SINGLE-PARENTS' PERSISTENCE IN PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A

CASE STUDY

by

Beryle Jean Poindexter

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative case study is an exploratory study to examine what contributes to the failure of the persistence of non-residential single-parents pursuing a college degree. The participants of this study included ten non-residential single-parent students between the ages of 21 and 50. The site of the interviews was in the Community Assistance Agency located in central Virginia. The theoretical framework guiding this study includes both the Student Integration Model Theory by Vincent Tinto (1975) and the Human Capital Theory by Theodore Schultz (1961). This framework provides a connection that explains the obstacles that exist for non-residential single-parents pursuing a college degree, as well as identifies possible solutions that address the issues involved in the pursuit of a college degree for these parents. The following research questions guided this study: What factors contribute to the failure of a single-parent to persist in higher education? How does academic involvement facilitate persistence in single-parent students? How does social involvement impact persistence to obtain a college degree in single-parent students? Data collection included a participant demographic profile, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group session. The data analysis process was presented in five phases, which included compiling all collected data, disassembling of data, reassembling data, interpretation of coded data, and themes were created. Five themes emerged from the coded data including family responsibilities, financial issues, academic involvement, self-improvement, and social involvement on campus.

Keywords: single-parents, persistence, obstacles, childcare, advising, academic involvement, social involvement

Dedication/Acknowledgements

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13 King James Version).

First and foremost, I will always give God the praise and glory for allowing me to succeed in my career. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, the late Doris Braxton Poindexter, who always encouraged me to continue my education. My father, the late Nathaniel Poindexter, who would always say, "I know you can do it because you are smart anyway." I also give many thanks to both my husband Salah and son Christopher, who stood by me as I worked so diligently on my studies.

I would also like to acknowledge my niece, Destiny Poindexter, who told me I inspired her to continue her education, and she wanted to be like me. Those very words gave me the inspiration to continue my education. Last, I will never forget two people who meant the world to me: the late Mrs. Thelma Mundy, who encouraged me when most people would discourage me; and the late Professor Wesley Boyd, my voice coach, who brought out the best in me. He would always inspire me and had a way of making me smile whenever I was sad.

MUCH LOVE AND GRATITUDE TO ALL

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List of Abbreviations

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Institute for Women's Research (IWR)

Gates Millennium Scholarship (GMS)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM)

American College Test (ACT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter One discusses non-residential single-parent students who have failed to persist in the pursuit of a higher education or college degree. There is an array of stressors and obstacles that contribute to single-parents not excelling in higher education. Single-parents "are not the traditional students most educators and decision-makers envisioned when creating their institutions and policies" (Single Mothers, 2011, p. 1). Chapter One describes the steps taken to understand the necessity of this study, beginning with the Background. Situation to Self describes how the study is related to the researcher. The Problem Statement gives an overview of the need for this study. The Statement of Purpose described the logical purpose of this study, followed by the Significance of the Study revealing who will likely benefit from the research. The research questions are answered using the research plan as well as concluding with a summary.

Background

Investigating the lives of non-residential single-parent students revealed their unique circumstances that influence persistence in higher education. Differing from a traditional student, non-residential single-parents must endure the stress of finding adequate childcare, course scheduling, and sufficient source of income to support a household. Arguably, there are underlying combinations of obstacles that can be expected from a single-parent student. Crucial factors of life are compounded with finding time to study and making academic progress. Persistence influences a single-parent's social mobility, which is synonymous with a person's socioeconomic status. Social mobility also refers to the opportunity to better oneself through a sociocultural structure. Relationships, parenting style, living conditions, and marital status

during the first years of a child's life are very critical to developing the required skills needed to complete social mobility.

"College-educated mothers devote more time to child rearing than do less educated mothers, especially child enrichment activities. They spend more time reading to children and less time watching television with them" (Heckman, 2008, p. 18). Having a basic vocabulary and analytical skills are the initial building blocks for achieving social mobility. The current job market reflects the need for an applicant to possess a degree of higher education. Education is undoubtedly a way to achieve social mobility. Parents who possess college degrees earn more money than those parents with only a high school diploma. Researchers of the Hamilton Project discovered that "A child born to parents with income in the lowest quintile is more than ten times more likely to end up in the lowest quintile than highest as an adult" (Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik, & Yu, 2013, p. 6). "Parents with higher incomes invested more money in their children's education by a staggering margin. In addition, those parents with higher socioeconomic status spent more time with their children" (Greenstone et al., 2013 p.7).

The current state of research proves to be in developmental stages. A meager number of enlightened historical findings exist. Recording identifiers are seen as flawed and have multiple definitions for single-parent students; this is a complexity that recognizes existing situations and custody agreements. Some single-parents have shared custody of children. If a divorced parent does not have full custody but is not married, he/she is not considered a single-parent. That hinders the most accurate account for dropout rates among this group. Even the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is not presenting high-quality data. The NCES "under reports the presence of parents by limiting the definition of *parent* to students claiming financial responsibility for one or more children" (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2011, p. 1). The concept of

parenting goes beyond the financial support. This is insufficient because it does not collect data on those parents who do not claim financial responsibility even though they are living together. In addition, records neglect to report whether a non-residential single- parent student is working while attending school.

Situation to Self

As a former single-parent, I had to be persistent while pursuing my education. During my many years of schooling, there have been unexpected deaths of family members or loved ones and economic hardships. As I conducted this study, I placed myself as a human instrument. My higher education experience and the participants' personal accounts of their educational experience gave a unique perspective of what it meant for them to obtain a college degree. Upon completing this dissertation, my future endeavors are to become an administrator or policy maker who will improve the educational system for today's diverse student population, and this study is my first step in working toward empowering students experiencing difficulties in persistence to obtain a college degree.

Problem Statement

In the United States from 2007 through 2008, undergraduates who were unmarried parents were disproportionately nonwhite. For example, 45% of these undergraduate students were white, compared to 30% African American, 17% Latino, and 1 in 5% of Native American. Overall, 8% of male graduates and 17% female undergraduates are unmarried parents.

Tinto (1975) stated that the problem of persistence among students is related to expectations, advice, involvement, support, and learning. The most recent research by Tinto (2012) suggested expectations that faculty establish for the students' performance and

expectations are important, especially in the classes they teach. Tinto (2012) noted, "Support is important because without academic, social, and in some cases financial support, many students, especially those who enter college academically underprepared, struggle to succeed" (pp. 10-64). Finally, if a student does not have academic and social involvement or become engaged with the "faculty, staff, and peers, especially in classroom activities, the more likely they are not to succeed in the classroom" (Tinto, 2012, pp. 10-64).

Tinto's (2012) theory identifies the problem of why some non-residential single-parent students succeed and why some non-residential single-parent students fail to obtain a college degree, but his theory does not answer the question why. Based on the literature reviewed, there appears to be a lack of qualitative studies that have been performed to examine why non-residential single-parents persist and why some non-residential single-parents fail to persist in completing a college degree.

Schultz (1963) and Becker (1964) drew attention to the benefits of education as an investment in human capital. According to Becker (1994), education and training are the most important investment in human capital because the earnings of more educated people are almost always well above average. Therefore, "Obtaining a postsecondary credential can provide economic security and social mobility for single-parent families while unleashing a potential wealth of Human Capital to meet the nation's workforce needs" (White House, 2011, para 2).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the non-residential single-parent student's failure to persist in obtaining a college degree in the central Virginia area. In this study, non-residential single-parent failure is defined as the unsuccessful

completion of an attempted college degree by a non-residential single-parent. This study explored non-residential single-parents' perceptions of obstacles and barriers to persistence. A second purpose of this study was to determine to what extent non-residential single-parent students are academically and socially involved in college activities. According to Tinto (1987), academic and social involvement were two important factors in persistence.

Significance of Study

This qualitative case study is significant because it addresses a gap in the literature by answering the question of why some non-residential single-parent students persist or do not persist in obtaining a college degree. The significance of this study is that it focuses on non-residential single-parent students, whereas Tinto's (2012) study only addressed residential students. The current study is also significant because no other qualitative studies have been conducted with this particular demographic group. According to Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010),"Although a significant share of unmarried parents enroll in college, they often run into difficulties of various kinds and fail to complete their degrees" (p. 179). This qualitative case study provided an understanding of why there is a low graduation rate among non-residential single-parents. The outcome of the study provides useful information for counselors, educators, program directors, deans or department heads concerning the most effective insight into helping to meet the needs of non-residential single-parent students continuing to persist in obtaining a degree. Furthermore, this study brings attention to non-residential single-parents' perceptions of obstacles. There is a prevalence of overlooked obstacles that hinder the non-residential single-parent student perspective in trying to persist in continuing his/her education. Suggestions for improvement regarding all facets of the college degree process are derived out of a comparative analytical study.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What factors contribute to the failure of a non-residential single- parent student's persistence in higher education?

"Recognizing that nontraditional students are a growing portion of college students and are less likely to persist and complete degree programs than traditional full-time students is critical" (Education Assistance, 2012, p. 4).

Research Question 2: How does academic involvement facilitate persistence in non-residential single-parent students?

Miller's study (2011) found that single-parent students are more likely than "traditional" students to need to support themselves and their families, have low incomes, work full time, attend school part time, need remedial coursework, survive domestic violence, and be the first in their families to attend college (p. 1).

Research Question 3: How does social involvement impact persistence to obtain a college degree in non-residential single-parent students?

"Promoting social relationships is particularly important for nontraditional students, who often have fewer opportunities to create them on their own due to competing demands on their time" (Karp, 2011, p. 1).

Research Plan

This is a qualitative case study. This method is suitable because it examined the obstacles that ten non-residential single-parents have faced in an attempt to return to college. The researcher explored the characteristics of being a non-residential single-parent who fails to persist in obtaining a college degree. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews

with non-residential single-parents. The key benefits of a semi-structured interview are its "attention to lived experience while also addressing theoretically driven variables of interest and semi-structured interviews offer great potential to attend to the complexity of the research topic" (Galletta, 2013, p. 24).

The participants were male and female non-residential single-parents, ranging from ages 21 to 50. This age range was chosen to analyze whether there is an age difference in non-residential single-parent students who fail to persist in obtaining a college degree. All individuals' participation was voluntary, with the sample population consisting of ten non-residential single-parent participants who either had previous college experience but had failed to complete a degree, or who had succeeded in completing a college degree. Pseudonyms were used in the place of participant names and addresses to maintain anonymity.

The researcher scheduled participants for individual interview sessions, which were recorded using a digital recorder as well as a cassette recorder for backup. The researcher administered a participant profile questionnaire to all participants. A focus group session was held at the local Central Community Assistance Agency, a location in central Virginia that was familiar to all participants in the study. The researcher recorded the focus group session using a digital recorder. The participants were asked seven open-ended questions. At the end of the interviews, the data were transcribed and stored in a file on the researcher's personal computer until the end of the study. When all of the data had been collected, it was analyzed using both open and axial coding.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

Given the topic of the research, this study was restricted to participants who were single or were once single during their attendance at an institution of higher education. Each participant must have had at least one child during or before attending college. The participants were not required to have graduated to take part in the study. The researcher felt that the information these participants provided could strengthen the qualitative uniqueness of the results.

Limitations

Being persistent through uncomfortable life situations is determined by the character of the individual. Many psychological considerations can be argued as points for or against a person's persistent nature. Gagging the truth of answers about personal questions is also an issue. Some individuals may not feel comfortable opening up to a stranger wholeheartedly. Participants may have selective memory for reminiscing about the tragic death of a loved one. This study was limited to non-residential single-parent students who had previous college experience. The need to contact participants for member checks may also be difficult due to geographic locations or work schedules.

Definitions

1. *Persistence* -"Persistence (Tinto, 1993) can be defined as a continuous or intermittent program attendance until learners reach their educational goal (i.e., the completion of a course, certificate program, or degree)"(Muller, 2008, p. 1).

2. *Single-parent* - Single-parents (also a lone parent, and sole parent) is a parent who cares for one or more children without the physical assistance of the other biological parent in the home" (Weaver, 2015, p.1). In today's society, there is no age limit to who

is classified as a single-parent because there are many grandparents who have custody of their grandchildren who still attend college.

3. *Academic involvement* - Academic involvement refers to perceptions that fit with the academic environment of a college resulting from interaction with faculty, staff, and peers in formal and informal settings (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). In this study, an example interaction would be seeking advice from a staff member or asking a question of your teacher concerning a particular assignment of which you may be unsure.

4. *Social involvement* - Is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to their academic experience" (Astin,1984, p. 297). In this study, physical energy would be involved in any extracurricular activities on campus, and psychological energy would be the sense of feeling that you belong in the on-campus environment, therefore, producing the energy to persist.

Summary

The goal of this research study was to explore the persistence of single-parent students in pursuit of a higher education. The participants were non-residential single-parents either by choice, divorce, the death of a spouse, separation, or desertion. This case study explored and analyzed the obstacles that have hindered non-residential single-parent students from reaching their desired educational goals. This study was significant because it explored whether or not the students were academically or socially prepared to pursue a higher education. This qualitative case study examined the background causes for lack of persistence among single-parent students. In the future, similar students may be able to benefit from the findings of this research. By highlighting the flawed areas found within institutions of higher education, policymakers may be able to perhaps integrate a more

diversified, theoretical approach to the overall school system. The theoretical literature found in the next chapter establishes reasoning for non-residential single-parent persistence in higher education exploration.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter Two presents literature reviewed to investigate factors that hinder non-residential single-parent students from persisting in pursuit of a higher education or college degree. This literature review attempted to uncover several theories that informed this study. Student persistence is a critical issue for both students and institutions because it affects students' accomplishment of their education goals and financially sustains the institution's goals (Lint, 2013). Consistent persistence is required for non-residential single-parents to complete their educational goals because most universities are not designed for their particular set of needs. A college degree creates the opportunity to elevate one's social class. This entails but is not limited to, financial independence, job stability, and a safer living environment. To improve non-residential single-parents' retention and graduation rates, research must be performed to uncover the causes of not being persistent, the impact of not being persistent, and how to increase persistence among single-parents. The purpose of this literature review was to explore previous research that has been done on non-residential single-parents' persistence in higher education. "A major challenge facing student-parents is that many colleges and universities cater to traditional students who attend college full time without family responsibilities" (Couch, 2013, p. 1). This topic greatly interests me because of personal experiences and a lack of attention from institutions of higher education. There is no doubt that college degree attainment requires persistence. According to Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah (2011), there is an income gap in the United States steadily increasing and a college education seems to be a worthwhile investment. This is a trend that appears to be steadily increasing. Carnevale et al. noted that a four-year

college degree is expected to earn two million dollars in a person's lifetime as opposed to someone who only graduates with a high school diploma (p. 4):

The persistence to obtain a college degree for financial gain is prevalent:

Parents of dependent children now make up almost one in four students pursuing a post-secondary education in the United States, as parents seek post-secondary credentials to increase their incomes and improve the status of their families. However, student parents, especially single-parents, face significant challenges to success in post-secondary programs (Miller, 2010, p. 1).

This chapter is organized into sections and subsections that address the following topics:

1.) Obstacles and Challenges to single-parent success or failure to persistence

2.) Academic and Social Involvement

3.) Theoretical Framework (a) Tinto's Theory of Persistence, (b) Human Capital Theory,

4.) Related Literature

(a) Obstacles that Hinder Persistence

(b) Childcare

(c) Institutional Structure

(d) Economics of Higher Education

1.) Factors Supporting Persistence

(a) Personal Health

(b) Earning Potential

2.) Support for Higher Education Persistence (advising)

3.) Online Learning

4.) Financial Support

Obstacles and Challenges to Single-parent Success or Failure to Persistence

There are obstacles and challenges that hinder the persistence of single-parent students in pursuit of higher education. This study explored the obstacles that hinder persistence of single-parent students from reaching their educational goals. Many of the obstacles that single-parents face come in all aspects of life that make higher education seem unobtainable. A great deal of non-residential single-parent students lack the support of family as well as institutions, especially when it comes to childcare. "Amenities that student-parents need, such as affordable childcare facilities, flexible scheduling options, and parents support group, aren't available at every institution" (Couch, 2013, p. 1).

Non-residential single-parents are often overwhelmed by the expectations that institutions of higher education place on them. Often non-residential single-parent students have been out of school for quite a while, and this can be a problem for them academically and socially. As noted by the National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association (2010), deciding to return to school is a huge decision. This decision is even harder when there are children or a family involved. Finding a balance between maintaining your own academic career and the well being of your family can be tricky (p. 118).

