturing workers who have provided us with everything from clothing to furniture and helped keep America running. They committed years of their lives and have abused their bodies with staple guns and long hours of standing or sitting to produce those items for us. They have taken pride in their work. For those in my family and those who were neighbors, I thank them all for their dedication to seeing a job well done every day while earning an honest day's wages. In recent years, musicians have acknowledged the efforts of these workers. As Kenny Chesney sang in his song "Shift Work," "Hard work. Tired bodies. Blue collared shirt and a baseball cap. Union made. Round the clock, the door never locks and the noise never stops, not all day. Working 7 to 3, 3 to 11, 11-7." In the beginning of Ronnie Dunn's "Cost of Livin'" video, the songwriter mentions a tire manufacturing plant in west Tennessee that has been open since 1969. The songwriter went there to talk to people who were losing their jobs to learn more. His lyrics offer the story about the challenges faced by those displaced who are desperate for jobs and income trying to make ends meet.

The three former manufacturing workers who participated in this study by sharing their stories with a stranger were vital to the success of this document and my journey. They may never understand the impact they have had on my life which goes beyond the product and lives inside me. They, and many other displaced workers, are my heroes because they were able to seize the opportunity provided by the displacement.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Dedication.....	viii
List of Tables	xii
Preface.....	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	1
Background: Globalization and the New Economy	4
NAFTA.....	5
Displaced Workers: The Known Story	7
Displaced Workers: An Incomplete Picture.....	9
Research Question.....	11
Preview of Methodology	11
Significance of the Study	12
Organization of the Study	13
Definition of Terms.....	14
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
Economic Impact of Job Loss	16
Psychological and Social Impacts of Job Loss.....	18
Challenges to Retraining and Education	21
Barriers to New Employment.....	22

Conceptual Framework	23
Adult Development Theory	24
Identity Theory	26
Schlossberg's Transition Theory	29
Ways Schlossberg Has Been Used	32
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	35
Design of the Study	35
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	36
Participants and Site	40
Data Collection	42
Data Analysis	43
Researcher as Instrument	45
Trustworthiness	48
Ethical Considerations	51
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	52
Participant Profiles	52
Miriam	54
Esther	61
Joshua	68
Data Analysis Process	75
Themes from the Research	78

Summary	87
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	89
Revisiting the Conceptual Framework	89
Conclusion.....	94
Implications	96
Limitations of This Study.....	98
Call for Future Research.....	99
Using IPA in an Educational Study.....	100
Postlude	101
References.....	104
Appendix A: Cover Letter to Participants	112
Appendix B: Informed Consent	114
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire For Participant	116
Appendix D: Interview Protocols	117
Vita.....	120

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Profiles.....	53
Table 2. Example of Transcript Analysis	76
Table 3. Interview Results	77
Table 4. Themes from the Research	78

Preface

“Shift Work”

The whistle blows to alert the workers that the shift has begun. Each worker assumes a position in the assembly line and the responsibility in the production. A row of machines with a worker at each station to perform the task in the assemblage of a finished product that will be tagged and sent to the market and thus begins the buzz and humming of the day. The machines make so much noise that you cannot hear your neighbor and barely your own thoughts. Someone has a radio playing but you can't quite make out the songs and certainly not the commercials. Perhaps that's okay because you don't need to think about anything right now except your part in the production. You've been performing this task for so long that your muscles have been conditioned to execute every hour of every shift in fine unison with the other workers on this line. You understand how each worker ahead of you relies on you making the most of every movement from how you pick up the piece to completing your portion of the assembly to the way you lay the piece for the next worker to receive. At the end of the line an inspector will review each piece and approve it or send it back for repairs. Repairs always require additional time and you remember that time is of the essence: time is money.

Just as your mind and body begin to tire from the day's activity, the whistle blows again as this shift ends and another group of workers will come in and assume their positions at the machines. You nod and smile at your coworkers to acknowledge the end of another good day. Those coworkers have become like family as you spend so many hours together every day. This day of work is finished. Before you leave the building, you stop to use an air hose to blow off as much of the lint and dust as possible. You are proud of the work you have

accomplished and head home to be with your family and get a good night's sleep. All the while, you know that tomorrow you will return to your work station and perform the same tasks again in an effort to bring home a paycheck at the end of the week with which to provide the needs of your family.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Since the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the United States, jobs were easy to find, particularly the entry-level, low-skilled jobs. The American dream implied that individuals could start at the bottom and work their way to the top. The rules for American workers have changed during the past 40-50 years as the global economy has changed (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002). The global economy includes a globalization of competition, which holds down wages of low-skilled workers, leads low-skilled, low-wage jobs giving way to high-skilled, highly paid jobs, and results in an increase of service jobs in hospitals, classrooms, and offices. This new economy requires workers to possess at least some college. Even manufacturing jobs use new technologies and high performance work processes which require more highly skilled workers (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002).

Some areas of the United States (U.S.) have been deeply affected by the loss of millions of jobs, due in large part to free trade agreements, such as NAFTA, and global economic restructuring. These changes have taken jobs in textiles, furniture, call centers, and other manual labor sectors beyond our U.S. borders to places where cheaper labor is an asset. The resulting displacement has left many of our neighbors, especially in rural mill towns of the U.S. southeast, in turmoil as they have sought to rebuild their lives.

This study took place in a rural western North Carolina county occupying more than 754 square miles and populated by 69,340 persons according to the 2010 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Several manufacturing facilities were located here and employees conducted manual labor tasks to produce glass and mirror items, furniture, and several textile items including hosiery, gloves, and denim jeans. In January 2001, as these manufacturing

facilities began closing their doors, unemployment rose from 3.7% to 5.0%. Unemployment remained higher than 5.0% in the following years and broke double digits following the 2008 economic crisis through 2012 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This county served as a prime location for researching the experiences of those who faced transitions resulting from displacement, to and through college, and into the new work force.

In many cases, the original event of displacement was unanticipated and spurred a major life transition. While Levinson's (1986) adult development theory recognizes transitions in adulthood by age, others (Rus, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011) posit that transitions in adulthood are prompted by the events individuals experience. This study seeks to explore transitions set in motion by the event of displacement.

In American society, one's identity is directly related to the work one does (Garrett-Peters, 2009). When job loss occurs, individuals must find new ways to identify the self (Garrett-Peters, 2009). In addition to obvious economic impacts, psychological impacts of job loss must also be addressed. Few displaced workers have actually later found jobs that increased their pay. Among those who were displaced between 2001 and 2003 but were employed in January 2004, 57% reported actually earning less income (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Many of those who have lost their jobs in the U.S. have been offered educational benefits through federal programs like Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and unemployment compensation to attend college and train for a new career. The jobs they previously held were low skill; thus, a new skill set would be necessary to compete in the new work force, defined in this dissertation as the new range of employment options made available by globalization and international trade agreements that marked the late twentieth

and early twenty-first centuries. This new skill set included a working knowledge of computers and a vocational or technical trade marketable in specific sectors (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2001; Fisher, 2004). Some displaced workers have taken advantage of the educational opportunity and earned an associate degree at local community colleges. These individuals then experienced another transition, from being unemployed to being a college student.

As these adult students completed their degree and began the job search, they found themselves developing yet another identity in transition (Kasworm, 2008). Their student self was ending and they were well on their way to developing the identity of a worker in a new work force. This new work force held jobs that had not previously been available to them due to educational barriers and the former work options were no longer available (Fisher, 2004).

In order for community colleges to serve displaced workers effectively, it is important for educators to understand the challenges faced by this population and the supports necessary to sustain individuals who successfully make these transitions. In an effort to understand more completely the lived experiences of those who have survived displacement, college, and enrollment in the “new work force,” this research explored the multiple identities and transitions associated with each event. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of the workers who have been displaced, transitioned to community college where they earned a degree, and then joined the new work force. Specifically, the research explored how the participants’ identities were affected with each transition and how each transition was successfully negotiated.

Background: Globalization and the New Economy

First, it is important to understand how the displacement occurred. Globalization has become a buzz word in today's world. Though the term globalization is used frequently, what is important here is to understand what the term means and how it affects us as individuals and as global citizens. Consider for a moment the following definitions of globalization. Rowntree, Lewis, Price, and Wyckoff (2011) define it as the "increasing interconnectedness of people and places through converging processes of economic, political, and cultural change" (p. 2). Steger (2009) points out that the phenomenon is a "dynamic process rather than a static condition" (p. 9). Friedman (2006), focusing on the economic aspects, emphasizes that globalization includes multinational companies, revolves around the birth and maturation of a global economy, and requires the ability of individuals to collaborate and compete globally (Friedman, 2006).

Globalization, especially international competition, is offered as a cause for the decline in manufacturing employment, as we find "many formerly low-skilled manufacturing jobs are now being done abroad" (Fisher, 2004, p. 2) because foreign wages are much lower than the domestic wages. Kletzer (2005) claims the high import rates have eliminated millions of U.S. manufacturing jobs. During the period from 1979-2001, it is estimated that "18.6 million workers lost jobs in all of U.S. manufacturing" (Kletzer, 2005, p. 42). Among those numbers, women accounted for 65-80% of workers displaced from the import-competing industries of apparel, textiles, footwear, and leather products (Kletzer, 2005). Kletzer (2005) also estimates North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) import-related job loss to be "24 percent-27 percent of manufacturing job losses over the 1993-99 period" (p. 42). Fisher (2004) notes that the U.S. is at a crossroads in economic history,

where manufacturing “is no longer a primary source of prosperity” (p. 1). High-tech sectors and other professional services are most important (Fisher, 2004). Globalization has often been blamed for the decline of traditional manufacturing jobs (Fisher, 2004). Another reason for the decline of traditional manufacturing work is that manufacturing has undergone rapid technological advances that has “reduced the need for manufacturing labor” (Fisher, 2004, p. 1), requiring technical training to secure those new jobs which are highly competitive. One would be hard pressed in the location of the current study to discuss manufacturing job loss without acknowledging the international competition for low-skilled manufacturing jobs.

NAFTA. A major event affecting the displacement of many manufacturing workers is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was signed in 1992 and became effective January 1, 1994. This agreement included the U.S., Canada, and Mexico and created the world’s largest free trade area (U.S. Customs & Border Protection, 2016). One of the side effects of NAFTA has been an unstable employment market in the United States because low-skilled, manual labor became more accessible in other countries (Vorpahl, 2010). The term “displaced workers” has become associated with those who have lost their jobs due specifically to NAFTA and other free trade agreements. They are typically from textiles and furniture manufacturing jobs but are now also recognized from the service industry such as call centers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment in the United States declined from January 1994 when NAFTA was signed, with a rate of 6.6% until January 2001 when the rate was 4.2% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). A mild economic recession occurred in 2001 (Peihani, 2012). However, over the next ten years, unemployment in the United States rose from 5.7% in January 2002 to a high of 10.1% in October 2009 before

another gradual decline (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). In North Carolina, unemployment was 4.5% in January 2001 and rose throughout 2002 and 2003. January 2004 saw a 5.9% unemployment rate, and the figures remained in the 4-5% range until June 2008 when unemployment began to rise. March 2009 through September 2010 saw double-digit unemployment with figures as high as 11.4% in January and February 2010 before ending the year at 9.8% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This data show that national and state unemployment continued to increase after the early years when many American jobs were moved across the border. There was no quick recovery from the loss of those jobs.

Another contributing factor to the increase in unemployment figures of 2008-2010, is the global economic crisis of 2008. In the decade prior to this, the U.S. experienced a massive credit boom and ran an enormous deficit while developing countries were running a surplus (Peihani, 2012). Homeowners considered their homes as assets and expected the home to increase in value leading homeowners to use home equity to finance other expenses (Peihani, 2012). Interest rates dropped and income inequalities were among the many factors that led to the greatest economic recession since the great depression (Elwell, 2013; Peihani, 2012).

When an economy plummets, it has been common for people to brainstorm entrepreneurial ideas. This is so common in fact that many of today's Fortune 500 companies were founded during a recession (Frey, 2012). Following the economic recession of 2008, several terms for the experiences of a changing economy appeared. A sharing economy was defined as an economic system that allowed private individuals to share their assets or services via the internet for free or for a fee (Bonciu, 2016). Fundamental to the sharing economy is that individuals can share information on the availability of their goods and

services that can be traded but are under utilized, un-utilized, or idle (Bonciu, 2016). Because the actors of the sharing economy were individuals and these transactions were occasional, the term soon gave way to the named gig economy (Bonciu, 2016). In American English, a gig job is defined as temporary and occasional which implies a risk to the stability of the job (Bonciu, 2016). In 2009, the term “The Gig Economy” was coined by writer Tina Brown when she noticed an increasing number of young people working as freelancers and holding multiple jobs (Frey, 2012). Workers of the gig economy may include self-employed, independent contractors, freelancers, and part-time workers (Johnson, 2016). Temp jobs were at an all-time high in 2015 and it is estimated that by 2020, 40-percent of the U.S. workforce will be workers of the gig economy (Johnson, 2016). Given the prevailing uncertainty of the economy and the general consensus of low job security, transitions similar to those experienced by the participants in this study may become more common. This again points the community college and local employment agencies to the need for an increased awareness of the non-traditional student.

Displaced Workers: The Known Story

The term “displaced workers,” as is used in this study, refers to persons who “permanently lost jobs they held for 3 or more years because their plant or company closed down or moved, their positions or shifts were abolished, or there was insufficient work for them to do” (Helwig, 2004, p. 54). Kletzer (2005) offers additional consideration of these workers as being displaced due to high-import competition among low-wage industries. Many had chosen employment options in textiles or furniture originally because “they paid fairly well and did not typically require a college education” (Fisher, 2004, p. 2). Others may

have chosen this direction because they had a family history in manufacturing. Due to rapid technological advances in manufacturing, those jobs had disappeared (Fisher, 2004).

As early as 1991, Carnevale maintained that more flexible and skilled employees would be necessary in the emerging new economy, with the impact of technology being the driving force of the change in skill requirements. A preponderance of jobs in the new economy would demand a “higher level of technical complexity in the human role” (Carnevale, 1991, p. 153) and better skills in reading, writing, arithmetic, and logic. Additionally, each employer’s technologies would be unique, thus requiring the employee to remain flexible in his/her technical knowledge and skills (Carnevale, 1991). This new skill set has become a necessity for the displaced worker.

Opportunities for those displaced to gain a new skill set would be needed. The U.S. government provided funds through the administration of the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) for the displaced workers to attend college and train for new jobs in the work force (Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002). Kletzer (2005) notes that “TAA is provided to workers displaced by “trade,” while other displaced workers are eligible for a lesser set of benefits through the Workforce Investment Act” (p. 43). Former laborers became students who persevered through the challenges set before them of living on a reduced income and becoming college students.

The displaced worker and the effects of displacement have been the topics of several research efforts. A review of the literature reveals that “[j]ob loss is a well-documented threat to both economic and psychological well-being” (Garrett-Peters, 2009, p. 548). Several works have focused on the psychological impact of job loss (Brand, Levy, & Gallo, 2008; Garrett-Peters, 2009; Ghilani, 2008; McAtee, & Benshoff, 2006; Mendenhall, Kalil, Spindel,

Hart, 2008). Work provides routines and relationships and in American society establishes an identity for the individual. A disruption in work severs the familiar, thus creating stress and anxiety.

Another advantage to work is earning an income that provides for the worker both needs and wants. Research centering on the recognized changes in economic abilities and confidences of the displaced worker are many (D'Arcy, Stater, & Wenger, 2009; Jacobson, LaLonde, & Sullivan, 2003; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006; Mendenhall et al., 2008). These studies reveal the changing economy of the U.S. and of the middle class who suffered wage loss due to displacement.

Job loss combined with the Trade Adjustment Act opened the doors to educational opportunities for displaced workers to train for jobs in a new work force. Few studies (Evelyn, 2003; McAtee & Benshoff, 2006), however, have offered information about the challenges of displaced workers who transitioned into the role of non-traditional students. Literature reveals even less emphasis on the re-entry into the workforce (Ghilani, 2008) following completion of a community college degree. This study sought to fill this gap.

Displaced Workers: An Incomplete Picture

Statistics are available regarding the unemployment data and the numbers of workers who have returned to work and no longer receive unemployment benefits. Even part-time employment will move an individual from unemployed to employed status, but the new employment opportunities may not restore the lifestyle of these who formerly enjoyed middle-class status. These individuals have faced innumerable personal and familial challenges through stress created by job and income loss. Many were not prepared for the academic rigors of attending college, as some had been out of school for 30 years or more.

Now they find that the local job market will no longer support the number of workers in their area, nor will it provide the lifestyle to which they were accustomed. There seems much to add to the quantitative perspective provided by the handful of studies in the extant literature; the story of the displaced worker is not yet complete. Only a few studies have been found to take a qualitative approach to understanding the plight of the displaced worker (Garrett-Peters, 2009; Mendenhall, Kalil, Spindel, & Hart, 2008; Newman, McDougall, & Baum, 2009).

McAtee and Benschhoff (2006) conducted a quantitative study but encouraged future researchers to include a qualitative component because the women who completed their surveys wrote unsolicited comments. Ghilani (2008) saw the need for further research to include an investigation of the level and length of retraining, the type of retraining program and its effect on employment and salary earnings. Mendenhall, Kalil, Spindel, and Hart (2008) conducted qualitative interviews with 77 recently unemployed, predominantly white males, age 40-60 in Chicago, Illinois, to discover

how the experiences of job loss and unemployment affected respondents' perceptions of the changing labor market, shaped their decision-making processes about resuming (or changing) careers at this stage in their life course and how these views spilled over into discussions they had with their children about their children's economic future. (p. 186)

A similar study was conducted in Australia with the youth of families who had at least one parent who lost work when an automobile manufacturing site closed in Adelaide, South Australia (Newman, McDougall, & Baum, 2009). These authors have acknowledged that the qualitative research is important in understanding more about the plight of the displaced

worker. These few studies recognize the need for and encourage future research to be conducted with this particular population using a qualitative approach. My research responds to this call.

