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By

STAN POLLARD
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FACTORS IN SUCCESSFUL GED RECIPIENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

Joan Smith, Ph.D., Chair

Grayson Noley, Ph.D. Chair

Irene Karpiak, Ph.D.

Robert Wyatt, Ph.D.

David Carnevale, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family, both past and present, for only through them could I have come this far.

In memory of:

Joe Daniel Pollard

1926-1973

Tina Marie Pollard

1958-2000

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ABSTRACT

For over a half century the General Educational Development Test (GED) has been accepted as an equivalent to an earned high school diploma, which can then be used by the successful recipient to gain access into institutions of higher education. Research has shown that the majority of this population is seeking to advance their present status by working toward a degree in higher education. However, research has also shown that members of this population are at a greater risk than their traditional and non-traditional counterparts for not completing their educational goals.

Studies have been done over the years that tract the success/failure ratios of these students compared to traditional students, but these studies do not illuminate the differences between the successful and non-successful GED recipients who attempt higher education. The purpose of this research was to investigate these differences and see which, if any, were correctable impediments that could be used to help other GED recipients wishing to attempt higher education in the future.

An inductive phenomenological study was conducted using eight GED recipients who had attempted higher

education at a four-year university with this researcher's own experiences included. Four members of the study were successful in the completion of their desired degree. Each recipient was interviewed and their personal history analyzed for relevant themes. The analysis of these personal histories revealed themes within both groups and one substantial theme shared by both. The relevant themes that emerged within the successful group were: Career driven majors; Uninterrupted attendance, and Family support. Within the non-successful group the themes were: Women's struggle with multiple roles; Abusive relationships; and Two-year college enrollment. The shared theme was: Poor quality of instruction.

FACTORS IN SUCCESSFUL GED RECIPIENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

CHAPTER I

PROBLEM

For more than 50 years high school equivalency certificates have been issued to persons wishing to integrate themselves into better living standards through attainment of better employment, post-secondary education or vocational training. Through completion of the General Education Development test (GED) a large population of college or university students have entered academia. However, attrition rates for most GED students will prevent them from achieving their educational goals. For these non-traditional students, failure to reach their goals usually correlates with employment opportunity and earning potential. Although numerous studies have been conducted in connection with the success rates of these students compared to traditional high school graduates, there is no concerted effort to identify positive traits and experiences which might increase educators' effectiveness when dealing with such college students. If an effort to support these students is to be taken seriously, a base of information should be developed not only concerning their problems, but identifying various means used to achieve success and graduation. Therefore, the research question

is: What is the profile of a GED recipient who has been successful in higher education?

Historical Background

Relatively little research has been conducted to ascertain characteristics and traits that enable some GED recipients to graduate from college, while the majority of their counterparts, who have exhibited comparable knowledge, are not successful. The GED is a formal testing device that allows adults without high school diplomas to display an equivalent knowledge base comparative to traditional high school graduates. Rooted in the 1942 decision of The United States Armed Forces Institute's (USAFI) desire to find an acceptable means of mainstreaming veterans back into society (Allen & Jones, 1992; Kett 1994), the GED has been a contributing factor in the number of adults entering college since it was introduced to the non-veteran population in 1947. It was at this time the Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences of the American Council on Education (ACE) approved the first state sponsored alternative diploma using tests developed by the Veterans Testing Service (VTS). However, by 1959, the number of non-veteran test-takers had passed that of the veterans, and the need for policy direction and program supervision became an issue in need of clarification. In 1961, the Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences defined these as being shared and joint responsibilities of the VTS, state, provincial and

territorial departments or ministries of education (Auchter, Sireci & Skaggs, 1993).

Originally, the 10-hour test was administered by the VTS; however, by 1963, the name of the tests was changed to General Educational Development Tests and subsequently the Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences was renamed the Commission on Educational Credit and Credentials. In 1966, overseas centers were established for American civilians and foreign nationals, and in 1969, Braille and large-print formats were made available. Also, at this time, Nova Scotia became the first Canadian province to offer GED testing to civilians. In the United States, however, the crowning achievement did not take place until 1974, when California became the 50th state to issue the GED as a high school equivalency diploma, making the GED a nationally accepted alternative to a high school diploma.

Although the scope of the GED program had been broadened, with tests even being offered in correctional and health institutes, the five original tests remained unmodified until 1978. At that time, a second generation of GED tests were implemented that had been designed in the mid- 1970s by committees of high school curriculum specialists (Auchter, Sireci & Skaggs, 1993). The lack of revision, undoubtedly, encouraged a label of academic inferiority on the recipients. This revision, according to ACE, was a result of the changing curricula and attitudes

toward education in the 1970s. Although the GED was still comprised of five different tests, the content and the amount of time needed for completion was changed. These second-generation tests were designed to require only six hours of administration time; however, after three years the time limits for the Writing Skills Test and Mathematics Test were increased, raising the overall time of administration to six hours and 45 minutes.

In 1982, the Commission on Educational Credit and Credentials adopted an ongoing policy of review wherein the staff of the GED Testing Service assumed the responsibility of recommending changes to the tests and testing policies. The process consisted of a five-year review plan that addressed three major issues in the goals of the tests; how the tests should measure knowledge base and skills; and organization and administration of the tests to be given. To gain information from the field, surveys and questionnaires were sent to experts and teachers in the field of adult education. The responses indicated that administration of the tests was not a concern, but a significant number of respondents identified three areas of change they felt should be addressed for future tests. These areas were the addition of a writing sample to the Writing Skills Test; increased emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving skills; and addressing the examiner's awareness of the importance of computer technology. Almost all of the issues were adopted by the

Commission when addressed in 1984 (Auchter, Sireci & Skaggs, 1993).

Approximately 14 percent of all high school credentials issued in the United States can presently be accredited to the successful completion of the GED test (American Council on Education, 1997), which is moving toward its second curriculum overhaul (American Council on Education, 1998) since its conception, producing a serious need for knowledge in the area of these recipients who have been successful in higher education. According to the General Educational Testing Service approximately 60 percent of the adults who complete the GED test annually indicate their desire to pursue advanced training or higher education (GED Testing Service, 1998). In 1996, that would have been 455,142 people, as the number of GED completions was listed at 758,570. However, according to the American Council on Education's GED 1996 Statistical Report, the number of those wishing to further their education was up to 547,096, an increase of a little over 12 percent. This large population of potential students, an estimated 12.6 million people since 1949 (GED 1996 Statistical Report, 1997), have proved a certain level of achievement and deserve the chance to continue with their education providing they can overcome the inherent and rightful difficulties of higher education.

Foundation for Perspective

I have utilized some research on retention and expectations of college students to determine the questions to be asked during the interviews. Studies such as Vincent Tinto's Leaving College (1987, 1993) and Lydia Kalsner's Issues in College Student Retention (1991) address issues of students leaving college before completing their goals. Tinto (1993) notes that over half of all students who enter higher education will leave without having completed a degree from either a two-year or four-year institution. Woven into these masses is the population entering through the non-traditional means of successful completion of the GED. This category of student is considered to be at high risk and, at least according to Swarm (1981), not as prepared for the expectations of college life as their high school graduate counterparts and therefore less likely to succeed.

Since the 1960s, a small amount of research such as the Swarm (1981) work, has been conducted on GED recipients. Some of it contradicts Swarm. For example, Anita Turner (1990) conducted a survey to determine factors leading to the success of GED recipients at North Shore Community College. However, the successful population surveyed consisted not of college graduates, but of students who had been enrolled for more than one semester and achieved a grade point average of more than 1.00. Although the scope of this study was directed at a

different population, many of the findings coincide with information being sought by this researcher from a different audience. Similarly, John Hamilton (1998), Sherril Colbert (1983) and George Rogers (1977) point to the GED recipient as being adequately prepared for the standards of college. Claire McElroy (1990) even discovered that between an equal sample of GED recipients and traditional high school graduates at Kankakee Community College, the GED recipients maintained a higher grade point average.

Theoretical contradictions suggested above beg for additional research in the area. But one point that can be gleaned from the literature is that successful GED recipients do exist and can be studied. Moreover, there seems to be no body of knowledge concerning the differences between GED recipients who have been successful in higher education and those who have failed to complete their goals. Addressing this problem should have a direct impact on reducing the attrition rates of GED recipients in higher education by increasing their chances of success. The purpose of this study was to determine: What factors are associated with GED recipients' successful completion of college, and are the inverse of those factors present in the lives of those who drop out?

Any number of tangential theory bases analyzing factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, and other cultural descriptors of college students may help analyze the

findings of my proposed study and, therefore, provide theoretical links to my study. Among other factors explored was society's role in creating some of the obstacles these students must overcome. Studies like those of Sherman Dorn (1996) and Michelle Fine (1991), which point to the role of politics and public perception in creating the situations unique to GED recipients, were used to add insight to their problems.

Resiliency theory was another point of interest that was thought possibly to shed light on the response patterns (Burger, 1994; Farrell, 1996; Franz & Stewart, 1994; Polk, 1997; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). In any case, the added obstacles faced by GED recipients such as: a higher than average college age, disadvantaged socio-economic strata, copious family responsibilities, and job-related time restrictions, are items that in-depth research must address, particularly with those college graduates who have succeeded in spite of them.

Possible Outcomes

For more than 50 years, the high school equivalency program, originally implemented by the military in 1942 (Allen & Jones, 1992), has been an avenue for many who wish to attempt higher education but, for various reasons, did not earn a high school diploma. Throughout this period, an abundance of research has been conducted targeted toward GED recipients which focuses on the likelihood of their

success compared to traditional high school graduates. However, this body of literature does not explain anything about the nature, characteristics and special circumstances which impede these students. Other studies, such as those conducted by Vincent Tinto, have examined student departure and made recommendations for addressing the problem of student attrition and retention but have not targeted the specific audience of GED recipients. Because of the lack of theory on the traits of successful GED recipients, this researcher is interested in determining what different characteristics exist between successful and unsuccessful recipients with consideration being given to whether or not contributing factors are cultural or social forces for the following reasons:

(1) To provide support for further research aimed at increasing the effectiveness of educators when working with GED recipients in the classroom. Growth in this population dictates the need for strategies aimed at the specific problems associated with being a nontraditional student attempting higher education without having completed high school. Determining what the differences between successful and unsuccessful recipients are, and what they mean, can only be accomplished after adequate research reflecting their experiences has been completed.

(2) To raise awareness among GED recipients of a concerted effort to increase their chances at being successful in higher education by making information

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available that will be directed specifically at special circumstances encountered more by GED recipients than any other group.

(3) To provide a more meaningful understanding of the special experiences encountered by GED recipients who will be attempting higher education by documenting the experiences of those who have gone before them.

CHAPTER II

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Due in part to the lack of theory that, initially, informs my study, to the need for perspective-seeking in-depth analysis of the GED higher education aspirant, and the introspective nature of the question (Barritt, 1985; Langenbach, et al., 1994) I have used an inductive phenomenological approach. It was only through the exploration of a certain population's experiences that I was given the opportunity to exhume answers for future use. Retrieval of this information required the study of the subjective interpretations of participants' collective experiences regarding their experience with the phenomenon, completing or not completing college, and the events surrounding that process. This, according to Langenbach, et al. (1994), Giorgi (1975), Bullington & Karlson (1984), and Barrett et al. (1985) can only be accomplished by a study that allows the researcher to examine participants' perceptions and how they structured their lives accordingly.

As with any qualitative research, the researcher becomes the key instrument (Bogden & Bilken, 1998) making the background, experience and expertise an important issue. In this case, I, as the researcher, am a GED recipient with an egalitarian philosophy. Although I have been successful in higher education and am currently a doctoral student, I

dropped out of college twice before finally re-entering and receiving a Bachelor of Arts. Prior to higher education, I was a blue-collar worker with several trade skills and a higher than average pay scale. Included in my background is an attempt at higher education at the traditional age (I was 18 when I enrolled in college, but didn't finish the first semester) for college entry and one while working full-time as a heavy equipment mechanic. The sum of my educational experiences qualify me to draw conclusions from the collected materials. Because the questions I wish to answer were born out of my educational experiences, I have included my own history to compare to those who were interviewed. This addition does not shift the design of the study, but adds the aspect of heuristic research to the sum of the collected data. In addition to comparisons of the subjects with each other, I have, in the conclusion of this research, compared my experiences with their collective experiences.