Academic and Social Involvement

Single-parents often feel they are not academically or socially prepared to return to an institution of higher education. Single-parents may feel they will not be persistent in their efforts to attain a college degree because they have been out of school for an extended period of time. When it comes to being academically ready to return to college, many single-parent students are

not prepared and have poor study habits that affect the retention rate" (Hanover, 2011, p. 6).

Those students who are not socially prepared to return to a college setting will often feel socially

challenged. The inability to socially integrate with other students as well as participate in

campus activities can make a single-parent feel out of place.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded by the Student Persistent Theory of Vincent Tinto and the

Human Capital Theory of Theodore Schultz.

Tinto's Theory of Persistence

Vincent Tinto is an American theorist highly educated in the fields of education and

sociology. He acquired degrees in both fields from the University of Chicago.

Tinto's passion for adressing social inequality in higher education and the character

and causes of student attrition in colleges and universities was a major focus. He has

authored more than 50 publications, including books, research reports, and journal articles

(Tinto, 2007, p. 2). During his career, he has lectured on multiple continents. His most

recent and notable international work was the European Access Network and the Dutch

Ministry of Education. He developed programs to promote access to higher education for

disadvantaged youth in Europe.   Degree attainment motivated him to seek funding for

further research in higher education persistence:

> Tinto chaired the national panel responsible for awarding $5 million to establish the
>
> first national center for research on teaching and learning in higher education and
>
> served as Associate Director of the $6 million National Center on Postsecondary
>
> Teaching, Learning, and Assessment funded by the U.S. Office of Education (Tinto,
>
> 2014, p. 302).

Tinto created a model that provided information derived from a sociological standpoint regarding persistence. It is the integration model or a student retention model that explains the contributing factors that threaten and hinder persistence in higher education. The model applies to many students because the core issues stem from the institutional structure. Tinto (2012) provided an explanation of five issues that deter persistence among single-parents that include expectations, advisement, support, involvement and learning.

Expectations. Students are more likely to succeed in settings where expectations for success are clearly articulated and are high. It is important that they have direct knowledge of what is expected of them at the institution of their choice. There are institutions that have set achievement standards that are often above the norm of higher educational institutions. Many students are unable to live up to what is expected of them by the administrative staff.

Advice.   Advice is important for all students to get started in the right direction as they enter their chosen institution of higher education. Getting pointed in the right direction and having knowledge of how to reach educational goals are very important. Having knowledge of what direction to go is essential. An academic advisor can map out a plan, which is helpful to all students in being persistent towards reaching their educational goals.

Support. Without support, academic, social, and in some cases financial, many students struggle to meet institutional expectations and succeed in college**.** Support is a necessity for persistence. Freshmen require not only the standard support of academic advisors but the support of external programs, as well. Pre-college and summer programs aid in the persistence of a student by increasing understanding of the everyday workings of the college lifestyle. Support should be arranged in multiple forms in a manner that is easily accessed.

Involvement. The more students are academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff, and peers, especially in classroom activities, the more likely are they to persist and graduate. Involvement influences persistence at all levels of higher education. Students who take pride in their relationships with an institution are more motivated to persist. Institutions that maintain positive, progressive relationships and activities have high numbers of student involvement. Involvement creates a sense of belonging and pride that motivates a student to accomplish academic goals.

Learning. Throughout the learning process, students should always feel that they are learning. When students are progressing in their studies, they will persist and push forward to reach their educational goals. When institutions of higher education create an environment to meet the needs of all students by providing up-to-date technology and strong student-teacher interactions, the more likely their retention rate will increase:

> Nowhere is involvement more important than in the classrooms of the university, the one place, perhaps the only place, students meet each other and the faculty, and engage in learning. For that reason, the centerpiece of any university policy to enhance retention must begin with the classrooms and serve to reshape the classroom practice in ways that more fully involve students in learning, especially with other students (Tinto, 2003, p. 4).

When a student is indecisive and uncertain about his/her field of study, the probability of degree completion will decrease. Tinto's model alludes to the fact that more institutions must realize the need to have support specifically catered to single- parent students. For single-parents, the perception of the degree process is often over or understated by advisors. Receiving advice from the proper channels regarding how courses generate the desired career path will boost persistence. Designing concepts to increase non-residential single-parent

student involvement on campus heightens persistence. Tinto suggested that universities orchestrate cultures that invite more productive social interaction:

> By asking students to construct knowledge together, such pedagogies involve students both socially and intellectually in ways that promote cognitive and social development as well as appreciation for the many ways in which one's own knowing is enhanced when other voices are part of that learning experience (Tinto, 2012, p. 7).

Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) (1975) provided an interpretation of faculty expectations, which is also an important factor in a student's success. Tinto further asserted that professors and administrators are to inspire, guide, and teach in such a manner that expresses the importance of each student's success. When students do not receive feedback that helps them realize that they are important, retention and persistence are influenced negatively. Single-parents often struggle with the involvement process for various reasons. By emphasizing the theories found within Tinto's Student Integration Models and Theodore Schultz's Human Capital Theory, a methodology that directly influences single-parents' persistence is explained.

Another important element of persistence is a single-parent's ability to integrate into the environment in a higher education institution. Tinto (1995) noted that many institutions of higher education are structured both academically and socially. The academic structure of most institutions of higher education focuses on the education of undergraduates and mainly targets the academic content within the institution that will help undergraduates obtain knowledge to persist and graduate. Tinto (1993) noted that social integration is considered a function of the nature and quality of interactions with peers and faculty, as well as student's social involvement in a college environment (p. 27). When it comes to the social system of

the institution of higher education, the focus is often primarily on what activities student can participate in on a daily basis with emphasis on individual needs to adjust to a campus environment (p. 59).

Tinto's Student Integration Model theorizes that "If the student fits the university's social and academic structure, integrates into academic and social life, and shows commitment to the university and to graduating, the likelihood of graduation is greater" (Dewitz, Woolsey, & Walsh, 2009, p. 20). Tinto's model of Social and Academic Involvement suggests that

- Academic: Pre-College preparation, which includes more involvement in lower-level courses
  - More high school programs
- Social: Peer group interaction with availability of group spaces
- Learning: Environment with up-to-date technology
  - There should be active learning in teaching sessions
- Advice: Social faculty interaction, such as one-on-one consultations
  - (Have a direct contact person) with available office hours

Human Capital Theory

"The Human Capital Theory was developed by Theodore Schultz who believed that people invest in themselves through education" (Schultz,1961, p. 29). He proclaimed that when a society is abundantly educated, companies maintain a high level of global economic competitiveness. Popovic and Nikola (2011), researchers in the economics department at Illinois Wesleyan University, explain how the Human Capital Theory will give a return on education investment:

General human capital theory states that skills obtained through education and experience in one's lifetime are what develops an intuition for successful business behavior due to a broad set of skills that are transferable between occupations. Productivity is predicated on citizens having a high level of education (p. 2).

Persistent single-parents reap the benefits of education through knowledge, wages, and opportunities. Persistence with education has also been shown to pay off by producing positive changes in a person's economic status. Kwon (2009) described how Human Capital Theory creates measurable payoffs in various aspects of life:

Accumulation of human capital through learning activities significantly influences many sectors. In the macroscopic aspects, many researchers present that accumulation of one's human capital on education and training investment largely affects the growth of an individual's wages, a firm's productivity, and national economy (p. 2).

As stated by Stark and Poppler (2011), beginning in the 1920s socioeconomic increases were created by formal education. Salaries grew for those individuals with high school diplomas. Today's salaries contrast between those who have degrees in higher education and those who do not have a degree in higher education. According to Carnevale et.al., 2013, "In base year 2010, 59 percent of all jobs in the U.S. economy required postsecondary education and training " (p. 15).

It is important to single-parents to be financially stable and be able to support a family with the necessities of life, which often equates to happiness. Personal happiness is related to the Human Capital Theory. Researchers explain that human capital goes beyond increased salaries and wealth. According to Piper (2012), Human Capital Theory leads to

"less risky and stimulating employment; improved ability to contribute to, and participate in, socio-political processes; enhanced ability to appreciate cultural goods; increased longevity and other health benefits;and subjective well-being" (p. 5).

Piper (2012) also highlights the relationship between doing what you like to do to make a living and doing what you must do to make a living to survive. A person who has a passion for design can attend college and earn a degree in architecture. The education leads to a position that involves doing what stimulates the brain. That stimulation will often transform into happiness. Single-parents benefit from the same concept. Not only are they able to provide for their children, but they can have a rewarding career. Research leads to the hypothesis that higher education leads to generational education within a family tree. Engberg and Allen (2010) stated that children from parents with an above-average net worth have access to quality schooling and needed resources to succeed academically. These fortunate individuals are more equipped to compete with the demands of higher education. The pathway to higher education attainment is more accessible because there are fewer financial challenges (p. 788). Human Capital Theory has future ramifications for the life that a child will live. The theory applies knowledge that will formulate persistence because of the benefits that have been fully researched.

The transferability of knowledge from one generation to another proves the concept of Human Capital Theory. According to Adewuyi, Olusayo, and Okemakind (2013), future generations are to learn from the collected knowledge of past generations. The desire to create from the present and current knowledge must be instilled into the next generation. These actions are the duties of parents, teachers, and those in leadership positions. Single-parents who struggle and persist and acquire formal education will pass on those values to

future generations. Traditions and values are learned components of life that start with the efforts set forth by the parents. If parents emphasize the importance of education, they will pass along the core value of Human Capital Theory.

Related Literature

In this chapter, the literature related to this study supports the significance of why this study is important. Related literature identifies factors hindering persistence as well as factors supporting persistence of non-residential single-parents.

Factors Hindering Persistence

Factors hindering persistence of non-residential single-parents focus on childcare, institutional structure, and economics of higher education.

Childcare. Childcare is a prevalent barrier for single-parent students. A study conducted by Miller, Gault, and Thorman (2011) found almost 90% of single- parent respondents agreed that having access to childcare dominated their reasoning for deciding to attend a particular college. Of those individuals, 40% viewed on-campus care to be a primary factor when choosing to enroll (p. 14). The parents of children age five and under needed childcare the most because once children reach age five, most are attending school during parents' traditional working hours.

The public school system allows parents the luxury of not paying for childcare once the child reaches a certain age; however, childcare opportunities on college campuses are not increasing. A key reason is the uncertain economic status of the United States. For-profit institutions are growing vastly, which are less likely to offer on-campus childcare services. This particular service is not viewed as a necessity, nor is it thought to be profitable for most universities. The findings of Miller, Gault, and Thorman (2011), revealed that childcare

availability is low for both four-year and two-year institutions. Boressoff (2012), a researcher for The National Coalition for Campus Children's Centers, researched the varieties in campus care as they related to the success of student parents. Boressoff concluded neither childcare nor resources to help find childcare at the three largest for-profit institutions existed, University of Phoenix, Kaplan University, and DeVry University (p. 23). "According to the National Center for Education Statistics, less than half of the more than 1,000 community colleges in the United States offer on-campus childcare for students" (St. Rose, 2014, para 3). Such information reiterates that the vast majority of traditional institutions of higher education do not see childcare as a priority. The primary emphasis today is still on younger residential students as opposed to the non-traditional or older students.

According to Miller, Gault, and Thorman (2011), one in four college students in the United States is a parents with dependent children, a significant shift from the typical college student of the past. This growing student population faces multiple obstacles to academic success. The majority of students who are parents are women.   Often, they work for minimal wages as waitresses, housekeepers in hotels, or sales clerks (Demeules & Hammer, 2013). The inconvenience of not having this much-needed resource impacts other aspects of life. Having to find off-campus care for children often leads to undesirable spending in transportation and time consumption.

In the United States, parents with an annual income of less than $18,000 are considered to be at the poverty level. Single-parents at this poverty level struggle with the cost of childcare. Working-class citizens saw a decrease in earnings in 2011,while the cost of living rose 3.2% in that same year (Childcare, 2012, p. 11). Childcare Aware of America

(2012) stated that, among the 50 states, the annual cost of center-based infant care averaged 38% and for a four-year-old child averaged 31% of the state median income for a single mother (p. 27). Some states have seen the cost of childcare rise past the yearly expenses of a four-year university.

In addition, if single-parents are lucky enough to find affordable childcare, the question that remains is the quality of the childcare. Single-parents who cannot afford to pay a certified professional organization could very well put their children at risk of neglect or abuse. Research by Karageorge and Kendall (2008) gave estimates of almost one million children who had been abused or neglected in 2006 in childcare facilities (p. 9). The reassurance of a child's safety is vital to the parent's ability to perform in the classroom or at work. In the instance that abuse occurs, research suggests that permanent damage can develop. Karageorge and Kendall (2013) found that childcare abuse victims showed signs of behavioral issues, suicide attempts, and the tendency to mimic abusive behavior. These data suggest that not only will parents have to deal with the aftermath of abuse, but also find necessary therapeutic options for healing. Vandell (2010) explained that even well into the teenage years, childcare has an influence on a person. Vandell noted that higher quality childcare produced better academic performance in later years. Even if the child came from a low-income background, the highest quality of childcare had a more positive effect on behavior during the teenage years.

Institutional structure. For the fortunate single-parents who find the resources for quality childcare, they may still struggle to obtain a higher level of education. Colleges, private/state institutions, and vocational schools require prerequisites of some form. Researchers have indicated that single-parents often struggle with the required protocols of

higher educational institutions. Miller (2010) suggested that socioeconomic characteristics and living conditions of parents may both influence the level of literacy for single-parent students. Miller's reasoning is based on the research performed on the obstacles to persistence in higher education for adult learners. Miller's findings suggested that these learners are rarely equipped with the skills necessary to take remedial classes. According to Adult Learners (2007) "Many adult learners start even further back on the educational ladder—in adult basic education courses geared to those with less than eighth-grade reading, writing, and math skills" (p. 16). Adult learners are not prepared to begin basic courses in higher education, which can lead to feelings of discouragement and helplessness. The enrollment processes at community colleges are more lenient, meaning students with various levels of academic preparedness can enroll. A drawback regarding prerequisites influences the level of persistence among adult learners. Students admit that they may be "eager to begin classes only to learn, from prerequisite placement tests, that they need either remedial or developmental education or have been assigned to adult basic education to improve their reading, writing, and math skills" (Hill & St. Rose, 2013, p. 24).

As noted by Adam, et al (2012), "More than 50 percent of students entering two-year colleges and nearly 20 percent of those entering four-year universities are placed in remedial classes" (p. 2). This is a problem nationwide for all incoming first-year students, not just older adult or single-parents. The success rates of math classes are higher than those of the liberal arts. Unfortunately, many adult students may give up before they even begin classes that count toward a degree. The literacy issue must be addressed before moving forward with courses that count toward degree completion because those students who find themselves in that situation will experience a delayed time for degree attainment. Single-parents seek

completion as soon as possible because it equates to progression in other areas such as job and family life.

Higher education preparedness is a serious barrier that deserves attention. The structure of our current higher educational system may be attributing to the failure of those students with aspirations of obtaining a higher education degree. "Higher education creates more informed citizens, better health, better parents, more job satisfaction and other non-economic benefits. Still, students would do well to consider carefully their objectives and expectations before choosing an institution or a major" (Sawhill, 2013, p. 1).

There is a great divide in the nation's high school courses preparing students for higher education. The difficulty faced by education boards/committees is in defining what exact changes must be applied in order to address the college preparedness issue. The assessment of the K-12 curriculum and how it transfers to higher education must be reformed in order to better prepare individuals for the future. Some aspects of traditional teaching methods may not be effective for the adult learner. There have been studies conducted on teaching styles and methods of improvement for learners of all ages. Findings from some of these studies suggested that the traditional method of classroom lecture may be ineffective when applied particularly to adult learners. For example, a study performed by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration and Office of Policy Development and Research discovered that low-income adults responded the least to the traditional lectured-style approach:

For many low-income adult learners, traditional pedagogical approaches replicate the very techniques that did not work particularly well for them in high school. Adult learners benefit from active engagement in defining the learning program and

approach, from methods that tap their experience base as workers and in other aspects of life, and from learning that is structured in ways that align with work settings (Chao, DeRocco, & Flynn, 2007, p. 17).