The experience of job loss is an important life event that presents a transition in one's life roles. Schlossberg (2008) describes a transition as an event or non-event that results in changed roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Displaced workers in this study have experienced three transitions: a transition from employed to unemployed, a transition from unemployed to college student, and a transition from college student to employee in the "new work force." Understanding how individuals successfully negotiate these transitions will be instructive to community colleges as they continue to construct services to serve workers in a volatile workforce.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study was: What are the experiences of workers who have been displaced, transitioned to community college where each earned a degree, and then joined the new work force? Specifically, how were their multiple identities affected with each transition and how was each transition successfully negotiated?

Preview of Methodology

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) "is a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). IPA allows the researcher to interpret ways an individual makes sense of a major life transition (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) like displacement, becoming a college student, and finding employment in a new field. The end result of IPA is always the way the researcher thinks the participant is thinking about the

lived experience. I gathered participants' views of their experiences (Creswell, 2009) through a series of semi-structured interview sessions involving open-ended questions which allowed each participant to share personal experiences and also elucidate the complexity of the events.

Each of three participants was asked to commit to three face-to-face interviews and potential follow-up conversations. However, the flow of the conversations resulted in two interview sessions with each participant. Each interview session lasted for more than one hour. During the first interview, we discussed the announcement of displacement and the resulting life changes – the transition from employed to unemployed (Transition 1). The conversation continued well into the originally planned second interview protocol which focused on the transition to the role of community college student. In the second interview, we discussed more about life as a college student, the completion of the Associate in Applied Science degree (Transition 2), and life after college to learn about the job search and securing employment in a new field as a transition from the student self to employee (Transition 3). Interviews were transcribed and evaluated for themes. Through the use of IPA, “interviews are analyzed case by case through a systematic analytic interpretation” and then “turned into a narrative account where the researcher’s analytic interpretation is presented in detail” supported with extracts from the participant (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 4). This analysis did necessitate additional research of the literature as themes emerged.

Significance of the Study

The lives of many U.S. citizens have been impacted by the life-changing events incurred by the effects of the changing global economy. Massive layoffs and plant closings have resulted in job loss, a life-changing event for which most were not prepared. Many have

chosen to take advantage of educational benefits afforded them by TAA to train for work in the new economy. The many in number are our neighbors and our relatives. They have experienced heartache, depression, and financial loss. There are equally as many experiences as there are individuals.

The research contained herein will extend the literature findings to include experiences of displaced workers through a qualitative investigation. While case studies have been conducted with various job loss situations, little research has been conducted with a focus on the individual following the training for a new career and new employment. One intention of this study is to give a voice to those individuals who have been displaced and then reemployed. Another intention is to inform the community college system of the experiences shared by these adult learners in order to enhance services provided to non-traditional students by faculty, staff, and administrators. Community college personnel need to better understand this population in an effort to equip the non-traditional student with coping and goal setting skills as they move in, move through, and move out of the college experience.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research, a purpose statement, the research question, a preview of the methodology, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 will present a review of the literature about the economic and psychological impacts of job loss and the return to college for retraining. It will also provide a conceptual framework for the current study, including theories of adult development, identity, and transition. Chapter 3 details the methodological approaches, the design of the study, research sites and participants, methods of data collection and analysis procedures, and finally, ethical

considerations. Chapter 4 reveals participant information including narratives of their own stories, the data analysis process, and emergent themes. Chapter 5 will revisit the conceptual framework and develop conclusions in addition to providing implications and limitations of the study as well as the call for future research.

Definition of Terms

Adult Development Theory: eras of transition in adult development defined by age (Levinson, 1986)

Displaced Workers: persons who “permanently lost jobs they held for 3 or more years because their plant or company closed down or moved, their positions or shifts was abolished, or there was insufficient work for them to do” (Helwig, 2004, p. 54)

Globalization: focus on the economic aspects, emphasizing that globalization includes multinational companies, revolving around the birth and maturation of a global economy, requiring the ability of individuals to collaborate and compete globally (Friedman, 2006)

Identity: the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3)

Middle-Class: there is no widely accepted definition of the middle class; some explain this as being in the middle of the income distribution, some individuals self-identify as middle class, and others count those who have achieved certain aspirations such as home ownership, saving for retirement, and the ability to send the children to college (Renwick & Short, 2014, p. 1)

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA): a federal entitlement program that assists U.S. workers who have lost or may lose their jobs as a result of foreign trade. This program seeks to

provide adversely affected workers with opportunities to obtain the skills, credentials, resources, and support necessary to become reemployed (Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002)

Transition: any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Schlossberg, 2011)

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of workers who have been displaced, transitioned to a community college where each earned a degree, and then joined the new work force. Specifically, the research explored how the participants' identities were affected with each transition and how each transition was successfully negotiated. The first part of this chapter will provide a review of literature related to the economic and psychological impacts of job loss and the return to college for training. The second part of the chapter will present the conceptual framework for the study, including theories of adult development, identity, and transition.

Economic Impact of Job Loss

Of all the assets employment provides, income is likely the one benefit that draws people to work. It is a means to provide both the needs and wants for ourselves and for our families. Therefore, one of the first disadvantages to come to mind when we hear of job loss is the reduction of income. For the individual affected by job loss, there are questions such as: *How will I feed my family? Will I lose my home?* The economic impact of job loss on so many individuals as a result of globalization and NAFTA has changed the way one thinks about employment, spending, and saving.

In the 1990s unemployment was low, the stock market soared, and income levels rose for workers at all levels (Mendenhall et al., 2008). The turn of the century marked a turn in our economy. The early years of the twenty-first century are referred to as an "economic bust," when unemployment soared and the stock market plummeted (Mendenhall et al., 2008, p. 185). This era came to be known as the "new risk economy," one in which company

loyalty was weakened and workers realized that a single, long-term employment lasting into the golden years of life was no longer a reality (Mendenhall et al., 2008, p. 186).

Displaced workers had traditionally been from the middle class. These were blue collar workers who were previously able to provide a home, automobile, and vacation for the family without worries of making the bills every month. When job loss made its way to the white-collar, middle management, middle-aged male, it found a population that had historically been protected from job loss (Mendenhall et al., 2008). These experienced workers from the financial, professional, and business service industries were hit especially hard in the Chicago area, where the participants in a study conducted by Mendenhall and his colleagues were located. This population of displaced workers was found to share strategies with their children about the “new risk economy” and how the next generation might “prepare for downturns, develop transferable skills, consider entrepreneurial pathways, and to neither expect nor offer company loyalty” (Mendenhall et al., 2008, p. 196).

D’arcy, Stater, and Wenger (2009) focused on the diminished wages the displaced worker earns upon returning to the workforce in a new position. This study noted that a low re-employment wage change is likely for workers who hold multiple jobs while displaced and that older workers have lower wage gains than their younger counterparts (D’arcy et al., 2009, p. 606). Older, minority, lower class, less educated women experience a greater challenge in finding a comparable salary once they are laid off, and the “fact is that they likely never will recover financially from the loss, especially if they have children” (McAtee & Benshoff, 2006, p. 699). Most likely, the jobs these women find will pay less, offer no seniority, and provide fewer retirement benefits (McAtee & Benshoff, 2006). These studies

indicate that many workers who are laid off will not likely ever again see comparable income with which to provide for themselves or their families.

D'arcy et al. (2009) argued that only 30-40% of displaced workers who are re-employed actually experience an increase in earnings. They used 1996-2002 data from the Displaced Workers Survey, regarded as an industry standard, to find that 9% averaged a decrease in real weekly earnings while 38.8% of the same group earned higher wages at their post-displacement jobs. They also found in post-displacement jobs that “women earn 23.4% less than similar men, older workers earn significantly more than younger workers,...college-educated workers earn significantly more than those with at most a high school education,” workers with longer tenure (at least 7 years) earn more, and “workers with employer-provided health insurance earn 25.7% more than uninsured workers” (D'arcy et al., 2009, p. 600). One flaw in using this tool is that there is no information about a worker's additional school or training since displacement.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, of those who were displaced between 2001 and 2003 but were employed in January 2004, 964,000 reported earning equal to or more than pre-displacement. However, 749,000 reported earning 20 percent or more below their pre-displacement income and an additional 498,000 reported earning less, but within 20 percent, below their pre-displacement income. Thus, 57% of those surveyed reported earning less following displacement. These numbers illustrate a very grim economic picture.

Psychological and Social Impacts of Job Loss

For many, identity is directly related to our employment status. In U.S. culture, such an emphasis on work and occupation suggests that one's identity is based on a job as a “key

resource for generating positive reflected appraisals and favorable social comparisons, both inside and outside the work place” and that “action in the workplace may be crucial for creating and sustaining feelings of self-efficacy through self-perceptions of competence” (Garrett-Peters, 2009, p. 548). Garrett-Peters (2009) points out that we often introduce ourselves in such a way as to incorporate what we do in our work place. As we are defined by those moments when we are confident in our work, so too are we defined by the moments when we may struggle to perform at work. If then our identity is so attached to the work we do, Garrett-Peters (2009) maintained that it is evident we must find new ways to identify the self when job loss occurs. Job loss appears to entail much more than the loss of work and wages “but also the routines and relationships that may substantially undergird one’s feelings of self-efficacy” (Garrett-Peters, 2009, p. 552). The resulting loss of work and wages, routines, and relationships may invoke psychological distress in emotions of fear, anxiety, depression and anger (Garrett-Peters, 2009).

Garrett-Peters (2009) conducted a year-long research study among male and female, white-collar, and displaced professional and managerial workers who were participating in job search/support groups. He observed twenty-five support group meetings that were open to the public in a medium-sized metropolitan city in southeastern United States. Intensive interviews with twenty-two group members followed. He found that through their work in the support group, participants were able to redefine unemployment as a positive opportunity. They learned to appreciate less familiar sorts of achievements – outside the realm of paid work – or to deemphasize objective results – pay raises, bonuses, promotions receiving praise from other members for doing so. Undirected time became filled with job search tasks and allowed participants to organize goal-oriented segments in their days. Partnerships were

developed between two group members who would communicate regularly, providing motivation and positive appraisals for each other. Volunteering or helping others allowed group members an opportunity to escape from job searching, see others who were worse off, and act as a resource for others offering immediate evidence of having done something. Garrett-Peters (2009) concluded that a key factor in surviving job loss was social capital which he described as being “created when people come together to share resources and help each other” (p. 574) which provides participants access to resources they would not otherwise have had. Furthermore, he demonstrates how the self-concept operates as a source of motivation for its own repair.

Another study of white-collar displaced workers focused on how personal perceptions had been affected by the displacement experience. Mendenhall, Kalil, Spindel, and Hart (2008) conducted interviews with 77 white-collared displaced workers, predominantly white males who lost their long term, middle-management jobs in the Chicago area when they were between the ages of 40 and 60 years old. These are the years Americans associate with mid-life crisis, when individuals may already be at odds with their own identity. One intent of Mendenhall and his colleagues (2008) was to discover

how the experiences of job loss and unemployment affected respondents’ perceptions of the changing labor market, shaped their decision-making processes about resuming (or changing) careers at this stage in their life course, and how these views spilled over into discussions they had with their children about their children’s economic future. (p. 186)

Participants reported how intergenerational conversations with their children resulted in sharing experiences of the job loss, encouraging children “to protect themselves from being

overly dependent on employers” (Mendenhall et al., 2008, p. 204) and to develop transferable skills. These interviews indicate a shift not only in thinking about the individual’s loss but also that of influencing future generation as a product of job loss.

Challenges to Retraining and Education

In some areas of the country, there have not been enough jobs to absorb all the displaced workers. Individuals in these areas have had no choice than to turn to a retraining program. Retraining assistance has been made available to displaced workers under the federal Trade Adjustment Act (TAA), which provided the tuition, fees, and books while displaced workers were attending a community college to earn a two-year associate degree. Workers were also eligible for unemployment benefits, which provided some portion of their income to satisfy living expenses. This benefit was limited to a number of weeks that often expired prior to completion of the community college degree (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). According to the US Department of Labor (2011), the Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002 stated that workers were eligible to apply for TAA services if they were laid off as a result of increased imports or if their company shifted production out of the United States to certain foreign countries. Later, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 expanded coverage to workers of the service sector whose jobs had been off-shored to any country. Several changes to the benefits of the TAA have occurred as recently as the Extension Act of 2011. These policies are important as we begin to study the experiences of those who chose to attend community college.

A handful of studies have explored experiences of rural displaced manufacturing workers as they transitioned from the work place to the community college for retraining (Evelyn, 2003; McAtee & Benschhoff, 2006). Evelyn (2003) shares the struggles of two men

who were displaced in Kannapolis, NC. Each man had been earning more than \$15 per hour plus overtime opportunities just prior to being displaced. Neither had completed a high school diploma. Once they lost their jobs, their lives became more complicated by the necessary paperwork of filing for benefits, completing college applications, and taking the GED, when such had never been necessary for working in the mill (Evelyn, 2003).

In another study, McAtee and Benshoff (2006) used the TGQ-M Questionnaire to survey 125 dislocated, rural women, ages 28-57 years, who held at least a high school diploma or GED. Some had chosen immediate re-employment while others chose to attend a community college. There were strong differences in the support networks for women who chose to attend a community college for retraining. These women indicated the importance of support provided by both the institution and family. The educational benefits provided the women of McAtee and Benshoff's (2006) study with opportunities for retraining but also presented challenges. Such challenges included completing the necessary paperwork for securing the benefits and also completing the college applications.

Barriers to New Employment

Local communities must work to provide jobs for those displaced workers who have retrained at a community college (McAtee & Benshoff, 2006) because those pre-displacement jobs no longer exist due to plant closure or move, insufficient work, or position or shift abolishment (D'Arcy et al., 2009). A quantitative approach to learning about the experiences of 670 displaced workers from a company that manufactured glass faceplates for cathode ray tube televisions in Pennsylvania who have re-entered the workforce was presented by Ghilani (2008). This company was owned by a Japanese subsidiary, and workers were dismissed on August 3, 2004. These workers were provided unemployment

benefits and assistance under the TAA. Of the more than 100 who enrolled at the local community college, 70 graduated with an associate degree. Ghilani then mailed surveys to each graduate with a 36% return rate. The survey requested information about “current employment, length of time to find employment, level of new position, starting salary, a comparison of jobs, hours, benefits, and job satisfaction to previous position” (Ghilani, 2008, p. 575-576). She found that most respondents were employed in entry-level positions, and all but one reported salaries lower than pre-displacement. About 2/3 reported fewer hours worked at the new job and found benefit coverage to be worse. With 60% of females reporting they liked their new position better, an even 20% reported they liked their job about the same and 20% didn’t like it as much. They found barriers to employment to include lack of experience, starting salary, age, too much experience, lack of positions, geographic distance, and family considerations (Ghilani, 2008). Ghilani’s (2008) participants were community college graduates yet the findings coincide with other reports (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011; D’Arcy et al., 2009) of lower income received by displaced workers who have joined the new work force.

Thus far in this chapter, I have reviewed the economic impact of job loss, the psychological and social impacts of job loss, educational opportunities, and new employment opportunities for the displaced. In the next section, I will map the conceptual framework and offer theories to support this study.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of workers who have been displaced, transitioned to community college and earned a degree, and then joined the new work force. Specifically, the research explored how the participants’ identities were

affected with each transition and how each transition was negotiated. Based on the literature, each of these events likely played a role in the creation of a new identity for these individuals. Likewise, each individual experienced these transitions in a very personal way. Therefore, I applied Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2008, 2011) as the basis for this study. I also applied two other key strands of theory to complete the conceptual framework: adult development theory (Levinson, 1986; Rus, 2012) and identity theory (Gecas, 1982; Kasworm, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Each of these will be discussed before outlining Schlossberg's Transition Theory (2008, 2011).

Adult Development Theory

Levinson is referred to as both prominent and influential as a life-cycle theorist (Kittrell, 1998) and his work references the development models of Freud, Erikson, and Piaget (Levinson, 1986). Based upon his own studies, Levinson developed a theory focusing on the concepts of life course and life cycle, identifying eras of transition in adult development defined by age. During his *early adulthood* era from about age 17 to 45 adults are “establishing a niche in society, raising a family,...forming an occupation” and possibly incurring “heavy financial obligations” (Levinson, 1986, p. 5). Other adult eras are identified as *midlife transition* from age 40 to 45, *middle adulthood* ranging from 40 to 65 with *late adulthood* starting at age 60 (Levinson, 1986).

Central to the adult life are marriage-family and occupation. They are important to the evolving life course and require a great amount of time and energy, influencing all other components of the life course (Levinson, 1986). Levinson contends that the formation of dreams is essential to entering early adulthood. Levinson found that men are most likely to develop occupational dreams during the late teens and early 20s, and women were often in

the age 30 transition before they developed occupational dreams (Kittrell, 1996). He also claimed that individuals experienced personal fulfillment when they built a life around the dreams of early adulthood. While Levinson's work is certainly noteworthy, his work focuses on adult development by age, which falls short in the scope of this study. The current research question needed a theory that recognizes events as central to the changes of adulthood.