Participants

The members in this study were eight GED recipients, divided into two groups: Group one with four successful members and group two with four unsuccessful members. The total number of eight participants is acceptable in phenomenological research (Tesch, 1988) because they provide a reasonable expectation for patterns to emerge. Of particular interest with the matched groups is the second part of the research question: are the inverse of those

factors present in the lives of those who drop out? Six of the eight subjects of this study responded to a mailed query sent by the researcher. Their names were taken from data regarding enrollment statistics collected at a teaching university. Three other universities in the same state of the study, and three two-year colleges, denied this researcher access to the same information. Out of the nearly 100 queries were sent out, only six GED recipients responded. The two remaining recipients were located through chance meetings within the researcher's profession. In attempting to enrich the comparisons between and within patterns, an effort was made to create as diverse a sample (race/ethnicity, gender, and class) as possible. Ideally, the members of each group would have been closely matched with a counterpart to validate each person's experiences and personal traits. However, due to the limited response by GED recipients, age and gender became the most defining difference within the group.

Methodology

A two-hour interview was conducted with each participant utilizing an interview guide to obtain such personal material as life history and view of educational experience. Other information being sought through a conversational style interview were as follows: What prompted the decision to attempt higher education? At what age was the decision made? What major was chosen and why? Was the content of the GED test applicable to the

expectations of knowledge for a college student? How many other attempts were made before completing the degree, if obtained? What were the most difficult impediments while in school? Were there any influences outside of the school that made obtaining the goal more difficult? Did the college, in any way, offer help in developing strategies aimed at overcoming difficulties associated with returning to school? What were the major contributing factors in the successful periods of higher education? How much time was spent in school before either quitting or achieving the degree?

Each interview was audio taped. From the tapes, transcripts were made with emerging themes or patterns coded as to their relevance. In the dissertation, I provided summaries of each participant. I have also included a discussion of each pattern adding quotes from each person whose data evidenced that particular response.

Because trustworthiness is always an issue when collecting data (Langenbach, et al., 1994) I discussed the individual interviews with a faculty member to corroborate my understanding of the content of the summaries. Transcripts of individual interviews were offered to the individuals for review to insure accuracy of the information collected, with any input being duly noted as new information on the participant's part. Obviously, this can only be done before any attempt at analysis of collected materials.

Definition of Terms

Goal: The level of education sought by the recipient, whether it included a diploma or not.

Higher Education: A four-year degree offering college.

Successful Student: One who has received a degree from an institution of higher education.

Native American: One who has a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) card.

Unsuccessful Student: One who has left an institution of higher education before receiving a degree. Students were considered unsuccessful if they had left higher education after failing to enroll in courses for four or more consecutive regular semesters.

Chapter III

PERSONAL HISTORIES

This study was conducted to profile through interviews the histories and traits of both successful and non-successful GED recipients who have attended higher education at a four-year college. The purpose of the study was to determine what factors aided in the successful completion of a four-year degree, and if these factors were missing in the non-successful respondents. The personal histories were segmented into four major life events for study and comparison of themes. These segments were labeled: Early family life, secondary education, post secondary life, and post college life. Although the crux of the study is taken from the post secondary life of the subjects, each topic is discussed to illuminate similarities shared by each subject. Drawing on the work of researchers in the field of adult learning like Stephen Brookfield's work with critical reflection of adult learners (Brookfield, 1994), K. Patricia Cross' work with her observations on why people are attempting higher education and what they are encountering at the university (Cross, 1981), Robert Kegan's insights on the demanding personal lives of those seeking to further educate themselves (Kegan, 1994), Joseph F. Kett and his historical

work with nontraditional education (Kett, 1994), and Eduard Lindeman's theories regarding adult education (Lindeman, 1961), the themes that emerged were analyzed regarding their conclusions and the findings from this study with sometimes significant differences. The information that is gained from these findings will help educators and researchers gain insight in addressing the needs and attrition rates of this population of students by providing a theory base for further research in the area of teacher effectiveness when dealing with GED recipients. It is also hoped that the use of this information will provide educators with tools to use when addressing the special circumstances GED recipients encounter when attempting higher education, and to enlighten this population of an effort directed specifically for their benefit. Research that is opened by this information is pre-college education for students who fit these profiles; there are many shared characteristics among all of the subjects interviewed. Aliases of the GED recipients who took part in this study are: Barry, a middle-aged white male from the Southwest; Rhonda, a middle-aged white female from a state located in the south central part of the United States; Louann, a middle-aged white female, born in a western state; Betty, a young-adult female, born in Europe; Harriet, a middle-aged Native American female born in the Southwest; Gerald, a middle-aged white male born in the Southwest; Eugene, an

older white male born in the Southwest; and, Marci, a white, middle-aged female, born in the Southwest.

Similarities of Personal Histories

Similarities were identified among all members of this study; themes were produced within the groups and shared between them. Seven themes were identified and expanded upon with the material showing there is traceable information that can be used to increase awareness in how to address the needs of GED recipients who wish to attempt higher education. These themes addressed the outcomes sought by the researcher in the areas of providing a theory base for future research, making GED recipients aware of a concerted effort to help them in their goals, and providing an approach for educators to understand the special experiences encountered by this population.

Early Family Life

All of the recipients in this study started life with both parents in the home. Their socio-economic status was lower-middle class to poor, with all but one person indicating a working father in the home. The one person whose father was not working indicated his father provided a monthly disability check. Four of the subjects indicated severe abuse directed at their mothers by their fathers. One was too young when her parents divorced to remember if they were in an abusive relationship. Five members of the

group had parents who divorced, three before they were in junior high, the other two at 14 and 16. Two of the remaining three had strained relationships with their fathers, and one indicated a traditional family life.

Of this grouping, all of the non-successful GED recipients came from a divorced family, and three indicated violent behavior directed at their mothers by their fathers. The fourth member of the non-successful group was only four at the time of her parents' divorce and could only state, "They were opposites in their approach to everything." Within the non-successful group, three members indicated alcohol use by their mothers, and one mother who suffered with mental illness.

The four members of the successful group all had both parents in the home, with the exception of Barry whose parents divorced when he was 14. Only one member of the group indicated alcohol or drug abuse by a mother, this also was Barry, and his father was the only violent parent from the successful group. Two members of this group stated their fathers were alcoholic, which, again, includes Barry's father, even though the father had quit drinking when he was young. Although Barry's father was violent, Barry still wanted to stay with him when his parents divorced, indicating a close bond. Barry still maintains close contact with both of his parents. Gerald has fond memories of his father, even though their lives were wrought with poverty. Though times were rough on the

family, he contends they were close and caring of one another, and stated, "We were poor money-wise. My dad was an alcoholic, but I do have good memories."

During elementary school, six of the eight respondents indicated they did well and enjoyed school. The other two included a person from each group. Eugene did well but was bored with school. He was able to learn quickly and would not behave if he became idle, which presented problems for him in the classroom. Rhonda had trouble learning in the traditional setting. One of her earliest memories of school was being spanked for asking too many questions regarding the material. "I don't remember doing well at all. I remember being in first grade at [small Southwestern town] and getting spanked with a paddle and yelled at for questioning and trying to-I don't know- the details of reading and stuff." The teacher did not understand that Rhonda was not able to comprehend what she was trying to teach the rest of the class and resented Rhonda's attempt at engaging her. According to Rhonda, the teacher scolded her saying, "'We're not going to do this in here. You're gonna do this!' I think I cried for the rest of the day."

All four members of the non-successful group moved at least once during elementary school, with Betty and Rhonda making several moves that took them into different schools. These moves were brought on, in part, due to divorce, which shuffled them between lifestyles. In the successful group, both Barry and Gerald made only one move during elementary

school and maintained both parents in the home during this period of their lives.

Of the eight respondents, only two had a parent(s) who attended college, in one case, the mother only. Betty's parents both attended college, her mother received an Associate's of Science, her father a bachelor's degree in Art Education.

Secondary Education

All eight of the respondents attended junior high and all but one started attending traditional high school classes before dropping out. Although Betty did not attend a traditional high school, she did work through an accredited religious organization that combined farm life with education until her departure from school. All eight started using alcohol and/or drugs before dropping out, and all but one became sexually active before dropping out. All but one respondent indicated they were not happy with school. The one person who did enjoy high school had to leave due to an unexpected pregnancy and was successful in higher education when she did attend.

Of the successful group, one left because of pregnancy, one was told not to return because of behavior problems, one left to work full time, and the last left after a disagreement with a coach. The non-successful group had one person who left due to drug abuse, one who was afraid to attend the school to which she had been assigned, one quit

to go to work, and one was abandoned by her family and left homeless.

All eight GED recipients interviewed for this study shared similar backgrounds and faced many of the same impediments in their attempts at higher education. Of the eight people interviewed, only one had not become sexually active before dropping out of school, which equals 87.5 percent; and all had started using alcohol and or drugs. According to a report by the Center for Disease Control in 2000, 64.9 percent of all 12th graders had experienced intercourse at least once (Crooks and Baur, p. 380). The members of this study who were sexually active before dropping out constitute a considerably higher percentage than the national average.

Five of the eight recipients reported taking on full-time jobs before the age of 18, placing themselves in an adult world, with adult expectations of their performance. Barry, although not traditionally employed, also put himself in an adult world when he entered into criminal enterprise.

Post-Secondary Life

The ages at which the respondents were successful at the GED are as follows: Rhonda-17, Betty-17, Eugene-18, Harriet-19, Barry-19, Marci-22, Gerald-28, and Louann-30. The ages at which each respondent started college are: Rhonda-18, Betty-20, Eugene-23, Harriet-38, Barry-19,

Marci-22, Gerald-30, and Louann-30. Three began their college careers at two-year colleges before transferring to a four-year college. One person attempted attending a two-year school but was denied entrance when he failed the GED. The three who started at the two-year colleges were not successful in their attempts at the four-year college level. Two of the four subjects who were successful at the four-year colleges completed their degrees at the colleges where they began their programs. Of the other two, one went into the military after one semester at a private four-year college. Upon his return he chose a public college and remained there until he completed his degree. The other successful recipient started college at a military academy then moved to a public four-year college. After leaving that university amid controversy, he left educational pursuits behind for 14 years before successfully attending another university. The last recipient was unsuccessful at her attempts in higher education but did start at a private four-year college. Since that time she has attended two different colleges.

All but one of the GED recipients entered college with children in the home. One had children who had already reached their teen years before entering higher education. All but one of the respondents were either married or already divorced by the time they entered higher education. The last recipient married while in college. All but two recipients have gone through at least one divorce.

Of the five female respondents, three had been in an abusive marriage. Two of the three entered into another abusive marriage. Only one of these women was successful in higher education. A fourth woman had been in abusive relationships before she married.

Six of the eight recipients reported they did not take part in any study groups or make use of any special facilities outside of the library. Their reasons were age, work ethic, work schedule, and, in one case, embarrassment. One recipient who did take advantage of the special facilities/programs offered at the school he attended was on probation for a low ACT score and had to take remedial coursework. Another wanted to take advantage of any tool that was offered; however, after transferring to a four-year college, she had to travel 40 miles and could not take advantage of any facilities due to time constraints.

All but two of the recipients worked while they were attending classes, four worked full-time. The two who did not work were attending on grants, loans, and one was receiving support from vocational rehabilitation. Of the four who worked full-time, only one was successful in the four-year college.

Majors and the reason they were chosen by the recipients were as follows: Eugene, history; Harriet, psychology and sociology; Gerald, psychology; Barry, human resources; Marci, elementary education; Rhonda, English; Louann, physical therapy program; Betty, accounting.

Eugene, who now holds a doctorate in history, did not choose his major until after 80 hours of college and finding "engaging teachers." He equated an education with higher living standards and compared himself with "a lot of first-generation students" in that he thought of education as a means to a profession. Eugene felt his choices in education were three-fold in the realm of his abilities, with the three being: education, ministry, and law. He was not advised in the direction he chose and feels like he might have taken a different path had he known of some of his options. "I didn't know there was such a thing as the study of theology in higher education, as opposed to ministry. ... I knew that probably by the time I was well into a graduate degree in history, but I didn't know what my options were."

Harriet, who has a master's in psychology now, found her major by reading the school's catalogue. She chose a dual major of psychology and sociology because they interested her. Harriet did not leave school by her choice and had always felt deprived of her right to an education. Although she chose career-oriented fields with her dual major, she maintained her goal in college was the pursuit of knowledge. "I remember for years I'd think, man, if I ever get to go to school, I'm going to take classes that tell me about the paintings of the world, that, you know, and the different artists, and, I don't know, just different kinds of things."