The structure of higher education is often foreseen as a barrier to non-residential single-parent students. Research suggests the higher education system is not orchestrated in a manner that promotes success for single-parent adult learners. If one looks closely at most vision or mission statements from institutions of higher education, one will likely notice the mention of the word *diversity*. According to Gaertner and Hart (2013), schools attempt to provide the most diverse campus environments that will enrich the lives of the students. The importance stems from the diversity of the workplace. Preparing individuals to perform in a complex society is a part of the overall institution's goal. However, when speaking in regards to diversity, the focus is rarely expanded past race, religion, or gender.

Chao, DeRocco, and Flynn (2007) conducted a study on barriers that made access and persistence difficult for single-parents. Their findings revealed that single-parents needed and benefited from having easy access to their classes. Traveling to campus had the potential to be a complex issue for those without personal transportation or the cost of public transportation. The authors suggested that universities must create smaller external locations that make taking courses convenient. Traveling to main campuses added an extra barrier for busy single-parents (p. 16). Chao et al also noted that time constraints on financial aid should be more flexible because single working parents may take longer than the scheduled time to complete their degree. According to Chao et al, over 70% of single-parents do not complete their degrees on time. The complications of juggling work, school, and parenting may lead to single-parents being forced to take breaks. Deciding to take time off presents

another possible barrier because of re-entry and exit policies. The authors noted that students face the possibility of having to repeat a course or take an extra course to facilitate the time missed (p. 16).

Economics of higher education. The economics of higher education are at the forefront of spending debates at all levels of government. Many students rely on government-supported loans and grants to fund their education. Chen and St. John's (2011) research showed that states are receiving fewer funds for higher education (p. 629). Federal cuts and the fiscal uncertainty of the country's economy demand more out-of-pocket spending for students. The persistence of students decreases when they encounter fluctuating tuition and fees that exceed their federal aid. The cost of supplies and lab fees may hinder persistence (Cerven, Park, Nations & Neilsen, 2013). For example, the cost of textbooks averages around $400 a semester, without adding in lab and technology fees. Furthermore, financial constraints are found beyond tuition cost. Low-income single-parents are forced into financial situations that do not favor their long-term financial needs. First-time students are prone to making unwise borrowing decisions because of lack of financial experience. Uninformed decisions may often lead to high-interest loan rates and financial trepidation.

Along with finding funding for education, single-parents struggle with everyday life expenses. The Institute for Women's Research (IWR) stated that there are an excessive number of financial issues for single-parent students (IWR, 2012, p. 41). Their figures explain how easy it is for single-parents to become discouraged. Currently, wages are staying moderately low while living expenses are increasing at a rapid rate. It is the increase of costs in all aspects of life that generates an overwhelming stigma associated with not having a college degree.

Those students slightly above the poverty level fear owing or defaulting on loan payments to banks (Dowd & Coury, 2006, p. 21). This fear comes from not having a stable economic support system to rely on when finances are depleted. The decision to attend college is swayed drastically when a student owes over $50-$100,000. According to the Institute for College Access and Success (2012), "Graduating with high debt, particularly if it includes private loan debt, can limit career options and make it difficult to save for a home, a family, retirement, or one's own children's education" (p. 16).

Factors Supporting Persistence

Related literature supporting factors of persistence include better physical and emotional health, earning potential, advice, and online learning.

Better physical and emotional health. Recent and past studies have drawn attention to the physical and emotional health characteristics of adults with higher education degrees. A noticeable difference does exist. According to Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010), the majority of college-educated adults are healthy and live many years beyond those who obtain no college degree (p. 190). Even in instances where the household income is equal among college and non-college graduates, results still indicate that college graduates are happier. Those who obtain a college degree live healthier lifestyles and have access to quality health care (Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen, 2010). The life expectancy gap is even larger between those students who do not graduate high school and those students who earn a high school diploma. According to Baum, Ma, and Payea (2010), those with a college degree tend not to develop eating disorders (p. 5). For example, obesity is on the rise in the United States in both adults and children.

Researchers have linked obesity as a contributing factor to the employment of the parent (Benson & Mohktari, 2011). The number of hours a parent worked, with the absence of a father, increased obesity rates among both children and parents. Excessive working hours lead to less time to focus on healthy diets. Even if healthy diets are in place, the discipline needed to implement the healthier decisions is not present. Higher education also benefits personal health or lifestyle habits. A research study by Baum, Ma, and Payea (2010) found that smoking decreased by 5% amongst people with bachelor's degrees from 1998 to 2008. Baum, Ma, and Payea also noted that there was a 2% decrease in smoking among high school graduates during this time frame. The authors also noted that living a healthier lifestyle has positive effects on the economy and helps regulate health care costs and expenditures (p. 25).

Earning potential. Higher education is viewed as a gateway to higher wages. Completing an undergraduate or graduate degree creates an increase in pay that could lead to financial stability. Those students majoring in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs begin careers with the highest annual income of at least earn almost $50,000. This figure is $20,000 more than graduates who major in the humanities (Melguizo and Wolniak, 2011, p. 398). As noted by Hout (2012), depending upon one's college degree level, one can expect to earn up to 20% more than high school graduates (p. 6). Certain variables play into one's annual income that include major and geographic location. Hout (2012) also found that males who work for longer than 30 years should expect to earn more than one and a half million dollars. Research performed by the Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce suggested an even higher payoff for college graduates.

As a general rule, educational attainment generates more income as one's degree level rises. Even those who have not completed a degree program have benefitted from taking classes after completing high school. Often, students who have taken post-secondary courses without completing a degree earn more than those who have not. As stated by Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah (2011), "Having some post-secondary education, even without earning a degree, adds nearly one-quarter of a million dollars to lifetime earnings. Annual earnings rise to $38,700 ($18.69 per hour)" (p. 4).

Advice. Indeed, quality support at all levels of education produces positive outcomes. Sometimes, students are not being guided to make the right decisions. Single-parents often may need reassurance and knowledge of options that will aid in persistence:

A growing body of experimental evidence shows that providing social, financial, and academic supports to vulnerable community college students can improve achievement and attainment. Contextualized learning programs, for example, have enabled participants not only to move on from basic skills to credit-bearing coursework, but also to complete credits, earn certificates, and make gains on basic skills tests (Goldrick-Rab & Sorensen, 2010, p. 179).

Colleges, in combination with lawmakers, are continuously redefining the means of improving student retention and persistence. They have performed countless studies on enrollment, graduation, and campus experience. An important factor in continuing education is academic advising. According to Drake (2011), advising should not be overlooked when evaluating strategies for student persistence (p. 10). Goldrick-Rab and Sorensen (2010) found success among students previously performing poorly once they received a specialized form of advising. The advising catered to their specific needs. The participants received

stipends for using the services, and the results aided the pace in which they completed their degrees. The duty of the advisor is to build a relationship of confidence and trust in the curriculum. If those components are developed, the student is more likely to persist. Increasingly, colleges are catering to single-parents by offering programs and workshops to address their unique issues. According to Single-parent Support Services (2013), Eastern Michigan University for example, is seeking to develop a specialized system of training for advisors to accommodate single-parent students (p. 5). The advisors are seeking ways to deal with the lack of family emotional support. They also want to provide workshops on being a better parent. At Eastern Michigan University, advisors are becoming equipped with the tools to help parents dealing with divorce issues. A conscious effort is being made to become a viable support system for single-parent students through the university system, instead of electing to refer students to outside resources.

Online learning. According to File and Ryan (2014), for many Americans, access to computers and high-speed Internet connections has never been more important, as they are used to complete school work, locate jobs, etc. The Internet has provided an alternative method for single-parents to attain higher education. Institutions are recognizing the demand to offer more online courses and have increased efforts in recent years. According to Moskal, Dziuban, Upchurch, Hartman, and Truman (2006), almost two and a half million students were taking classes online, and the trend is growing about 20% each year (p. 26). Research performed by the Educational Testing Service indicated that online learning has nearly tripled since 2002 (Liu, 2011, p. 471).

According to Liu (2011), the nation's top retailers are adopting online learning to further the skills of their employees. Wal-Mart and American Public University have

collaborated to create courses for employees to earn credits in management. The phenomenal growth of online learning is aiding in the persistence of all students, especially single-parents. The advantages of online classes highly favor the single-parent student. The key to the success and popularity of online learning is the flexibility element it provides. Allen and Seaman (2011) performed research that compared the preferences of single-parents for online versus face-to-face learning and found a stark preference for the flexibility of online learning. Allen and Seaman stated that flexibility was the top-ranked reason that participants chose online courses because it allows students to complete assignments at a more desirable speed (p. 16). Flexibility allows accommodation for non-traditional work schedules. Single-parents often find themselves in the unfortunate position of working schedules that often change. Growing trends among community colleges are weekend classes and around-the-clock access to tutoring resources. The nation's higher education institutions are aiding student persistence. As of 2007, almost 100% of community colleges in the United States offered an online course (Hachey, Wladis, & Conway, 2012, p. 1).

Financial support. Furthermore, research has shown that the U.S. government remains supportive of those who pursue college degrees. A nationwide increase in funding for community colleges has been set forth by the Obama Administration. As Obama (2009) stated, "By 2020 America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (p. 1). One goal of this initiative is to designate $12 billion toward community colleges to enable them to make several key changes in their structure. For example, community colleges will be able to design programs that coincide with companies' direct job descriptions. The student loan structure will also be reformed in a simpler manner that promotes smarter lending decisions. Another goal of the initiative is that Federal Pell grants

will increase by $500,000 (Obama, 2009). Pell grants are heavily relied upon for financing

higher education and are need-based grants that provide an opportunity for low-income

students to attend school. The criteria to receive Pell grants are also determined by the

number of credits a student takes and the cost of tuition. Studies performed on the trends in

education-based aid showed the following increases in financial support:

- Total Pell Grant expenditures increased from $14.8 billion (in 2012 dollars) in 2002-03 to $37.5 billion in 2010-11 but declined to an estimated $32.3 billion by 2012-13.

- Grant aid from colleges and universities in the form of discounts to students grew from $13 billion (in 2012 dollars) in 1992-93 to $22 billion in 2002-03 and to $44 billion in 2012-13 (Trends, 2013, p. 4).

The U.S. government has also made it possible to receive education tax credits. These

credits may be applied to college tuition and other related expenses. Research performed on

the trends in higher education has shown that support systems are being utilized (Baum and

Payea, 2013). As noted by Baum and Payea, over 14 million people took advantage of the

education tax credit in 2011. That is an increase of about 10 million since 2008. Billions of

dollars in loan interest were subtracted by similar programs. Grants awarded to students

exceeded more than $9 billion, so increases in certain states require need-based grants. Need-

based grants are state grants that are derived particularly from students' financial

circumstances.

If grants are not available, then scholarships are another option that may be explored.

A considerable number of scholarships are available specifically for single- parent students.

For example, the Salt Lake Community College has a scholarship called Single-Parent

Appreciation Scholarship. Scholarship amounts awarded vary from college to college. The figures are determined by the funding sponsors. According to a grant impact report, the state of Arkansas awarded over 20 single- parent scholarships totaling over $200,000 (Grant Report, 2013). This impressive amount is provided by Tyson Foods, Inc. "A comprehensive recipient follow-up study completed in 2011 revealed 83% retention and graduation rate and a 63% employment rate at above poverty-level income among working graduates" (Arkansas Single-parent Scholarship, 2013, para. 3). The following statistics display the unique factors of why such assistance is needed in Arkansas:

- 77% are receiving at least one form of government assistance
- 52% receive no child support, and most of the others receive it irregularly
- 21% have previously filed bankruptcy
- 44% of their children receive free or reduced lunch at school
- 60% of their children have learning or medical disabilities
- 56% are the first in their family ever to attend college (p. 1).

Beyond federal assistance, private organizations seek to help students persist in higher education with scholarships and developmental programs. There are opportunities for low-income, minority students who achieve high academic standings. Research shows that many STEM minority students benefitted from the Gates Millennium Scholarship Fund (GMS). In 2000, the fund awarded 4,000 students with scholarships (Melguizo and Wolniak, 2011, p. 387). The structure of the fund promotes equal opportunity for those students motivated to achieve. One way in which it does so is by not limiting availability to minority groups. Compared to other scholarships, the GMS does not limit recipients to location, minority group, or gender. Further research showed that

- GMS has awarded over $763,628,869 in scholarships between the 2000-2012 academic years.

- The average award was $12,227 between the 2001-2012 academic years.

- The average first-year undergraduate student retention rate is 97.9% among Gates Scholars; the average second-year rate is 96%.

- Over 10,315 Gates Millennium Scholars have completed a degree since the program's inception (The Gates Millennium, 2013, para 5).

Summary

The reviewed literature in this chapter indicated that in order for non-residential single-parent students to persist, there must be adjustments made to the current education system. Tinto (1995), a key researcher and theorist who has studied the issues that affect the persistence of many non-residential single-parent students, noted that more research was needed to study the demographics of single-parent students. Tinto suggested five issues that must be addressed by institutions of higher education to raise the persistence of all students. First, he felt that students should be aware of what is expected of them by the institution of higher education they choose to attend. It is important that the school administration, along with the faculty and staff, make a collaborative effort in creating graduation expectations that are clear and concise to all perspective students. This is especially true for single-parent students. Secondly, Tinto suggested that advising provides direction to students who are undecided as to what career path they want to take, but are willing to take a chance. It is important that students be given a road map of whatever degree plan they choose. Thirdly, the issue of academic involvement and support can be very important. Social involvement and support may also help students maintain persistence. Tinto suggested that social support will give non-traditional students a sense of

belonging. The fourth issue Tinto emphasized was involvement, whereby getting students involved in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. For example, group projects allow students to help each other through the learning process. The fifth issue was making sure that the higher education institution's administration makes every effort to do everything possible to encourage a student's success by monitoring the curriculum offered by the institution, such as scaling up the programs and technology offered.

Tinto, throughout his research, focused primarily on residential students in four-year institutions. Since the beginning of his research, "Some institutions have been able to make substantial improvements in the rate at which their students graduate, and many have not" (Tinto, 2007, p. 2). Tinto also focused on the importance of academic and social integration and involvement. "Tinto's Student Integration Model argues that a variety of academic, social and personal supports that are integrated into, not separate from, a college or university's existing institutional structure is needed " (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, Lee, 2007, p. 3). Tinto emphasized that the more a student is academically and socially involved within the college or university, the more likely he/she would remain in college and persist. "The fact is that despite many years of work on this issue, there is still more work that is not known and has yet to be explored" (Tinto, 2007, p. 2). Tinto indicated that more research is needed to discover which demographic groups are the most persistent in pursuing a college degree.

In reviewing the literature, other studies focused on the importance of education, such as the Human Capital Theory and Self- Determination Theory (SDT). The Human Capital Theory was developed by Theodore Schultz (1961), who felt that education is commonly regarded as the major form of investment in human resources. The basic proposition of the Human Capital Theory is that people invest in themselves through education. Those families without post-

secondary education remain at a lower income level. Stanczyk (2009) noted that before the recession of 2008, "Seventy percent of single-parents are in the workforce, but only about 40 percent work full time—perhaps because of childcare challenges and other family responsibilities. When they work, low-income single-parents work for lower wages" (p. 1).

Single-parents face obstacles that are exclusive to them as non-residential students. Research has shown that married couples struggle with similar issues. The cost of childcare is increasing and causing individuals to miss out on opportunities for advancement. In addition, the need for support from the federal government and external organizations was discussed. Improvements must be made at the highest level of government to usher in change.

There will always be a debate about the allocation of funds for education. However, less attention is placed upon childcare. This belief aligns with the notion that if a child receives quality childcare, then in later years he/she will be productive in society. Single-parent students see it as almost impossible to deal with the increasing cost of childcare, and more research should be conducted that points to the need for more college campuses to become equipped with affordable on-campus childcare. For example, the positive impact of campus childcare centers on student parents was revealed in a study conducted by the State University of New York. The report concluded that graduation rates were higher for parents who were students when campus childcare was provided. Such students were more likely to remain in school, graduate in fewer years, and earn higher grades (Kappner, 2002). "The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) has estimated that nearly one-quarter of undergraduate students enrolled in U.S. postsecondary institutions--about four million students--are parents of dependent children" (Miller, 2012, p. 2).