Levinson (1986) defines adult development using ages while others (Rus, 2012; Schlossberg, 2008, 2011) define adult development by events. Rus (2012) points out in reference to the life cycle theory that "adult development is marked by events such as new family roles, disease, unemployment, and retirement" (p. 226). He stressed that the most important roles of adulthood are associated with family, work, and community. Work may be viewed as an economic means or a survival mechanism. The work environment is a place where adults establish an adult work identity and there is a "link between individual and society, and between the personal objectives and social goals" (Rus, 2012, p. 228). Work may also enhance "a mundane life, increase the framework of interpersonal relationships, define the status and personal identity, maintain and sustain the development of an activity" (Rus, 2012, p. 228). A person's identity, social status, and income are all attached to the work one does.

Rus (2012) maintains that sometimes work opportunities change due to the labor market and the globalization of our economy. Involuntary unemployment severs the bond between the person and the role for which one has been preparing, leaving the individual in a compromising situation. Negative consequences may include lower salaries, fewer benefits available, and less political movement. Some displaced workers may consider this a

welcomed opportunity to reorganize life, change work, or to re-orient the career (Rus, 2012). Rus (2012) cites the middle-aged employed versus the middle-aged unemployed, finding the unemployed to show more “physical symptoms, lower self-esteem, worsening of mental health, and greater level of hostility” (p. 229). These are some of the psychological impacts of job loss.

Levinson (1986) and Rus (2012) agree that family and work are central to adult life. One major difference is that Levinson (1986) only acknowledges transitions in adulthood with age while Rus (2012) acknowledges transitions in adulthood with events such as unemployment, which is important to the current study. Work and family are only two of the roles that influence one’s identity. The literature of adult development delivers two constructs that warrant more exploration: identity and transitions. Each of these will be explored next.

Identity Theory

In an attempt to define identity, one may find it important to understand the evolution of the term “self-concept” to the more widely used and accepted term of “identity.” Seminal writings of self-concept date to the late 1800s (Gecas, 1982). Gecas (1982) defines “self-concept” as the idea an “individual has of himself as a physical, social, and spiritual or moral being” (p. 3) and is an “experiential, mostly cognitive phenomenon” (p. 4). One’s self-concept may reflect the appraisal of others; however, not all others are equally significant. Furthermore, individuals often compare abilities and virtues to those of others attempting a social norm to establish a desired identity in a particular social setting (Gecas, 1982). Since an individual encounters multiple social settings, the construct of identity necessitates a sense of plurality – identities – instead of a singular notion of self-concept.

Gecas (1982) explains that identities are often “established and maintained through the process of negotiation” (p. 10) in social interactions. Thus, one’s identity is inseparable from the social interaction. Indeed, the “establishment of identities is considered the fundamental task of social encounters” (Gecas, 1982, p. 12). As we often identify ourselves by what we do in our work role, we seemingly define ourselves by our work. Work is an element of social structure. However, work is only one of the many roles and relationships that we participate in throughout the day. Other roles might include spouse, sibling, child, parent, and friend. Therefore, multiple identities exist as we seek to fulfill the many behavioral expectations in our social system (Gecas, 1982).

Another perspective used to understand identity is social identity theory. Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed the idea that an individual’s self-concept is derived from perceived membership within social groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) explored the view that a person has not one “personal identity,” but rather multiple identities that correspond to the membership of various social circles. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel, and act on the basis of his personal, family or national “level of self” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Deaux (1993) further defined this concept, noting “social identities are those roles or membership categories that a person claims as representative” (p. 6). One’s role in society, whether student, parent, sibling, friend, leader, boss, or employee, can dramatically influence one’s identity.

Gecas (1982) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) note that we possess multiple identities not as an identity crisis but rather a way to navigate the many social roles we inhabit. These are formed as we participate in our various social groups. Social and emotional engagement is “viewed in terms of role participation and identity construction” (p. 51). One of the

processes explaining how individuals give meaning to the roles is “identity meanings,” or how one views one’s self in a given role (Smith & Taylor, 2010). When the primary social group for an individual is work related and suddenly work no longer exists for that person, an abrupt disruption to the identity occurs. Relevant to this study then, is how the displaced worker experienced loss of a role and encountered a need to establish an identity in a new social group.

As a variety of social roles have been noted, Kasworm (2008) offers the role of student as yet another identity for consideration. According to Kasworm (2008), adult students struggle to establish a student identity. She also notes that adult learners have been attending college in growing numbers yet “current theory and research on college students has continued to look at the undergraduate population through the lens of young adult development theories” (Kasworm, 2008, p. 3). Previous research on college students’ identity has “not taken into account the complex maturation and experiential base of lifeworld-shaped identities of the adult collegiate student” (Kasworm, 2008, p. 3). Adults who enroll in college continue their complex lives with multiple roles as they add the challenge of becoming a college student. In addition to the added challenge of becoming a college student, the adult may encounter challenges in the sense of identity (Kasworm, 2005).

Displaced workers who enroll in community colleges have done so as the result of a life crisis where they have already experienced separation and chaos. Kasworm (2008) posits that adults who enter college as a result of a life crisis often “display emotional chaos as they develop a student identity, contemplate future success in a collegiate classroom, and psychologically manage their turbulent life circumstances” (p. 28). Students have often had experiences where family and friends were unsupportive of their attempts to attend

community college. Each semester presents a new challenge in their already complex lives so these students must renegotiate or adapt with each term (Kasworm, 2008).

These explanations may lead one to believe that one's identity would definitely change while experiencing life-changing events such as job loss, becoming a college student, and joining the new work force. The challenge for the displaced worker to negotiate multiple identities associated with each setting most likely lies in the abrupt, unplanned nature of those events. We live in a world where change seems inevitable. Some changes are anticipated while others may be sudden and unexpected. Regardless of how the change occurred, each individual experiences the transition in a very personal way. Transitions change a person's life and the current study required a theoretical model for contemplating transitions. For that we turn to Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Some models discuss transitions during adulthood by age (Levinson, 1986) while others offer explanation of transitions during adulthood as related to life events (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Rus, 2012; Schlossberg, 2008). Events may be either planned, including marriage and retirement, or unplanned, such as events that suddenly disrupt an individual's routines or relationships. These events, whether planned or unplanned, may produce anxiety and may be frightening without regard to age. Among several individuals experiencing the same event, some may describe the event as a crisis while others may describe the event as an opportunity. Whether viewed as crisis or opportunity, each individual will undergo a transition from the old self to the new while coping with the changes of life. Schlossberg (2008) offers a transition theory that considers an individual's coping strategies when faced with a life-changing event. Schlossberg (2008) describes a

transition as an event or non-event that results in changed roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Her theory is noted as “psychosocial in nature” and is “typically categorized as a theory of adult development” representing a “conceptual integration of and expansion on existing theory and research” (Evans, 2010, p. 213).

The transition model has three parts: approaching transitions, taking stock of coping resources (4-S System), and taking charge (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Approaching transitions is the time to identify the trigger or event precipitating the transition, the degree to which the individual’s life changes, and where the adult is in the transition process (moving in, moving through, or moving out). The approaching transition is an anticipated event, an unanticipated event, or a non-event (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Taking stock of coping resources includes “four sets of factors that influence one’s ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies, known as the 4-S’s” (Evans, 2010). Schlossberg (2011) suggests that “mystery can be taken out of change” when we understand these features (p. 160). *Situation* is explained as the individual’s situation at the time of transition and includes other stresses (Schlossberg, 2011), concepts of control and choice, duration, and previous experience with a similar transition (Goodman & Anderson, 2012).

Self “refers to the person’s inner strength for coping with the situation” (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 160) but also considers the individual’s outlook or sense of optimism (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). In her work with individuals approaching retirement, Schlossberg used the term “psychological portfolio” to explain the individual’s psychological resources as a person’s identity, relationships, and a sense of purpose (Goodman & Anderson, 2012, p. 13).

Other factors important to self are demographics such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity/culture (Evans, 2010).

There are four types of social *support* (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) important in the transition: “intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions” to which the individual belongs (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 84; Evans, 2010, p. 217). In addition to people and things, one may also include abstract concepts such as faith and spirituality (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). While one support system may be diminished another may be sought by the individual.

Schlossberg (2010) recommends the use of a variety of *strategies* to cope with a transition. Strategies include “those that change the situation, those that change the meaning of the situation, and those that manage the stress of the transition” (Goodman & Anderson, 2012, p. 15). Changing the situation may entail finding ways to feel useful again or to restore some structure to the day (Goodman & Anderson, 2012). Changing the meaning of the situation may require the individual “seek to find the opportunity in adversity” (Goodman & Anderson, 2012, p. 16). In order to effectively manage the stress of a transition, individuals must find a way to keep both the mind and body healthy (Goodman & Anderson, 2012).

The third major part of the transition model is *taking charge* (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Individuals may need to set goals to change the way they perceive a particular situation or change the situation, increase self-understanding, increase support, and develop better strategies (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is important to the current study as it recognizes that life events, during adulthood regardless of age may be planned or unplanned, create anxiety and identifies a need for strategies to aid the individual in successful navigation through each

event. Recognition of the trigger event leads the individual to evaluate the situation and consider choices while finding the inner strength to progress. The individual finds social circles, institutions, and faith systems provide support while seeking strategies to manage the transition. Eventually, the adult is able to develop goals that will place the individual on a new path.

Ways Schlossberg Has Been Used

Much of Schlossberg's effort has been applied to the transition from work to retirement. In addition to her own writings, Schlossberg's colleagues Goodman and Anderson (2012) have also applied the 4-S model to retirement. After discussing each of the four factors, Goodman and Anderson (2012) conclude that "intentional and mindful attention to each of the 4-S's can be helpful when working with clients approaching or living in what could be considered a very meaningful life stage" (p.17).

A few researchers have applied Schlossberg's theory to individuals attending college. Schaefer (2010) applied Schlossberg's transition model as a theoretical framework to examine the experience of older baby boomer students' return to college. All participants in her study were first-generation, had previous college experience, and sought additional career opportunities by pursuing a bachelor's degree at a Midwestern university. The findings of the study demonstrated that the study's first-generational college students needed help understanding the higher education process; that participants were motivated by career aspirations; and that students experienced "complex support needs while transitioning back into college" (Schaefer, 2010, p. 86).

Yet another population of adults transitioning to college students is veterans. Wheeler (2012) conducted a qualitative study to examine the experiences of veterans who enrolled in

community college for the first time using Schlossberg's Theory of Adult Transitions as a guiding framework. Wheeler (2012) found past academic experiences, personal relationships and connections, and benefit bureaucracy to impact their transition. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) also researched veterans and their transition to college students grounding their work in Schlossberg's theory. These studies have all focused on adults making the transition to become college students. One study was found to have researched the transition through a college program (Dela Cruz, Farr, Klakovich, & Esslinger, 2013). Dela Cruz and colleagues (2013) report the use of Schlossberg's transition theory in investigating the Second Careers and Nursing (SCAN) program at Azusa Pacific University in California. The program was designed in the three stages of "*moving in* to the learning environment, *moving through* it, and preparing to leave – *moving out* of the transition" (Dela Cruz, et al, 2013, p. 12). Schlossberg's theory was successfully used by this team to establish the timing of socialization approaches for students (Dela Cruz, et al., 2013).

To date, research using Schlossberg's model has been conducted with those facing retirement and adults transitioning to college. In this study, I executed a more comprehensive approach of moving in, moving through, and moving out and include the multiple transitions of an employee from manufacturing or the service sector who transitioned to a college student and transitioned once more to an employee in the new work force. A simple view of transition might be that from manufacturing worker to new work force member. A more complete view of transitions for this population also exists with multiple transitions over time. For instance, one transition occurred when the worker received notice that the employment would soon end: the employed became the unemployed (Transition 1). Then, the unemployed transitioned to college student (Transition 2). The final transition in this

research is that of student to worker in the new work force (Transition 3). As demonstrated, this group of adults has likely experienced multiple role identities across and through these transitions. I wove together the theories of adult development, identity, and transitions as the guiding framework for this research.

This chapter has provided a review of the literature of the economic and psychological impacts of job loss as well as educational opportunities and new employment opportunities afforded the displaced worker. Also, the conceptual framework including adult development, identity, and Schlossberg's Transition Theory has been built for the study. Chapter 3 will present the design of the study including the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodologies incorporated in the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of workers who have been displaced, transitioned to community college where each earned a degree, and then joined the new work force. Specifically, the research explores how the participants' identities were affected with each transition and how each transition was successfully negotiated. The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was chosen as the methodology for the study because this approach allows the researcher to explore the ways people make sense of their major life experiences.

Using the concepts found in the literature and theories as a framework, the research focuses on understanding the perceptions of displaced workers across three life-changing events: displacement, college life, and employment in the new work force. This chapter details the design of the study, the research site and participants, the methods of data collection and analysis procedures, and finally, ethical considerations.

Design of the Study

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding a phenomenon rather than predicting (Clandinin, 2007). The qualitative researcher must then understand the fluid nature of this type of research. Because qualitative research will evolve as the study is conducted, the researcher must remain flexible and alert to the time and space when the participant and research may take on a new direction (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2005). It is as if the research takes on a unique life form. Clandinin (2007) cautions that the method and inquiry will have starting points that will be informed and intertwined with literature that in turn informs method and understanding (Clandinin, 2007).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) fits the purpose of the proposed investigation because I sought to understand the lived experiences of the displaced worker during three life events: displacement, attending college, and transitioning to the new work force. Each of these will be discussed as a transition and the opportunity for the participant to share personal accounts from each transition will lead to a better understanding of the perceptions held during each era.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Phenomenology is an approach to research grounded in the work of philosopher Edmund Husserl (Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). Husserlian phenomenology purports a phenomenon exists only when a subject has perceived the object (Dowling & Cooney, 2012), is referred to as a study of the ‘life world’ (Tuohy et al., 2013), and attempts to get to the essence or true meaning of the lived experience by use of phenomenological reduction or bracketing which requires the researcher to suspend prejudices and beliefs that might influence the participant’s description (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). Husserl’s work has often been referred to as descriptive phenomenology and has inspired the work of Giorgi, Moustakas, and van Manen (Dowling & Cooney, 2012). Tuohy et al., (2013) states that the “aim of descriptive phenomenology is to describe a phenomenon’s general characteristics rather than the individual’s experiences” (p. 18).

As a student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger built upon the work of Husserl; however, Heidegger sought to “move beyond description to interpretation” (Dowling & Cooney, 2012, p. 24). Heidegger contended that a “researcher cannot separate description from his or her own interpretation” due to the unity between the person and the world in which one lives (Dowling & Cooney, 2012, p. 24). The goal of *interpretive phenomenology*, then, “is to

describe, understand and interpret participants' experiences" (Tuohy et al., 2013, p. 18). Interpretive phenomenology allows the researcher and participant to socially construct the experiences of the participant. Dowling and Cooney (2012) noted that "phenomenology is most useful when the task at hand is to understand an experience as it is understood by those who are having it" (p. 25).

Heidegger also further developed the work of Wilhelm Dilthey on hermeneutics (Tuohy et al., 2013). Dilthey argued that description plays a profound role in the human sciences and recognized the meaningful interrelations that exist "within the context of the whole" (Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011, p. 80). He also concluded that the preferred method to study one's lived experience is through "description, interpretation, and understanding" (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 81). Therefore, "hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy that aims to achieve understanding through interpretation and adopts a process that clarifies the phenomenon of interest in its context" (Dowling & Cooney, 2011, p. 25). From hermeneutic phenomenology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) evolved (Clancy, 2013), appearing on the scene in the mid-1990s and "drawing on concepts and ideas which have much longer histories" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 4). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) state that "IPA is a qualitative approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences" (p. 1). An 'experience' is defined as an anticipated or unanticipated event with major significance to the individuals. As individuals reflect upon the significance of the event, IPA research aims to explore the reflections (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA "focuses on understanding individual experiences, the cares and concerns of participants being paramount" (Clancy, 2013, p. 12).

Important to IPA is the use of “reflexivity as a tool for representing the information researchers gain from participants” (Clancy, 2013, p. 12). Reflexivity is described as an active process by which the researcher is aware of the self, is able to evaluate the self in the situation, and reduces the risk of prejudices, biases, and personal characteristics on the research and findings (Clancy, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Reflexivity is the ability to be introspective and is crucial to both the research and the researcher/participant interactions (Clancy, 2013). The reflexivity of the researcher allows monitoring of subjective feelings and may lead the researcher to ask certain questions and make certain interpretations (Glesne, 2011). This is in essence two research projects conducted simultaneously with one research study of the topic and the other of the researcher self (Glesne, 2011). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) refer to this as double hermeneutics wherein the researcher seeks how an individual makes sense of the experience and the participant is asked to make sense of what is happening to him. The researcher “only has access to the participant’s experience through the participant’s own account of it” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3).

My own reflexivity took several forms. Prior to the study, I wrote a personal narrative which served as an opportunity to both place myself in the study and also as a way to make sense and understanding of the ways my life has been influenced by manufacturing family members and the way I have been professionally positioned to offer assistance to those who have been displaced. Following some of the interviews, I also wrote a journal entry. The journal entries allowed me an opportunity to reflect on the stories I was hearing from the participants and sort through some of my personal knowledge of the struggles experienced by both previous students and family members.

The use of IPA for this study may seem a bit daring as this approach has been used mostly in psychology, health psychology, clinical and psychological counseling, and social and educational psychology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). However, I find that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is appropriate to this study because the purpose of this research study is to understand the major life experiences of workers who were displaced, transitioned to community college where they earned an associate degree, and then found employment in the new work force. IPA allows the researcher to look in detail at “how someone makes sense of a major transition in their life” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3) to know what the experience is like for this person and what sense this person is making of what is happening. Specifically, the research seeks to understand how these multiple identities of manufacturing worker, college student, and worker in the new work force were affected with each transition and how each transition was successfully negotiated.