Gerald, who also holds a master's in psychology, discovered his career goal through the occupational testing services he had access to because of his vocational rehabilitation. Because his world had been so narrowly defined, he did not have any idea of what he wanted to do with his life in higher education. He did, however, harbor a secret desire to have an office-type job and equated an education as a means to achieve it. In the end, Gerald has achieved his goal, but was only able to do so with the help of an agency that was created to help orient dislocated workers with new careers. "My family seems to work with their backs and muscles, and I guess I am the first one that I know, of all of my uncles and aunts, that has a degree. So that education wasn't a very valued thing, but I always wanted to have an office."

Barry, whose bachelor's is in human resources, did not have any advisement when he began his final attempt at college. He had originally chosen environmental science, only because the positions are lucrative and somewhat related to the blue-collar work he had done when holding a legitimate job; however, his math and science skills were not adequate for that major. Shortly after beginning the program he found the human resources program and pursued it through completion. It, like the environmental science degree, was something he could associate with past experience and envision as a career at which he could be successful.

Marci was placed in elementary education, mainly because she did not know what she wanted to do. It was a program that she did not like, was not prepared for, nor interested in as a profession. While going to school she worked at a bank and started advancing through the career track, which consumed too much of her time. Although her reason for not completing her degree was the pressures of her job, she feels that she would still like to complete a degree someday. She also is sure that if she does return it will be for a degree of her choice, possibly art.

Rhonda tried to maintain an English major because she liked the idea of being allowed to be expressive. It also seemed to her to be a "liberating" degree. However, she did try classes from other areas, including art and social work. Rhonda maintained she only wanted the degree for personal enrichment and did not have any career designs or pursuits, and remarked, "You know, I'm not wanting to get a degree and-I'm not wanting to change anything I don't want to change anything. I don't want to change anybody." She only wants an education, though she is not sure what that is. "Yeah, I just-I want an education. And I want to finish it." At the time of the interview, Rhonda was over 40 years old, had been attempting college for over 20 years, and only completed 30 hours.

Betty chose accounting only because her teacher/advisor at a vocational training school encouraged her to do so. She was taking classes at a trade school to train as a

secretary when the opportunity for college came about. Betty relates a degree, or education, with better career options and is more interested in how she could use the degree to benefit herself professionally. She felt like she might have remained in school had she not had the burden of caring for her son, since she enjoyed going to college. "I enjoyed going to college. I loved it, but when I had my son, it was, like, just my priorities changed a lot." Her main goal in life is to have a better life for her child, and stated, "You know, I don't want to be in a position where my kids know I'm sacrificing for them. A friend of mine calls it the 'four shoe theory.'" For Betty, this means being able to afford four pairs of shoes for her kids so they do not have to wear tennis shoes all year long. When asked if obtaining a degree was more important than the education aspect, she replied, "No. I just want to be financially independent."

Louann, through employment, found that she liked physical therapy and chose a program that offered certification in that field. Louann had worked in other areas of health care, but kept coming back to physical therapy and was happy with the position she held, and was comfortable with the success she had acquired. However, the thought of returning to school seemed to be more than she was willing to risk, even though her husband routinely encouraged her at least to try. "And my husband's at home going, 'You need to go to school.' I said, I can not go ...

I'm not intelligent enough." She probably would not have gone if the therapist she was working for had not encouraged her, plus offered a scholarship, and informed her of the program at a smaller school than the research university she thought she would have to attend. She also realizes the support of her husband as paramount in her endeavors in higher education. "My husband took on the role of Mr. Mom, and I literally did not have to do anything except come home and study." Louann, though not having completed a four-year degree, has met her educational goals in that she has the certification she sought and will maintain any continuing education classes that are required for her to keep her certification.

Post College Life

The four recipients who were successful in higher education all work in fields relating to their degrees. Three have continued past the bachelor's degree, with two having earned master's degrees, one a doctorate, and one is now attending graduate school. These four recipients were able to relate the degree to what they wanted to do professionally after they finished college. Three have chosen counseling as a career, and the fourth is a professor and dean at a small teaching university in the Southwest.

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Of the non-successful recipients, one is successful in the banking business; one has only enough hours for certification as an assistant and works in her chosen field of physical therapy; another is working for a public school district driving a bus; and the last is working at service type jobs that have no educational requirements. Two of the recipients reported attempting degrees for which they were not prepared or in which they were not interested. The other two feel like the degree is secondary to the knowledge gained toward career goals, even though they did attend a four-year college and attempted degreed programs. Only one person in this group feels she met her goal in education and does not feel the need to complete a four-year degree.

One person of the eight interviewed reported a loss of friends or contact with family over his desire to obtain an education. That person was successful in his attempt at higher education. One person was cast out by her parents but did maintain contact with a brother who was supportive of her ambition toward higher education. She has not been successful at earning a degree.

Three of the four successful recipients were not successful at higher education until they were middle-aged. They had worked at various low-paying jobs and are now liberated from both the physical and financial strains that accompanied their previous jobs. The one person who completed a degree before the age of 30 worked within

education while completing graduate school. However, he did relate the bachelor's degree with a better work environment from what his jobs were while working on the degree.

Two of the four recipients who did not complete a degree at a four-year college have chosen occupations that fulfill their immediate needs, which consists of less than desirable working conditions and unwanted shift work. The other two have been successful in their chosen occupations and are happy with their salaries.

Individual Histories

Barry

Barry was born in 1961 to an 18-year-old mother and an abusive father. His first seven years were spent in a Southwestern state before moving to another state in the same region where his maternal grandfather lived. Both parents had varied careers, mostly dealing with selling, which allowed the family to enjoy at least a comfortable middle-class living. For several years, the family lived on a ranch, but the main income was still derived from sales.

Both of Barry's parents suffer from alcohol related problems. His father is what he labels a "dry drunk" and his mother a full-blown alcoholic. The "dry drunk" is a person who, although not a drinker, takes on the characteristics of an alcoholic. In the case of Barry's father, it was the violence; he started whipping Barry with

a belt when he was only three and making him do push-ups for punishment. According to Barry, his paternal grandfather was a violent alcoholic, and his father mimics those traits.

Barry's mother is a heavy drinker in the last stages of advanced alcoholism. "She's an alcoholic too, my mom is, she drinks every day. She drinks like two glasses of wine and gets all goofy now."

Violence was common in the home where Barry was reared. His father would "go off" for no apparent reason and sometimes disappear for days, sometimes weeks. In one instance, Barry's mother had made spaghetti noodles for dinner, but they were too sticky for his father's pallet, causing the father to lose his temper. In his anger he picked up the whole table and "threw it against the wall," then vanished for two weeks. Another episode that Barry remembers vividly was, at five years old, being tied to a tree and beaten with a piece of barbed wire for getting "bucked off a mule." His mother interceded in this instance, firing a handgun at his father and chasing him through a pasture.

Although Barry was never sexually abused by his parents, while on his father's ranch, an older child tried to assault him. After defending himself, Barry was in trouble with his father for beating up the other child, who happened to be his father's business partner's son.

Barry was large for his age, perhaps because of all the push-ups his father forced him to do for punishment added with the labor that goes with living on a ranch. Because of his size and speed he was very good at sports. While in junior high and high school he excelled in three sports every year. When Barry was 14, his parents divorced.

That was hard. That was weird, too. I was wanting to go with Dad, and he was the one beating me. And all because Mom; it seemed like Mom was another child, and Dad was raising all three of us. She was 18 when I was born; she was a kid; she didn't know anything. She was a kid raised by alcoholic parents. Both of my grandparents were alcoholics, so she had problems. They had been married for 16 years.

Shortly after the divorce Barry started using drugs on a regular basis. Between the ages of 14 and 32, Barry was an intravenous drug user, abusing methamphetamine, cocaine and even whiskey. "Yeah, when I was 14 to 20, I'd shoot up whiskey. Yeah, I'd shoot up anything."

Even though he wanted to go with his father, he ended up living with his mother, who remarried a short time after the divorce. The man she married didn't like Barry, and after an argument, pulled a shotgun on him. Barry took the gun away from him, "caved in the side of his head," and was put out of the home.

While living in his father's house, Barry became involved with his stepmother both with drugs and sexually.

After taking "a bunch of Valiums" she had given him, he passed out in his father's bed with his stepmother, only to be awakened by his father putting a .38-caliber handgun to his head. He begged his father to go ahead and shoot him, and feels that his pleading to die was the only thing that kept him alive.

Since he was accomplished at sports, his father made a deal with him to keep him both in school and off the streets by renting an apartment for him with the stipulation that he maintain a "C" average and stay in three sports. Barry was 16 when his father rented him his own apartment. When he started his junior year of high school, Barry was excelling in football and was a starting player. However, he felt he was not getting the recognition he deserved and started an argument with his coach. He felt he deserved as much coverage in the paper as the senior players were getting, even though he knew the coach was trying to help them get into college. Angry over that, he quit school and moved to a neighboring state and took a job as a mortar tender for a bricking company. He worked at this job for a year before deciding to return home and go back to school. Upon his return to high school, he began wrestling and placed in the state tournament.

To earn extra money, Barry worked for a loan shark as an "arm breaker" and a collector for drug dealers. But he had stolen money from them and was forced to hide from them while trying to attend school. At the end of the academic

year, he was still lacking three credits to graduate, but had a football scholarship to three colleges, so he decided he would take the GED and go to college. Choosing a two-year college in the same state he had spent most of his life in, Barry started practice with the team while waiting to take the GED with another player with similar circumstances. When it came time for them to test, Barry did not even read the questions, only marked answers. He failed the test and had to leave college.

Also, during this time Barry married his first wife. They were forced to marry because she was pregnant, but he left soon after the marriage and was divorced within two years.

Although his father was angry with him, he arranged for him to attend another college to play football at a military institute in the Southwest. Before he started his first day, which included taking the GED again, the commandant caught him smoking marijuana in his room, but gave him "just one more chance" because he was such a good ball player. The next time Barry took the test, he passed and was allowed to play football.

While playing football at the military institute, Barry hurt his knee and decided to leave for another college in the Midwest. A former coach was working there and invited him to try out for the team. He had been accepted to the team, but, while taking Quaaludes, he got into a fight and seriously injured a teammate, and was kicked out of the

program. He returned home to find that his father did not want anything to do with him, leaving him with no place to live.

Barry's grandfather offered him a job in the oil field. He took the job and worked at it for "a couple of years" before heading off to California for about the same amount of time. While there, he worked as bouncer in a bar and became addicted to methamphetamine.

In 1991, he injured his back and was given prescriptions for pain medication. From there he came up with a plan to refill the medications by calling a pharmacy and posing as a doctor. After doing this for a year, Barry was arrested and charged with two felony counts: conspiracy to sell drugs and trying to obtain Controlled and Dangerous Substances under false pretenses.

I had been doin' it for over a year - ignorant mother fuck- and I called in 500 blue Valiums and I sent a dummy in right up there at [pharmacy] and the DA was in there waiting. That dude had an ounce of weed in his pocket, and he's running through the parking lot, and he's pointing at the truck 'cause I just met him a week before that. So, they throw me in jail for that.

After getting out of jail on those charges, Barry moved back in with his ex-wife and became addicted to cocaine. He stayed with her for two years before she kicked him out of the house, leaving him homeless again.

For the entire year of 1993, Barry was homeless, wandering between three states. In one city he met a girl and used her credit cards without permission. She filed charges on him, but he had already moved on to a different state and never knew he had warrants out for his arrest. After checking into a Salvation Army in a different state, Barry met a girl and soon moved in with her and started a life. Barry was working and had even bought a car with her. But after a year his grandfather had become ill, and wanted him to return home, which he did. While taking care of his grandfather, Barry got into an argument with him and the police were called. When they arrived, they found that there were outstanding warrants against him and put him in jail again. This time, after he was convicted, he was sentenced to two years in a state prison.

Working out a deal, he went into a treatment center to get time off on his sentence.

I went to a treatment center and stayed there six months. I went there because they said if I went to this treatment center and completed it, it was a six-month-to-a-year treatment center, then I wouldn't have to go to prison. I completed it, did what they wanted me to do, got up there, and they sent me to prison anyway. Gave me two years.

After leaving prison, Barry stayed clean and started taking care of his college aspirations. "I started doing things a

lot different when I was about 34, 35. It took me a long time. I'm a late bloomer, I think."

After prison, Barry started school at a regional college with a total enrollment of around 4,000 students. His first major was in environmental science, a program where he wishes he had remained; however, he changed his major after learning how much chemistry and math was required for his original choice. He became a human resources major. Barry started his first semester taking all zero level courses to make up for deficiencies discovered from his ACT score, which was a 17, two points lower than the lowest acceptable level at the school he was to attend. With special permission, and probation, he was allowed to start school and finished his degree in the four years usually required, even after using his first year on classes that did not count toward his degree.