Research has also shown that the U.S. government is cutting back the allowed amount of spending and borrowing at colleges. Studies have shown that a majority of single-parents are living at the poverty level and cannot afford increased tuition or decreases in grants. Such obstacles make persistence seem impossible. There are programs designed to assist those students in financial need. An unavoidable negative factor about higher education is the cost. An underlying issue is the debt incurred. Students, whether they are single-parents or not, face staggering debt totals upon completion of a degree program. The institutions of higher education do not entirely provide an ideal financial scenario for those who have little financial resources. Students are forced to borrow funds without a consistently proven formula to remove such debt. The fear of debt operates as a deterrent for those individuals who may be undecided about selecting higher education as a path to financial stability. On the other hand, for those students who are brave enough to take on the financial challenge of a college education, legislation exists that currently contributes billions of dollars for higher education funding.

Therefore, self-determination is a socio-cognitive theory that delves into what motivates individuals to seek an education. This theory is explained by breaking down intrinsic motivation. "Intrinsic motivation refers to the performance of an activity for its own sake, for instance, learning about a subject because we find it interesting. It is the most optimal state of motivation because it is fully autonomous and self-determined" (Rothes, Lemos & Goncalves, 2014, p. 940). Once a person becomes a parent, that person is expected to put forth the best effort to provide more than just the necessities of life. It has become the norm in societies around the world to portray education as a means to an end. That end goal is stigmatized around financial gains. The process of educational attainment should be valued just as much as the possible long-term financial success. Conceptually, there is a misunderstanding about the value

of knowledge of popular culture. Various important lessons are learned during the degree process from which an individual will benefit throughout a lifetime. Societies of highly educated individuals have ushered in a progression and change that have benefitted man. For single-parents, the motivation to persist is a combination of internalized intrinsic thoughts and cultural ideologies. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), single-parents have an interest in a particular subject and pursue an education within that field. There are others who take part in learning at the college level because of the external pressures generated by cultural expectations. "There is often a stigma attached to being a single- parent student. Peers may not interact with them by choice, and don't understand the pressures they face. Sometimes they are viewed as irresponsible" (Single-parent Support, 2013, pp. 2-3). Mather (2010) stated, "Despite the volumes of research available on this topic, there are still many misconceptions about single-mother families based on outdated or anecdotal information" (para. 2). Before a single-parent student can even think about returning to school, he/she must, first and foremost, take a realistic picture of what it takes for such a challenge. "With a comprehensive understanding of these existing theories, models, and concepts, it is hoped that researchers, faculty, and others can develop more effective policies and programs to improve the persistence of their students" (Seidman & Astin, 2012, p. 63).

As a result of performing this review of the literature, the researcher has discovered a gap in the literature, as the studies reviewed referenced only first-year students or only residential students attending four-year colleges. More studies need to be conducted that focus on non-residential single-parents and that particularly target student persistence. The review of the literature also revealed that there have been more quantitative than qualitative studies conducted on single-parent persistence. Therefore, Chapter Three describes the qualitative research

methods used in the current study. Using a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of reasons why there is a low graduation rate among non-residential single-parent students.

This study examined ten non-residential single-parent students on how they perceive their educational experience, thus far. They were asked to identify any obstacles they feel would hinder them in achieving their educational goals. As non-residential single-parents, it was necessary to know why they decided to return to school. This study also investigated the demographics of which among the non-residential single-parent students returned to school, therefore, focusing on single-parents from ages 22 to 50.

Some trends have occurred as we see that more grandparents are now returning to college because they have a responsibility to their grandchildren. This area is not covered in Tinto's research. The study investigated how returning to school affected the single-parent's family life. The research conducted was also to explore single-parent support systems. What type of support do they feel would be needed to maintain the persistence they need to complete their educational journey?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Chapter Three describes the methods utilized in a qualitative case study to explore the rationale of failure of non-residential single-parent students to persist in obtaining a college degree. According to Smith (2001), in order to get a better understanding of a complicated situation, it is best to use a qualitative research method, thereby, choosing a case study design. This approach enables the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and develop themes to explore the underlying causes of the phenomenon.

This chapter contains the following subsections: research design, research questions, site of research, and participants selected for the study. An expert review was also implemented as part of the procedure, as well as obtaining permission for recruitment of participants for the interviews and focus group.

Research was conducted using ten non-residential single-parent participants, who participated in semi-structured interviews. The interview data were then transcribed and coded using both open-coding and axial coding. The coded data were analyzed, and emergent participant responses were placed into categories. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations were taken throughout the entire study.

Design

This study used a qualitative case study design. A qualitative case study was beneficial because it explained, explored, and defined the factors that led to lost persistence in the pursuit of a college degree. This collective case study design is thought to reveal behaviors and contexts that relate to a single-parent's motivation to persist. According to Yin (2009), having multiple cases provides enough information for comparing and contrasting data. In this qualitative case

study, the researcher interviewed participants who had previous higher education experience but did not finish. Data were generated through the process of semi-structured interviews, a focus group session, and participant profile.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What factors contribute to the failure of a non-residential single- parent student's persistence in higher education?

Research Question 2: How does academic involvement facilitate persistence in non-residential single-parent students?

Research Question 3: How does social involvement impact persistence to obtain a college degree in non-residential single-parent students?

Site

The site for this qualitative case study was the Community Assistance Agency located in central Virginia. This is a private, non-profit corporation founded in 1965 that tries to meet the needs of individuals and families in the central Virginia area as well as the surrounding counties. The Community Assistance Agency is comprised of an administrative staff, President/CEO, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Planning and Development, Director of Federal and State Resources, Director of Housing Services, and Director of Head Start. The agency offers programs such as employment training, emergency assistance, crisis intervention, and employment services programs. The site is handicap accessible. This site was chosen because of the flexible hours of operation for the participants' access. This site is also in proximity to the researcher. The site was also chosen because it is a familiar place for the participants. There were several conference rooms on each floor as well as vacant classrooms that seat ten people at a time.

Participants

The ten non-residential single-parents were recruited for this collective case study using criterion and purposeful sampling. "Criterion sampling refers to picking cases that meet some pre-specified criterion" (Creswell, 2013, p. 348). Creswell (2007), also indicated that "The Inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). Prospective non-residential single-parent participants were recruited through the Community Assistance Agency in central Virginia. Participants were selected based on the following selection criteria: divorced, unwed single-parent by choice, death, separation, or desertion. All ten participants lived in the central Virginia, area. This was a diverse group of male and female participants ranging from 21 to 50 years of age. Participants were also selected on the basis that they had previous higher education experience and were non-residential, single-parent students during the time of the study.

Procedures

Prior to the proposal defense, the interview questions were presented to two outside experts (Appendix F). One expert was a doctor of education who has worked for over 30 years as a dean at a local university in central Virginia. The second field expert was a doctor of psychology who has worked for over 25 years in the field of counseling at a university in northern Virginia. Copies of the interview questions were submitted to the experts via email or U.S. mail service. The experts were asked to render their opinions on the interview questions and focus group questions to see whether or not they were appropriate for the study, and to ensure clarity of the interview questions (Appendix E). The experts were requested to return their comments within one week from the receipt date of the request.

Permission

In addition the researcher sought approval from Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with the study (Appendix A). "Much of an IRB's work focuses on provisions for protection of human subjects in proposed projects, but it is also authorized to review research in progress" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 78). The researcher contacted the President of the Community Assistance Agency to obtain permission to recruit the participants from within the agency. The President then directed the researcher to the appropriate program director's office to obtain a list of agency clients.

Recruitment of Participants

The researcher began to recruit prospective participants through the Community Assistance Agency of central Virginia. The researcher contacted the program director and scheduled a meeting to explain the study as well as the criteria for choosing the participants. The director provided the researcher with a list of 25 agency clients from which the researcher recruited ten participants. The names of the participants and their contact information were given to the researcher. This process took two weeks to complete.

The researcher contacted the participants on the list and explained the study. The researcher clarified any questions that the participants may have had at that time. The participants were informed that at no time would their identity be jeopardized because pseudonyms would be used for their names and addresses. Once the participants were recruited, each participant was asked to attend a one-hour meeting to complete the Individual Interview & Focus Group Consent Form (Appendix B) and a Participant Profile Questionnaire (Appendix D). The researcher scheduled the interviews. The participants were given an appointment card with the time, date, and location of each interview. Three weeks were allotted to complete all

interviews; however, they were all completed in two weeks. The one-hour focus group session took place on the same day of the initial meeting at the Central Assistance Action Agency.

Focus Group

In this qualitative case study, a one-hour focus group session was conducted at the local Community Assistance Agency. Before the meeting, the researcher explained the purpose of the focus group session to the participants. The researcher informed the participants that the focus group session would be recorded using video and audio recording devices. "Video will be helpful for identifying who is speaking. Recordings also provide access to the nuances of the discussion and the ability to replay sessions during analysis" (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008, p. 1). A digital audio-recording device was also used as a backup. The participants were informed that the audio and video recording would be used only for transcription purposes. Each participant signed a consent form giving the researcher permission to video and audio record the session. Pseudonyms were used in the place of names and addresses, ensuring that the participants' identities would not be revealed. Participants were asked questions concerning how they felt about obtaining a higher education as a non-residential single-parent.

Interviews

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the ten participants. Semi-structured interviews led to deeper exploration of single-parent persistence. "Semi-structured interviews are often used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a topic and to understand thoroughly the answer provided" (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 27). For this qualitative case study, interviews were a significant component of the research. Through individual interviews, the researcher explored how academic and social involvement played a part in the success or failure of single-parent college students.

Interview recording procedures. During the individual interviews, two audio-recording devices were used. One audio-recording device used was a digital device, and a second recording device used was a cassette recording machine used as a backup. During the interview, only the researcher and the participant were present. At the end of the interview session, the researcher provided a follow-up appointment with each participant to review the transcript. Each interview session lasted approximately one hour.

Transcription of Data

The researcher transcribed the recorded data from both focus group session as well as one-on-one interviews. By way of member checking, the researcher contacted each participant within 48 hours of his or her interview session and reviewed the transcribed data. Each participant was asked to sign an agreement verifying that the reviewed data were acceptable. A complete transcription of all interviews and member checks took approximately two weeks. The transcribed data of each interview were stored on a computer that was password protected. All copies of documents were locked in a file cabinet in the home of the researcher. At the end of the study, all transcribed data, as well as all documents, were destroyed.

The Researcher's Role

In my role as a researcher, my background and personal life were not discussed prior to or during the interviews. As a researcher, I presented myself as a human instrument seeking information to improve the lives of those single-parents struggling with academic achievement. I had no relationship to the participants that would affect the interviews. Therefore, the interview questions showed no bias because they were predetermined. The researcher holds many titles on various committees within the church and community organizations. This provided a better understanding of leading and conducting discussions or interviews for multiple purposes.

Data Collection

Participant Profile Questionnaires

At the start of the data collection procedure, a participant's profile was used. A participant's profile was given to all participants who agreed to participate in the study (Appendix D). The participant's profile was a description of the participant's demographic information such as age, race, gender, residency, college experience, and job title. "The strong advantage of recruiting participants from the questionnaire sample is that you are able to use information from the questionnaire to select participants, thereby developing a more refined purposive recruitment strategy" (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011, p. 39).

Interview

Open-ended questions were used during the semi-structured interview. "An open-ended question establishes the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction he wants. It does not presume an answer" (Seidman, 2006, p. 84).

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

Questions

Single-parent Persistence in Pursuit of a Higher Education

 1. What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your
     degree?

 2. What does it mean for you to persist in your education despite obstacles?

 3. What helped you sustain your persistence?

 4. What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

5. How academically involved were you on campus?

6. How socially involved were you on campus?

7. What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

The purpose of the Single-parent Persistence in Pursuit of Higher Education interview questions was to gather information from the participants as to why some were able to finish their degree and why some were not. The main purpose of questions 1-4 was to gather information concerning what a higher education really means to a non-residential single-parent student in spite of the obstacles he/she often faces in pursuit of a higher education. "For students with families of their own, the economic and academic challenges of college can be overwhelming" (Couch, 2013, para. 4). Questions 5-7 were important to inform the researcher about non-residential single-parent student academic and social involvement while in college: "The more students are academically and socially engaged with faculty, staff, and peers, especially in classroom activities, the more they are to succeed in the classroom" (Tinto, 2011, p.7).

Focus Group

The focus group allowed the researcher to get a broader view of how single-parents felt when it came to obtaining an education. The focus group allowed the researcher to see if there were any emerging themes between what was expressed in the focus group and what was expressed in the individual interviews. A focus group allowed the participants to interact with each other, sharing lived experiences of obstacles as well as perceptions of what could be done that would enable them to reach their desired educational goals. "Researchers are finding that the interactions among the participants stimulate them to state feelings, perceptions, and beliefs that they would not express if interviewed individually" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 245).

Standardized Focus Group Questions

Questions

Single-parent Persistence in Pursuit of a Higher Education

1.   As a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

2. What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical trade school or college?

3.   What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

4.   What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

5.   What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

6.   What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college?

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

According to Yin (2011), there are five phases of data analysis. The first phase begins the process by compiling and organizing all data collected. In this study, the instruments used were a participant profile questionnaire, a focus group session, and individual interviews. The researcher created a file identifying the data to be kept separate for further use. It is therefore suggested that "The researcher should also log the type of data according to the dates and time when, the place where, and the persons with whom they were gathered " (Saldana, 2011, p. 122).

The first data analyzed were the participant profile questionnaires that obtained the following information: gender, age, race, educational experience, and present job title of each participant. The second data analyzed were the focus group transcript. The video-audio recorded data were reviewed and transcribed immediately following the focus group session. The responses of each participant were transcribed using only the relevant portions of the

discussion. The researcher combined all comments of each participant from the focus group. The researcher read through all answers of each question of the focus group. The researcher looked for patterns and similarities, therefore grouping the main points together by keeping a list while going through the transcribed data. This process was repeated until each question was completed. Finally, a few quotes from the list were used to provide insight for the study.

The third data analyzed were the open-ended individual interview questions. "Doing all or some of your own interview transcription (instead of having them done by a transcriber), for example, provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights" (Patton, 2002, p. 441). Therefore, the researcher transcribed the interviews within 24 hours after the interview. The researcher then met with the participants to allow them the opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy. The transcribed data were entered into the computer, where each participant had a separate file.

The second phase of the analysis process was to manually disassemble the data through open coding. Creswell (2014) stated:

> Coding consists of organizing the data by bracketing chunks (or text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins and then coding the data to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis (pp. 197-199).

"Open-coding is the process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 2007, p. 61). Each transcribed interview was read line-by-line, circling words and phrases and sentences using three to seven words at a time, thereby assigning codes. The third phase of data analysis was to reassemble the data that had been open-coded, a process known as *axial coding*. "Axial coding refers to a set of procedures

whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding by making connections

between categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 2007, p. 96). At this stage, the researcher began to put

the codes into separate categories based on the common themes that had developed from open

coding. In the third phase, the researcher began reassembling or tying the categories of axial

coding together to develop a theme. At the fourth phase, the researcher interpreted themes that

were developed through the coding process. Saldana (2011) defined a theme as "a phrase or

sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (p. 139). Concluding

the fifth phase by creating a point of view concerning the case study was the final step of the data

analysis.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is defined by demonstrating that the evidence for

the results reported is sound and when the argument made is based on the result is strong (In

search of scientific creativity, 2010). This qualitative case study established trustworthiness by

using triangulation to verify data collected through interviews, a focus group session, and a

participant profile. "With respect to qualitative data, case study researchers typically triangulate

their data from one method of observation by seeking corroboration from other types of data that

they collected" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 19). To ensure validity, this study used several criteria.

Credibility

To ensure credibility, member checking and triangulation were performed. "Member

checking in qualitative research is the process of having research participants judge the accuracy

and completeness of statements made in the researcher's report" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 644).

Member checking was utilized so the participants could examine a draft of their interview. The

researcher contacted each participant to schedule a meeting, which involved having the

participants review statements in the transcribed document. The participants were allowed to correct any errors where needed. "Credibility refers to confidence of truth of the data and interpretations of them. Credibility of inquiry involves two aspects: first, carrying out the investigation in a way that believability is enhanced, and secondly, taking steps to demonstrate credibility" (Kemparaj, 2013, p. 1).

Dependability

Dependability ensures that the exact methods of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation in qualitative research are described. Such dense description of methods provides information as to how reputable the study might be and how unique the situation is (Krafting, 1991). This study used triangulation as a dependability strategy. The researcher also coded and recoded analyzed data to ensure dependability.