I found the early limitations of this investigation to be my relationship to the research topic and the locality of the research to be conducted. My employment at a community college has positioned me such that I have potentially seen the possible participants from the announcement of displacement to the college experience to the new work force jobs they hold. One additional relationship item to consider is that of my own family members who have experienced these transitions. I am conducting this research in my own community where I live, work, and have both neighbors and relatives who have experienced displacement. While these may be considered limitations, I also see how they have allowed me to become impassioned by the changed lives I have witnessed.

Participants and Site

This study was conducted in a rural county situated in western North Carolina. This county occupies 754.28 square miles and is populated by 69,340 persons, according to the 2010 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The 2000 census reported 66% of the population having earned a high school diploma or higher among persons 25 years and older compared to 73.5% during the years 2008-2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The unemployment rate of this county in December 2000 was 3.7% and began to rise January 2001 (5.0%) with annual averages of 6.1% in 2001, 8.3% in 2002, and 7.4% in 2003. Through 2007 county unemployment data revealed a brief decline before reaching an annual average of 7.7% in 2008 then breaking the double digit in January 2009 following the global economic crisis. The county's unemployment remained in double digits through 2012 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This information is helpful to build a picture of the community of the study.

Purposeful sampling was the primary method for identifying potential participants. In purposeful sampling, the criteria directly reflect "the purpose of the study and guide(s) in the identification of information-rich cases" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 77-78). Additionally, the purposeful selection of participants is to identify those who will "best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). In an attempt to achieve information-rich cases, essential attributes for a successful candidate were determined. The ideal candidate was a displaced worker who had earned an Associate in Applied Science degree (AAS) from a rural community college in western North Carolina and has now entered the new work force. The candidate was not necessarily employed in the new work force in a career field that aligned with the earned degree program of study. For example, the interviewee may have earned a degree in Horticulture Technology but be

working in hardware sales. This would be acceptable because these were not intended to be success stories of our graduates. There was the potential for the stories to indicate the struggles of securing employment in the related field when the interviewee was located in a rural setting with limited access to job opportunities. Three participants were sought for this study.

Network sampling is a common form of purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). This strategy allows for identification of a few key participants who meet the criteria established for participation in the study (Merriam, 2009). Networking with the community college employees gave me access to potential interviewees. I shared the criteria for the ideal participant with college employees via email and in face-to-face conversations. They were asked to send me the name and contact information for prospective participants who met the criteria of the study. As soon as I received a recommendation from college employees, I began contacting the potential candidate. The name of one participant was given me by a college bookstore employee, one name from a business office employee and the final name from a faculty member in the Industrial and Workforce Division. I called each prospective participant by phone as a first contact to share the expectations of the research. Then, I sent each a cover letter and informed consent. The demographic survey was emailed to the participant once the first interview was scheduled. Three participants seemed appropriate as “IPA studies usually have a small number of participants and the aim is to reveal something of the experience of each of these individuals” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3).

The site for interviews was offered to participants in the library on the campus of the local community college. The use of the library would provide a public, neutral setting for the interviews. Private, enclosed study areas provide a quiet space for the conversation and

recording. Surprisingly, each participant chose to conduct the interviews in the place of current employment with approval of the current employer. Although I work at this community college, and knew several who met the criteria of the study, I did not interview any with whom I had previously worked.

Data Collection

Data collection in the IPA approach is usually “in the form of semi-structured interviews where an interview schedule is used flexibly and the participant has an important stake in what is covered” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 4). The original plan was to conduct three interviews with three participants to explore the displaced worker’s life experience through each of the three major events. The first would focus on the displacement from the familiar manufacturing life. The topic of the second interview was to be the transition to and through the community college experience. The third interview would provide insight into the new career and how the participant successfully transitioned. Each interview was planned to last approximately one hour. As the interviews began, the conversations continued from the protocol of the first interview into the topics and questions of the second interview. Thus, the first interview lasted more than one hour. The second interview also took more than one hour but concluded the protocol of the originally planned second interview and completed the topics of the planned third interview.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured form where I used open-ended questions to guide the conversation. Broad, general questions allowed the participant to tell the personal story and share the experiences of each of the three life-changing events. Additional probing questions were used to assist the researcher and participant in making meaning of the events. I took interview notes in combination with using an audio recording

device, and a transcription was typed as soon as possible following the interview. The format of the typed transcription was wide margins on the left and right of the text to be used for comments during analysis (Smith, 2008).

The participant's personal perspective can only be achieved inasmuch as he or she is willing to divulge and the researcher acknowledges that it is impossible to enter the mind of another. I provided an oral summary of the previous interviews to be discussed with the interviewee at the beginning of the next scheduled interview to allow the participant's feedback and serve as a member check. An additional meeting to discuss the oral summary was a scheduling option with each participant. Upon conclusion of the interview sessions, transcription, and the creation of each narrative, each participant received either a paper copy or an electronic copy via email for review and afforded the opportunity to make revisions to the story. Throughout this process, the participant was allowed to share as much of a very personal story as was comfortable and appropriate to the research. No stipend or other monetary exchange occurred.

The anonymity of each participant has been honored. There was no evidence of harm or danger to any participant; however, some involved may have found the interview questions a bit personal or uncomfortable. Participants were allowed the opportunity to withdraw from questioning or the study at any time.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, words are the data to be analyzed (Merriam, 2009). First-person accounts of the experiences of displaced blue-collar manufacturing workers will provide valuable information to complement the quantitative information that currently exists

in the literature. The method and its analysis cannot be separated. Analysis is continual and begins during the retrieval of the stories, the data (Merriam, 2009).

Interviews were transcribed within two days of the interview session. I personally transcribed each interview. There is a great deal of importance in transcribing my own work and in the timing of the transcription. Because the conversations were still reeling in my mind, I was able to begin the analysis process during the interviews and I replayed those moments from memory during transcription. Each transcription was read and reviewed to uncover potential themes such as various support systems and possible re-direction to literature for support in themes including gender work identity. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach notes that “transcripts of interviews are to be analyzed case by case through a systematic qualitative analysis” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 4).

According to Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) there is no single method for working with the data retrieved and the “essence of IPA lies in its analytic focus” (p. 79). The process is multi-directional and “is only ‘fixed’ through the act of writing up” (p. 81), where this “dynamism is at the heart of good qualitative analysis and is what makes it both exhilarating but also demanding” (p. 81). Although the IPA analysis is subjective, the six-step method offered by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) was followed.

With reference to the steps of analysis, in Step 1 – Reading and re-reading, I listened to the audio as I read the transcription and journaled my recollections of the interview experience. Step 2 – Initial noting, is very detailed and time consuming as the analyst has the goal to “produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 83). This interpretative notetaking helped the researcher

understand how and why the participant had the concerns expressed. The notes became especially important in Step 3 – Developing emergent themes, which involved the analysis of volumes of notes rather than the actual transcript to determine patterns, themes, and connections. The themes developed in Step 3 became the focus of Step 4 – Searching for connections across emergent themes as I worked to produce a structure “to point to all of the most interesting and important aspects” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 96) of the participant’s account. The previous steps were repeated with each case as Step 5 – Moving to the next case was completed. After Steps 1 through 4 were completed with the individual interview and transcripts, Step 6 – Looking for patterns across cases was the task where emergent themes were discovered (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In the current study, eight themes emerged during Step 6 as patterns surfaced across the three cases.

Researcher as Instrument

Smith et al. (2009) maintain that the IPA researcher must possess qualities of open-mindedness, flexibility, patience, empathy, “and the willingness to enter into, and respond to, the participant’s world” (p. 55) as well as determination, persistence, and curiosity. Because the IPA researcher may not be fully aware of any preconceptions in advance of the research and reading for analysis, reflective practices become important to the process.

The double hermeneutic process involves the researcher attempting to understand the perceptions of the participant in as much as the participant allows the researcher to know. This also requires the researcher to be self-aware of an ongoing biography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Smith (2007) used a circle to illustrate how the researcher is at one point on the circle influenced by his own preconceptions, shaped by experiences and expertise. The

researcher must leave this position on the circle in an encounter with the participant moving to a place where the participant is the focus. This process is complex and dynamic.

Reflexivity by the researcher was managed through journaling. A researcher may experience stress in an effort to be aware of the personal field and to position the self in such a manner that the experiences of those participating are not tainted in the report by the personal stories of the researcher. Self-reflection and awareness may be very important prior to, during, and after the research because the researcher must always be aware of personal experiences that could interfere with the collection of the stories of others. Journaling is one strategy to continuously acknowledge that the researcher's positionality affects or is affected by the work and relationships with the participant (Clancy, 2013; Glesne, 2011).

As the researcher, my preconceptions toward the experiences of the displaced workers are both personal and professional in nature. I remember visiting local manufacturing facilities when I was a child. In fact, this was the only kind of work that I knew existed beyond the school other than perhaps retail. My father, my mother, my aunts and uncles, and my grandfathers all worked in manufacturing facilities. I saw that they were able to provide for their families and that these were respected jobs in our community. As some would say, these were examples of "an honest day's work for an honest day's pay."

While I was in high school, I remember my mother working a third shift job and many weeks working seven nights. I chose to take the college preparation courses in high school perhaps because I knew there had to be a better way to earn a living than what I had seen in my own family. As I approached my own high school graduation, my father told me that he could get me a job at the factory where he was working. This was a respected kind of work in my community. It was dependable. There were several manufacturing facilities in

town to choose from or to move between if I needed a change. I remember worrying about how to tell my family that I knew this was not the kind of work that I wanted to be doing or the kind of place where I wanted to spend my days. My decision to go to college was a foreign idea to my family.

When I was so fortunate as to earn a position in Student Services at the community college in the county where I had been raised, I was soon faced with the changing economic and mental health of my very own community. There were meetings being held at manufacturing facilities to inform those employees that their jobs would soon end due to events related to the free trade agreements. These workers had never known any other kind of work. Some had been employed in manufacturing for only a few years while others had a long, rich history with the company. Regardless of their age, they had families, they had bills, and they had only two options remaining. They could hurry to another factory that had not closed yet or they could take advantage of the educational benefits allowed by the government to train for a new career. Very soon everyone would come to realize that there was only the latter as an option because other factories were quickly closing their doors.

Those who were losing their jobs became outraged. Psychological and economic issues concerned them. They were scared of the unknown. They did not know how they would continue to provide for their families. Unemployment pay benefits did not equal their earned take home pay. Health insurance was no longer provided at the low cost they had known. What would happen to the lifestyle they had grown accustomed to? They worked hard every day. All they wanted to do was work.

I am faced with the reality almost daily in my work that I could have been one of those students. Being on this side allows me to help our students in a unique way because of

my own experiences and understandings of a manufacturing lifestyle. Because I was the one in my family to break the cycle, I also understand the students who come in and tell me that their family members do not understand the time and effort required to complete our college courses. I take every opportunity to encourage them to stay the course.

This insider knowledge placed me in a unique position to research the experiences of those displaced in my community. Because I have had family members, neighbors, and students who endured the challenges associated with displacement, I was sensitive to the stories that were shared as I sought to understand more about their transition to college and ultimately to join the new work force in our community. While I do have my own experiences to reflect upon, I was eager to learn more about each individual's interpretation of the events and convey those to impact community college practitioners. However, my insider knowledge also meant that I must take care not to insert my own biases into my interpretation of the participant's experiences. I address the mechanisms that will be inserted into the design of the study to monitor these biases in the next section.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness remains “a debated topic in qualitative research scholarship” (Glesne, 2011, p. 49), where the researcher plays such a transparently vital role in the data collection and analysis process. Creswell (2009) recommends implementing a variety of validity strategies to assess the accuracy of the findings and reporting. The strategies of member checking and clarifying the researcher bias will be essential to the study. Another strategy that may become evident is the use of rich, thick description.

Member checking, as described by Creswell (2009), involves providing the participant parts of the finished product and allowing the participant an opportunity to

comment on the researcher's description. The process goes beyond the participant's reading of the transcribed interview, allowing the participant to remain a part of the research process beyond the information gathering. At the beginning of the second interview, notes from the first were shared and discussed with each participant as a way to review the responses the first interview. This allowed the participant an opportunity to correct any items that were misunderstood. Also, this gave me one more opportunity to understand the message of the participant. Following the development of a narrative, each participant was allowed the opportunity to read the narrative and provide feedback on accuracy of the individual story.

In an attempt to clarify the bias of the researcher, Creswell (2009) recommends the researcher implement self-reflection and incorporate how the interpretation is shaped by her background because "reflectivity has been mentioned as a core characteristic of qualitative research" (p. 192). My self-reflection was accomplished through the personal narrative prior to beginning the study and through journaling as the interviews began. Rich, thick descriptions allow the reader to enter the context of the events and perhaps realize shared experiences or to transport the reader to the setting. This was accomplished through the development and sharing of participant narratives.

Additionally, IPA quality and validity are assessed through four broad principles. These principles are (1) sensitivity to context; (2) commitment and rigour; (3) transparency and coherence; and (4) impact and importance. *Sensitivity to context* is accomplished through purposive sampling, a successful interview process through the analysis process, and giving the participant a voice in the reporting by using verbatim extracts. Purposive sampling was followed with the establishment of criteria befitting a perfect candidate. The criteria was shared with the network of college employees who shared potential participant names with

the researcher. Following successful interviews, narratives were developed that incorporate several verbatim extracts that make each story richer. *Commitment and rigour* are demonstrated by my commitment to the participant and the thoroughness of the study. In the current study, I maintained commitment and rigour with the participant through professional manners in all communications with participants, respecting the participants' wishes for meeting times and locations as well as time allotments for the conversations. The third principle, *transparency and coherence*, refer to clarity in process and write-up of the study. All steps were described verbally and in writing with participants prior to their participation in the current study. Each participant was given the opportunity to read the narrative developed from the interviews and provide feedback prior to inclusion in the final document. The principle of *impact and importance* leads to the test of real validity "in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 183). The results of the interviews can be used by practitioners who assist displaced workers and community college employees who provide support to those non-traditional students making such life transitions.

An independent audit is recommended as a way to validate the research. This entails allowing someone else to "make sense of the final report and check that a coherent chain of arguments runs from the initial raw data to the final write-up" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 183). For this study, the readers were the dissertation committee members. They determined whether the report was plausible or credible in terms of the data collected and a logical step-by-step method through the evidence.

Ethical Considerations

When humans are involved in research, ethical considerations are essential. This particular research may stir unpleasant memories for the participants related to job loss or other events since displacement. Stringer (2007) points out that procedures of confidentiality, permission, and informed consent must be adhered to in any research. Each participant's confidentiality is protected by the use of a pseudonym, digital recordings were transcribed by the researcher, and notes have remained confidential. Documents shared to fulfill requirements of the doctoral program did not bear any identifiable information. Because the interviewees were adults who were no longer students at the community college, the researcher held no power or authority over the participant. A signed consent of each participant was an important fulfillment of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. Pursuant to the IRB, all documents pertaining to the study including signed consent and transcriptions will be stored for at least three (3) years.

This chapter detailed the design of the study, research sites and participants, methods of data collection and analysis procedures, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness. This chapter outlined the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to be used in this study. Through the use of a typical five-chapter dissertation model, the analysis will be presented in chapter four with conclusion and recommendations for future research in chapter five.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of workers who have been displaced, transitioned to community college where each earned a degree, and then joined the new work force. Specifically, the research explored how the participants' identities were affected with each transition and how each transition was successfully negotiated. In this chapter, demographic information about the three participants and their experiences will be made clearer. The attributes of the ideal candidate were that the individual be a displaced worker who has earned an Associate in Applied Science degree (AAS) from a rural community college in southeastern US and has now entered the new work force. While not a qualification for participation, all three candidates were high school graduates. Some displaced workers were not high school graduates. Employment in a career field that aligned with the earned degree program of study was not a requirement. The selection criteria were made known to several community college employees. Through the use of network sampling, three participants were identified by community college employees. All three participants agreed to be interviewed and to discuss their experiences as manufacturing workers becoming displaced, as community college students, and as those seeking employment in the new work force.

Participant Profiles

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with three participants. Table 1 includes demographic information about each participant. All participants self-identified as white Caucasian. For confidentiality, each participant was assigned first-name pseudonyms. The name "Miriam" was chosen for a participant who demonstrated robust qualities of courage and ingenuity, social responsibility, and was loyal to her family. Another woman was

deemed “Esther” because her degree was in horticulture and in the Jewish language, Esther is a myrtle whose leaves only release fragrance when crushed. The male participant was named “Joshua” because he was trusted by his boss and made many efforts to help his former co-workers even after displacement.

Table 1 – *Participant Profiles*

Name	Age at Displacement	Job Title at Displacement	Years in Manufacturing	Education Level at Displacement	Reason for Displacement
Miriam	44	Sewer in Textiles	28	High School Diploma	International Trade
Esther	56	Cladding on Windows	38	High School Diploma	Local Operations Ended
Joshua	39	Upholsterer	23	High School Diploma	Company shut its doors

Each interview was conducted at a time convenient and in a location agreed upon by the participant. Interestingly, each participant chose to be interviewed in his or her current workplace with permission of the immediate supervisor. A digital recorder was used to record each interview. These were then transcribed by me. Notetaking during the interview was kept to a minimum allowing the focus to be on the conversation. Originally, three interview sessions were planned; however, two interview sessions were conducted with each participant because the conversation naturally flowed from the focus of interview one into the focus of interview two. Also, the participant seemed excited to be given the opportunity to talk about the experiences and the enthusiasm kept the momentum going and the researcher responded by continuing the conversation rather than cutting the dialogue to fit the protocol. The first interview focused on the reasons for choosing manufacturing and

experiences in that workplace before, during, and after the announcement of displacement occurred and during the time preceding college enrollment. This led to the transition to and through the community college experience. The second interview was dedicated to the experiences of the job search for a community college graduate in the new work force. The first session was more than one hour in length while the second session was accomplished in just one hour.