Although Barry was working toward a degree and had plans for his future, he suffered another setback when he was arrested with a relative of his fiancée from Arizona and one the relative's friends. The two came to visit Barry in a "pretty new Mustang" and stayed with him for a couple of weeks. En route to the closest city of any size to the town where Barry lived, they were apprehended in a Wal-Mart parking lot for being in a stolen car. Even though the warrants had been issued for the two persons visiting Barry, and were from another state, the District Attorney's

office charged Barry for possession of a stolen vehicle. Barry was riding in the back seat when they were stopped.

This latest arrest has depleted Barry of any resources he had, and forced him to sell the home his grandfather had left him. He is still in school, but does not know what the outcome will be when he goes to trial, as they have only come down six years on their original offer of 16 years in prison. At the time of the interview, he had already spent over \$14,500 and was getting ready to hire a new lawyer who was requiring a substantial down payment. Barry's hope is to receive only probation, even though he wasn't guilty of anything in his mind.

This is how stupid the law is. Because of my past, it took them 48 hours to see if they could try and stick it on me. Now they're saying it's because of my past they could stick it because I've had felony convictions. ... Ten years in prison, 10 years out is what they're offering me. The first deal was for 16 in, 16 out. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time, and this is the system, see, if you get in trouble and you clean up, it don't mean nothing. It don't make much difference. I have to get the felonies erased somehow. They're still there, after 20 years.

Even while he is waiting on his trial, Barry is continuing to work toward his goals. He has started a graduate program and is considering his options, which

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include working on a doctorate in sociology. He feels he will not be a marketable product in any other field with his felony convictions and that the experiences might even serve him well in the field of sociology.

Rhonda

Rhonda was born in 1959, the oldest of three children, in a state located in the south central part of the United States, in a town with a population of fewer than 15,000. Her first home after leaving the hospital was on a ranch that her paternal grandparents owned in a neighboring community. Her mother was only 16 when she was born, and would have her other two children by the time she was nineteen. Rhonda's father, who was also young when they married, was athletic and was afforded the chance to go to college on scholarships for baseball and basketball but turned it down. He considered himself too wild and unruly for the responsibility.

Although she was reared for nine years primarily by her natural parents, Rhonda spent a great deal of time around her grandparents due to living arrangements. The economic situation of her childhood was lower class, but not "charity poor." Life, while the grandparents were around, was comfortable.

Uhm, it wasn't poverty. My grandparents weren't - they weren't poverty - they weren't ignorant and poor. They were smart in a lot of ways that I will never be. But there was, there was stability as long as I was around them. But when my parents were around them, they were an influence.

Rhonda's parents were opposite from her grandparents in their approaches to life. Her father was very "common sensical" with a "deal with what you have" kind of philosophy, while her mother was very emotional. When Rhonda was nine years old, her parents divorced. At that time, Rhonda went to live with her mother in a town close to where she had lived on the ranch. Within two years, her mother had remarried to a man who was in the Air Force. He moved them to a town in the Southwest, then to Okinawa. It was in Okinawa that Rhonda had her only positive childhood memorable educational experience, when she learned about culture with the children of the island. Other than that, her experiences with public education left her bitter, even as a child.

I don't remember doing well. I don't remember that at all! I remember being in first grade at [a small Southwestern town] and getting spanked with a paddle and yelled at for questioning and trying to, I don't know. I was just - the details of reading and the stuff she was doing. I tried to engage her in something else, and she didn't like it.

After Rhonda had turned 13, her natural parents went through a child custody battle, and she was made the arbitrator for the other two children. She was to decide with whom they should live, and changed her mind twice before it was settled. This arbitration drove a wedge

between her and both of her parents, in her opinion, causing them both, she feels, to hate her.

Rhonda and her sister stayed with her mother after the custody battle, but she could never get along with either parent after that. By the age of 14 she had become sexually active, hoping to find "acceptance" anywhere she could. At 15 she started using both alcohol and drugs, but had managed to stay in school despite poor grades and attendance. Also during this time, her mother's health (mental) began to deteriorate causing her to be hospitalized. Due to her illness, Rhonda's mother decided she could no longer care for the two children, so the younger sister went to live with her father. Because of the bitterness of the custody battle, Rhonda was not given the opportunity to live with her father, so she became homeless. She was 16 years old at the time. For the following year, Rhonda traveled between three states, staying with friends and relatives and working odd jobs.

After Rhonda turned 17, and her high school class had graduated, she took the GED and started college the following semester at a small teaching college in a Southwestern region. Building on her past experiences in education, she decided to move in with a couple of girls who were of a different background than her own. Being "Quakers," Rhonda thought their structure might be an advantage to her own situation and a good influence on her lifestyle.

They weren't. They appeared to be extremely religious, but they weren't. They didn't seem like the kind of people I didn't want to be around, and it turned out to be the very opposite.

As it turned out, the girls became involved in just the things Rhonda was trying to avoid, and she joined in with them. They were able to stay out late and keep up with their studies, but Rhonda couldn't, and soon was forced to leave school - possibly before her first semester had ended.

From there she gravitated toward jobs that she never felt comfortable with, such as secretarial work. " ... It bored me crazy. I kept trying to fit in to this - I kept trying to be what everyone else wanted me to be, but I just never made it."

Shortly before Rhonda turned 20 she became pregnant with her first of four children, and married the child's father. She was 20 and reluctant to wed a man she "had no respect for." The marriage only lasted two years. This was the first of four marriages for Rhonda, with the longest one lasting only seven years. All of the husbands were abusive.

Oddly, through all of this turmoil, Rhonda was never in trouble with the law. She credits this to being taught not to be afraid of the police and not to fight authority. These were lessons she had learned while living with her grandparents. However, having been in abusive relationships, she has had to deal with the police and

courts on many occasions after becoming a parent and feels she has been prematurely judged by persons of authority because she is emotional. She also feels that she has been unduly labeled by authorities and has no trust in the legal and judicial system and is adamant about not wanting to be "a part of the system."

After struggling through her twenties and thirties and rearing children, two of which are still in the home, Rhonda decided to return to college at another regional school in the town where she lived. Her reason for returning was that she simply wanted an education and was not interested in whether or not she received the degree.

I had nightmares about quitting school until I was 35... But I kept having these recurrent nightmares about quitting high school, and I guess, you know, how my life has turned out. I'm not a traditional person; I'm not a conventional person. You know, I've done everything wrong that you can practically do, but there is still a part of me that, you know, really needs to do this, right? I want a college education because, I don't know, it's like, maybe this might seem like a strange statement, but I, you know, I just feel like it's one of those things I was supposed to do.

Having attempted college as a middle-aged nontraditional student, Rhonda feels there should be a different way of treating returning students, stating, "You can't just tell

these people to hang in there and tough it out!" Rhonda believes that people who, like she, are "intuitive" need a different approach to education and are not given a fair chance. She also feels that there might be some discrimination toward people who are struggling financially at the institution she attended for a year.

Is it assumed that everyone just has these compartments in their brain, and they can just remember little boring details that won't get you anywhere in life, that really can't teach you anything? I mean, don't they consider that some people are more intuitive; that some people are more universal in the way they think and the way they approach life? And what they're doing is - I mean, if you're in a certain situation where you have mom and pop, and everything is going good, and they have stability and a certain amount of money to make sure you get the things you need, and, I guess, you know, you can whiz by if you're more intuitive. But if you're poor, and you don't have anything... they're going to say you're stupid.

Although the last college Rhonda attended did have labs to help students in at least some of their classes, she did not take part in these and did not socialize within the campus. Part of this was because of her situation at home, working with two children to take care of, and also the lack of anyone with shared or similar experiences to her

own with whom she could relate. These combined situations have made attaining the goal of "getting an education" even more difficult for her, but she still has not given up on her dream, even though she has been forced to back away from school again.

"Yeah. I just... I want an education. And I want to finish it. And I want to do something with it. The degree will actually be, it's kind of like the degree isn't so important as what I learn."

Louann

Louann was born in the Western part of the United States in 1962, where she lived until junior high when her family moved to a Southwestern state to take care of an ailing grandparent. The town they moved to had a population of fewer than 15,000.

Neither parent had attended college, and only her father had completed high school. According to Louann, her mother was "very young" when she married Louann's father. Her father was an alcoholic that was highly motivated by money, so they always lived in a nice home while he was the head of the house. However, his jobs always required him to work many extra hours, and he changed positions often, which caused them to move around quite a bit.

As Louann grew up in her father's household, her mother was a traditional homemaker who spent her days making sure the house was clean and meals were cooked. Louann considered her mother the anchor of the family because of her ability to maintain the home in adverse conditions. Her mother had even started working as an EMT for the local hospital. Life with her father was troublesome and sometimes violent.

I think I was 14 or 15 - it was the day before my birthday, we were decorating the dining room for my party, and dad came home drunk, went after my mom and tried to kill her. He was going to stab her with a

pair of scissors that were on the table while we were hanging streamers. I attacked my dad to try and get him off Mom and my brother called the police, and Dad was a business owner - knew the cops - so they were like, '[Joe] take it easy on the wife.' Didn't throw him in jail like he should have been.

Just days after the incident, which was the summer before Louann started her junior year of high school, Louann's parents divorced and her mother moved Louann and her younger brother to the largest city in the state in which they were living. It was a turbulent time and busing had just been enforced in this certain city a few years before their arrival.

We lived in one part of town, but the busing was just, they just started busing a couple of years ago. So, instead of sending me to [a school], which was just a couple of blocks away, they shipped me over to [a school] which was the name of the school which was extremely rough. A total different culture shock from what I experienced in... The Blacks didn't want us there, the Whites didn't want to be there. Lot of racial tension.

While Louann was at this school, the violence escalated, and along with riots, there were fights and at least one violent rape of a white girl in the parking lot while Louann was in the building. After hiding in the basement during a riot, she decided she would not return to this

school, and after it was safe to emerge, she went home and told her mother of her plans. She had a friend at a different school in a better location. The friend allowed her to use her address so Louann could transfer; but the truth was soon found out, and Louann was forced to attend yet another school with a violent reputation. This time, when she told her mother she would not go to the school to which she was to be sent, her mother told her if she wasn't going to go to school, she had to get a job. So, at 17, Louann dropped out of school and began working in a retail clothing store.

It was during this time period that Louann's mother had a "nervous breakdown" due to the stress of the divorce, move, and her own problems with alcohol. Both Louann and her brother started spending time with kids that "really never went home very much and drank a lot and smoked a lot of dope, that kind of thing."

Everybody was trying to deal with their own problems their own way, and so we were no longer a family unit supporting each other. We were just all trying to hang on and do the best we could. My brother, my mom and me in the city, my dad in [a western city]. And also during this period of time I was dating this boy, who in retrospect, definitely was a loser.

Also during this period in her life she met the man she would marry. He was a mutual friend with her and her

boyfriend, and five years older. He became more than just a friend over time and would make sure Louann stayed in school, even taking her back on days he would find her skipping. Since she was not living at home any more (Louann had stopped going home and started living with friends), he made sure she was eating and was staying in safe places. Eventually, Louann moved in with a cousin of her future husband and started working with her. Shortly after that, he moved in with them. What had been a platonic relationship became more involved after about four months, and Louann became pregnant at seventeen.

Of course, he was saying, 'Oh, I'm gonna stay with you, don't worry.' And I'm going, 'Right, yeah, whatever.' But he's been around. We've been married 22 years. And [Bob] was definitely my, he is my rock, still.

Due to the circumstances, Louann's husband did not try to stop her from dropping out of school at that point. However, he did not give up on her continuing with her education, and encouraged her to work toward earning an EMT license. With her license, which did not require proof of a high school diploma or GED, Louann went to work at a hospital in a suburb of the city where she, her husband, and, now, two children lived.

By the time their oldest child, a son, was almost ready to start school, they decided they wanted to move to the town Louann moved to when she was twelve. The decision was

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based on schooling situations for the children and Louann had been offered a job because of her credentials. However, when they arrived, the job description had changed as far as the hours were concerned, 24 hours on, 48 hours off. The administrator who had given her a verbal confirmation of the job didn't think it would be a "good idea for a young girl to work and live in those conditions."

Having already moved the family, Louann was forced to go back into retail while she looked for a job in the field of physical therapy, an area in which she had been picking up experience while at the first hospital. After a short time at the retail position she found a job working for a physical therapist who had a contract with an Indian hospital. While there she was encouraged by her employer, the actual therapist, to go to school so she could become a licensed therapist herself. She confided in her supervisor the fact that she was a high school dropout, and was afraid that she was not smart enough to go to college.

Eventually the therapist lost the contract with the hospital, and Louann and another worker went to work at the main office. After about two years had passed, Louann decided to quit work to stay at home with her children. "The kids were getting a little older, and I wanted to stay home with them. So, I stayed home for about two years, I guess it was."