Confirmability

In this study, an audit trail was kept to diagrammatically describe how the study was carried out to show confirmability.

Confirmability is the avoidance of bias within the study. Critical to this process is the "audit trail" which allows any observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described. The "audit trail" may be represented diagrammatically (Shenton, 2004, p.72).

Transferability

Informative details described who the participants were and where the anticipated interview site would take place, which allowed a rich description without risking any confidentiality of the participants. *Transferability* refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a

qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. The qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by doing a thorough job describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. The person who wishes to "transfer" the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is (Trochim, 2006, p. 72).

Ethical Considerations

The rights and interests of the participants were taken into ethical consideration. Upon approval from the IRB, signed consent forms were distributed to all prospective participants. "Once the research data has been collected, the researcher must ensure that no unauthorized persons have access to them and that the privacy of individuals to whom the data apply is protected" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 85). The participants were informed that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the entire study. Pseudonyms were used instead of real names. Participation guidelines were implemented to ensure that participants would thoroughly understand the study being conducted. The participants were not paid for their participation. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Steps were taken to ensure that all data collected from the participants were securely locked in a filing cabinet to which only the researcher would have access. Transcribed data of participant interviews were stored on a computer file, which was password protected. At the end of the research, computer files were deleted, documents were shredded, and artifacts were returned to participants.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth description of research methods using a qualitative case study. A qualitative case study research design was chosen to explore obstacles that may

affect the persistence of single-parent students in pursuit of higher education. The purpose of this chapter was to explore how the participants persisted in returning to college despite obstacles and lack of support. Ten participants were chosen for the study. The research procedures were presented in detail. The final step in this chapter was a description of how the data were analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS
Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine why non-residential single-parent students failed or succeeded to persist in obtaining a degree. This study used a case study approach to investigate the low degree completion rate among non-residential single-parent students. "A case study is done to shed light on a phenomenon, which is a process, event, person or other item of interest to the researcher" (Gall et al. , 2007, p. 447). Moreover, this study identified the obstacles that hinder non-residential single-parent persistence in completing a college degree. Such research findings will be applicable to stakeholders (e.g., college administrators, faculty, staff, students) or to anyone interested in the degree completion rate among non-residential single-parent students. Chapter Four consists of data collection and analysis procedures, participant demographic information, participant responses to interview questions, and results of this study. A thick description of the participants is provided, as well as an analysis of non-residential single-parent perspectives on persisting in obtaining a degree. In this study, non-residential single-parent failure to succeed in completing his/her college degree was defined as the unsuccessful completion of an attempted college degree by a non-residential single-parent. This study explored non-residential single-parents' perceptions of obstacles and barriers to persistence in completing a college degree once started. An additional purpose of this study was to determine to what extent non-residential single-parent students are academically and socially involved in college activities.

In examining the success and failure of non-residential single-parents to obtain a college degree, the following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What factors contribute to the failure of a non-residential single-parent student's persistence in higher education?

RQ2: How does academic involvement facilitate persistence in non-residential single-parent students?

RQ3: How does social involvement impact persistence to obtain a college degree in non-residential single-parent students?

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought expert review of the focus group and interview questions from two field experts. Both experts provided positive feedback on the questions, rendering them appropriate for the study. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, research began by first collecting data through triangulation. "Triangulation allows a researcher to investigate the research problem from a variety of angles and perspectives. This approach can help to ensure dependability that the data gathered in a project described are credible and valid" (Givins, 2015, p. 71). Instruments used to collect the data were a focus group session, a participant profile, and one-on-one interviews. Ethical clearance was sought and permission was granted by the president of the Community Assistance Agency in central Virginia to recruit participants. Ten non-residential single-parents were recruited using criterion sampling. "Criterion sampling refers to picking cases that meet some prespecified criterion" (Creswell, 2013, p. 348).

When inviting the participants, the purpose of the research was clearly explained. The participants agreed to meet for a focus group session. The researcher informed the participants that the focus group session would be both audio and video recorded. The participants were informed that at no time would their identity be jeopardized because

pseudonyms would be used. Time was given to the participants to clarify any questions they had about the study. The focus group session took place on a Saturday morning and lasted one hour. The session began with the researcher asking semi-structured questions (See Appendix H). As the session began, the female participants seemed to be more vocal in expressing their opinions than the males. Once the session was underway, the participants seemed pleasant and eager to interact with each other, sharing lived experiences of obstacles that hindered their persistence in degree completion. At the end of the focus group session, the participants agreed to participate in a one-on-one interview. Upon obtaining informed consent, the participants were given a participant profile questionnaire (See Appendix D). The participant interviews were scheduled at a time that was suitable to them. The researcher thanked the participants for agreeing to participate in the study, and they were dismissed. Digitally recorded data of the focus group session were then transcribed by the researcher. After the data were transcribed, the researcher read over the transcript while listening to the recording to check for accuracy. The transcribed data were kept on a password-protected computer. During each one-on-one interview, semi-structured questions were asked (See Appendix E). Recorded data from each interview session were transcribed within the 24-48 hour time allotted by the researcher. A copy of the transcribed data was then printed and placed in a file folder for member checking and later data analysis. Member Checking was conducted by contacting participants through email to review the transcribed interviews and re-scheduling individual meetings, allowing participants to review their transcribed data. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), "Member checking involves having research participants review statements in the report for accuracy and completeness" (p. 475).

Data Analysis

Data Analysis consisted of five phases. The first phase began by compiling and organizing all the data collected. The first instrument used to collect data was a participant profile questionnaire, which gave a description of the participant's demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, number of children, education experience, and employment status (See Table 1). The second instrument was a transcript of the audio-recording from a focus group session. The third instrument used were the transcripts from the one-on-one interviews, using semi-structured questions. During this process, the researcher looked for patterns and similarities, therefore grouping the main points together by keeping a list while going through all transcribed data. This process was repeated until all questions were completed.

The second phase of the data analysis process began with manually disassembling the data through open coding (See Appendix H and Appendix J). Each transcribed interview was read line by line, circling words, phrases, and sentences using three to seven words at a time, thereby assigning codes.

The third phase was to reassemble the data that had been coded. This step was known as axial coding (See Appendix H and Appendix J). At this stage, the researcher began to put the codes into separate categories based on the codes that had been developed from open coding. During the fourth phase, the researcher developed themes that emerged throughout the coding process (See Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3). The fifth phase was concluded by creating a point of view concerning the case study.

Participants

Participants were selected using criterion sampling. "The concept of criterion sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2001, p. 238). Criteria for selecting the participants were as follows: Non-residential single-parents with at least one child, male and female, age range of 21 to 50 years of age, previous college experience, and live in the central Virginia area. The study consisted of ten non-residential students with previous college experience: five African American females, one Caucasian female, one Native American female, two African American males, and one Caucasian male. Results of the participant profile questionnaire revealed participant demographic information listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Profile

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Children	College experience	Job Title	Res.
Anna	Female	50	African American	2	2 ½ years	Sales Manager	City
Nicole	Female	34	African American	5	2 years	Beautician	City
Ashley	Female	33	African American	3	Bachelor's degree	Claims Specialist	County
Marie	Female	32	Native American	2	2 years	Disabled	County
Andria	Female	38	African American	2	Bachelor's degree	Registered Nurse	City
Christy	Female	39	Caucasian	1	2 semesters	Office Assistant	County
David	Male	45	African American	1	2 ½ years	Auto Mechanic	City
Ross	Male	34	Caucasian	1	2 years	Welder	Suburb
Mickey	Female	28	African American	1	Bachelor's degree	Registered Nurse	City

Gilbert	Male	48	African American	3	Bachelor's degree	Teacher	City

Anna

Participant One is a 50-year-old African American sales manager. She is a grandmother. She cares for two of her grandchildren. She has had 2-1/2 years of college experience. Quite often, she has tried to complete a bachelor's degree, but her job has consumed most of her time. She seems to feel that a degree would mean the world to her despite her present obstacles, which seemed to be financial. She has a great desire to complete her degree, but "The timing is just not right at this time." She stated, "I have had a few life changes, especially when my husband died a few years ago, and now I have to work to make up the extra income. I also find myself helping my daughter out from time to time" (A. Payne, (pseudonym) personal communication, February 22, 2016).

Nicole

Participant Two is a 34-year-old African American beautician. She is the mother of five children. She has had two years of college experience off and on, altogether. She attempted to major in criminal justice, but having to work and the timing have been problems for her. She wants to find a way to continue her studies in the hopes that one day she can become a lawyer. She stated, "I want to be an example to my children to show them that in spite of their obstacles they can still achieve their goals" (N. Clark, (pseudonym) personal communication, February 23, 2016). Nicole revealed that she has been married twice in the past, but now she is single again.

Ashley

Participant Three is a 33-year-old African American who works as a Business Development Specialist. She is a mother of three. She has had at least five years of college experience off and on and holds a bachelor's degree in Business Forensics. She stated, "It meant

a lot to me to persist in finishing my degree. I am now able to explore other employment opportunities" (A. Steele, (pseudonymn), personal communication, Febuary 24, 2016).

Marie

Participant Four is a 48-year-old Native American (Cherokee) single-parent who is disabled. She has been divorced for three years and is the mother of one child. She has had at least two years of college experience in which she has acquired several certificates in accounting. Marie has had to quit going to college because she had problems with childcare and her health. She lacked the family support because her family did not live close by. She stated, "I have a great desire to go back to school, but right now my child comes first, along with my health. I can't concentrate when I don't feel well. Presently I don't have the finances to go to school like I had in the past because I have defaulted on school loans" (M. Penn, (pseudonym), personal communication, February 25, 2016).

Andrea

Participant Five is a 38-year-old African American registered nurse who works in the emergency room. She has two children. She has had four years of college experience, off and on. Her biggest challenge was trying to attend class while struggling with childcare as well as her job. Andria stated, "I was determined to complete my degree because staying in my previous position as a cardiac tech was like being in stagnant water" (A. Rose), (pseudonym), personal communication, February 26, 2016).

Christy

Participant Six is a 30-year-old Caucasian office assistant. She is a mother of one. She has had two semesters of college experience, but was unable to continue because she expressed, "My child takes up a lot of my time." She goes on to say, "It was hard for me to focus on classwork and balance everything" (C. Sandidge, (pseudonym), personal communication,

February 27, 2016). Christy wants to continue her education some day because she believes that "Education can boost your lifestyle."

David

Participant Seven is a 45-year-old African American mechanic. He is the father of one child. He has had 2-1/2 years of college experience. David felt that, "My jobs required quite a bit of my time, and therefore I could not keep up with my classwork" (D. Scott, (pseudonym), personal communication, February 28, 2016). He has a desire to return to college to continue his study in religion. As it stands right now, his job still requires quite a bit of his time.

Ross

Participant Eight is a 39-year-old Caucasian welder. He is the father of one child. He has 1-1/2 years of college experience. Ross felt that finances were the biggest issue when it came to attending college. He felt that college was "too expensive" (R. Christian, (pseudonym), personal communication, February 29, 2016). He stated that he had to care for his child, and that was his priority. Ross desires to return to college to become an aeronautical engineer some time in the future.

Mickey

Participant Nine is a 28-year-old African American registered nurse. She is the mother of two children. Mickey has had at least 4-1/2 years of college experience off and on until she finished her nursing degree. At present, she is just glad that she had the type of family support from her parents that she needed or else she would not have been able to go back to college. Mickey stated, "My parents always encouraged me to go until I finish" (M. Banks, (pseudonym), personal communication, February 29, 2016).

Gilbert

Participant Ten is a 48-year-old African American male. He is a teacher and a father of three. He has 5-1/2 years of college experience where he earned a bachelor's degree. Gilbert stated, "I basically went to college off and on for several years taking classes, starting and stopping until I decided to go straight through until I finished with a degree in math. I was determined to complete my degree because just knowing I would have a better life for my family by completing my degree was important" (G. Irby, (pseudonym) personal communication, March 5, 2016).
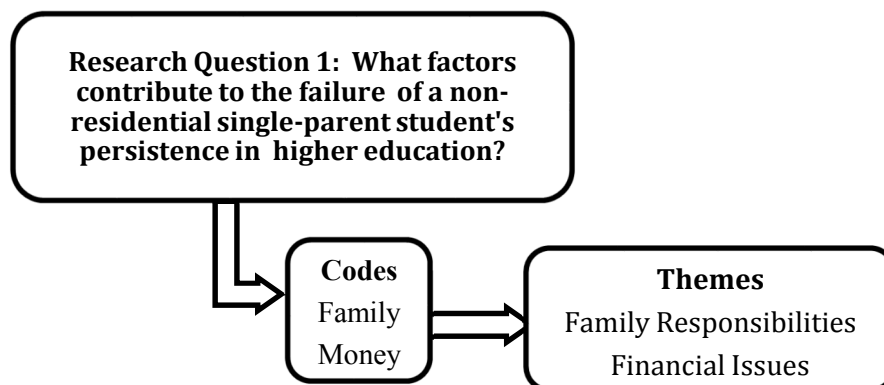
Results

The following are the data analysis results of this qualitative case study guided by three research questions. Triangulation was accomplished by collecting data in the form of individual interviews, a focus group session, and participant profile questionnaires. I used the process of open coding to identify codes, and by clustering the codes together using axial coding, I was able to identify the themes that answered the three research questions. The data generated through this study provides evidence to explain possible reasons for success or failure of non-residential single-parent students to persist in obtaining a degree of higher education. A breakdown of responses and codes is shown in Appendix H (*Interview Results)* and Appendix J (*Focus Group Results)*.

Research Question One

Figure 1 is an illustration of the themes derived from the coded data analyzed. The results answered the first research question of what factors contributed to the failure of non-residential single-parent students' persistence in higher education. The major themes that

emerged were family responsibilities and financial issues.