The suggested set of steps in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) leads the researcher to analyze each case individually “allowing new themes to emerge with each case” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 100) before “looking for patterns across cases” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 101). Therefore, individual cases will be presented with emerging themes identified before a cross-case analysis.

Miriam. Miriam married at the age of 16 years while still in high school. She needed a job to provide a home and a car so she began going to school during the morning and working in manufacturing in the afternoon. Miriam did complete her high school diploma on track. Her husband was also working in manufacturing during second shift. She noted how movement between manufacturing jobs was simplified due to the abundance of companies and this kind of work: “you could quit a job this morning and by afternoon you could have another job.” Miriam’s work was sewing on production and she reflected how she could shut out the rest of the world while she was sewing yet think about a lot of things. She described her manufacturing self as “adaptive.” When asked how she introduced herself while working in manufacturing, she explained how she would say “I work at...” and “I do...” filling in with the name of one of the many places she worked and one of the different tasks she had done. Manufacturing work was repetitious and hard on her body. She had begun wearing

compression gloves because her hands hurt. Her legs hurt because she had stood for so many years on concrete floors. Her knees were bad and she has had one knee replacement with the need for replacing the other knee. Through the aches and pains of manufacturing work, Miriam thought she would probably work in manufacturing until retirement. She stayed in manufacturing as long as possible in order to pay the bills. Miriam and her husband had two sons whom she told “you can be anything you want to be” and she worked to ensure her sons had a better life than the manufacturing work while letting them know she wanted them to go to school and college. Miriam’s reflection on manufacturing workers was that it was a respected profession, they were seen as hard working people, and to leave manufacturing would be difficult.

Although she had worked in manufacturing for approximately 30 years, the event of her displacement came as no surprise as she had been seeing the downsizing and phasing out of other departments along with rumors that more closures were forthcoming. Her employer did give a notice and helped the workers gather information about the college. She explained how multiple buildings were occupied but then

Downsized to one building more or less. You could see it coming. There were always rumors: we’re gonna close in a month...we’re gonna close. But when the management informed us that they were going to close at such and such a date, they gave us a notice. But, um, they were working with the people at the college. They took us all over and (the company) paid for it. I mean paid us. While they did this, they would take us over to the college and showed us around at the college. They did some...gave us literature, told us about different programs and things like that. I

mean they were really good about giving us options or letting us know what was available to us and told us, you know, that eh workforce something would pay for it. Miriam quickly realized her options were limited because other manufacturing jobs were not available as many facilities had already closed. She looked for work that did not require a college degree and found a housekeeping position at the hospital but realized she could meet the physical demands of that job. When she considered these options, she leaned on her faith in God when she said “[T]hat’s hard work. I was at a point where I knew my body would not do those types of jobs. I just asked, ‘please Lord.’” She could go to college or quit work and she knew she couldn’t afford the latter.

Miriam recalled a couple of different federal programs that paid her college expenses. While the cost of college was covered, there were still living expenses to be paid and there were two teenage boys. Miriam’s husband was still working and Miriam was drawing unemployment. However, the unemployment pay would end “six months or so” before she finished the degree. The oldest son was attending the community college and had received a scholarship from the company where Miriam worked. The scholarship ended when the company closed its doors. This was an added financial burden for the family.

Miriam had always wanted to go to college even as a teenager. Neither parent had graduated from high school making college an uncharted territory. She believed there was no way she could go to college following high school graduation but now realized the opportunity before her:

It was just like, I really would like to go to college but there’s no way I could go to college, you know. Or I didn’t feel like there was. I probably could have made a way but at the time I didn’t think I could. And then when it comes down to looking you in

the face...I've got this opportunity and I really want to do it. Do I think I can really do this?

With college now a reality, she had doubts and was uncertain of the right program of study for her. After a long day at the college for registration and books, she went home in tears saying, "I can't do this." Her son, the college student, offered his support by telling her, "If you quit, I'll quit." so she found the strength to stay the course. Miriam received support and encouragement from both sons, their girlfriends and some wonderful instructors at the college.

With thoughts of becoming a college student, Miriam described herself as "terrified," "worried," and "scared" but those descriptions transitioned to "proud of myself" through overcoming her doubts, fears, and frustrations. She found college instructors were surprised with the work ethic of the older, non-traditional students and compared how she had witnessed in manufacturing the younger workers had a different attitude about work just like in college. Miriam and others had come from a production-based environment and those behaviors carried over into her work as a college student and again in the new work force.

As a college student, Miriam described herself as moving from "lost" to "confident" and "diligent." She found it took longer to learn and she had to work harder to retain the material. College studies continued into the weekends and during breaks. She was afraid of failing and prayed constantly. Soon she realized she wanted to do well in college. Her student identity was described as, "I'm a student."

Of course, there were others from her work place experiencing the displacement and the challenges of college. This afforded each of them a support system. Miriam's sister was displaced from the same location. Her sister had never graduated high school and had to

complete the adult high school credential prior to enrolling at the college. Miriam was proud of her sister's accomplishments. Sometimes they would have lunch together and even had a couple of classes together. Family and friends were good to have with her on this journey because they understood her situation and offered support. She had classes with others who had been displaced and would also meet out of class in the library to study or just to share their situations growing the relationship with her former co-workers beyond the work place. More social time than during manufacturing led to different bonds of friendship.

The completion of the degree was not Miriam's goal in the beginning. She wanted to take a few classes and see what college was like. She became optimistic with some success in her early coursework. When a co-operative education opportunity arose, Miriam chose her location as a place where she might become employed after college: the local hospital. This plan worked. She earned her Associate in Applied Science in Office Systems Technology and her first job out of college was at the hospital in a part-time position leading to a full-time position where she worked for five years before experiencing another layoff. She lamented,

In January 2009 they got a new CEO and he did a big lay off and I was one who got laid off, again, in 2009. Then, I was out of work from January 2009 til August 2009 when I found this job. I was applying everywhere. I thought, 'on no, it's starting all over again.' So, I actually did get to draw unemployment again with that. I was still trying to get a job because unemployment does not pay what working pays.

Over the next seven months, she applied for multiple office positions and participated in several interviews. The job search was described as hard, fearful, yet hopeful as she continued to depend on her faith through prayer. Finally, she was offered both a full time job

and a part time job. She took the full time job as she found someone who would ‘take a chance on her.’ She has been with this employer for six years.

Of her current work as a paralegal, Miriam described the learning process that was still necessary even after earning a college degree. She has continued to learn things about herself, like how she enjoys graphic design which is a long way from her first encounter with a computer in college. She didn’t study the paralegal tract in college so she has had much to learn. She never imagined she would be working for an attorney. She started out in this job taking a lot of notes, being trained by others in the office, and printing examples for future reference. In addition to the new vocabulary, Miriam has found that computers are in every job and she now knows how to use the computers at the local courthouse to look up deeds and other documents. Though it was scary at first and very different from manufacturing, she enjoys this work. Now, she introduces herself to others as “I am a secretary for an attorney” which is quite different from her days in manufacturing.

Looking back on her college experience, her suggestion to other non-traditional students is simply “go for it!”

Miriam’s oldest son had finished his first year at the community college when Miriam enrolled. The next school year, Miriam’s youngest son enrolled. She attended college with both sons. She even took the same English class as one of her sons during one semester. Expectations were high for her boys so she knew she needed to set her own barre high. Her husband attended three graduations in three years.

Theoretical Connections: Consistent with adult development theory, while working in manufacturing, Miriam thought this would be her work until retirement. The major life event that changed her plans was displacement. Her family roles remained consistent through her

transition from manufacturing to unemployment to college and into the new work force. She is hopeful that her current work will take her to retirement.

Miriam's worker identity during manufacturing was "this is where I work and what I do." Yet as a college student, she identified herself as a college student with comments like, "I'm in school" and "I'm a college student." Now, in her new work, Miriam identifies with her work as in "I'm a secretary for an attorney." Her other roles as mother, wife, sister, and friend did not change: thus, she continued to fulfill those roles without the worker self she had known for so many years.

For Miriam, each of the three transitions was anticipated. The transition from employed to unemployed seems to have made the most significant impact on her life causing the most change. Miriam's coping resources of situation, self, support, and strategies were also examined. Situation – The disruption of her worker identity, her financial security, and the relationship with her family were burdens unique to the transition of displacement. She had never experienced unemployment. Miriam had no sense of choice about what she would do next. As a college student, she had difficulty choosing a degree program. She was a first-generation college student. When Miriam joined the new work force, she had no previous experience in the office environment and with regard to her current work, she had no previous experience with the legal jargon or documents. Self – As a manufacturing worker, Miriam described herself as adaptive. In her displacement, Miriam was not optimistic about her future as a college student. She was 44 years old and had two teenage sons with the oldest in college receiving a scholarship from her employer. Her income was reduced from that of a full-time worker to unemployment benefits. Health problems had taken hold on Miriam following years of physical labor in manufacturing. While attending college,

Miriam's outlook changed from being terrified and scared to feeling proud of herself. Unemployment pay ended before she graduated from college but her husband was still employed full time. Miriam did not experience the challenges of job search until her second job after college. Her first job was the result of her co-operative education while a college student so she did not experience the job search challenges until five years later when that job ended. For Miriam, the end of that job was a repeat event in unemployment and the job search lasted for seven months before full time employment. She made special note that unemployment pay does not equal working pay. Support – Miriam received support from her husband, her sons and their girlfriends, her sister, and former co-workers through each of the three transitions. She spoke of building relationships with college instructors who aided her in the process. She also expressed her dependence on her faith in God to see her through each step of the journey. Strategies – Miriam did seek the opportunity to go to college in the adversity that was displacement. She worked tirelessly to learn the material presented in college courses and to insure grades for which she could be proud. Work and college provided structured spaces for her.

Miriam knew she was going to college but did not have a clear degree plan. Furthermore, she did not have a goal of earning a degree until after she experienced success in a few college courses. When she was able to take charge of the situation, she dedicated herself to completing the degree and to finding full-time employment.

Esther. Esther chose manufacturing right after high school because there was little value on higher education. She saw an opportunity for earning an income which seemed more important than attending college. At the time, there was a plethora of manufacturing jobs available and college wasn't necessary for work in manufacturing. Esther said it was

easy to get a job in manufacturing. She worked in a hosiery mill for 24 years. Then, layoffs began occurring in stages so those remaining anticipated their own layoff would soon follow. After twenty-four years at one manufacturing facility and performing several tasks, Esther experienced her initial layoff. At the time, she was able to secure employment at another nearby manufacturing facility recalling that she applied to only one place and was hired right away. Moving between manufacturing jobs was still relatively easy.

The next manufacturing site was where Esther performed several different occupations like running a saw, building frames, dropping glass into the windows, putting a ‘bead’ around the glass, and putting metal cladding on wooden windows. Unlike her previous employer, this company did not shut its doors due to jobs leaving American soil. This company simply chose to shut down this location. The layoffs occurred again in a gradual manner where Esther found herself in the second wave. She noted how her supervisor had an impersonal approach by referring to the workers as “bodies” when her immediate supervisor would call you in the group and they would call out everybody but, they would call out whoever was going to be laid off and you would be going to the office and the rest of you go back to work. For my last supervisor, we were “bodies.” He would call his “bodies” together.

In the layoff process, she was given directions to go to the Employment Security Commission, she received severance pay equal to two weeks of pay, and she was able to keep her health insurance for 30 days.

This layoff happened to Esther in spring of 2008 and she was faced with the realization that manufacturing was gone from her hometown. There was no quick job find like she had experienced earlier. Unemployment was high. When reality set in, so did

sadness and confusion. She was sad because she didn't have a job and confused because she didn't know which way she was going next. The only thing she could do was go to sign up for unemployment and start the job hunting process.

While working in manufacturing, Esther recalls introducing herself as, "I work at..." and explaining what tasks she performed. She described her manufacturing self as a dedicated, hard worker, who was always there. These were qualities she attributes to her mother. Also, she considered herself a steady worker who liked working with her hands and worked overtime when it was possible. Esther had a long-term plan of working and retiring from manufacturing; therefore, her revelation about higher education came much later in life.

Following displacement, Esther went to the local Employment Security Commission (ESC) and JobLink office where she believed she was doing all that she could toward gaining employment. She even tried to learn more about using computers because that skill set had not been necessary during her work in manufacturing. She sought help with resume writing, interview skills, and participated in practice interviews. Through the many applications she submitted, Esther found support from her family, friends and her case worker from JobLink. However, potential employers did not return the courtesy of acknowledging receipt of her applications. This situation and struggle led Esther to her decision to enroll in college. Esther said, "I realized I wasn't going to get a job right away and my alternative was to go ahead and start school while I could." Esther feared her unemployment benefits would expire before she could complete the degree.

The ESC encouraged Esther to pursue culinary instead of seasonal work like horticulture. Esther chose horticulture because this was something she found interesting. The displacement occurred in the spring. Esther continued to apply for jobs weekly following the

ESC requirements for unemployment benefits. She was able to work part time at a garden market during the summer. Taking charge of the situation, Esther's goal was to earn the Associate in Applied Science degree in Horticulture whether on a full-time or part-time schedule. College classes began in August.

Esther found herself in college classes with other displaced workers who were in their 40s and 50s and bonded with displaced workers from other industries and other towns. She found support from other displaced workers and from instructors. Some college instructors would take time to explain concepts in different ways giving her another opportunity to understand the material. One instructor offered her the opportunity to participate in the college's Work Study program where she would spend additional time in the horticulture labs. Esther also took advantage of college resources such as the open computer lab and the federally funded TRIO program where she would stay late into the evening working on homework before going home to continue her studies. Outside the college community, she also found support from her friends.

When she began attending college, she introduced herself as a college student with phrases like "I'm going back to school," "I'm going to college," and "I'm taking horticulture to get a degree." Esther compared going to college to working another job as she explained she had to be there and she had to do the work. She found herself to be more diligent with the college work than she had been in high school. When I asked about the advice she would offer to other adult students returning to college, she replied: "To go for it. To do what they want to do and, I will tell you that I tell my students to get their degree that job opportunities are so much better even though their degree might not be in what they end up getting a job in

but having that degree makes a big difference in what job opportunities may come up for them.”

Upon graduation from the community college, Esther found herself in the midst of another transition. She was seeking employment in a different kind of work force. Previously, a college degree and job interviews had not been necessary. Fortunately, she was offered a part-time teaching opportunity in the horticulture program she had just completed. However, she chose to pursue a full-time custodial position at the college and asked a horticulture instructor to be a reference. Her JobLink caseworker assisted with the job application, practice interviews, and encouraged her to not only submit the application but to also go to the man who would be her supervisor and introduce herself. Three months later, Esther was employed full time at the community college in the custodial department.

For several days, her supervisor and new co-workers helped her learn the skills necessary to complete her tasks. Esther learned which tasks were absolutely necessary every day and which tasks could be worked throughout her work week. She noted that each building is unique including its schedule, traffic and its people. Esther was once again offered the opportunity to teach horticulture classes part time. She accepted and now teaches part time during the morning followed by a full-time afternoon shift with the custodial department. When she introduces herself now, she tells others, “I’m a full-time custodian and teach part time.” Esther maintains her strong work ethic in that she tries to do her best, learn something new every day, and be dependable. When asked about the advice she would offer to others who might want to work at the college, she said, “to apply for it and follow the instructions on the job application. That’s very important.” Now, she encourages others to

apply for part-time employment because she has witnessed how that can lead to full-time opportunities.

Theoretical Connections: Consistent with adult development theory, Esther believed she would work in manufacturing until retirement. She did make an effort to remain in manufacturing by moving to another facility when displacements began occurring. However, she soon found herself experiencing a major life event as she was displaced with no other manufacturing jobs to be found. No change in family roles was examined for Esther save the increasing care needed for her aging father.

As a manufacturing worker, Esther identified herself as “I work at...” and explained to the others where she worked and what tasks she performed. While she was a college student, she did exhibit more ownership of her role but was still performing a task introducing herself as “I’m going back to school,” “I’m going to college,” and “I’m taking horticulture to get a degree.” Now, as a member of the new work force, Esther seems connected with her role as when she introduces herself as “I’m a full-time custodian and teach part time.” She continued to fulfill her roles of daughter and friend throughout the changes in work.