During this time Louann became active in her children's school and had taken on the role of the "PTO mom." She

would help out on a daily basis, setting up parties, and even graded papers for the teachers. She was happy with what she was doing, and not seeking any changes when a man from her church asked her to help out with his elderly female neighbor. Louann initially declined the offer; however, the man was so sincere, even weeping at the thought of not finding someone for the woman, she accepted the job and became a full-time caretaker for her. The job, which she stipulated was to be temporary, lasted another two years of her life and allowed her the opportunity to get close to a person whom she really felt offered "unconditional love."

She was such a godly woman. I remember one day, I came in... it was pouring down rain, and I looked like a drowned rat. And she was like, "Good morning, Angel Child," She always called me angel child, and that morning, "Isn't it a beautiful day?" And I'm sitting there dripping wet, going, 'No!' But that's just how she saw everything.

The lady that Louann cared for had been living within her home since her husband's death, and had not been off of her property for about 20 years. Everything she needed was either provided by her neighbors or mail order. So, when Louann went to work for her, she started taking the elderly lady on drives so she could see how much the town had changed and introduced her to such things as drive-through windows at fast food establishments. Although Louann was

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this person's primary caregiver, she treated it as though she was the one receiving the true benefits of the relationship.

Two years into the job/friendship the patient had a massive stroke and was left bedfast. Even though Louann was not part of the family, she and the neighbor that had originally asked her to help out were asked to sit in on the decisions that had to be made. It was obvious the woman would have to be placed in a rest home, which was the outcome, but Louann continued to visit her, even after she had started a new job. Louann took an active role in ensuring proper care was given by the staff and insisted she be moved to another home when the care became too impersonal. Looking back, Louann realizes this was the link to her present position in physical rehabilitation.

While doing the blood screening at a medical establishment Louann was asked to go to work at a "rehab clinic" she had become acquainted with while caring for the elderly lady. They had been persistent, even calling her at work, and Louann had always enjoyed working in physical therapy, so she accepted a position as a technician.

It was like God just kept sticking me in PT. I just kept getting there. And so I worked there for six years. I guess my fourth or fifth year into it, the therapist kept saying, 'You need to go to school.' And my husband's at home going, 'You need to go to school.' And I said, I cannot go to [Southwestern

research university] and go to - I can't do it! I know I can't, I'm not intelligent enough.

Because she was adamant about not going to [Southwestern research university], the therapist she worked with told her she should check into a physical therapy assistant program at one of the community colleges. With this as an option, and the offer of a scholarship from her boss, Louann decided to attempt the assistant program at a college in a neighboring county. However, before she could start, she would have to receive a GED.

At 30, Louann went to the same school she had been attending when her parents divorced to take the GED assessment test. It was also the school her children were attending, and the teachers knew her as soon as she walked in. The experience was "humiliating" for her, but she completed the test, then took the GED and passed. As soon as she had confirmation of passing she took the ACT and was able to enroll in a regional university located in the same town in which she was both living and working. Her goal was to take the prerequisites she needed to get into the program at the community college she had found. Her experience upon returning was much different than when she was younger and being forced to stay in school.

I think it was a combination of a lot of things - probably maturity, you know what you want, clarity, and also the teacher. So, that was like kind of the beginning of my self-confidence as far as going back

to school. Lowest score I made in any of my classes was a "C"; made it in chemistry.

Louann knew she had to maintain a good GPA because the program into which she was trying to gain entrance operated on a point system. Although she was not at the top of her classes at the university she attended, Louann was the first of only 15 students that were admitted into the physical therapist assistant (PTA) program she applied for.

To be board certified after receiving an Associate's degree in Applied Sciences, Louann had to take a test that is offered through a state agency. After completing the boards, there is a requirement of maintaining 20 hours of continuing education every two years. She had maintained this, as well as becoming a member of the advisory committee for the program from which she graduated.

Louann has not earned a bachelor's degree yet, and does not think she wants to. She feels she has accomplished her educational goals and does not wish to move out of the career choice she made 20 years earlier. She is not committed to earning any more degrees as long as she continues to complete the hourly requirements of the state board. There are areas within the physical therapist assistant umbrella that do interest her, but not any in which she could get a degree. In fact, the only academic achievement outside of the PTA field she is interested in is learning to speak Spanish. She has several Spanish-

speaking clients and wants to communicate more effectively with them.

As for her return to school, and any impediments, Louann feels as though she had the advantage upon her return.

No, actually I felt like I had the advantage because I was more focused, and I knew what I wanted. There were a lot of kids there that were still playing ball, or you know had the - I had, I had the stress of having a full-time job and a family to try to juggle with you. But my employers and fellow workers were very, very supportive. They gave me study time; they wanted me to do this so they helped me out at work.

Along with the support of her workplace, Louann's family and friends were supportive of her return to school. Her husband took on the role of a "Mr. Mom," that allowed her to study when she needed. However, there was one impediment at the university at which she did her prerequisite work. It was a chemistry professor that prided himself on how many people he could fail. She made it through the class, but did send a letter of complaint to the administration. She remains upset about the treatment this professor dealt to his students, and stated that "I would never bring a student in and set them up for failure or to humiliate them..."

Louann also took advantage of any type of study group she could. There was a regular group with varying ages, she

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and one other student, a male, were the oldest. She feels like she had to study harder than the others and put more time in to absorb the information, a problem she thinks is a product of the drug use in her younger years. Something else she feels was helpful in her success as a student was the ability to choose a sequence of classes that didn't put too much stress on her.

That was one of the things I was really mindful of.

I took a class that I thought was going to be difficult for me and I took a 'gravy' class along with it, so I didn't have to spend so much time trying to kill my self for two classes.

She also made sure the instructor knew who she was by interacting with him/her. Louann did not want them to think of her as just another "number."

As she grew older, Louann was able to forgive her father and has maintained a relationship with him for the past six years. However, her mother, who had become a vagrant the last time Louann had any contact with her, stepped out of her life when Louann was 19 and has not made contact with her since.

Betty

Betty was born in 1972, in Europe where her father was stationed while in the Army. Two years later the family returned to the States, where they moved around for another two years before her parents divorced. Both parents lived on the West Coast, so Betty was "bounced" from one end of a state to the other.

Her parents, with whom she never shared any kind of healthy relationship, were opposite in their approach to dealing with discipline, and she quickly learned how to play that to her favor. Her father was not as strict as her mother and would allow her to get away with more.

When I was in fifth grade, I spent a year in Hawaii with my dad and went to school there and discovered that, wow, you could go to school and do nothing and get away with it. As opposed to living with my mom and where it was every day you came home and did the spelling lesson, the homework and stuff. My dad just had no clue.

After her mother discovered her father's relaxed discipline she brought Betty back to live in her home. Betty remained with her mother through the eighth grade, where things were "pretty normal." However, before finishing the ninth grade, Betty decided she was ready to be on her own and went to live at a boarding school run by the Seventh Day Adventists on the West Coast. She chose the school because it offered different trades that allowed the

students to be self-supporting. As well as offering paying jobs during the school year, the students were allowed to stay on in the dorms and work through the summer for extra money.

Betty stayed in this school for over a year, but was forced to leave after she was injured while working in the dairy. Not being able to work meant she couldn't afford the tuition, which, with the room and board attached, was around \$1,000 per month. After leaving the Seventh Day Adventist church, Betty went to live with her mother's parents and attended a private academy that their church was operating. It was an "A-C-E school, American Christian Education." The school was a non-conventional school in its approach to education and was outcome based with a program they called PACE. If a student was able to pass a pretest for any of the subject matter they were allowed to advance. Betty did well in this environment and in less than a year had not only caught up on the freshman work she had missed, but completed the sophomore level and was very near being classified as a senior.

After the semester ended, Betty went back to live with her mother at the age of 15 where she "just got in with the wrong crowd." By the time she was 16 she had run away to the West Coast and had found employment with the Job Corps. It is here that she was convinced she needed to take the GED. Two months after receiving the GED, Betty began to wander from place to place, working odd jobs to get by.

Finally she ended up stranded in the Southwest. After contacting her parents she found that they were unwilling to help her out of the situation into which she had gotten herself. Eventually, Betty found a women's shelter that helped her out, and put her in contact with Alcoholics Anonymous. According to Betty, "I don't know necessarily that I was an alcoholic as much as I needed some kind of emotional support." Even though she might not have been an alcoholic, Betty was doing a lot of drugs (mostly Cocaine), something she had been doing since she was 13, and it was AA's structure that helped her get off of them.

At 18, Betty found herself moving to another state and back with the Job Corps, where she chose cooking as a trade. Although she was not interested in cooking for a living, she needed "a safe place to get my act together," and Job Corps was good for that. Betty decided while at this Job Corps location that it was time to grow up and become responsible. After finishing her program, she moved to a town in a different part of the same state. Shortly after arriving, she married a local man and began taking classes at a vo-tech center where she enrolled in computer classes. While at the vo-tech, Betty went to a two-year college for a competition and won scholarships and fee waivers to the school where she was competing. Unsure of the importance of what was happening, Betty went to her teacher and was advised to take advantage of the situation. She had planned on becoming a secretary when she completed

her work at the vo-tech center, but the instructor told her, "Be an accountant, don't be a secretary... Do something where you are going to make some money. You know, live the life that you'd like." So, at 20, she enrolled the next semester and went to the two-year college for a year before transferring to a four-year institution where she majored in accounting.

While at the two-year college, Betty became pregnant and had a son shortly after the finals. Because of the birth of her son, and the distance she had to drive to get to school, Betty discovered that she could not maintain the emotional and physical drain of continuing her education. Leaving academe was the only answer for Betty's situation; however, she has kept her options open for a return in the future, but is not committed to the idea.

Both of Betty's parents were high school graduates, and her mother was a traditional college student who earned an associate of art in business directly out of high school. Upon his retirement from the Army, her father went to school and earned a degree in art education. However, neither parent was using his or her degree professionally at the time of this interview; which Betty considered a waste. In her opinion the degree is the least important part of an education and what you learn that you can use is the most important. In fact, while in school, Betty was only focusing on getting the professional training required to pass the CPA exam. Her true goal at the time was to be

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able to work out of her home, so she could be with her child. She was not interested in any more education than was required to get the certification.

Betty and her husband divorced when she was 25 years old, their marriage only lasted six years. Since that time she has worked within the school system in the town in which she and her husband had settled. Part of her day is spent driving a school bus, while she puts in just enough hours in the food service department to keep herself classified as a full-time employee so she can keep insurance for herself and her son. She enjoys the contact she has with the students, and without acting as a counselor, tries to let them know they have a friend in her if they ever want to talk. She feels that sharing her experiences of being on the road at an early age has deterred, or at least, "slowed down" a few teenage girls from making the same mistakes she has. Because of this contact she has considered returning to higher education to get a teaching certificate when she and her fiancé relocate in Texas; however, she is certain that she will not return for any other reason.

Unlike her years in the public school system, Betty's experience in higher education was mostly a good one. She enjoyed most of her classes and even weathered those that she did not like. She attempted algebra three times before finally passing the zero-level course, which she needed to get into the accounting program in which she was

interested. Other classes were much the same as some of the classes she had in her youth, and were, she considers, a waste of everyone's time. Part of this was due to the fact that she had a child at home during part of her educational experience, and she felt she should be with him as much as possible. "I had a real thing about - I didn't want to show up for class and waste my time." Betty did not like classes where the instructor did nothing but read from the book, stating, "If you just want me to read what's in the book, hand me the book, and let me go."

Also, while in higher education, Betty was in an unusual situation with her peers. There were students her age, but she was married and did not share any of the same interests as the other students. She also did not fit in with the returning students that were coming back after rearing their children, even though she felt they shared the same work ethic. Betty, who considers herself a "very sociable person," feels she was isolated for these reasons. "I didn't fit in anywhere, really. I was just kind of there."

As well as not having a social life in college, Betty feels that having to travel to get to the schools she attended made it harder on her. Before her son was born, she was working full-time in a town that was more than an hour's drive from her residence. From there, it was another hour to get to the two-year college and another hour to get home. When she transferred to the four-year college she quit the job, but still had to travel over an hour to get

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to the town where the school was located. All of this was time she would have rather been spending with her son, and the educational benefits were not as important to her as being with her son.

Harriet

Harriet, a Native American, was born in a small community located in the Southwest in 1955. She did well in school and maintained good grades through the 11 years she attended public school. During her junior year of high school, however, Harriet discovered she was pregnant and married the father of her child in December of that year. She finished the school year, but it was not easy for her, and she suffered through a lot of social trials.