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ Research Question 1: What factors│
│ contribute to the failure of a non-│
│ residential single-parent student's│
│ persistence in higher education? │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
        │
        ↓
    ┌─────────┐         ┌──────────────────────┐
    │ Codes   │         │      Themes           │
    │ Family  │  ──→    │ Family Responsibilities│
    │ Money   │         │  Financial Issues     │
    └─────────┘         └──────────────────────┘
```

Figure 1: Data Analysis of Persistence

Family responsibilities. Throughout the interviews, many of the participants voiced their issues that centered on family responsibilities interfering with maintaining their persistence in college. During the interviews, participants often talked about their lack of time due to their family responsibilities and the demands of their jobs. Family responsibilities were felt to be somewhat of an obstacle to their inability to successfully persist in returning to college to complete a degree. Anna expressed, "Getting back in the routine of going to classes was not easy. My coursework, especially the math, was harder than I expected. I was on a tight schedule trying to get my grandkids off to school and then run to school myself. In the evenings, I had to get home to prepare their meals, make sure my grandchildren were doing their homework, and then do my homework." Nicole stated, "There was never an opportunity where I could stay on top of things. Had to make sure the kids were okay. With the demands of my job, not having time to study was a big problem." Ashley noted, "At first, it was tough trying to take care of my three children and go to class, but my parents agreed to help me with childcare as long as I finished my degree." Marie remarked, "I hate to say it, but my children do take up a lot of my time. Which made it hard to concentrate and focus on my homework."

Andria expressed, "My educational experience has been challenging, trying to raise my kids while going to school." Christy explained, "Trying to balance work, life, school life, as well as being a parent was kind of hard. Had to pick up my kid at daycare, get him home and feed him, and then try to take a later class made it difficult. Going to class on time, you have to prioritize your time, and if you can't prioritize your time, then it won't work." David indicated, "Having to work two jobs to take care of my responsibilities made it difficult for me to stay on top of my assignments." Ross stated, "Having to travel a great distance from work to school took too much time for me." Mickey, expressed, "Without the support from my family and friends helping me to care for my children, I would not have been able to complete my nursing degree." Gilbert shared, "Having to work during the day, along with trying to attend classes in the evening, was difficult for me. Most of the time I had a hard time trying to find a reliable babysitter. After several attempts of going to class on campus, I decided to withdraw until I finally worked out my situation, and I did take some of my classes online, but I finished up on campus because at that time all of my classes were not offered online."

Financial issues. Another theme that emerged related to Research Question One was that there was a great need for financial assistance among the participants. Many felt that their jobs did not provide them the financial means to take care of their family's personal financial needs in addition to paying for college. Anna felt, "It is hard to focus when your finances are not where they should be. Financially, it is expensive for single-parents paying out-of-pocket for books and accessories they need." Nicole expressed, "There should be more books offered as eBooks because they are too expensive." Ashley remarked, "Even though I was working, without the help of financial aid, I would not have been able to start my classes. Without financial aid, I just don't know what I would have done because my books were too expensive at times." Marie

indicated, "Before I can return to college, I have to pay off my student loans that are presently in default." Andria expressed, "I feel that colleges should provide scholarships to help with childcare." Christy felt, "The cost of attending college is getting more expensive, even for students not living on campus. Because I work, I don't get enough student aid to pay for college." David indicated, "Because of financial obligations, I have to work two jobs. I made too much money to qualify for enough financial aid to pay my tuition and buy the books that I needed." Ross explained, "I do not have time to pursue school right now because of my job and the distance I have to travel to campus, but at least I tried it." Mickey remarked, "My personal finances were my biggest challenge while trying to go to school." Gilbert expressed, "Money has always been an issue for me. There is never enough money when you have children. Having to pay tuition and buy books was hard at times. I had to take out student loans, something I didn't want to do, but I had to do it. What made me persist even more was the fact that I had invested a lot of money in my education."

Research Question Two

Figure 2 illustrates the themes that emerged from the coded data analyzed in an attempt to answer the second research question of how does academic involvement facilitate persistence in single-parent students. The major themes of academic involvement and self-improvement were found to be important issues for non-residential single-parent students.
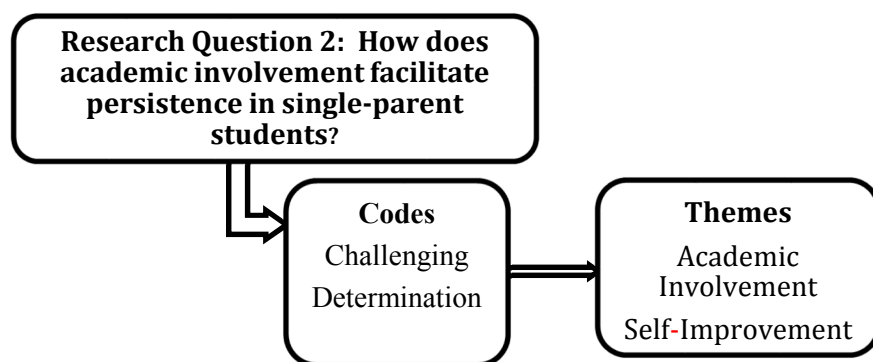
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    │              │        │  Involvement      │
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Figure 2: Data Analysis of Academic Involvement

Academic involvement. The opinions of the participants regarding their academic involvement included not being academically prepared to return to college, and to many of them, it was a challenging experience. When asked, eight out of ten participants preferred to take classes online as opposed to an on-campus, face-to-face, hands-on approach. Anna said, "I had to have one-on-one involvement with my professors in order to gain more understanding of the more difficult classes. I had to have a tutor because of my lack of math skills." Nicole expressed, "I basically got the assignments and went home. I did most of my work at home, and if there was something I did not understand, I would go to my professors. I would also go to the Writing Center and got a tutor for math. I think, like, having reliable resources such as having the school supply laptops and books and tools would be helpful. Because now a lot of the books are online. They are not in a physical form anymore. So I think to have physical books would be a good thing that I think would help in my persistence if I choose to go back to college." Ashley remarked, "Of course I had quite a few lab class presentations for a couple of classes." Marie indicated, "I only did class presentations and class group discussions." Andria stated, "In order to help me stay focused, I sought counselors about career changes, I also sought tutors to help when I needed one." Christy expressed positive and negative views of the online class approach:

"Currently, they have online classes that do make it a little easier. The only thing about the online classes is that the workload is greater, and if they could just cut some of the papers that you have to write, that would be great. Because it does take up a lot of time when you are working, and you are stressed out with all your work, and then you have to come home and take care of kids, and they are stressful. I have to worry about getting out a 16-page report, and I have your reading assignments I have to do. It can get a little hard. Also, computer literacy is a concern, too." David stated, "I was not academically involved and did not have to do any presentations, just sit behind the desk. There could be more testing out of classes I don't need." Ross explained, "I was academically involved on campus because I did tons of presentations. I had to present at least once a week. I often required assistance from the professors in courses that I didn't understand. Whenever I do choose to return to college, I will probably go online." Mickey felt, "If I had to do it all over again, I would prefer online classes because you don't have to travel to campus as much. While on campus, I had to go to the Learning Lab. I was involved in study sessions with my class. Also, if I was struggling, I would go to my professors to get a better understanding of my class. The only time I went to counselors was at the end of the school year to make sure I was registering for the right classes." Gilbert indicated, "Academically, the only time I spent on campus was with my study group to study for exams; other than that, I had to get to work. The only time I would interact with my professors is when there was something I didn't understand or not sure of."

Self-improvement. Many of the participants expressed a desire to persist in continuing their education at some point in their future. Several of the participants expressed their feelings by setting examples for their children that no matter what their circumstances may be, they must persist in completing their education. Anna expressed, "It is very important to me to persist and

go back to college because, without an education, I am stuck in a negative place. I feel like a hamster running around a wheel. That is why it is so important for me to get out of this circle. Also, I must say that my faith in God is the only thing I can think of, and I have a goal and in that goal is what I am trying to reach. My faith in God is what will help me take each step to get out of this circle." Nicole remarked, "It means a lot to me to return to college and persist in obtaining my degree. When I finish, my goal is to attend law school. and if not, do something with the Justice Department. Because I want to be an example for my children, letting my children see that I am still working on it. Along with being an example for my children showing them that despite my obstacles, they can still achieve their own goals." Ashley expressed, "It has always been a life goal of mine to complete my degree, and I did." Marie stated, "It means a lot to me to persist in my education one day because nowadays without a degree you can't do anything. I want to make my own money, and wanting to have a better life for me and my children means a lot. I would like to go into business management, if my health permits." Andria noted, "I really want to go back to school, so I can get a higher degree. My career goal would be to get another degree, maybe a doctor, I don't know." Christy shared, "I want to find another job. A higher paying job that will allow me to go back to school as well as being an example for my child. I want him to see that a higher education can boost your lifestyle. I want to continue my education in business management to get a leadership position." David expressed, "I would like to go back to college soon because I need to get higher pay for what I do as a mechanic. I need more computer skills." Ross explained, "If I had a chance to return to college, it would be in the field of aerodynamics. Returning to college is very important to me." Mickey stated, "I didn't have too many obstacles because my family supported me when I needed them to care for my kids. My family knew how important it was for me to finish my degree and become a nurse. I had to

finish because I wanted to do better for my family." Gilbert felt, "Just knowing that I may have more money, a better job, and more knowledge by completing my degree was important to me."

Research Question Three

Figure 3 illustrates the theme of social involvement that was derived from the coded data analyzed to answer Research Question Three of how social involvement impacts persistence to obtain a college degree.
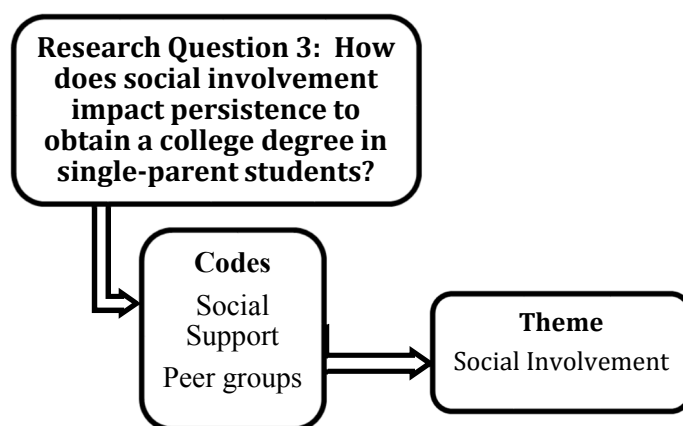
Figure 3 Data Analysis of Social Involvement

Social involvement. The participants in this study were asked how socially involved they were on campus, such as student government, campus-sponsored activities, sporting events, volunteer at sporting events, etc. The participants had different views when it came to social involvement in college. Anna stated, "I did not have time to be socially involved on campus because I had grandchildren at home, and they were my priority. There was no time for social anything in between the schedule I had to socialize." Nicole noted, "I was not socially involved on campus. I knew what I was there for and did not have time to hang around. Childcare would be good, like if they have facilities where parents can be there and their children be there, and parents can finish whatever work they have to do." Ashley explained, "If there was an exam coming up, I would get together with a few people in my class and study from time to time, but I

did not have time to go to any activities or hang out on campus because I had to get home to my kids." Marie pointed out, "I was very social in college and had a lot of friends. I was also a member of the honor society." Andria stated, "I was socially involved on campus whenever I had to stay after school to get class projects and lab done. I was social on campus with my peers, but no time for campus activities. What prevented me from being more socially involved was having to pick up my kids from daycare." Christy indicated that she was part of a study group and would sit and talk in group sessions. Christy expressed, "Being a single mother prevented me from being too social." David remarked, "The only socializing I did was just a round table discussion. I can't think of anything else at this point." Ross added, "I was very socially active when I attended college." Mickey pointed out, "I wasn't involved with social activities I was focused on my studies and had to get to work." Gilbert, expressed, "Socially, I had no to time to be social, I had to get to work, no time for campus activities. The only socializing I did was with my children and their activities."

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the reasons why non-residential single-parents in pursuit of a college degree fail to persist and why some succeed in completing a college degree. Study participants completed a participant profile, participated in a focus group, and one-on-one interviews. Participants included five African American females, two African American males, one Caucasian female, one Caucasian male, and one Native American female, ranging in age from 21-50 years.

Data collected through a focus group discussion, participant profile questionnaire, and one-on-one interviews revealed a clearer picture of failure to persist from the perspective of the participants. Three research questions were used to guide this study: (1) What factors contribute

to the failure of a non-residential single-parent student's persistence in higher education? (2) How does academic involvement facilitate persistence in single-parent students? (3) How does social involvement impact persistence to obtain a college degree in single-parent students? The themes that emerged from the first research question were Family Responsibilities and Financial Issues. The themes that emerged from the second research question were Academic Involvement and Self-Improvement. Finally, the theme that emerged from the third research question was Social Involvement on Campus.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Chapter Five provides a summary of this qualitative case study. It gives a summary of the findings and a discussion of the findings as they relate to the empirical, theoretical and practical literature, and suggests the implications of what steps could be taken to improve the graduation rate among non-residential single-parent students. The limitations of this case study are discussed, as well as recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the low degree completion rate among non-residential single-parent students. More specifically, this study examined non-residential single-parent students, why some persist and succeed, and why some fail to persist, while identifying obstacles that hinder their persistence in obtaining a college degree. The study was conducted in the central Virginia area at the Community Assistance Agency. The research method used was qualitative, using a case study design. Triangulation of data was achieved by using a focus group, one-on-one interviews, and a participant profile questionnaire.

The data were collected and analyzed in five phases, including compiling all data collected, disassembling the data through open coding, interpreting themes that emerged from axial coding, and creating themes that emerged from the coding process to create a point of view. This analysis enabled the researcher to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What factors contribute to the failure of a non-residential single-parent student's persistence in higher education? The findings suggested that 60% of the participants felt that family responsibilities prevented them from obtaining a degree in higher education. Financial issues also played a role in the factors contributing to the failure of persistence in

degree completion among non-residential single-parent students. Findings revealed that 40% percent of the participants felt that personal financial issues hindered them from persisting in obtaining a degree.

Research Question 2: How does academic involvement facilitate persistence in non-residential single-parent students? Findings also proposed that academic involvement, when available, would facilitate persistence in non-residential single-parent students. This study revealed that 40% of the participants were academically involved through class presentations, 30% utilized a tutor, 20% had interactions with faculty, and 10% had no involvement at all. The other theme that emerged for this research question was Self-Improvement. Ninety percent of the participants desired to return to school and 10% of the participants were not sure about returning to college. Many noted that being persistent would set an example for others despite their failed educational experiences in the past.

Research Question 3: How does social involvement impact persistence to obtain a college degree in non-residential single-parent students? Findings revealed that social involvement does not necessarily have an impact on persistence of non-residential single-parents. Fifty percent of the participants were found to be socially involved, and 50% were found to be not socially involved when they attended classes on campus.

Discussion

In this study, the discussion centers on the persistence to pursue a college degree among non-residential single-parent students. While there have been a great deal of quantitative research studies conducted on residential single-parent students in regard to retention and attrition rates at four-year colleges and universities, the amount of qualitative research conducted

on non-residential single-parent students has been very limited. Findings in this chapter discuss the relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Empirical Literature

  Family responsibilities. According to Chao, DeRocco, and Flynn (2007), over 70% of single-parents do not complete their degrees on time. The complications of juggling work, school, and parenting may lead to single-parents taking breaks (p. 16). Findings in the current study suggest that time was a big factor that hindered participants' persistence in obtaining their degree. Being the sole parent, time management was an issue for the majority of the participants interviewed. Many of the participants expressed that it had been difficult trying to prioritize their time and if one cannot prioritize one's time, then trying to attend college on campus just will not work. Many participants found difficulties in attending classes on time as well as being able to properly look after their children. "A challenge facing student-parents is that many colleges cater to traditional students who attend college full time without family responsibilities" (Couch, 2013, p. 1).

  "Amenities that student parents need such as affordable childcare facilities, flexible scheduling options, and parent support groups aren't available at every institution" (Couch, 2013, p. 1). Many of the non-residential single-parent students in the current study felt that their families came first. The participants voiced their own opinions about the need for childcare and family support that was not available to them. The participants felt that having to keep up with their jobs, which were demanding at times, and not having the family support that they often needed were challenges they faced as single-parents. "As noted by the National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association (2010), finding a balance

between maintaining your own academic career and the well being of your family can be tricky" (p. 118).

Financial issues. Chen and St. John's (2011) research showed that states are receiving fewer funds for higher education (p. 629). Consistent with the findings of Chen and St. John, the current research found that money seemed to be an issue for the majority of the non-residential single-parent students. They felt that the financial aid being offered was just not enough when they attended college, and that college was too expensive for them. Because they were working, they often times had to come up with more money for tuition, books, and fees because they did not qualify for much of the financial aid. However, research shows that the U.S. government remains supportive of those who pursue college degrees. A nationwide increase in funding for community colleges was set forth by the Obama administration. As Obama (2009) stated, "By 2020 America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (p. 1). Although this remains to be seen, it gives hope to the non-residential single-parent students who feel that there is a lack of financial help in the form of grants as well as scholarships geared toward the non-residential single-parent student. "Students slightly above the poverty line fear defaulting on loan payments to banks" (Dowd & Coury, 2006, p. 21). The results of this study confirm that some of the non-residential single-parent students had defaulted on student loans that hindered them from returning to college until the loans were paid off. There are other participants who were working two jobs to make ends meet, and although they may have qualified for minimal financial aid, it was not enough. Participants expressed a fear of going into any more debt because of other financial responsibilities they already had incurred.

Academic involvement. The findings in this study revealed that the majority of non-residential single-parents preferred to take online classes. However, there were those who felt

that they needed to interact with their professors and tutors, especially when it came to difficult subjects such as math. Students admit that they may "be eager to begin classes only to learn from prerequisite placement tests that they need either remedial or developmental education or have been assigned to adult basic education to improve their reading, writing and math skills" (Hill & St. Rose, 2013, p. 24). Findings from the current study noted that participants, especially male participants, voiced their need for courses to improve their computer skills in order to be able to complete their assignments. Many of the participants felt that their instructors should be more lenient when working with single-parent students by interacting on a one-on-one basis. Allen and Seaman (2011) stated that flexibility is the top-ranked reason to choose online courses because they allow students to complete assignments at a more desirable speed (p. 16).

Self-improvement. As noted by the National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association (2010), "Deciding to return to school is a huge decision. This decision is even harder when there are children or a family to care for. Finding a balance between maintaining your own academic career and the well being of your family can be tricky" (p. 118). Findings in the current study confirmed that as non-residential single-parents, they faced many obstacles trying to balance work and school . Non-residential single-parents attending college on campus found it to be a challenge. Despite the fact that many of the participants had been out of school for a while, they were eager to return to college for many reasons, such as the need to earn a higher salary in order to set an example for their children to persist in spite of their obstacles.

Social involvement among single-parents. According to Hanover (2011), "Social alienation, social isolation is subject to negative peer pressure, uninvolved in college activities, little involvement with the faculty member or advisor affect student persistence" (p. 6). The current study confirms that many of the participants did not have time to socialize in on-campus