Esther anticipated each of the three transitions she experienced. The greatest challenges resulted from the displacement from manufacturing work. Following is an examination of Esther’s coping resources of situation, self, support, and strategies. Situation – Displacement presented Esther with challenges she had never before experienced. She had never been unemployed and tried to avoid displacement by moving to another company. Esther had never been a college student as college had never been important to her success or well-being. Now, in the new work force, she is at the college daily. She had some familiarity

with custodial work but admits that she continues to learn the nuances of each building and its people with each passing day. She also takes advantage of the opportunity to share with her students from her own recent experiences. Self – As a manufacturing worker, Esther described herself as a dedicated, hard worker, who was always at work, and she was a steady worker. She attributed these qualities to her mother’s teachings. Esther took these qualities with her when she became a college student where she took charge of the situation and was dedicated to completing her degree even if she had to reduce her load from full time to part time in the event her benefits expired. She considered college as another job. Esther took advantage of the Work Study program and offerings from her teacher to spend additional time in the horticulture labs. When she graduated from college, she waited for that full-time opportunity. She was fortunate to be hired in a few short months as a full-time custodian with a part-time teaching load that resulted from her efforts while attending college. Support – During displacement, Esther found support from her family, friends, and her case worker from JobLink. As they faced this challenging time together, she sought help with resume writing and interview skills while she accepted that there were no jobs and she needed to enroll in college while she had the opportunity. In college, she found support from other displaced workers and from instructors. She took advantage of SAGE (a federally funded TRIO program) and the resources of the Academic Support Center and Open Computer Lab often. Her family and friends continued to offer their support. Upon graduation, support was once again offered by the JobLink case worker who encouraged her to visit her potential supervisor where she was applying for the custodial position. In her new work, she finds support from her supervisor and coworkers but also from her family and friends. Strategies – Esther experienced displacement and uncertainty. She was able to turn adversity into

opportunity. She chose to attend college and carried with her the character traits she had spent many years developing. She used the support of those around her to propel herself into and through college. Esther used Work Study as an occasion to learn more about the horticulture labs and to build relationships. Those relationships created references that likely opened doors for her in her job search. She trusted her case worker's advice and followed through on those suggestions.

Joshua. While in high school, Joshua was encouraged by some friends who already worked in manufacturing to join them. So, rather than to work on the farm, Joshua applied at the furniture factory where his friends worked and he was hired. Joshua was dedicated to completing his high school credential so he enrolled in the evening program which allowed him to work days and attend high school beginning at 4:00pm. During his years of building furniture, he worked production that later led to a salaried position where he would work with designers building high quality pieces for furniture markets and special one-of-a-kind pieces that were shipped as far away as Russia. There were health hazards in building furniture as Joshua recalled one worker have an incident with a saw and even himself shooting his hands on several occasions with the staple gun. One time, he stapled his finger to a wooden frame and had to seek assistance from a co-worker to remove the staple. In addition to immediate hazards were the long-term effects of tugging and pulling the fabrics and lifting the furniture.

When he introduced himself, Joshua would always shake hands and be friendly and tell his new acquaintance, "I work at Key City Furniture," and describe what he was building. When there were visitors in the facility, he would often show them a photo of the design he was describing. He was a very dependable and trusted employee as he had a key to the

facility allowing himself in and out during other hours when he needed additional time to produce upcoming market samples or meeting deadlines. This also meant he was an independent worker and worked long hours when necessary. He also believed he was well-liked by his co-workers and his boss.

Both Joshua and his wife worked at this furniture factory. His wife worked in a different department and experienced displacement earlier than Joshua. There were many other husband and wife teams who worked here. Joshua even recalled how some multi-generational families were employed here because both parents and children worked at this location. He thought everyone who worked there would retire with that company including himself.

When his wife was displaced, she already held an associate degree from the community college. Joshua encouraged her to continue her education and she did so earning a bachelor's degree and master's degree. He was still working strong and was able to support them both while she advanced her education. While her displacement was anticipated, Joshua and others found the announcement a complete surprise. They were steadily working on orders when one afternoon the massive layoff was announced with no warning by the owners. Joshua recalled the announcement was harsh, abrupt, and totally unexpected. He lamented how, on that very day, he lost respect for the owner who handled the situation in this manner. The company shut its doors. There was no severance. There was no insurance. There was no holiday pay that was due them and there was no pay for the week's work they had just earned. Joshua became agitated as he recalled the announcement and the days ahead:

I can't remember if it was on a Thursday or Friday. The guy that owned the company come in there, probably 2 in the evening and got everybody in the whole plant and

told everybody. He said, 'We're closing. We just can't do this no more. I'd like for everybody to stay and finish the work on the floor. By the way, we ain't got the money to pay you for this week.' I thought he was gonna get whooped. I told him, 'you better...' which I really liked him but I lost a lot of feeling for him over that. I told him when everybody scattered, 'you better leave.' I said, 'somebody will clobber you if you don't get out of here.' We never did get paid.

Those displaced would learn that the health insurance that had been deducted from their paychecks had not been forwarded to the insurance provider; therefore, they did not have health insurance and were caught unaware. This factory did not close due to trade agreements which did not make this a clear case for some educational benefits. Joshua learned that this factory closed for reasons other than jobs being relocated to other countries which meant trade agreement benefits from programs like the TAA would not provide the workers from this factory with higher education options. However, he was eligible for a lesser set of benefits through programs like the Workforce Investment Act.

Joshua stated that he missed his former co-workers even commenting how "[Y]ou spent more time with them than family." He had compassion for his former co-workers especially the husband and wife teams who both lost their jobs in that announcement and sometimes their adult children were displaced at the same time. He was desperately seeking assistance from someone to restore the money they had been owed by the company. His efforts led him to lengthy phone calls with several agencies at the local and state levels. Almost daily, he would converse with his former boss and some co-workers who were on the same mission to share their efforts and limited success. Following all their efforts, no monies were restored to the individuals who were displaced so abruptly.

JobLink and the ESC required those who were receiving unemployment benefits to apply to jobs weekly and provide a report. Joshua did not know how to use the computer so he found help from his wife. Joshua's father had supported him prior to the layoff and continued to offer his fatherly wisdom during the period of unemployment. The continued network among Joshua, his co-workers, and former boss provided additional support during this time. Those who were displaced found that there were no job prospects in the area. Joshua did not want to go to college but was encouraged by his father and former boss who said, those who were displaced had earned the opportunity to go to college. Also, Joshua believed there was no other way to secure employment without a degree.

Joshua began attending college classes without knowing if he was approved for financial assistance beyond the first semester since this benefit had yet to be approved by the state. JobLink helped him enroll at the local community college. He chose the diesel/heavy equipment program because, in his words, "there wasn't anything else over there that I liked." Having lived on a farm, he was familiar with tractors, so this seemed a logical fit. In the beginning of his time as a college student, Joshua seemed confused simply because he was unfamiliar with the college and he did not know where to go. He was a rather independent soul in that he didn't want anyone to give him anything but commented, "I'd rather get it on my own." Soon, he found support from many directions including the instructors in his discipline, English and psychology instructors, SAGE (a federally funded TRIO program), and he sought tutors for computer use, math, and English. He even joined a study group for his psychology course. His father and former boss were also encouraging Joshua to stay the course. His former boss, who had encouraged Joshua to attend college, withdrew from college after the first semester but continued to encourage Joshua.

When asked how he introduced himself as a college student, he simply stated, “I’m going back to school.” Although college was a new experience for Joshua, he chose to take a heavy load of classes so he could complete the requirements before his unemployment and educational benefits expired. He also sought the opportunity to learn more while volunteering with a local diesel mechanic. Some of those experiences reinforced what he was learning in the classroom while others were opportunities to learn something new. The volunteer experience helped Joshua secure full-time employment upon graduation. Fortunately, Joshua completed his Associate in Applied Science degree in Diesel and Heavy Equipment Technology before his unemployment and educational benefits expired. However, he did know others who were not so fortunate. They had to leave college without earning a degree.

Joshua encouraged those who were still in college to have some form of employment secured before graduating because of his lack of support from JobLink once he earned his degree. His advice to others who want to get a community college degree is to “do it when you get out of high school.” He also encourages students to seek the services of the SAGE (federally funded TRIO program) at this college.

Upon his college graduation, Joshua presented his documentation to the JobLink office. Much to his surprise, the staff did not offer him support in securing full-time employment. He was fortunate to have been volunteering with a local diesel mechanic that resulted in full-time employment. Joshua and his employer worked as a team in a small diesel shop. Joshua had been learning the trade both in college classes and in the shop. He was also making connection with the customers of the shop. While he was fortunate to have this job, he still recognized that there were few jobs to be had in this county. Joshua said he liked his new work; he also seemed grateful to have a job with an income and to be able to stay in the

county. Some of his classmates took jobs in Charlotte and other areas requiring a two-hour commute or a relocation. As a married adult with the needs of others to consider, Joshua found these were not options for him. Joshua advised these younger students to “get out of here...now is the time for you to do it. Get a job and get out of here.”

After working for almost one year in this new work, his advice to those who are young and just finishing high school would be that “they need to go to college, get it over with, and get a real good job.” Even though he has not worked in manufacturing for a few years, he still recalled how easy it was to change jobs when a worker “could quit a job and just about have another one the same day.” He continued in his reflection by saying, “you can’t do that now.” The local furniture factories did not like their workers moving from job to job in this manner so they would not hire workers from each other. When asked how he introduces himself to others now, Joshua replied, “I help (this person) at (this shop).” He has continued to be a faithful and dependable employee.

Theoretical Connections: Joshua thought he and others working at the furniture factory would work there until retirement which is consistent with adult development theory. The sudden and unexpected announcement of this factory’s closing displaced many individuals and families setting into motion a major life transition. Joshua’s family roles remained consistent from the time in manufacturing through college and into the new work force. He is hopeful this will be his work until retirement.

Joshua’s worker identity during manufacturing was “I work at Key City Furniture.” As a college student, he identified himself as a college student when introducing himself as “I’m going back to school.” In his current work as a diesel mechanic, he says, “I help (this

person) at (this shop).” Joshua’s family status remained the same during the time of his displacement, college life, and entering the new work force.

The transition from furniture manufacturing to unemployed was not anticipated. When comparing the three transitions, this transition presented the greatest challenges for Joshua. The transitions to college student and later to the new work force were anticipated. A review of Joshua’s coping resources of situation, self, support, and strategies follows.

Situation – Since he had been old enough to work, Joshua had never been unemployed. This event had a significant impact on his life. He no longer claimed a paycheck to support himself and his wife. He discovered his health insurance coverage had lapsed due to the company’s nonpayment of premiums. Joshua quickly enrolled in college classes even before the state had approved funding. He chose a program that he found interesting. When Joshua joined the new work force, he had already been volunteering at this location and discovered that he liked this work.

Self – As a manufacturing worker, Joshua described himself as dependable and trustworthy. He was loyal to the company and his coworkers. Joshua became agitated when he reflected on those events related to the displacement announcement and the days ahead when he tried to resolve issues of payroll and health insurance. There had been immediate and long-term health hazards of working in upholstery. When he began classes at the college, he felt confused about where things were and what to do. By the time of his graduation, he was offering advice to other students. His employment following college was the result of his volunteering while yet a college student so he did not experience the job search challenges upon graduation.

Support – Following displacement, Joshua received support from his father. His former boss and co-workers who were also experiencing this unanticipated event and they supported each other. His wife offered support by helping with

tasks that required use of a computer like applications and reporting to JobLink. As a college student, he mentioned support from a few teachers and some of the college's support services that he found helpful in achieving his degree. His father and his wife continue to support him in the new work force. Strategies – Joshua did take an opportunity for college from his displacement. As a student, his days were structured, he sought the help of teachers and student resources that helped reduce stress, and he took this opportunity to learn a new skill set that would make himself marketable in the new work force. Once he became employed, he was able to earn a paycheck and contribute to his family again.

Joshua took charge in each situation. When he was displaced, he enrolled in college right away. While he was in college, he took his education into his own care by seeking support and choosing to take heavy loads to finish before his unemployment benefits expired. He even sought the opportunity to volunteer at a local shop where he could learn more which led to his full-time employment following college degree completion.

The above narratives were created from interviewing and transcribing the interviews before organizing all comments into a timeline of events as presented herein. As in any conversation, the participants did not speak the narrative in chronological order. However, chronological order of the events is important to the research given the research question progresses from displacement to and through college and on to placement in the new work force.

Data Analysis Process

The IPA methodology allows the researcher to take liberties with analyzing the data while maintaining the focus of attempting to make sense of the participants' experiences. As a novice in IPA research and analysis, I relied on the process outlined by Smith, Flowers, and

Larkin (2009). The four suggested steps of IPA analysis are: Step 1 – Reading and re-reading; Step 2 – Initial noting; Step 3 – Developing emergent themes; Step 4 –Searching for connections across emergent themes; Step 5 –Moving to the next case; and Step 6 – Looking for patterns across cases (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In Step 1, I personally transcribed each recording. The initial reading of the transcript was done while listening again to the recording. This allowed an opportunity to focus on the conversation rather than being reduced to mere words on paper. As suggested, I created a three-column document placing the transcribed words of the interview in the center column, my initial review notes extracted from the transcript in the right column (Step 2), and more definition toward themes in the left column (Step 3) as seen in Table 2 below (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This process was completed for each participant’s transcript before interviewing the next participant.

Table 2 – *Example of Transcript Analysis*

Themes	Transcript	Reading Notes
*Work ethic carried over from mfg.	Esther: To me, going to college was like another job. You had to be there. You had to do the work. I think I was more diligent with my work than even when I was in high school. And, of course, (college instructor)	*Considered college as another job. Work. Diligent. *Similar to mfg. worker traits
*Began building connections with faculty	had asked for me to be a work study after I had been	*Encouraged by instructor who asked her to do Work

	there for a month or two so that made me feel good because I felt like I was doing something right, you know.	Study in the horticulture labs. *Boost in confidence
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The emerging themes became especially useful in the next steps of the IPA process. To address Steps 4, 5, & 6, I created another table. The table was categorized by each of the three life events (manufacturing to displacement, to and through college, and the new work force). Then, items from the theoretical framework covered in Chapter 2 were placed in the left-hand column and one column was created for noting comments from each participant’s transcript followed by a final column heading for comparisons where I noted similarities and differences in the cross-case analysis and where I began searching for connections across emergent themes. These became notes in the far right column. Table 3 – *Interview Results* is an example from the life event of Manufacturing Worker and illustrates noting from each participant related to the theme of identity and the cross-case analysis.

Table 3 – *Interview Results*

As a Manufacturing Worker

Focus: Manufacturing/other work life transitioning to and through displacement

	Miriam	Esther	Joshua	Comparison
Identity				
Introducing Myself	“I work at such-and-such	“I worked at Ithaca...in	I work at Key City Furniture.	**3 of 3 – “I work at...and

	and whatever I was doing at that time.”	hosiery mill and I done so-and-so” or “I build windows” (while at A&H)	When he introduced himself, he would shake hands and was always friendly describing what he was building and even share pictures	this is what I do...”
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Themes from the Research

The following eight themes emerged from the coding process of the shared experiences among participants: 1) manufacturing work since a teenager; 2) erosion of job security in manufacturing; 3) supporting relationships; 4) appreciating services; 5) building connection; 6) offering advice; 7) transferrable work ethic; and 8) gender work identity. Each theme will be explained including an example from each participant.

Table 4 – *Themes from the Research*

Manufacturing Work Since a Teenager	Building Connection
Erosion of Job Security in Manufacturing	Offering Advice
Supporting Relationships	Transferrable Work Ethic
Appreciating Services	Gender Work Identity

Manufacturing Work Since a Teenager. All participants had worked continuously in manufacturing from the teenage years. As a 16-year-old bride, Miriam recalled, “I needed a job. I wanted to work so we could get married and have a home and have a car. That’s what I did. I would go to...school til 11:30 or 12:00...then I would go to...work 1:00-6:30 in the afternoon.” Miriam had always wanted to go to college; however, neither of her parents had graduated high school. College was uncharted waters and Miriam believed there was no way for her to go to college: “I really would like to go to college but there’s no way I could go to college you know. Or I didn’t feel like there was. I probably could have made a way but at the time I didn’t think I could.” For Esther, college was not viewed as important to the job search and the money seemed more important than education when she stated, “when I got out of school, college and higher education (pause) people didn’t see it as important as it is now to get a job. So, you get out of school. I started to work the first day that I graduated.” Joshua was working on a farm while he was in high school. He wanted to drop out of high school but his father encouraged him to look for options so he could earn his high school diploma. Of his first job application experience, Joshua’s friends helped him when “some of them guys told me you can probably get a job down here. I probably knew two of the boss men. I went and talked to them and they took me right in there.” Joshua chose a night school option to complete his high school diploma because he could work full time and night school “started at 4 and I got off work at 3:30 so I had just enough time to drive straight over there so I finished high school.”

Erosion of Job Security in Manufacturing. No participant had experienced unemployment prior to the displacement event. All commented on the ease of transitioning from work at one facility to another during the height of manufacturing in this county.

Miriam worked at a variety of manufacturing facilities during her almost 30-year career. At each textile location, her task was to sew garments. Upon displacement, Miriam realized she had to choose the option to attend college “because there was no manufacturing” jobs remaining. She commented, “It was either go to college or do nothing” because “there just weren’t a lot of options. Esther also worked at several manufacturing facilities. She recalled that “there was a lot of factories here. There was furniture, hosiery, glove factories, the chicken processing plant. There was just all kinds of factories to work in. So, it wasn’t hard to obtain a job at that time.” When Esther began seeing layoffs occur, she went “just out the back door” of the facility where she worked, applied to this one location and was hired right away which demonstrates how simply the move was between manufacturing jobs. However, Esther noted that by 2008, “there wasn’t anything. It was gone. There was maybe one furniture factory left” with a skeleton crew and the chicken processing plant. Joshua worked at the furniture factory so he was among the latest to experience displacement. Although he had only experienced manufacturing from this one facility and was displaced, he was aware of the historical simplicity of changing jobs when “years ago, you could quit a job and just about have another one the same day. You can’t do that now.” He was also knew that “where we worked. They had a deal with other furniture factories. They wouldn’t hire workers from where I worked.”