You've got to remember this has been a while back; schools didn't encourage you to go to school. Schools thought you were a disgrace and wanted you out of the school system immediately. What I did to complete my junior year was; I'd go up on Mondays, get my school work, go back on Fridays, take it back, and completed my junior year that way.

Harriet never returned for her senior year after the baby was born in June. Her marriage turned out to be an abusive relationship; plus she had a baby to care for and very little money to do it with. Her parents were supportive of her, as they had been her whole life, but were unable to help out much with her situation. After a couple of years away from school she took the GED and passed. "I think in the back of my mind, I knew I was going back to school. Nah, I wouldn't even say 'thought.' I knew at some point I was going to go back. I liked school."

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Her first marriage lasted ten and a half years, and ended with her terminating the husband's parental rights to their two children. During the marriage, Harriet had considered returning to school to work on a degree to be an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse). However, she was never able to do it and knew her husband would never have been supportive of her efforts. Another impediment Harriet faced toward achieving her educational goals was rearing her children. Without support from her former husband, she was forced to be the provider for the family and worked as many as three jobs at a time for them to survive. The best year she had working before finishing her education was when she made \$17,000 for the three of them to live on.

As soon as she was able, Harriet began classes, but not before remarrying. It was a short marriage that she feels bitter about, as the outcome was a lot of debt that kept her from pursuing a "master's slash doctorate" at a much larger university than she was attending. She felt like she would have been admitted as soon as she finished her bachelor's since she fit all of the criteria for admission.

It was looking really good, and I had assumed that when I got out of my bachelor's program, I would immediately go into that program. It didn't work because of the second marriage. He had written lots of hot checks. He ran up some really bad debts, and I found out about it. It was up to me, I felt like, to help take care of the debts. Got rid of him, but

still had the debts because they were incurred while we were married.

Because of the debt situation, and paying for it on her own again, Harriet was forced to postpone any graduate work she had planned. However, as soon as she was able to afford going back to school, she did. Enrolling in the same school she decided to attempt to complete a 45-hour program in psychology, so she could get an LPC (licensed counselor) in an abbreviated amount of time. The reason for the rushed schedule was so she would not have to wait another year to get into the program. So, against the advice of the graduate dean, Harriet entered the program, taking 15 hours of course work in the fall and spring semesters, and 12 during the summer. While in school she was still employed and working as many as 47 hours per week. Her job was more than 50 miles away from her home and where she attended classes. And since she had to maintain her hours to keep her insurance, she sometimes had to leave work, go to classes, and return to the job. She also had to work weekends.

Neither of Harriet's parents attended college, and never "really pushed" education on their three kids. However, all three children have degrees, with Harriet and her sister having earned master's degrees. She feels that her greatest support was from her family, as she was attending school. Another source of inspiration came from a life-long friend who was an advocate of getting an education.

Harriet started her college career at 38, and was not employed while working on twin bachelor's degrees. Although she is happy with her choices of psychology and sociology, she contends she would have gone to school just to learn, regardless of any program. Because of this attitude she feels she had an advantage over the traditional students. She considered research assignments a privilege, not a chore.

I would look at the other kids around me that were half my age and it almost seemed sad to me that they were here for such different reasons than I was. They were there because of expectations, because of their age, or because of the parents, or because of pressure from here, there, and yonder. I didn't have that. I wasn't here to impress anyone. I was here because I wanted to be here. I had put in my dues in life as far as working, as far as raising my children, and it was my time to get out of life what I wanted.

Harriet, who excelled in school, feels like the curriculum of any program is as challenging as a person makes it. She earned the label of "Library Queen" from her fellow students, because she loved researching and learning new material. Harriet did not take part in any of the study halls, group study programs that were arranged within the school she attended, but not because of her age. She was pro-active in her education and achieving her goals. She

was usually ahead of the rest of her classmates, and moving on to other studies before they assembled for the tasks at hand. Instead of waiting for her advisor to set a plan of study for four years, she went through the catalog and mapped out her four years before even going to enroll. She knew what classes she needed to complete a double major within three years, but opted to stay the whole four so she could take extra courses that interested her. In the end, she left her bachelor's program with a degree in psychology and sociology, and with a grade point average of 3.86. She was also in honors programs in both psychology and sociology and was inducted into the school's honor society. She attributes this to good attendance and knowing what she wanted from her education.

As for any impediments toward achieving her goal, Harriet feels embarrassment was the one she remembers most; embarrassment over having earned a GED instead of a diploma. She feels there is a stigma attached to people who have the GED instead of a high school diploma.

If you went out and asked 10 people what a dropout looks like, what a dropout ends up doing for life and why they did this, you're not going to have a positive reaction. That's me. I was the dropout. I did not make it. I wasn't a stupid person. I made some bad choices at that time in my life. It didn't make me stupid. But when you're around people that you know, that's society's feelings, it can make you

feel stupid. So, I didn't tell people that I had the GED. When they would ask me when I graduated, I didn't say, 'Oh, and by the way, I didn't do that. I got through with a GED.' I would just tell them the year that I would have typically graduated.

However, after achieving her educational goals, Harriet now looks back on her GED with a certain amount of pride. Part of the healing toward it comes from her mother, a strong influence in her life. Her mother insists that a person with a GED has done more to earn their education over the traditional student and have more of which to be proud.

As for any advice she would give to others considering the path of higher education after the GED, she merely says, "Hold your head up. Don't let it stand in your way. Don't let it be a roadblock."

Gerald

Gerald, born in 1958, is one of the middle children in a family with six siblings. His father was a veteran of WWII, and an alcoholic. Shortly after his birth the family left the small Southwestern city, and moved to neighboring state. In 1961, Gerald's father had to have 85 percent of his stomach removed due to what was believed to be a war related injury. After the surgery, his father would regurgitate his food after eating. This situation was, according to Gerald, called "dunking syndrome," and made eating very difficult for his father.

When Gerald was four, they moved back to the state of his birth, but to a different town and remained there until he was in fourth grade. When he was nine, the family moved back to the town of his birth. At the time of what would be their last move, Gerald's oldest brother and sister left the family in pursuit of their own lives. The brother joined the army and went to Vietnam, while his sister, 16 at the time, went into the Job Corps.

Gerald's family as he was growing up was always financially challenged. Recalling his past and the neighborhood they lived in he said:

We were really poor - probably the worst looking house on the block - that type of stuff. We were poor money-wise. My dad was an alcoholic, but I do have good memories. My mom was a very hard worker. Kept the house as best she could - worked constantly, all

day long. You know, cooked three meals a day; back in them days, beans and 'taters and so forth.

Gerald did well in school as he was growing up and attending elementary school. He did not have to put a lot of effort into maintaining "fair" grades, and he got along well with his teachers. But things changed for him considerably when he entered junior high.

I remember in this town we lived in here, we had three elementary schools, and then we all come together in seventh grade, in junior high... lots of people I didn't know from town, so there were different cliques going on and so forth. Even though we were very, very poor, I remember we lived in a 30-dollar-a-month rent house, it didn't seem to affect, or you know, I still had friends of range, age, social ranges and stuff during elementary school. Got up to junior high - just seemed to be, just seemed to change a bit.

It was at this time Gerald started noticing how different groups were viewed and how they were treated. Not only was he from a poor family, Gerald was overweight, he learned at an early age that if he wanted anything extra, he had to get it on his own. His first paying job was when he was five years old, picking produce.

I remember age five, getting into the back of a pickup truck when we lived in [a small Southwestern town] with some Black folks and some Mexican folks

and going over to [a neighboring town], and picking cucumbers and tomatoes and stuff like that over at some fields that Campbell Soup owned. And we'd pick pecans every year. I remember when I was in first grade, I would go out in the yard and pick a gallon of pecans, take them to the store and sell them to buy candy with.

Gerald is quick to point out that he and his family had all of the basics; clothing, food, shelter, and support. And he feels that his life at home was in a "fairly loving family."

When Gerald was 12 years old he took a job delivering papers, and another when he was 14, working at a drive-in. He stayed at the drive-in for over a year, and only quit to take a job with another drive-in chain that had come into town. The new job allowed him to have more hours, but the shifts were at night, and he started missing a lot of class. Eventually, he just quit going to school during his junior year of high school. Before the school year had ended, a teacher had convinced him to come in and take the finals, suggesting that it was not too late for him to return to school. Gerald took the finals and passed, but never returned for his senior year and became a full-time employee at the drive-in.

The chain of drive-ins for which he was working grew substantially during his tenure, going from two hundred stores to nearly 1,000 in a 30-month span. This growth gave

Gerald the opportunity to travel to other states to help open the new stores, and he was earning a better wage by that time. However, Gerald's family had never had a bank account, and he did not know anything about managing his money. For the most part he spent all of his earnings.

Of course I was young and didn't know what to do with money. I didn't, wasn't from the background of my parents. We was on welfare and stuff like that, and never had a bank account, savings, investments, or anything like that, so I didn't, of course, use my money very wisely.

Along with the situation of not managing his money well, Gerald married a woman he had known for two years. The marriage, however, ended after 10 months, and produced a child. Differences in families and religions prevented them from working out any resolution, and, as a result, Gerald lost contact with his daughter. While dealing with the problems of the divorce, he started drinking heavily and "partying too much." Realizing the problems he was causing himself, Gerald decided he needed to move to another town to get away from the problems. Staying with the same company, he changed locations and eventually was given a store to manage in a nearby town. While there, he quit drinking after meeting a lady that had a child born around the same time as his. He also decided to take the GED while working at this store. In 1986, more to please his mother

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than anything else, Gerald took and passed the five-part test. He admits it did help with his self-esteem.

Gerald remained with the drive-in company from 1974 through 1991, when he developed back problems. After the pain became severe, he went to a doctor and found that he was going to have to go through surgery. Not having any insurance, he was careful to make arrangements that would have the least amount of impact on his family. He had remarried and had two children at the time. After arranging to have his wife step up into his position, and having the surgery, both he and his wife were terminated unexpectedly. Gerald was able to file for Workman's Compensation due to the nature of his injury, but it took 10 months for the first check to arrive. Their family was used to having a joint income of around \$30,000, and they were forced to live on around \$600 per month, until the checks started arriving.

After the checks began arriving regularly, and the family had adjusted to the new lifestyle, Gerald was able to get into a placement program for people with debilitating injuries. He realized he was going to have to decide what to do when he finished his rehabilitation, and knew he did not want to go back into food service again. Gerald took the SATs and began college for the first time in January, 1992.

I decided to try something different. So I went and applied at [a Southwestern university]. Was able to

get on over there. Did fair on the SATs - fair is all - but of course, I quit school in the 11th grade. But once I did get started in college, I had a couple of days there to where I was, embarrassed myself terrible, you know. Felt like quitting and stuff, you know. Going to the wrong room, you know, stuff like that. Simple stuff that probably don't mean nothing to anybody, but, you know, I feel like I've got an inferiority complex, and I turn red and sweat and stuff when I'm embarrassed.

Despite the occasional setbacks that occurred along the way, Gerald found himself making good grades. Of the four years of his undergraduate work, he was on the Dean's Honor Roll three of them.

While working on his education, Gerald's family's lifestyle was also changing. Though they had less money in the house, they were able to adjust and raise themselves to a better life, utilizing social programs that were available for them at the time, such as food stamps. According to Gerald, "I felt like I was accomplishing something."

After Gerald completed the bachelor's degree, he began a master's program aiming for a career in counseling. His goal in life was to find an office-type job, something he had secretly wanted all of his life, and the master's was necessary in the career field he had chosen. While in his last year of the program, his wife started working on a

degree to become a registered nurse. Gerald feels as if she would have never taken on the task had she not seen his success in education.

We were both going to school there for a little while. And I think, you know, I get some pride out of breaking the chain, or out of showing [Lou] that it's do-able. We've changed our whole outlook on life. She has got into church; I have not.

Gerald's education has not been without some personal cost, however. Since entering college, he has become estranged from his siblings. They were not supportive of his educational efforts, and seemed to resent his new standing in life. Also, most of his life-long friends have abandoned him since he is no longer like them. But he doesn't dwell on these situations, rather looks for the good that has come from the opportunities he has been given.

Higher education has given Gerald more than academic success. While he always maintained a part-time job, he was afforded more time at home with the youngest daughter. He was also able to take advantage of an income-based home that was sold through Habitat for Humanity. Part of the contract was for a certain amount of labor to be supplied by the family, which he was able to provide since he was in school. Gerald realizes he has been fortunate, and is proud that he never abused the systems that he was able to access.