activities. Other participants expressed opinions that institutions of higher education should have more support groups, study groups, and social events geared toward non-residential single-parent students in their age group.

Theoretical Literature

Vincent Tinto, who developed Tinto's Student Integration Model Theory; and Theodore Schultz, who developed the Human Capital Theory, grounded this case study. Tinto (1995) provided an explanation of the issues that deter persistence among single-parents.

Expectation. "For a student to continue his/her education, it is important to have direct knowledge of what is expected of them at the institution of choice (Tinto, 2012, p.7). Findings in the current study revealed that many of the non-residential single-parents were aware of their school's expectations. Although they made an attempt by attending class and completing the required assignments, they were unable to comply with the expectations of their college or university because of family responsibilities. The course workload of assignments that they had to deliver by a certain deadline was hard for them to keep up with. Therefore, findings in this study revealed that more leniencies from instructors are needed for non-residential single-parents in submitting class assignments.

Advice. "Advice is important for all students to get started in the right direction as they enter their chosen institute of higher education" (Tinto, V., 2012, p. 7). Findings in the current study revealed that many of the non-residential single-parents were very confident in what direction they wanted to go because of the fact that they had attended an institution of higher education before. By now, having certain responsibilities that they may not have had before allowed them to have a clearer picture when it came to persistence if they chose to return to college. To many of the participants, the big question was how to get started.

Support. "Support is a necessity for persistence. Support should be arranged in multiple forms in a manner that is easily accessed" (Tinto, V., 2012, p. 7). This study revealed that many of the non-residential single-parents sought support from tutors when they were having problems with certain courses, such as math. Findings also revealed that many of the participants did not have time to stay after class on campus to seek help because they had issues with childcare, which many of their colleges and universities did not offer.

Involvement. "Involvement influences persistence at all levels of higher education. Students who take pride in their relationships with an institution are more motivated to persist. Institutions that maintain positive, progressive relationships and activities have high numbers of student involvement. Involvement creates a sense of belonging and pride that motivates a student to accomplish academic goals" (Tinto, V., 2012, p. 7). Findings in this study revealed that most of the participants were involved academically in only what was required of them, such as a consultation with a professor, an advisor appointment, class presentations, or study group assignments. When it came to being socially involved, there was simply no time for any extra campus activities or socializing. Many of the non-residential single-parents did not return to campus once they left for the day.

Schultz (1961), felt that, "By investing in themselves, people can enlarge the range of choice available to them. It is one way free men can enhance their welfare" (p. 2). Many of the participants felt that being persistent in completing their degree was important despite the obstacles that they had previously encountered because it was important to set an example for their children. The participants also felt that a college degree would be most beneficial in the long run, especially when it came to job advancement and higher pay. This only confirms "The

basic proposition of the Human Capital Theory is that people invest in themselves through education" (Schultz, T., 1961, p. 29).

The novel contribution of this study is an attempt to clear any misconception in today's society of why non-residential single-parent students fail to complete a college degree. Findings revealed that non-residential single-parent students feel differently about social involvement on campus than residential students "who are socially integrated feel a strong affiliation with the campus social environment" (Tinto, V., 1993, p. 5). Non-residential single-parent students do not have an interest or have the time to participate in on-campus activities because they have family responsibilities and jobs. Findings in this study revealed that some non-residential single-parents do not want to go into too much debt while trying to complete a degree. Therefore, making financial aid an area of great concern would be helpful to nonresidential single-parent students. While residential students may not have to be concerned about financial support because of the scholarships or the support they may receive from their parents.

Implications

Empirical Implications

Findings in this study have important implications that stakeholders of institutions of higher education could use for developing more programs geared toward serving the needs of non-residential single-parent students. Nicole expressed, "I have had both on-campus and online classes. In my opinion, I found that the workload of online classes requires a lot more time. I always needed more time to submit written assignments such as essays, research papers. If I had taken an orientation class before I started my online classes, I would have been able to decide if online classes or on-campus classes were really what I wanted to do" (N. Clark, personal communication, June 15, 2016). It is suggested that non-residential single-parent students who have been out of school for over a year should have at least one hour of orientation before the

start of their first term. Orientation may help to enlighten the non-residential student-parent of academic expectations such as clarifying any questions concerning the course content as well as the assignment timelines. This recommendation may also help non-residential single-parent students in their engagement of college life again, therefore, making a bigger attempt to persist in completing a college degree. Non-residential single-parent students having a direct knowledge of what is expected of them at the higher education institution they choose may prove to be beneficial in balancing everyday family life, school life, personal finances, and work.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study suggest that academic involvement is an important facilitator to help the persistence of non-residential single-parent students' degree completion. Tinto (2010) argued, "The most important condition for student success is involvement (p. 11)." Marie indicated, "I was very social in college and had a lot of friends. I was also a member of the honor society"(M. Penn, personal communication, Feb. 25, 2016). According to Drake (2011), advising should not be overlooked when evaluating strategies for student persistence (p. 10). Advisors are important because they are able to give encouragement, point students in the right career path, and provide support where needed. It is therefore recommended that students connect with their professors as well as their advisors.

Practical Implications

Practical implication of this current study suggests that educational institutions should offer more satellite classes on weekends and after hours. Ross stated, "Having to travel a great distance from work to school took too much time for me" (R. Christian, personal communication, Feb. 17, 2016). This could be a convenience for non-residential single-parent students who still prefer to attend classes on campus.

Limitations

This qualitative case study was conducted to investigate non-residential single- parent students' success or failure to persist in obtaining a college degree, but there were limitations. First, there is relatively little quantitative research performed on non-residential single-parent students. This study implemented a qualitative case study design approach, which provided exploratory data with regard to the success and failure of non-residential single-parent students to persist in obtaining a college degree. However, this study had limitations due to the qualitative study design. Secondly, the sample used in this research was relatively small, making this study too small to generalize to the public. Therefore, future studies should be conducted with a larger sample. Thirdly, the study was restricted only to the central Virginia area, which was not descriptive of all ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, this study should be conducted in other geographical locations where it may render different results.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on findings of this study, it is recommended that future research should therefore concentrate on the investigation of a pilot study testing the effectiveness of an orientation class for non-residential single-parent students. This main aim would be to teach non-residential single-parent students how to balance school, work, finances, and family time. Further research might investigate what type of support systems (i.e. advising, counseling, childcare) are offered by colleges and universities across the country and whether or not this has an effect on the persistence of non-residential single- parent students to complete a degree. Furthermore, because this research is exploratory, which is considered qualitative research, no quantitative research has been conducted on non-residential single-parent students. It is recommended that future research be conducted implementing a mixed-method design in order to provide a better comparison of findings between qualitative and quantitative research of non-residential single-parent students'

success and failure to complete a degree.

Summary

This study was conducted to examine the reasons why there is a low degree completion rate among some non-residential single-parent students. More specifically, this study examined non-residential single-parent students as to why some persist and succeeded and why some failed to persist in degree completion. The majority of non-residential single-parent participants perceived that they had the ability to academically achieve a college degree; however, as the participants reflected on their college experiences they shared how they realized that family responsibilities and financial issues had become top priorities for them. The consequences of trying to balance school, work, and family life became important issues.

The literature reviewed in this study included that of Tinto (1975), who developed the Student Integration Model. His theory focused mainly on four-year residential students and not community college or non-residential single-parent students. It also includes the works of Schultz (1961), Nobel Peace Prize Economist, who theorized and established the Human Capital Theory. Schultz felt that when people are persistent and invest in themselves through education, they increase knowledge, benefit from higher wages, and have opportunities to elevate their career; therefore, investing in education will give them the opportunity to take care of their families.

The results of the study were discussed from both theoretical and empirical standpoints. Implications were suggested. Minor limitations were recognized in the study as well as recommendations for future research. The main takeaway for me is that non-residential single-parent students, despite their obstacles, unlike residential students, have a great desire to persist in obtaining their degree. The value of an education is nothing new to them. The participants were in need of support in order to eliminate barriers to their persistence. The main aim of this

study is to apply knowledge wherever it is needed into an area of higher education when it is

needed in order to bring about success and empowerment to non-residential single-parent

students in degree completion.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval (IRB)

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 12, 2016

Beryle Poindexter
IRB Approval 2424.021216: Single Parents' Persistence in Pursuit of a Higher Education: A Case Study

Dear Beryle,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix B

Participant Interview and Focus Group Consent Form

SINGLE-PARENTS' PERSISTENCE IN PURSUIT OF HIGHER EDUCATION:A CASE
STUDY
Beryle J. Poindexter
Liberty University
School of Education
(Qualitative Case Study Dissertation Research Project)

You are invited to participate in a research study of single-parents who lack persistence in pursuit of higher education. You were selected as a possible participant because you qualify as a single-parent between the age of 21 and 50. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Beryle J. Poindexter, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study is to explore single-parents who have previously had experience in higher education but failed to complete their degree.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to paraticipate in the following activities:

Study Procedures:

This study involves two ways of interviewing individuals. I will be interviewing individuals on a one-on-one basis and asking semi-structured questions about what obstacles prevented them from persisting in reaching their educational goals. Another way I will be interviewing is by asking participants to come together into a focus group. In this group, I will ask questions about the participants' lived experiences as single-parents trying to attend college. The focus group session will last approximately one hour. The focus groups and individual interviews will take place in the Central Assistance Center, located in central Virginia. The researcher will also ask if you would be willing to be contacted at a later date in case there is a need to clarify any of the responses given in the interview. This would involve providing your name, address, and phone number, and the name of another contact person in case you move or your phone number changes. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Audio recording will be used in both the individual interviews as well as the focus group session. A video recorder will only be used in the focus group session. This will be done for the purpose of maintaining an accurate record of the interviews and focus group session.

Background Information:

This study explores the foreseeable obstacles that exist for single-parents desiring a higher education, and what factors will motivate a single-parent to persist in obtaining a college degree. The purpose of this study will also explore methods of how to rebuild the loss of persistence that affects single-parents who desire a higher education.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

This study is considered minimal risk, which is not greater than participants would encounter when going about daily activities. This study will have many benefits to our society because it

will explore the improvements that can be made through institutions of higher education and stakeholders on how to accommodate single-parents in reaching their desired educational goals.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated for this study. The study will be conducted on a volunteer basis only.

Confidentiality:

Pseudonyms will be used in place of real names or geographic location of the interview. All personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, separate from the interview data, and kept on file for the duration of the study. Access to personal information will be restricted to the researcher. It will be secured electronically and physically in a locked office away from public access. The records of this study will be kept private. In any report published, all personal information will be excluded. Any digital recordings will be stored in a file which will be password protected. All data received will be locked in a file cabinet until the data will no longer be needed. At the conclusion of this research project, we will destroy all computer and paper records containing your identifying information.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Beryle J. Poindexter. You may ask questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 321 Bryant Road, Madison Heights, VA. Phone # (434-846-0702) email: *bjpoindexter@liberty.edu* or faculty advisor Dr. Veronica Sims, email: *vsims@liberty.edu*

If you have any questions regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

_____ Please check this blank giving consent to involve audio recording for this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Phone #: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Questions

Standardized Focus Group Questions

Single-parent Persistence in Pursuit of a Higher Education

1. As a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

2. What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical trade school or college?

3. What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

4. What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

5. What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

6. What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college?

Appendix D

Participant Profile Questionaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Please complete the questionnaire below and return it to the researcher at the end of our orientation session in the envelope provided. The information collected in this questionnaire is confidential and will only be used for this research study.

1. My gender is_____ Female _____Male

2. My age is _____18-30 _____ 31-40 _____ 41-50 _____50+

3. My race/ethnicity is

   a. _____Caucasian

   b. _____ African American

   c. _____ Asian

   d. _____ Hispanic

   e. _____ Native American

4. How would you identify your area of residency? County/City_____

   _____Rural_____ Inner City _____Suburban

5. Single-parent because of _____divorce _____death _____separation

   _____ Unwed parent by choice _____desertion

6. Number of children: _____

7. Occupation: _____

8. Educational Background: _____

9. Years in school to date: _____

(Bloomberg, Volpe, 2012, p. 259)

Appendix E

Participant Interview Questions

Single-parent Persistence in Pursuit of a Higher Education

1. What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

2. What does it mean to you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

3. What helped you or would help you sustain your persistence?

4. What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

5. How socially involved were you on campus?

6. What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

7. How academically involved were you on campus?

Appendix F

Solicitation Letter for Expert External Reviewers

Dear Dr.:

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA. As part of my dissertation process, I must prepare a proposal for review. I have to get an expert in the field to review my study. The topic of this study is Single-parent Persistence in Pursuit of Higher Education: A Case Study.

I am asking that you evaluate the enclosed Interview Questions to see if you feel that they will be deemed appropriate for the study. Please review the questions and render your opinions. I ask that you return your opinions within one week via email to the address provided below. Your expert opinion will be greatly appreciated. Would you be so kind as to assist us in this regard?

Thanking you in advance for your assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Beryle Poindexter
Doctoral Candidate
Ph.: (434) 846-0702

E-mail:*bjpoindexter@liberty.edu*

Appendix G

Transcript of Interview

P1 Anna

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

Anna: "Getting back in the routine of going to classes was not easy. My coursework, especially the math, was harder than I expected. I was on a tight schedule trying to get my grandkids off to school and then run to school myself. In the evenings, I had to get home to prepare their meals, make sure my grandchildren were doing their homework, and then do my homework."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacle?

Anna: "It is very important to me to persist and go back to college because, without an education, I am stuck in a negative place. I feel like a hamster running around a wheel. That is why it is so important for me to get out of this circle."

What would help you or have helped you sustain your persistence?

Anna: "I must say that my faith in God is the only thing I can think of, and I have a goal and in that goal is what I am trying to reach. My faith in God is what will help me take each step to get out of this circle."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Anna: "Overall, the only thing I can see is the lack of finances and scholarships. It is hard to focus when your finances are not where they should be. I have had a few life changes, especially when my husband died a few years ago, and now I have to work to make up the extra income. I also find myself helping my daughter out from time to time."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Anna: "I did not have time to be socially involved on campus because I had grandchildren at home, and they were my priority. There was not a time for social anything in the schedule I had to socialize."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

Anna: "It was a tight schedule. Schedule to get my children off to school and to run to school and get home to prepare their meals, and make sure my children was doing their homework and do my homework. There was no time for social anything in between the schedule I had, which was a very tight schedule."

How academically involved were you on campus?

Anna: "I had to have one-on-one involvement with my professors in order to gain more understanding of the more difficult classes. I had to have a tutor because of my lack of math skills" (A. Payne, (pseudonym)personal communication, February 22, 2016).

P2 Nicole

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

Nicole stated, "Timing and work. There was never an opportunity where I could stay on top of things. Had to make sure the kids were okay. With the demands of my job, not having time to study was a big problem."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Nicole: "It means a lot to me to return to college and persist in obtaining my degree."

What would help you to sustain your persistence?

Nicole: "A support team and because I want to be an example for my children, letting my children see that I am still working on it. Along with being an example for my children, showing

them that despite my obstacles, they can still achieve their goals. There should be more books offered as ebooks because they are too expensive."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Nicole: "Time, and the fact that I am on an extended break makes it harder to put it off and procrastination."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Nicole: "I was not socially involved on campus."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

*Nicole: "*I knew what I was there for and did not have time to hang around."

How academically involved were you on campus?

Nicole: "I basically got the assignments and went home. I did most of my work at home, and if there was something I did not understand, I would go to my professors. I would also go to the Writing Center and got a tutor for math" (N. Clark, (Pseudonym) personal communication, February 23, 2016).

P3 Ashley

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

Ashley: "At first, it was tough trying to take care of my three children and go to class, but my parents agreed to help me with childcare as long as I finished my degree."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Ashley: "It meant a lot to me to persist in finishing my degree."

What helped you sustain your persistence?

Ashley: "It has always been a life goal of mine to complete my degree, and I did."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Ashley: "The only thing that would have stopped me is when my funding wasn't available or when I needed help taking care of my kids while I was at school. Even though I was working, without the help of financial aid, I would not have been able to start my classes. Without financial aid, I just don't know what I would have done because my books were too expensive, at times."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Ashley: "If there was an exam coming up, I would get together with a few people in my class and study from time to time, but I did not have time to go to any activities or hang out on campus.

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