Supporting Relationships. Participants had many supporting relationships including family, co-workers, and college instructors. While family structures were different, no one experienced a change in familial roles during the transitions. Miriam was a mother of two teenage boys and the wife of a blue-collar worker. Her sons supported her efforts to go to college and the oldest son who was already attending the community college informed his

mother, “if you quit, I’ll quit.” The support she received from her husband was a bit different likely because he had not experienced a layoff no college. She said he was okay with her attending college. Miriam’s sister was displaced at about the same time as Miriam and from the same facility. Her sister knew what she wanted to do and began right away on that track at the community college. Miriam found motivation from her family. Esther’s family was supportive of her. However, as a single woman with no children and an aging father, she leaned more on her friends for support. Joshua described a long-time relationship with his father that had been a supportive one. On one occasion, Joshua recalls his father’s advice about taking advantage of the opportunity to go to college, “ya’ll was cheated. I would go to school. You didn’t get a chance when you got out of high school. I’d go and let them pay for it.” Joshua also had a wife who had earlier experienced a layoff and Joshua had supported her while she had been in college. Now, her time had come to be his support and she rose to the occasion as she helped him with tasks on the computer like filing job applications. These encouraging words from those close relationships were likely priceless.

Co-workers from manufacturing who also experienced the displacement were bonded by the displacement. Miriam described how, as factory workers, there was not a lot of time to get to know each other on a personal level but she noted ways they were able to congregate while attending college. Sometimes they would have lunch together or find time to study together. Esther also attended class with some former co-workers but also with other displaced workers from a variety of industries and from other towns. They also shared the common bond of being non-traditional students. Joshua’s former boss served as his connection to the former manufacturing world and they remained friends following displacement. However, soon after college classes began, Joshua’s boss left the college.

The support of current co-workers has been important to each participant as well. As she began to work in a legal office, Miriam was unfamiliar with the jargon, forms, and research. She took many notes as her supervisor and co-workers helped her learn these aspects of the new job. Now, she is able to accomplish many tasks without the assistance of others. Esther relied on her supervisor and co-workers to help her learn the routine and offered tips about the various duties and buildings and people she would encounter. Joshua had already established a relationship with his current employer while he was a college student. In his current employment, he and his supervisor comprise the team.

Appreciating Services. The participants took advantage of many services offered at the community college and commented on the importance of using those services to be successful in earning their degree. Miriam recalls instructor support from two wonderful math teachers who helped her. While Miriam had a lot of support at home with two college sons, she still used the college's library to meet and study with her classmates as when "we would get together after class when there was a window of one hour from one class to the next. We'd meet in the library or wherever and we'd study and do all this together." Esther spoke of spending hours in the Open Computer Lab where she would work until they closed and go home to continue working on assignments late into the night and also became a member of the SAGE program (a federally funded TRIO program). She recalls, "I used the computer labs a lot. They saw me religiously here at the computer lab and SAGE. I got into SAGE too and that is a wonderful program. They really helped me a lot." She also reflected on her appreciation for the encouragement she received from the horticulture instructors. Joshua remembers how his diesel/heavy equipment instructors and also an English instructor were helpful to him as a student. He became a member of SAGE (a federally funded TRIO

program) where he could use a smaller, quiet computer lab because he found that he was easily distracted when working in the Open Computer Lab where many students were gathered. Through SAGE, he was also able to receive tutoring in math and English. Of his SAGE experience, Joshua said, “It really helped...I could go in there anytime if I had a problem with something. Somebody would sit down and help you right then.”

Building Connections. Each participant took advantage of opportunities during college that led to their next job. A unique approach to these opportunities occurred. Miriam had a co-operative education opportunity built into her program of study. She watched as some students chose to take this learning experience at a location that would not likely result in long-term employment. Miriam had the foresight to place herself at a location where she might earn more than a grade for the course but a place where she might one day become employed. She said, “I want to do mine where there is a possibility of getting a job.” This plan worked for Miriam. Her strategic plan of co-operative learning at the local hospital resulted in her full-time employment because she was in the right place and was familiar with the facility when they needed an additional full-time employee. Esther was asked by an instructor to work in the greenhouse labs at the college while enrolled as a student after only a month or two which made her feel good about things. She noted how, “that made me feel good because I felt like I was doing something right.” This gave her opportunities to do projects that other students didn’t do and more time to converse with the faculty of the discipline. Upon graduation, Esther was offered a part-time teaching position at the community college. She held out for full-time work and was hired within three months of graduation as a custodian with teaching options. She was certain that connections she built as a student helped her gain full-time employment at the college. When Joshua built a

relationship with his college instructors, he went to them and asked if they would recommend a local diesel garage where he could volunteer his time. One of Joshua's instructors referred him to a local mechanic where Joshua helped for more than a year. At this volunteer location, Joshua realized how much this helped him with his mechanical classes. He explained how the mechanic helped him and said "if I hadn't seen it, I could ask him and he'd tell me." Upon college graduation, this connection resulted in full-time employment at this same garage because Joshua said, "[h]e just let me stay here."

Offering Advice. Three manufacturing workers who were displaced and became non-traditional students and graduated from the community college commented were eager to advise others to earn a college degree. They had never been to college. They were initially uncertain of college. When asked about advice she would give to someone of going to college and pursuing her kind of work, without hesitation, Miriam said, "You can do it. If I can do it, you can do it. It's hard. It's scary. But, you can do it. I'm living proof." Esther echoed with wanting to tell others "[t]o go for it. To do what they want to do and I will tell my students to get their degree, that job opportunities are so much better even though their degree might not be in what they end up getting a job in but having that degree makes a big difference in what job opportunities may come up for them." Joshua had a keen awareness that there were not a lot of diesel mechanic opportunities in his county so he advised some of the younger guys he was attending classes with that they "need to get out of here" and "now is the time to go for it. Get a job and get out of here." While some of those younger students were reluctant to leave home and family, Joshua knew that a few had relocated and accepted better jobs than they would ever have if they remained local.

Transferrable Work Ethics. Each participant described the manufacturing self as adaptive, dedicated, and hard working. As a college student, words to describe the student self included persistent, diligent, and dedicated. When asked to describe themselves as workers in the new work force, each one discussed ways their manufacturing worker traits were still very much a part of their worker self describing their dependability and the desire to do their best. For example, a word Miriam used to describe her manufacturing self was adaptive. Esther described herself as a manufacturing worker using words like dedicated, work overtime when it was available, never miss a day, hard worker and steady worker. While Joshua was working in manufacturing, he described himself as dependable and well liked. He was trusted by his employer and given a key to the facility so he could come in and work on samples early in the morning or stay late in the evening demonstrating his independence as a worker. These work ethics, such as dedication to getting the job done even if it meant working long hours, were established before enrolling in college and the skills were found to be transferrable. Miriam went from being lost and even terrified of college to being confident and diligent in reaching her goal. She was afraid of failure but was persistent as she faced the challenges one day at a time. While Esther was a college student, she described her college self when she said, “[t]o me, going to college was like another job. You had to be there. You had to do the work. I think I was more diligent with my work than even when I was in high school.” This is evident also in her use of the college’s Open Computer Lab for long evening hours and working late into the night once she was home to complete the assignments. Joshua reflected on his college experience as being confused in the beginning but that he was dedicated and persistent in staying the course to complete the degree. Now, Miriam reflects on how the manufacturing and production mentality of “get it,

get it, get it” has carried over to her new work. She gave an example of when one lawyer gave her a task and indicated that it may be time consuming but she was able to attack the project and finish quickly. The lawyer was surprised and Miriam recognized that other, younger, co-workers did not have the same work ethic she had developed. In her new work, Esther says that she tries to do her best, she tries to learn something every day, and she likes being dependable. Joshua still considers himself to be dependable and easy to get along with on the job.

Gender Work identity. An interesting difference in the way these former manufacturing workers identified themselves arose during the questions about their new worker identity. As manufacturing workers, they unanimously stated how they explained to others, “I work at (this place) and I do (these tasks).” For example, Miriam stated, “I work at such-and-such and whatever I was doing at that time. That’s what I would say.” Joshua said he would always shake hands and be friendly with some conversation around the statement, “I work at (furniture factory).” He felt confident that people knew what upholstery was at the time. These comments might lead one to consider how the identity was about what tasks they do and they are in no way related to the individual’s being or sense of self. While attending college, they explained how they told others “I’m going to college” or “I’m a student.” When asked how they introduce themselves in their current work, Miriam said, “I’m a secretary for an attorney” and Esther said, “I am a custodian and teach part-time.” The difference occurred when Joshua maintained that his current work introductions would be “I’m helping (this man).” The statement “I am” bears some connotation that the individual may believe this to be a part of the being as opposed to simply something the individual does from day to day for

income. Another noting on this difference is that the women both took new roles in a more professional environment as opposed to Joshua's continued work in a blue-collared job.

The theme of Gender Work Identity was not fully supported by the identity theories previously presented. An additional literature review was necessary to better understand the differences recognized between the females and male responses offered in this study. Stryker and Burke (2000) defined identity salience as a cognitive schema that is the likelihood an identity may be invoked in a variety of situations or that individuals may develop an identity differently in a given situation. Relevant to the current study then, Stryker and Burke (2000) makes an inference possible that not every individual will develop the same kind of work identity. Job involvement is viewed as a psychological involvement and identification with the role of work as an important part of the self-concept or sense of self (Kanungo, 1982; Lawler & Hall, 1970). For the two women of the current study, perhaps the self-concept is connected to the new role and way of identifying themselves to self and others. Meanwhile, Joshua may not use his work as a way of fulfilling his self-concept. There seems no standard offered by these authors for the way one might identify with the work one does. The worker identity appears to be a subjective meaning assigned by an individual to the role without regard to gender.

Summary

The literature revealed that the economic impact of job loss is likely the first disadvantage to be acknowledged when we hear of job loss. Interestingly, financial changes were only briefly mentioned by any participant. The psychological impacts of job loss seem much more substantial as one reviews the themes. The themes of *Manufacturing Work Since a Teenager*, *Erosion of Job Security*, and *Supporting Relationships* demonstrate the adult

development theories of Levinson (1986) and Rus (2012). Identity theories were found in responses leading to the themes of *Manufacturing Work Since a Teenager*, *Appreciating Services*, *Building Community*, and *Gender Work Identity*. Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory can be applied to themes of *Erosion of Job Security*, *Supporting Relationships*, *Appreciating Services*, *Building Connections*, *Offering Advice*, and *Transferable Work Ethics*. The explanation of ways the themes and theories are connected will be presented in Chapter 5.

In this chapter, the participant profiles and narratives have been shared which shed light on the experiences of our neighbors who have been displaced from manufacturing, earned a community college degree, and secured work in the new work force. Then, the explanation of the application of the IPA methodology and resulting emergent themes were presented. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the themes in relation to theory, the consideration of the use of IPA in an educational study, implications and limitations of this study, and a call for future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of workers who have been displaced from a factory job, transitioned to community college where each earned a degree, and then employed in a new work force. Specifically, the research explored how the participants' identities were affected by each transition and how each transition was successfully negotiated. Displaced workers are those who have worked for three years or more with a company that was "closed down or moved, their positions or shifts was abolished, or there was insufficient work for them to do" (Helwig, 2004, p. 54). The study explored the lived experiences of three displaced workers through the frameworks of adult development, identity and transition. This chapter will include a connection of the interview results with the theories, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research and practice in community colleges.

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

Adult development theorists (Levinson, 1986; Rus, 2012) describe adulthood differently. Levinson (1986) describes adulthood with ages and also mentions occupational dreams. Rus (2012) explains adulthood in terms of events. Both have proven effective in this study. Levinson (1986) describes the *early adulthood* era as ages 17 to 45 when adults are raising a family, forming an occupation, and possibly incurring heavy financial obligations. Additionally, Levinson (1986) contends that occupational dreams are developed by both men in their 20s and women in their 30s. All participants in this study believed they would work in manufacturing until retirement. Whether these participants imagined occupational dreams in their 20s or 30s is not known; however, they did expect to work in manufacturing until they retired. None planned to change from manufacturing to enroll at the community college.

All reflected on the simplicity of changing manufacturing jobs when those were plentiful. When displacement occurred, there were no other manufacturing jobs to obtain and long-term security was lost. They found their options were to attend college or do nothing.

Displacement, thus unemployment, obviously presented a financial change but also a psychosocial change for these adults. Rus (2012) points out that adult development is marked by events including unemployment. The announcement of displacement was anticipated by some workers while sudden and unexpected for others. According to Schlossberg (2008), these events, whether planned or unplanned, may produce anxiety and may be frightening, regardless of age. These manufacturing workers who worked between 23 and 38 years in manufacturing, faced many challenges upon displacement. Their identities were challenged.

Work is only one of the many roles and relationships that we participate in throughout the day. Other roles might include spouse, sibling, child, parent, and friend. Gecas (1982) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) noted that we possess multiple identities that are formed when we participate in various social groups. For example, we develop an identity as an employee, as a family member, or a friend. When the primary social group for an individual is work related and suddenly work no longer exists for that person, an abrupt disruption to the identity occurs. Each participant in this study discussed the ways they maintained contact with their former manufacturing friends and former work issues while they struggled with new roles. This demonstrates an attachment to the former self, a manufacturing worker, while the participant was also trying to develop a new identity. Also, as each became a college student and a member of the new social group, some connections to the past and friendships continued. According to Kasworm (2008), adult students who enter college as a result of a life crisis struggle to develop an identity as a student. Often, they experience emotional

chaos, as they contemplate their potential for success as a college student, and manage their complex lives beyond college. Once the displaced worker becomes a college student, their identity as a manufacturing worker shifts and a new social group is formed. Upon graduation, the student self ended as the social group changed once more. Yet again, when the college student becomes a worker in the new work force, the identity shifts to that of the new work place social group.

As the displaced workers in this study explained, their changing identities from each phase, two of the three shifted from a *sense of doing* to a *sense of being*. For example, phrases describing the manufacturing self included “I work at...” or “this is where I work and what I do.” As college students, they still described themselves in terms of what they were doing, rather than who they were becoming. Descriptions such as “I’m going back to school” or “I’m in college” were still prevalent. The shift from doing to being seems to have occurred as membership in the new work force took place. Now, their comments began with “I’m a...” in which they described commitment to the work as though it were a part of themselves as individuals. The two individuals who reported this change are now working in semi-professional roles: one as a paralegal and one as a part-time college instructor and custodian at the college. The third individual, the only male in the study, essentially remained in the role of a production worker. The only discrepancy in this shift was when the male, Joshua, continued to describe his new worker self as still a *sense of doing* as opposed to a *sense of being* when he described his new identity as “I help (this person) at (this shop).”

Each of the participants planned for the future worker self while still enrolled in college as each was building connections with members of the community where they might find employment. During this time, each was also unknowingly creating a new worker

identity while still experiencing the student self. The plan worked as each was successfully hired in the place where those connections were built. These efforts to connect with potential employers while still in college, before college was completed, may also be interpreted as coping strategies in the face of the upcoming transition.

Throughout this study, the participants experienced transitions. Transitions occur when individuals experience a planned or unplanned event that suddenly disrupts the routine or relationships of an individual. Schlossberg's (2008) transition theory considers an individual's coping strategy when faced with a life-changing event. The model has three parts: approaching transitions, taking stock of coping resources including the 4-S system of *situation, self, support, and strategies*, and taking charge (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). The participants of this study approached transitions when they were displaced, when they became college students, and when they joined the new work force. The participants' initial response to the displacement seemed to be a crisis for each individual and each participant, however, turned this crisis into an opportunity to attend college.

When taking stock of the coping resources and the *situation*, none of these participants had previously been unemployed or experienced displacement. Each participant was also fortunate that there were no additional stressors in place. No one else from the family was displaced at the same time. The time between displacement and college enrollment was short, and the individual acknowledged the only choice was to attend college. Burdens unique to the displacement included the disruption of the worker self, financial insecurity, and health insurance concerns.

Schlossberg (2011) states that *self* refers to a person's inner strength for coping with the situation and their outlook or sense of optimism. Each of the participants described the

worker self as dependable, trustworthy, and loyal even as they acknowledged the physical toils of manufacturing. As each faced college, Esther said she was not optimistic about her future as a college student. All agreed that they were confused and scared as they began to attend college classes. However, that fear grew into pride as they experienced success. Later, they became so confident that they offered advice to other students about career and college goals.

The *support* experienced by the participants was astounding. Support was provided by spouses, fathers and others of the family unit, and a network of friends. In the college setting, support was found in college instructors and other resource personnel, and sometimes through JobLink, a community resource. One participant expressed how her faith in God saw her through the journey. In the new work force, the participants found support from co-workers and supervisors but also from family and friends. The support that came from so many directions likely helped propel them to success.

The participants implemented a variety of strategies to cope with the transitions they faced. A structured day is common to a manufacturing worker but not to a displaced worker. Once the participants began attending college classes, some sense of structure was restored. Attending college was an opportunity that arose from the adversity of displacement. They carried their work ethic and character traits developed from years of factory work.

Each participant took charge of the situation. When faced with displacement, they enrolled in college. While in college, they took responsibility for their education by seeking college resources that would help them be successful. They took advantage of many services available to them from their instructors and support services including the open computer

labs, study spaces, and tutoring services. They were dedicated to attaining a college degree and once again joining the work force.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of the displaced workers in this study illuminated a few things for me. The seemingly obvious changes in identity from manufacturing worker to student to worker were never quite so well understood until the synthesis of these interviews demonstrated the change from a sense of doing to a sense of being for some individuals.

Also, the perseverance of these individuals is inspiring. Following a major life event, they surrounded themselves with support networks in social groups, with college resources, and in family members. They chose to face their fears about college with determination. They did not give up when courses were difficult and they were short on sleep. Instead, they stayed the course and saw that earning that college degree was also a way of caring for their families. They demonstrated a strong spirit and renewed their self-esteem.