Impediments that Gerald found in his educational pursuits were not unlike those of the traditional students with whom he attended classes. Algebra was a problem for him, but he worked his way through it by taking the suggested course work leading up to the college algebra class he needed to complete his program. He did not take advantage of the study groups that were available.

Really, I was a little older than most people. I worked at [a drive-inn], man. I drove a Yugo. I drove a Yugo for four years from here to [school]. So I didn't really have a - like I said, I got kind of an inferiority complex - I don't have too high regard of myself. My wife and my kid is my peer group, basically.

Gerald's experiences in school were positive. He feels like he was fortunate with the programs he chose, and the professors he encountered. He feels like the best advice for a person attempting higher education after being away for a long time is to set reasonable goals. Attendance is something else that he stressed. "You got to be there," he said. Although he entered with a goal of finding a job, he admits that one of the driving forces in his pursuit was his mother. He wanted to make her proud by being the first member of the family to earn a college degree.

Eugene

Eugene was born in the Southwest in the summer of 1943, while his father was serving in the Army during WWII. His father's civilian occupation was in sales, institutional foods to grocery stores, while his mother was a housewife who took outside jobs to help support the family. Eugene has one sister, who is five years younger. The family's economic status was lower-middle class, and religion was a big influence in the household.

Eugene went to public school during the 1950's, a time when students were expected to be obedient and not question authority. Eugene, however, could not be that type of student, and it caused problems for him until he was asked not to return after his junior year of high school.

...there's always a bit of a problem with a kid that gets it quick. What do you do with him when he's already gotten the material and learning the first time you talked about it, but that was especially a problem in the era I was in. The fifties were a heavily conformist era, and I just didn't then, manage to fit anybody's square peg or round hole or whatever else. As soon as I'd shape myself to fit a round hole, it seemed to me like they'd change it.

Along with misbehaving in high school, he began drinking and was frequently involved in fights, before being told not to return to school. During the interview he stated that if there was a hell "uniquely defined" just for him it

would be high school. "I wouldn't go back to high school for anything. No way."

The summer after he left school, Eugene was admitted to a religious private college based solely on his score from the National Merit Scholarship Test, as he had not taken the GED yet. He went one semester before enlisting in the Army on a three-year volunteer program. After completing basic training, he was given a battery of tests required for Officer Candidate School. Among these tests was the GED, which he passed. That was in 1962, and by the time he had the results back from the tests, he had decided not to attend OCS.

During his time in the military, Eugene feels he matured considerably, and, even though he left after his enlistment was over, he enjoyed his time in. He considers his time in the Army as the first time he was able to think freely without retribution.

... the Army was the first time I felt like in my life, by and large, people left me alone. Or they didn't mess with me about things I thought were important at that time. I mean they'd worry about my shoes and whether they were shined and that sort of stuff, but nobody was trying to tell me what to think or whatever else. ...I grew up in the Army in many respects.

After being discharged from the Army, Eugene returned to his home state and started attending classes at a teaching

college. Not only was he older than the traditional students at the college, he entered through means other than a high school diploma. Although he completed his education without disruption, and even in less time than normally allotted, he didn't declare a major until near the end. Also, his performance was "very erratic," as far as grades were concerned.

My first semester I had 11 hours of A and three hours of F. And I kind of - that was kind of my pattern. ... I think I had a total in the first year and a half or so - a total of seven hours of F, 12 hours of D.

At eighty hours he was forced to choose a major, and had three areas he could choose from. Of the three, English, political science, and history, he chose history.

Eugene started his college career before the glut of Vietnam War Veterans flooded the colleges using their GI Bill money to further their education. In much the same fashion as the private college, he was admitted without consideration of high school diploma, only on his transcripts from another university. "I never, uh - [Southwestern teaching college] pretty much admitted me on the basis of a transfer from [private religious college] rather than - they didn't pay any attention to the GED. Or, if they did, it didn't seem to be an issue."

The erratic grades eventually turned around with both his marriage and finally gaining contact with a group of

instructors that "legitimized" his being an aggressive questioner. Eugene found that he could function in the academic world and maintain his attitude.

I challenged conventional wisdom. I was always arguing and liked to debate and that sort of stuff. Then when I got a group of teachers who thought that was okay, then I was all right; and that is when I really bonded with the whole higher education. I thought, hey, this is great. People paid to think, and/or let you think.

After finding his "groove," Eugene was able to, with a lot of effort, accommodate classes that he needed for his degree but really did not want to sit through.

While attending college, Eugene maintained both a full-time job and class schedule. One of the jobs at which he worked was a machine shop in a neighboring city from 5:30 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. His duties included physical labor, which caused him to miss a lot of class due to fatigue. He stayed with that job for "the better part of two years."

Eugene's family was supportive of his educational endeavors, as were his friends and coworkers. But he does admit that there were not many friends in those days. Between his job, family life (he married almost two years after starting college), and school, there was not much time for anything else. But the support he received from these people was general, as they had no expectation of an education being more than a tool for a better job.

After earning his degree in history, Eugene accepted a job in an urban school in the Midwest. He was there for two years and started working on his master's degree while teaching English and social studies. The school was an inner city school, and he realized early on that he did not relate well with high school students. It was at this school he decided that he should be in higher education. After he received his master's, Eugene and his family moved back to their home state, where he started working on his doctorate. As he had before, with both the bachelor's and master's degrees, Eugene maintained a full-time job while going to school.

After earning his doctorate, Eugene taught at a two-year college, located in the southwestern corner of his home state. He stayed there from 1973 through 1977. His stay at the two-year school was not a happy one, and after four years, he resigned his position.

... it was a nervous little place. My wife wasn't happy in [small Southwestern town]. We just left. And then I went off and built this career in the museum field, but I left it in a dispute with a new executive director.

While trying to build a museum, the principals that had pledged the necessary money backed out of their promise, leaving Eugene "holding the bag." From there he ran a rural water district for a year. This was an unhappy time in his career. At present, Eugene is the dean of a humanities

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school in a teaching college in the south-central part of the state where he grew up. He has been there since 1998.

As for impediments he faced along the way with his education, he feels that having to work full time had a negative effect on some of his performance. Especially while attending undergraduate classes. He was tired and slept through some classes, causing him to miss material. Although he had several instructors at the undergraduate level he did not care for, he does not feel they were to blame for his poor performance in their classes. He just did not like the material or their way of presenting it. To this day, he refuses to sit through something that bores him.

Factors that Eugene believes lead to his success were his ability to create situations for himself.

... if I were to write my own epitaph and say nice things about me, I think what I've always been pleased with is that I've managed to create - do the things I needed to do to establish the career and so forth, in frameworks where other people said it couldn't be done.

Marci

Marci was born on the West Coast in 1958. She was one of five children. Both of her parents worked outside of the home. Her father was a mechanic, and her mother worked at manufacturing jobs and as a waitress. Her father was an alcoholic and was abusive to her mother, and eventually the two divorced when Marci was ten.

After the divorce, her mother moved with the children to a small town in a Southwestern state. She took a job at manufacturing plant to support her children and attended one semester of college. Marci's father never advanced beyond high school.

By the time Marci had reached 15, she was misbehaving and getting into trouble. She was staying out late and started using alcohol. She started working when she was 16 so she could make payments on a car and left home the next year when her mother took the keys away as a form of punishment. She had to quit school her junior year so she could support herself, which she did by working as a clerk and teller at a bank.

Marci married when she was 18, but it ended when she was 24. Her first husband, like her father, was an alcoholic and abuser, and would not allow her time for any friends. During that time, when she was 22, she was successful at the GED and attended one year at a two-year community college, located 40 miles from the town in which she lived. After the first year, she transferred to a teaching

university located in the same town in which she now lives. She majored in elementary education. However, the job she had was becoming more demanding as she advanced through to a management position. It became too much to go to school, rear a family, and work full time.

Marci's family did offer her support while she was attempting higher education. She feels that she still would like to go back and finish someday, as a personal goal instead of a professional one. She is now a success in the banking business and does not need the degree to help in her career. At present, there are too many time constraints to allow her the opportunity to return, and she does not see that changing as long as she remains in the business in which she now works. She has remarried, and her husband is supportive of the family's interests. Also, religion has become an important part of her and her family's lives.

Impediments Marci encountered in higher education were both esteem and ability. She was embarrassed about having entered with a GED and felt much older than the other students. Because of this, she did not take part in any study activities for which she would have been available. This made some of her course work even more difficult, since she "struggled with studying," and had a hard time retaining the material as it was presented, which resulted in poor performance and grades of which she is not proud.

It should be noted that three of Marci's sisters did not acquire a diploma or equivalency. Also, her mother, who

remarried to another alcoholic, and she have become close friends. And, although he only drinks one beer per night, Marci feels that her husband suffers from alcoholism. "He doesn't get drunk, but he has to have that one beer at the end of the day."

Personal History of the Researcher

I was born in 1959, in a small community by the name of Edmond, located 15 miles north of Oklahoma City, to working parents. I am the youngest of three children. There are five years between each of us. My father was a veteran of World War II and worked at two civil service jobs before he retired due to a heart condition discovered while he was still in his early thirties. I was four when he retired and was put on disability. In 1963, my father had to have heart surgery to have a mitral valve replaced. After that, he began his own business as a barber and built a shop behind our house for my mother to start her own hair business. Before that time Lenora (my mother) had worked for Southwestern Bell in Oklahoma City.

My father had left school when he was in his early teens to try and help the family earn money. This occurred toward the end of the Great Depression, and his parents, who were share-croppers, were desperately poor. Of the seven siblings, five were still at home when World War II began. My father worked at any type of job he could find, which was always labor intense. Knowing that he would be drafted, he joined the Navy when he turned seventeen. His older brother had been drafted and was serving in the Army at the time. Of all of his brothers and sisters, only one, the next to youngest, finished high school, as his father felt a job was more important than an education.

Lenora was born an only child in 1930, and traveled with her parents to any job her father could find during the Great Depression. Her father was a skilled mechanic and was able to maintain jobs in the oilfield and construction trades. However, this occupation meant traveling to other states, and the family crisscrossed the country on more than one occasion. Lenora stayed in school, and while in high school, met my father during her senior year. They were married the same month she graduated. She was 17, and he was 22.

My parents moved from southwest Oklahoma to Edmond when my father was able to secure a job at an airforce base in the area. While working at this job, he did attend some college classes at Central State Teachers College (later to become Central State University, then the University of Central Oklahoma), but was not seeking a degree. Lenora never attended college.

My childhood memories of Edmond are of a sleepy little community of mostly labor-type people and farmers where religion was an important part of everyone's life. The population for the first 11 years of my life never exceeded 10,000, and the family's middle-income status seemed to be the norm for most of the town. In 1968, my father was told by his cardiologist he needed to find a job that required less standing, so he sold the barber shop and went into car sales for a short while. Although he did earn a living, he never liked selling cars for the year he worked at it. In

1969, due to his disability and veterans' status, he was able to secure a job within the state government. His health was deteriorating rapidly, and within two years of starting the job he had a cardiac arrest, and bypass surgery twice.

As my father's health was failing, the town I grew up in was changing at a rapid pace. In 1970, due to busing issues in Oklahoma City, a flood of families relocated in Edmond. Along with the new families came a new social status, and a new attitude within the schools. Racial tensions were not an issue as I was going to school in Edmond, but social class was. While in junior high, three groups defined themselves and were at odds with each other on every issue. The first were the children of the elite, called Socs, taken from S. E. Hinton's book "The Outsiders." The second group called themselves "freaks" or "hippies" and prided themselves on being members of the drug culture. The third were the "cowboys" that still kept their hair short and seemed to be following in their parents' traditions. I was a member of the latter group until 1973.

My relationship with my parents was nontraditional because of their both having jobs. I spent most of my early years bouncing between babysitters and daycare. The babysitters that were chosen were family friends, and usually older than my grandparents. There were many rules in these settings, and at an early age I tried to defy every one. When I began kindergarten, Lenora's business was

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in operation, and it was easier to have me in non-mandatory half-day school than it was to find a babysitter. By the time I was in first grade, I was allowed to take care of myself within the household. It was not an unusual occurrence for me to be outside of the household for several hours with no one knowing where I was. Lenora was a harsh parent, possibly because of her own upbringing. She would not think twice about beating her children with a belt, and not always on the buttocks. I never felt comfortable around her, and regardless of trying, absolutely did not trust her.

My father, on the other hand, was my hero. He was not a loud man, nor contentious, and stressed his belief it was not right to brag. However, on more than one occasion, I witnessed him stand up for what he thought was right when the odds were not in his favor. I consider my father to have been my primary care giver as I was growing up. I suffered from migraine headaches until I was 15, sometimes three times per week. Whenever I would start to feel the onset of one, he was the person I sought out. If I could not find him, I usually hid in dark places. At least twice, I was found and spanked by Lenora, who felt like I was hiding for the attention.