Ashley: "I did not have the time to devote to it because I had to get home to my kids."

How academically involved were you on campus?

Ashley: "It has always been a life goal of mine to complete my degree, and I did" (A. Steele, (Pseudonym), personal communication, February 24, 2016).

P4 Marie

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

Marie: "I hate to say it, but my children do take up a lot of my time. Which made it hard to concentrate and focus on my homework."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Marie: "I have a great desire to go back to school, but right now my child comes first, along with my health. I can't concentrate when I don't feel well."

What helped or would help you sustain your persistence?

Marie: "I want to make my own money, and want to have a better life for me and my children really mean a lot to me. I would like to go into business management if my health permits."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Marie: "Before I can return to college, I have to pay off my student loans that are presently in default."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Marie: "I was very social in college and had a lot of friends. I was also a member of the honor society."

What, if any, barriers, prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

Marie: "I had no time to socialize."

How academically involved were you on campus?

Marie: "I only did class presentations and class group discussions" (M. Penn, (pseudonym), personal communication, February 25, 2016).

P5 Andria

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

Andria: "Finances, I couldn't afford it."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Andria: "I really wanted to go back to school, so I could get a higher degree. I was determined to complete my degree because staying in my previous position as a cardiac tech. was like being in stagnant water. My career goal is to be a doctor, but I don't know when. I did finally finish my nursing degree."

What helped you sustain your persistence?

Andria: "Being patient, and my family helped me a lot with my childcare."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Andria: "My finances and childcare were difficult at times."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Andria: "I was socially involved on campus whenever I had to stay after school to get class projects and lab done. I was social on campus with my peers, but no time for campus activities."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

Andria: "What prevented me from being more socially involved was having to pick up my kids from daycare."

How academically involved were you on campus?

Andria: "I did a ton of presentations. I had presentations once a week" (A. Rose, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, February, 26, 2016).

P6 Christy

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

Christy: "It was hard for me trying to focus on classwork and balancing life, work, school life, as well as being a parent was kind of hard. Had to pick up my kid at daycare, get him home and feed him, and then try to take a later class made it difficult. My child takes up a lot of my time."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Christy: "I want to find another job. A higher paying job will allow me to go back to school as well as being an example for my child. I want them to see that a higher education can boost your lifestyle."

What helped you sustain your persistence?

Christy: "From a financial aspect, I would be able to find another job. I want to continue my education in business management."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Christy: "The cost of tuition and illnesses."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Christy: "I was part of a study group and would sit and talk in group sessions."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

Christy: "Being a single mother prevented me from being too social."

How academically involved were you on campus?

Christy: "In order to help me stay focused, and I sought counseling on campus, utilized tutoring in classes that I was lagging behind in" (C. Sandidge, (Pseudonym) personal communication, February 27, 2016).

P7 David

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

David: "Having to work two jobs to take care of my responsibilities made it difficult for me to stay on top of my assignments. My jobs required quite a bit of my time, and I could not keep up with my classes."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of obstacles?

David: "I would like to go back to college soon because I need to get higher pay for what I do as a mechanic. I need more computer skills."

What helped you sustain your persistence?

David: "Financial Aid."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

David: "Because of financial obligations, I have to work two jobs. I made too much money to qualify for enough financial aid to pay my tuition and buy the books that I needed."

How socially involved were you on campus?

David: "The only socializing I did was just a round table discussion. I can't think of anything else at this point."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

David: "None."

How academically involved were you on campus?

David: "I was not academically involved and did not have to do any presentations, just sit behind the desk" (D. Scott, (Pseudonym), personal communication, February 28, 2016).

P8 Ross

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining your degree?

Ross: "Having to travel a great distance from work to school took too much time for me."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Ross: "If I had a chance to return to college, it would be in the field of aerodynamics. Returning to college is very important to me."

What helped, or would help you to sustain your persistence?

Ross: "Finances, college is just too expensive."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Ross: "I don't have time to pursue it right now because of my job and the distance I have to travel to campus, but at least I tried it."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Ross: "I was very socially active when I attended college. I attended several college events when I had time and met several friends, too."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

Ross: "I really didn't have a whole lot of time because I had to get to my job."

How academically involved were you on campus?

"I was academically involved on campus because I did tons of presentations. I had to present at least once a week. I often required assistance from the professors in the course that I didn't understand" (R. Brown, Pseudonym) personal communication, February 29, 2016).

P9 Mickey

W*hat obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting in obtaining a degree?*

Mickey: "Without the support from my family and friends helping me to care for my children, I would not have been able to complete my nursing degree."

What does it mean for you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Mickey: "I didn't have too many obstacles because my family supported me when I needed them to care for my kids. My family knew how important it was for me to finish my degree and become a nurse. My parents always encouraged me to go until I finish."

What helped you sustain your persistence?

Mickey: "I had to finish because I wanted do better for my family."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education?

Mickey: "My personal finances were my biggest challenge while trying to go to school."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Mickey: "I wasn't involved with social activities. I was focused on my studies."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

 Mickey: "I had to get to work."

How academically involved were you on campus?

"While on campus, I had to go to the Learning Lab. I was involved in study sessions with my class. Also, if I were struggling, I would go to my professor to get a better understanding of my classes. The only time I went to counselors was at the end of the school year to make sure I was registering for the right classes" (M. Banks, (Pseudonymn) personal communication, February 29, 2016).

P10 Gilbert

What obstacles do you think would hinder you from persisting to obtaining your degree?

Gilbert: "Having to work during the day, along with trying to attend classes in the evening, was difficult for me. Most of the time, I had a hard time trying to find a reliable babysitter. After several attempts of going to class on campus, I decided to withdraw until I finally worked out my situation, and I did take some of my classes online, but I finished up on campus because at the time all of my classes were not offered online."

What does it mean to you to persist in your education in spite of the obstacles?

Gilbert: "I basically went to college off and on for several years taking classes, starting and stopping until I decided to go straight through until I finished with a degree in math. I was determined to complete my degree because just knowing I would have a better life for my family by completing my degree was important to me, and knowing that I may have more money, a better job and more knowledge by completing my degree."

What helped you sustain your persistence?

Gilbert: "What made me persist even more was the fact that I had already invested a lot of money in my education."

What do you feel are obstacles that would prevent you from obtaining a higher education.

Gilbert: "Money has always been an issue for me. You never have enough money when you have children. Having to pay for tuition and buying books was hard at times. I had to take out student loans, something I didn't want to do, but I had to do it."

How socially involved were you on campus?

Gilbert: "Socially, I had no time to be social. The only socializing I did was with my children and their activities."

What, if any, barriers prevented you from being socially involved on campus?

Gilbert: "I had to get to work, no time for campus activities."

How academically involved were you on campus?

Gilbert: "Academically, the only time I spent on campus was with my study group to study for exams; other than that, I had to get to work. The only time I interacted with my professors is when there was something I didn't understand or was not sure " (G. Irby, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, March 5, 2016).

Appendix H

Interview Results

Questions	Open Codes	% of Open Codes	Axial Codes
What hindered you from persisting in obtaining your degree?	Family responsibilities Financial Issues	60% 40%	Family
What does it mean for you to persist in your education despite the obstacles?	Higher pay Career advancement Education important Setting an example	40% 40% 10% 10%	Money
What helped you to sustain your persistence?	Better family life My faith in God Better job Self-motivation Personal goal More financial aid Being focused	40% 10% 10% 10% 10% 10% 10%	Determination
What obstacles do you feel prevented you from obtaining a higher education?	Finances Not enough time Needed childcare	60% 20% 20%	Money
How socially involved were you on campus?	Not socially involved Socially involved	50% 50%	Peer groups
What barriers, if any, prevented you from being socially involved on campus?	Responsibilities Nothing	80% 20%	Family
How academically involved were you on campus?	Class presentations Utilized tutors Faculty interaction No involvement	40% 30% 20% 10%	Academic Involvement

Appendix I

Transcript of Focus Group Interview

P1 Anna

When asked, as a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

Anna: "Getting back in the routine of going to classes was not easy. My coursework, especially the math, was harder than I expected."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical trade school or college?

Anna: "I would love to finish my degree in psychology some day."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Anna: "They could help with affordable childcare for single-parents, and more of the classes should be online. In the case where the situation where parents don't have babysitters, they can at least do their homework and make it more convenient for single-parents to do their homework, rather than parents having to leave home."

What service socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Anna: "They should have a support group for single-parents."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Anna: "Online definitely."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as we consider re-entering college? Anna: "Financially, it is very, very expensive for single-parents to pay out-of-pocket for books and accessories they need. Not only that, there are not specific scholarships

available for single-parents" (A. Payne, (Pseudonym), personal communication, February 22, 2016).

P2 Nicole

When asked, as a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

Nicole: "Being on campus was different. Having to commute, not having time to sit down and study."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to school of higher education, be it technical, trade school or college?

Nicole: "When I finish, my goal is to attend law school and if not, do something with the Justice Department. I have not narrowed down which direction I want to go."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Nicole: "I think like having reliable sources such as having the school supply laptops and books and tools. Most books are online, and having physical books supplied to us would be helpful. So, I think to have physical books would be a good thing that I think would help in my persistence if I choose to go back to college. Instructors should be more compassionate when working with single-parents."

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Nicole: "Childcare would be good, like if they have facilities where parents can be there and their children be there, and parents can finish whatever work they have to do."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Nicole: "Online."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college?

Nicole: "The need of afterschool programs where you can take your children while you do your homework. So I think that would help in my persistence to go back to college" (N. Clark, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, February 20, 2016).

P3 Ashley

When asked, as a single-parent what was your educational experience like?

Ashley: "It was challenging because I went to school at night. It was challenging as far as making sure I had childcare available and being able to make sure I had my studies done with taking care of four children. "

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical trade school or college?

Ashley: "My goal is to work in some type of insurance fraud-based job. To be promoted in a different area, but having my degree is required. So that is what my goal is."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Ashley: "The only thing I can think of is just to offer more ways to take courses or ways to take courses or the availability of courses, more flexibility for people with children. As far as online, making more classes available online."

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Ashley: "Nothing I can think of because I don't have time to do things on campus. I can't think of anything that would be of benefit to me right off the top of my head because I don't have time to commit to anything."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Ashley: "Kind of hard to say for me, I am more of a face-to-face person. If I had a math class, I needed face-to-face. It depends on the type of courses."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college? Ashley: "Trying to find ways to make college more affordable. Not to have a lot of student loans, other ways to pay for college" (A. Steele, (Pseudonymn), February 20, 2016).

P4 Marie

When asked, as a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

Marie: "It was hard trying to prioritize my time, and if you can't prioritize your time, then it won't work." *What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical, trade school, or college?*

Marie: "I would like to go into business management if my health permits."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Marie: "I would say more help financially."

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Marie: "There should be study groups and support groups for my age because when you go to college, there are a variety of ages, and I am 32 years old, and I have a 60-year-old person in my age group."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Marie: "On campus because it would make me go to class, make me focus."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college? Marie: "Make sure you have a backup plan. Even if you don't finish, don't stop going to school if you don't have a backup plan" (M. Penn, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, February 20, 2016).

P5 Andria

When asked, what was your educational experience like?

Andria: "My educational experience has been challenging with financial aid and finding care for my kids while I am at school."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical, trade school, or college?

Andria: "My career goals would be to go back to get my doctorate in nursing, but right now finances doesn't allow. I haven't figured out what I want to do, right now it is up in the air."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Andria: "I would say provide childcare, provide a place for them, ways for them to pay for school while they are in school, have scholarships readily available for single-parents while they are in school. Help with the burden of buying books."

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Andria: "Socially, Have things available like activities that involve family studies, along with getting an education at the same time."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Andria: "Online."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college?

Andria: "We have covered all the areas, but mainly financial" (A. Rose, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, February 20, 2016).

P6 Christy

When asked, what was your educational experience like?

Christy: "Well, at first I started as a traditional student. I tried going on campus. Trying to balance work, life, and school life as well as being a parent was kind of hard. Had to pick up my kids and at daycare, get them home and feed them, and then try to take a late class. I couldn't go full time. I was only able to take two classes a week."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical, trade school, or college?

Christy: "I want to continue my education in business management to get a leadership position in my current field."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Christy: "Currently, they have online classes that make it a little easier. The only thing about the online classes, the workload is greater. If they could just cut out some of the papers that you have to write, that would be great. It does take up a lot of time when you are working and you are stressed out with all your work, and then you have to come home and take care of kids. It is very stressful when you have to worry about a 16-page report or even more pages, and you have your reading assignment you have to do, it gets a little hard. Also, computer literacy is a concern, too."

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Christy: "You have younger adults there and they have their own generational style, and it is difficult for a person that is older to blend in. It would be good if they created social events for the non-traditional student, as well."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Christy: "Online."

What areas do you feel that we have not discussed that are important to know as you consider re-entering college? Christy: "The cost. It is getting more expensive even for non-traditional students who basically are in the middle-class pay range. Then the scholarships and student aid is still not enough" (C. Sandidge, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, February 20, 2016).

P7-David

When asked, as a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

David: "It was okay."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical, trade school or college?

David: "Computer Skills."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for

people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

David: "Testing out of classes I don't need."

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age

group or with children to re-enter college?

David: "I don't know."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

David: "Online."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-

entering college? David: "Finances"(D. Scott, (Pseudonymn), personal communication,

February 20, 2016).

P8 Ross

When asked, as a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

Ross: "My experience was good, but it turned out to be somewhat of a hardship."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a

school of higher education, be it technical, trade school, or college?

Ross: "Something in the aerodynamic field."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for

people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Ross: "More programs geared to single-parents such as housing, and the college should provide

separate type housing *where your child can stay also."*

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Ross: "Just knowing that there is on-campus security. There are too many things happening on campus."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Ross: "Online."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college?

Ross: "Not enough about finances and affordability to go to college" (R. Brown, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, February 20, 2016).

P9 Mickey

As a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

Mickey: My personal finances were my biggest challenge while trying to go to school."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical, trade school or college?

Mickey: "I would like to go back to school to become a nurse practitioner."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in our age group or with children to re-enter college?

Mickey: "The college could offer affordable childcare."

What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Mickey: "More social groups geared toward single-parents."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Mickey: "Online."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college?

Mickey: "I can't think of anything right now"(M. Banks, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, February 23, 2016).

P10 Gilbert

When asked, as a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?

Gilbert: "Having to work during the day, along with trying to attend classes in the evening, was difficult for me. Most of the time, I had a hard time trying to find a reliable babysitter."

What type of career goals do you look forward to re-entering when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical, trade school, or college?

Gilbert: "I don't have any specific goal, right now, I am just glad that I have finished my bachelor's degree."

What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?

Gilbert: "Childcare."

What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you, online or on campus?

Gilbert: "Online."

What area do you feel that we have not discussed that is important to know as you consider re-entering college?

Gilbert: "College affordability" (G. Irby, (Pseudonymn), personal communication, March 5, 2016).

Appendix J

Focus Group Results

Questions	Open Codes	% Of Open codes	Axial Codes
As a single-parent, what was your educational experience like?	Challenging Liked school It was difficult Not enough time to complete assignments	40% 30% 20% 10%	Challenging
What type of career goals do you look forward to when it comes to returning to a school of higher education, be it technical trade school or college?	Desire to return to school Not sure	90% 10%	Self- Improvement
What are your suggestions for academic services the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?	More flexibility in time to submit assignments Childcare Offer more scholarships/grants Testing out of classes Lighter workload	50% 20% 10% 10% 10%	Challenging
What services socially do you feel the college could offer to make it easier for people in your age group or with children to re-enter college?	Single-parent support groups Single-parent family activities Nothing Childcare	40% 20% 30% 10%	Social Support
What educational approach do you feel would be most fitting to you online or on campus?	Online On campus	60% 40%	Determination

What area (s) do you feel that we have not discussed are important to know as you consider re-entering college?	Cost, affordability, finance	60%	Money
	After-school programs for single-parent children	20%	
	Time management	10%	
	Housing	10%	