Community colleges are an excellent place for continued research on how adult students might develop a student identity. Kasworm (2008) noted that research on the nature of student identity among this population of students is lacking in current theory and research. The current study helps fill that void. A traditional age college student (18-24 years) carries the student identity from a K-12 role before assuming adult roles and identities. Non-traditional adult students (over 24 years), however, have already developed adult roles and identities without the experience of a student identity.

At the conclusion of this current study, my recommendation to community colleges would be to invest time and energy in learning more about their non-traditional students. These students bring a wealth of life experiences and wisdom. The participants in this study

commented on their interactions with younger students both inside and outside the classroom. Also, they shared their wisdom and advice with the younger generation as they encouraged them to complete the degree and even to consider relocation to other areas where the jobs may be more plentiful. The participants seemed genuinely interested in the younger generation and their successes and struggles. In turn, the younger students were helpful to the non-traditional students with classroom tasks including technology support and homework. A great sense of community can be achieved when these two generations of students are afforded opportunities to share their strengths with the other.

Other benefits to a better understanding of the non-traditional students could lead the community college to discover and secure institutional resources that might aid and encourage these students to complete their degrees. Consideration of all steps to becoming a college student including the college application, admissions process including testing, and other initial steps need review and feedback from the non-traditional student. If the institution finds that most non-traditional students complete enrollment but do not complete a credential, conversations with those non-completers will be essential.

Focus groups of currently enrolled non-traditional students might offer insight into the necessary improvements to be made by the institution. Another method of seeking information that might help the college understand this population might be to seek non-completers and solicit their feedback on things the college could improve. Such efforts would necessitate the college's openness to accepting the voice of these adult students and its willingness to consider revising current procedures.

In addition to encouraging the traditional-age college student, the participants of this study may also influence their younger family members and other future generations of

college attendees based on their experiences. Community colleges would likely prefer their students have positive experiences to share with future generations.

Implications

One of the four broad principles in the validity and quality of the IPA study is *impact and importance* “in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 183). This study should enlighten the reader of the struggles and challenges faced by these displaced workers. We know there have been many displaced workers as those stories in the news continued for several years. The experiences of displacement have left permanent emotional scars. Some scars prevent them from trusting in the concept of job security. Other scars have resulted from lessons learned about just how resilient these individuals really are and how they have incredible support systems that provide lasting encouragement. As the participants of this study faced those struggles and challenges, we find success stories of college graduation and gainful employment. Through each very complicated story, I was most impressed with how the participants were not willing to just sit at home following the tragic end to a long career in manufacturing. They were not willing to give up when they faced their first challenges at the college. Instead, they persisted and offered their newly found wisdom to the younger generation.

This study better informs community colleges of their non-traditional student population. Specifically, these findings can be used to review and improve the support systems for this group of students and draw on the life experiences of the non-traditional student that will enrich the college’s community. The work ethic of these former laborers’ commitment to producing one’s best work can be used as an example for all student populations. They all sought the resources of the college that helped them be successful.

One suggestion for a way in which the community college can better assist the non-traditional student is through the support provided by mentor programs where a non-traditional student is partnered with a traditional-age college student in the same program of study. A mentor program would benefit both students. For example, a non-traditional student who is not familiar with conducting internet searches or setting up documents in Word might benefit from a younger student who has had more practice with those kinds of technologies. The older student can share some of life's experiences with the younger student. Oftentimes, this kind of knowledge is not shared in a classroom setting.

This study also informs companies that must dismiss employees of some very different ways to approach the dismissal. Each participant had a unique experience in the separation. The participant who knew the displacement was on the horizon was better prepared, especially when the employer provided work-time access to benefit plans and encouraged the community college option. Another who was among a small group called into the office and was referred to very coldheartedly as "bodies" was simply dismissed and had to learn what the next steps should be. The third participant could see there was work yet to be done when the facility-wide announcement was made and no one understood what was happening or what they should do next. Clearly, from the research provided, a job loss is more than a loss of income but also a psychological loss. For companies that must dismiss employees, I encourage the approach taken by the company of the first participant to make the displacement a seamless one for the employees. A displacement where the company acknowledges the work of so many for so many years and fosters the displaced in a new direction aiding those displaced in making connections with community resources is more supportive and results in less animosity.

Other agencies including the Employment Security Commission and JobLink that offer resources to the displaced worker also stand to learn from the participants of this study. Job applications and interviews in a competitive work force were new experiences for the participants leading us to state that it is not safe to assume that all who enter the doors know how to complete job applications and have polished job interview skills. When Esther had such a positive experience with her case worker, she felt encouraged. She was more confident approaching a prospective employer to introduce herself when she took the application. She was also confident when she went to interviews because her case worker met with her several times preparing her for these events and offering advice. Joshua had a very different experience when he submitted his final paperwork to his case worker and was left to secure employment. These agencies may take this opportunity to look more closely at their practices and efforts with all individuals who are experiencing unemployment and seek to be gainfully employed. One suggestion is a follow-up interview with each client seeking to understand the experiences with the process and the agents. Use the results to refine the process and provide professional development opportunities for the entire staff.

Limitations of This Study

Due to time and travel constraints, this study was conducted in my own backyard. The findings of this study cannot be readily generalized to a larger group of displaced workers or to other non-traditional students. Only three participants were in this study and numbers were kept low due to the depth of the interviews which in turn allowed for rich conversations about their experiences. Also, the findings of this study are not to be generalized to other ethnic groups. All participants self-identified as white/Caucasian. There is a possibility that other ethnic groups may have had very different experiences or very

similar experiences. Ethnicity was not a qualifier for participants who were referred by faculty members. However, this community and its college are fairly homogenous. As a matter of convenience, this study was conducted in a rural community in southeastern United States. Further qualitative studies with the displaced workers might reach into other geographical areas where large numbers of displacement have been recorded. Another avenue for exploration might investigate the displaced worker who needed to complete a high school credential prior to enrolling in a community college degree program. While none of the current participants experienced marital separation or divorce, loss of home, or other drastic familial or financial stressors, those are certainly others with whom to converse about the experiences of displacement.

Call for Future Research

Previous researchers have suggested qualitative research with the displaced workers (Garrett-Peters, 2009; McAtee & Benschhoff, 2006; Mendenhall, Kalil, Spindel, & Hart, 2008; Newman, McDougall, & Baum, 2009). These researchers recognized the need for and encouraged future research to be conducted with this particular population of displaced workers using a qualitative method. The current study begins to fill that gap. There is acknowledgement that those individuals have more to share than the numbers can tell us. Perhaps this study will spark an interest to continue the qualitative inquiries to understand the lived experiences of those displaced. The participants in this study were, by some standards, successful because they had earned a high school diploma prior to manufacturing displacement and were then able to complete the community college degree. Another study might seek to understand the experiences of those displaced workers who did not complete the community college degree. Such information could be helpful to community colleges as

they strive to have a higher completion rate and have positive impacts on individuals and the community at large. A better understanding of why students *do not* complete a college degree can be more helpful in the work toward higher graduation rates than understanding only why students *do* complete a college degree.

As Kasworm (2008) notes that adult learners are attending college in growing numbers yet the research continues to explore undergraduate populations through the lens of the young adult. The current study adds to Kasworm's (2008) work with non-traditional age college students. I will take this opportunity to inspire future researchers to consider the value added effect of studying the complex lives of adults with multiple roles who choose to enroll in college.

Using IPA in an Educational Study. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen for this study because in it lies a goal to understand the lived experiences of the participants. Previously, the IPA methodology has been used in several psychological settings. The current study presents another use of this qualitative methodology as I sought to understand the major life experiences of the participants who were displaced, transitioned to community college where they earned an associate degree, and then found employment in the new work force.

Paramount to the IPA methodology is the analysis. The analysis process was woven throughout the interviewing, transcribing, reading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, and searching for connections across the themes of individual interviews. This process was completed for each participant's transcript before interviewing the next participant. As I looked for patterns across cases, eight themes emerged. As a novice in IPA methodology, I experienced the analysis process to be quite time consuming. However, the

results of case-by-case analysis followed by cross-case analysis allowed for a better understanding of both the individual and the collective whole. This methodology has proven effective when gathering information from college students that might be used to influence decision makers and others who serve displaced workers or non-traditional students because more than an individual perspective is presented when the collective analysis illuminates a group perspective.

The stories contained herein are unique not only because they are individual experiences but also because our world of work is changing. The numbers of displaced manufacturing workers may have peaked by the time of this current study. The massive layoffs and plant closings in manufacturing may never occur again. Changes in the nature of work means that less people are employed in manual labor industries, there was the invent of the gig economy where workers are contracting their skills, and employees have lost their sense of job security in manufacturing jobs.

Postlude

When I was so fortunate to earn a position in Student Services at the community college in the county where I had been raised, I was soon faced with the changing economic and mental health of my own community. There were meetings being held at manufacturing facilities to inform those employees that their jobs would soon end due to impact of the free trade agreements. These workers had never known any other kind of work. Some had been employed in manufacturing for only a few years while others were in mid-life or near retirement. Regardless of their age, they had families, they had bills, and they had only two options remaining. They could hurry to another factory that had not closed yet or they could take advantage of the educational benefits allowed by the government to train for a new

career. The latter was likely the best option because other factories would soon close their doors, too.

Those who were losing their jobs became outraged. Psychological and economic issues concerned them. They were scared of the unknown. They did not know how they would continue to provide for their families. Unemployment pay benefits did not equal their take home pay. Health insurance was no longer provided at the low cost they had known. What would happen to the lifestyle they had grown accustomed to? They worked hard every day. All they wanted to do was work.

I realize that I could have been one of those students. A power, higher than I, saw fit for me to be on this side, perhaps so I could help ours understand their own experiences from my knowledge of a manufacturing life. Because I was the one in my family to attend college instead of enter the factory, I also understand the students who come in and tell me that their family members do not understand the college experience. I take every opportunity to encourage them to stay the course. There is something better on the other side.

Contrary to their former lives in the manufacturing sector, I imagine that each of these participants prepare for their next day at work in their new roles as they reminisce of days gone by. It seems that they have a renewed sense of worth and wonder. As Miriam is driving to work today, she knows she will meet a few new people as she sits in her comfortable chair at her own desk in her upstairs office. This new work is not as physically demanding as her previous manufacturing tasks. Once inside the building, everyone she passes on the way to her office takes a moment to speak and ask Miriam how she is doing. She knows that she will be able to assist a few of the law firm's clients. Esther knows that each day brings new challenges. She will encounter college employees from faculty and staff

to the college president. She may smile as she performs the many tasks of her day. While she is leading in the classroom, she will encourage students to complete the degree because she knows the benefits that await those who do so. As Joshua drives to his work in the diesel shop, he passes the former location of his manufacturing days and recalls the work and the people of days gone by. Perhaps he smiles as he arrives at his new work where he will speak with a new customer about the work that can be accomplished in the shop. Later that day, he will speak with a customer by phone to let the driver know the condition of the repairs on the truck.

The work each one does is very different from the former manufacturing day. They do not take their new jobs for granted. They appreciate every opportunity. Now, they face the challenges of each new day with optimism because they have survived displacement, community college, and new forms of employment in the new work force.

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Appendix A: Cover Letter to Participants

Appalachian State University

Educational Leadership Doctoral Studies Program

To Whom This May Concern:

I am currently a doctoral student at Appalachian State University. I would like to invite you to participate in a study of the experiences of workers who have been displaced, earned a community college degree, and then found a new job. Displaced workers are defined as those who lost jobs they held for 3 or more years because their plant or company closed down or moved, their positions or shifts was abolished, or there was insufficient work for them to do.

If you would like to participate, you will be invited to three interviews. Over the course of several weeks, I will spend time talking with you about your experiences in each of the three events. The interviews will be scheduled at a time and place that are convenient for you and your schedule. I will recommend that we meet at the community college library when it is available.

The questions for the interviews will pertain to your experiences as a worker who became displaced, life as a college student, and as a worker in the new work force. Your participation in this study and responses to the questions will be kept confidential at all times.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please review and sign the Informed Consent and the Demographic Questionnaire that are attached to this letter. Please bring both the Informed Consent and the Demographic Questionnaire to the first interview. Thank you so much for your willingness to consider participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Sheneele Wagoner

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Consent to Participate in Research: Information to Consider

Title of Project: DISPLACED WORKERS: CONTINUING THE STORY

Researcher: Shannon Sheneele Faw Wagoner, Appalachian State University Doctoral

Candidate

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of workers who have been displaced, earned a community college degree, and found a new job. In doing this study, we hope to understand the experiences of each life-changing transition and how each may have affected your identity. Furthermore, we hope to gain insight into the strength, support, and coping strategies required to handle these events.

You will be asked to participate in three personal interviews. Each of the three interviews will be conducted on separate days and will last approximately one hour at the community college library or another location convenient for you. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed. While there may be no personal benefit to participating in this research, the information shared will hopefully assist community colleges in understanding the experiences of adult students. The risk for harm in participating in this study is expected to be no more than you would experience in everyday life. Your participation and responses will remain confidential. You will not be identified in any published or presented materials. For the purpose of protecting confidentiality, each participant will be assigned a pseudonym. Following each recorded and transcribed interview, I will share my notes with you as an

opportunity to clarify and expound upon any points necessary. All recordings and transcripts will be securely stored for three (3) years and properly destroyed at the conclusion of the three-year period.

Any questions about the study should be directed to Sheneele Wagoner (wagonersf@appstate.edu) or Dr. Amy Trawick (trawicka@appstate.edu).

Questions regarding the protection of human subjects may be addressed to irb@appstate.edu.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. There will be no consequences if you choose not to volunteer or if you decide to stop participating at any time.

Participant's Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

Participant's Email Address: _____

Participant's Phone Number: _____

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire For Participant

Directions: Please answer the following questions the best that you can. We will address any questions you have during our first interview.

Gender: Male Female

Ethnicity: _____

Job title prior to displacement _____

Place of employment prior to displacement _____

How long had you been in that job? _____

Age – at Displacement: _____

How much time passed between displacement and beginning college? _____

Highest level of education at time of displacement: _____

Community College Degree: _____

Graduation date: _____

Age – Now: _____

Current job title: _____

Current place of employment: _____

How long have you worked with your current employer? _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocols

Interview 1

Focus: Manufacturing/other work life & the announcement of displacement

1. [Review information from the Demographic Survey and clarify information.]
2. How did you come to have your job as a _____?
3. Describe yourself as a manufacturing worker/call center employee/other. (identity)
4. How did you introduce yourself to others? (speaks to identity)
5. When you had that job, what were your plans for the future?
(Probes: Did you see yourself working at this job until retirement? Why?)
(perceptions and identity)
6. Describe what happened when you received the announcement that you had been laid off. (Probes: How did that make you feel? Why did you have that reaction? Had you ever experienced anything like this before?) (Approaching Transitions/Situation)
7. How did you cope with the announcement and eventual loss of work? (Probes: Who helped you through this?) (Self/Support/Strategies: optimistic, intimate relationships, family, friends, institutions, faith & spirituality)
8. What was your next goal? (Situation/Self/Support/Strategies)

Second Interview

Focus: Transition to and through the community college experience

1. [Review key points from previous interview.] Is there anything you would like to correct or clarify?
2. Why did you decide to go to college? (Probe: What led up to your decision? Was it an easy one or a difficult one? Why?)

3. What did you have to do to enroll in college?
4. What was it like for you in becoming a college student? (Approaching Transition)

(application, placement test, registering, first day)
5. How did you feel about becoming a college student? (Probe: When do you believe that you had settled into the role of college student?)
6. What words describe your experience as a college student? (confident, lost, overwhelmed)
7. How did you introduce yourself to others during that time? (identity)
8. How did you manage and complete a college degree?

(Situation/Self/Support/Strategies) (Probe: What kind of support did you have? Was there anyone in particular who helped your through? What kinds of strategies did you use?)
9. What advice would you offer to other adults who decide to attend college?

(Strategies)

Third Interview

Focus: Becoming a worker – the job hunt and acclimation - in the new work force

For something new to begin, something old has to end

1. [Review key points from previous interview.] Is there anything you would like to correct or clarify?
2. How did you find your new job? (Probes: What other jobs did you apply for? Why did you choose this one?)
3. How would you describe the experience of trying to find a job after college

(Approaching Transition)

Probe: How was this different from the previous job searches you had conducted?

How was it similar? (Approaching Transition)

4. How did it feel starting your job? What strategies did you use? Who helped you?

(Strategies/Support)

5. What words describe your experience in this job? (4-Ss)

6. How do you introduce yourself to others now? (identity)

7. What advice would you offer to others who express interest in this kind of work? (4-

Ss)

Possible Probing Questions

1. Please describe what you mean.
2. Could you provide an example?
3. Would you explain further?
4. Are there any other thoughts that have occurred to you?

Vita

Shannon Sheneele Faw Wagoner was born in Wilkes County, North Carolina to Garry and Doris Faw. Both parents and other relatives worked in manufacturing facilities. She graduated from Catawba Valley Community College in May 1990 before beginning her work in drafting for an engineering firm. Following three years of full-time work, Mrs. Wagoner enrolled at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC where she completed a Bachelor of Technology in December 1994. The following August, she began the Master of Arts in Student Development earning that credential in May 1997. Several temporary part-time jobs were held prior to becoming a high school counselor at her alma mater in August 1998. A product and believer of the community college system, Mrs. Wagoner sought employment and was hired at Wilkes Community College in April 2000 where she has remained and has held roles as a counselor in Student Services and in 2008 began teaching geography and student success courses. She completed an Education Specialist with a teaching concentration at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC in December 2006. In August 2009, Mrs. Wagoner commenced work on the Doctorate in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.