In 1973, my father died while going through what would have been his fourth open-heart surgery. The last two years of his life were spent in and out of the hospital, and on one occasion he was not expected to live through the night.

However, he always seemed to be able to recover from anything. So, the fact that he did not make it through the final surgery was not only devastating, it left me with a lot of guilt for not realizing how serious the situation was.

Shortly after my father's death, my brother moved to another state to attend a trade school. He had gone to two universities within the state and was not happy with the education they offered. With my brother gone, I was left in the home with Lenora, who was trying to rebuild her life as well. She had always claimed religion, and was able to lean on the people in her church when she needed sympathy. I, on the other hand, had spent most of my life disgusted with church and would have no part of their compassion. I found my solace with the troubled youth I had known in elementary school.

I had already tried alcohol on several occasions before my father's death, but had only drunk enough to be inebriated twice, both times by accident and in my parents' presence. (Once was on some homemade wine at a Thanksgiving Dinner. It was decided that all of the kids would be allowed one taste. I slipped back through the line several times before being caught. I was five. The other time was on vacation in the Rocky Mountains. I was drinking what I thought was just spiced cider, because it was a hot beverage left in the foyer of the lodge. Although I knew I felt strange, I did not put it together that the spiced

cider was wassail until my father asked what I was drinking.) But I had never tried liquor before, nor had I ever smoked marijuana. Within a year of my father's death I was doing both, and had started taking drugs for recreation. During this time my brother's driver's license renewal came in the mail, and I renewed it so I could buy liquor. Eventually, the state went to picture identification on the licenses. So, when I was 17 I bought a pair of glasses and went and had my face put on his license.

I had always tried to find jobs when I was growing up, more for the respect of my father than the money, and had a paper route when I was 10 or 11 years old. I kept it until I grew tired of the hassles and gave it to another child in the neighborhood. At 15, I started working again at a part-time job during the summer. I did not like the job, and in retrospect, was not a good employee. It did, however, provide me with extra money, which I used for alcohol, drugs, and gasoline for my motorcycle. While working at this job, which was for the school district, I realized a true hatred for certain types of teachers and coaches. I had already been embarrassed by an eighth-grade English teacher who spent her time trying to be a guidance counselor for the athletes, instead of teaching English. She openly granted special privileges to the rich kids, or the athletes, and would make the quiet students read assignments out loud for the others. One day she assigned

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the quiet students with animal characters and a poem to read. I drew the monkey and she made the remark of it being fitting. With this job, I was working with two coaches, both of whom would brag about how they could get their players special privileges. I associated them with the English teacher, and to this day, I still dislike coaches.

I had always been shy and really had not started dating until about the time I was in ninth grade. Since I had been reared to believe bragging was not acceptable, I think I was left a little behind by the others who were able to sell themselves more readily. But with the alcohol and drugs, I became a bit more outgoing, and began misbehaving in school. With that notoriety, I became a bit more popular among my peers. By the age of 16 I was sexually active, and staying away from home as much as I could get away with.

My educational experience after elementary school had always been a negative one, and I did not like school. However, with all but one class, I was given passing grades, even if I did not attend the class. Just to keep me, and others like me, out of the way, we were allowed to take remedial classes without being tested, which was, in some cases, stealing a seat from someone who really needed it. The one teacher who cared enough about what was going on in her class gave me a failing grade, threatened to beat some sense back into me, then helped recapture my love of reading. I was in the 10th grade.

Like most of my peers, I was given the opportunity to attend vocational training. It was a way to get out of school for half of a day and mingle with students from other schools. I took one year of sheet metal fabrication, and one year of machine shop. It was in these two classes that I learned any of the math skills I have acquired.

The summer after completing my junior year of high school, I became involved with a girl with whom I had gone to school. Lenora remarried and moved away, but allowed me to remain in the house as long as I stayed in school. The girl I was involved with had graduated the previous May, and was working at a bookstore in town, while living in Oklahoma City. We shared a lot of similarities in our lives, and seemed to be able to relate to each other. Toward the end of June, we moved in together. I quit taking drugs entirely and reduced my drinking considerably after meeting her, without being asked to do so.

I enrolled the following semester, but don't think I attended any classes after the first day. I was unemployed, but had a monthly Social Security and Veterans check coming in from my father's death. As soon as I quit school, the checks ended. I went to work, usually in fields closely related to things I had trained for while in high school. In December of 1976, I married, and in August of 1977, we had our first child. I had taken the GED in May of 1977, and decided the following January to attempt college,

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equating it with a better living, or at least working conditions.

My first college experience was not a pleasant one. I was put on probation before I could be allowed in school, because I was entering with a GED instead of a high school diploma. For advisement, I was asked what I wanted to do with my life. When I said "something behind a desk," I was placed in the school of business. I did not make it through my first semester.

By February of that year, I was working in construction and stayed there for about three years, becoming journeyman in the carpenter's union. I bypassed the apprenticeship program to do so. The next career path I chose was in an oilfield machine shop. I worked at that for about a year, then went to work as a mechanic. This was the only time I took a job as an apprentice. After about six months I moved to another job located in Oklahoma City, and stayed there for five years. While at this job I tried to attempt college again on a part-time basis, but was not able to keep up with my studies and the rigors of being a field mechanic. Although my peers at the job were supportive of my going to school, the management for whom I worked seemed to resent anyone who tried to go to college, and gave them, what seemed like, extra duties.

In 1985, I was injured on the job and had to have back surgery the following year. I was not able to continue with the type of work I had been doing and was forced to

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retrain. My wife and I decided I should try college again, only this time I would go full-time and test for careers before I enrolled. I took some career counseling tests that showed I scored high in more than one area, and I chose to follow a pre-med program. The first couple of semesters I worked off-campus, and for a while at a full-time position. I was having trouble keeping up with my studies and was concerned that I should declare a different major. While looking for an elective class to take with some physical science courses, I came across a photography class. I had always been interested in photography and had actually scored high in the field on my career test. By the end of the semester, I had decided to change my major to journalism and started taking writing classes. Two professors in the department made it possible for me to see that I could be successful in the field and encouraged me to continue with both the writing and the photography aspects of the trade. I graduated May 10, and was at a newspaper in Texas the following Monday, May 13, 1990. I was well prepared for my duties, and not intimidated by the tasks because of my educational experiences. In fact, shortly after I arrived I was asked to start writing regular articles for the paper as well as shooting their photographs.

The next year I returned to college and earned a Master's in Education, with a specialty in journalism. The degree was directed toward teaching at the community

college level, and the outlook for jobs was optimistic. I, again, was able to attend classes full-time and completed the degree without interruption. Throughout the time I was in college, my wife was supportive of my efforts and was a constant source of encouragement. While in school again our daughter started running away and getting into trouble at school. After confiding in Lenora, she ran away and asked to declare Lenora as her guardian. My wife felt that it would be more harmful for her to have us fight it out in court. We made a decision we would both regret from then on.

After I graduated with the M.Ed., we were forced to leave Oklahoma for me to find work. Although the outlook was for the initial wave of college instructors to start retiring, leaving openings in two-year colleges, the schools began replacing full-time instructors with adjunct positions. I had to return to working at a newspaper. During the year that followed, I was a salaried employee trying to get a paper brought into the digital world. It was not unusual to work eighty hours in a week, which took its toll on my marriage. My wife returned to Oklahoma with our son.

Several months later I returned as well, and found an apartment in the same town in which I had grown up. I remained a constant figure in the lives of my son and wife. After a little more than a year, we were able to communicate our feelings and come to terms with issues,

most of which I had created. It was possibly the first time I felt compelled to be completely honest, as I really did want to make things work for us.

I decided to continue on with my education, in hopes that the doctorate would make me a more marketable product. I chose a program at the University of Oklahoma and began in August of 1996. I was concerned because I had never been successful at education when attending part-time, but again received encouragement from my wife. With this support I was able to continue with my education, and worked non-stop through the coursework of the program.

In 1997, I took a job as an adjunct instructor, gambling that it would turn into a full-time position. I moved my family from the central part of Oklahoma, to the southeastern part. The culture shock was greatest on my son, who was 13 when we moved, but the whole family had to make several adjustments. However, the job did turn into a full-time position, and I have remained at the same college.

In 2000, just months after becoming ABD, my wife died, and though I tried, I was unable to sustain the momentum I had up until that time in my life. Although I collected some data after her death, for over three years I was uninterested in completing what I had started. Slowly, I began to put my house back in order, and started working on this study again. Now, I have a reason to continue that is outside of the demands of employment. I am ready to move on

with my life, which is a result of having someone I care about back in my life. I have remarried and started a new life, but I can not move too far forward until I close this chapter. I owe it to myself, to my wife, to the people who volunteered their time for this study, and to anybody that might be helped from the knowledge gained from these pages.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL THEMES

This study was conducted to profile, through the use of individual histories collected by interviews, the traits of both successful and non-successful GED recipients who have attended higher education at a four-year college. The purpose of the study was to determine what factors aided in the successful completion of a four-year degree. Findings were analyzed for the presence of relevant themes that were gleaned from the individual experiences, and correlations from other researchers' work in similar areas were noted.

As previously mentioned, research has been done to track ratios of successful to non-successful GED recipients in higher education, and the success to failure ratio of GED recipients and traditional students (Colert, 1983; Dorn, 1996; Hamilton, 1998; Kroll, 1993; McElroy, 1990; Metzger, 1997; Quin, 1986; Rogers, 1977; Schillo, 1990; Soltz, 1996; Swarm, 1981; Turner, 1990). However, no substantial body of research has been done regarding the differences in traits between non-successful and successful GED recipients. Searching existing research and literature brought to the surface the work of several researchers whose studies were used to support the findings of this study.

Stephen Brookfield (1994), who studied the social effects of becoming a critical thinker, is utilized to see

if his findings were relevant within both groups of this study. Although the group he studied was comprised of people who were in some way associated with adult education attempting more education, he identified themes that can be applied to any adult placing him or her self in a similar arena of higher education. Of the five themes Brookfield documented, three were of particular interest in this study regarding the backgrounds and histories of the GED recipients. These three themes were "Community," "Cultural Suicide," and "Impostorship" (p. 203). The first two dealt with the issue of support from those around the GED recipient wishing to attempt a four-year degree. The last was an issue of whether or not the recipient felt deserving of the position they had placed themselves in, since they entered into higher education in a non-traditional manner.

To pinpoint the importance of understanding impediments caused by the special circumstances GED recipients face, literature from Patricia Cross (1981), and Robert Kegan (1994), was utilized. Cross' work not only highlights the reasons adults participate in higher education, but situations and impediments that keep others from attempting the same course. Perhaps most important, however, is the reflective look she delivers regarding the part that institutions play in creating and or perpetuating barriers that either block entrance, or promote failure of non-traditional students (p.33). Kegan also focuses on the impediments adult learners face with the pace of modern

life and the importance of personal support. In this work, the positive role of spousal support (p. 83) is highlighted and necessary to this study as most adult learners will have a significant partner in his or her life when they attempt higher education.

Researchers in the field of higher education such as Eduard Lindeman (1961), Joseph Kett (1994), and Page Smith (1990), were utilized for their perspective on the quality of education and its implications regarding adult learners. Lindeman's postulate that education should not be desired for professional or vocational advancement is observed as well as his thoughts on how to address students' needs and the quality of education. Kett adds an historical perspective to the reasons for adults participating in higher education and the advancements, though sometimes through great difficulties, people have made in their search for quality education. In addition to quality of education, Page Smith's work on what institutions should offer students, and how they should view their needs is also implemented regarding the quality of education sought by the members of this study.

From the personal histories, themes did emerge that separated the non-successful and successful recipients. Initially the research was focused on the traits of those who had successfully completed at least a four-year degree; however, in analysis of the research, themes for the non-successful group also became evident, as well as one that

was shared by both groups. This chapter will explore these findings beginning with a discussion of the themes exhibited by only the successful members of the study. Following the presentation of data collected from the successful members of this study, common phenomenological themes from the non-successful group are discussed regarding the relevant events from this group's histories. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to a shared phenomenological theme that both groups presented regarding poor quality of instruction. This information was then used to determine what factors aided in the successful completion of a four-year degree, and which were actually impediments to success.

From the successful group the obvious phenomenological themes to surface were: Career Driven Majors; Uninterrupted Attendance; and Family support.

The next section in this chapter is that of the Non-successful Group, who also presented with three different phenomenological themes of an entirely different nature, and all were impediments. The first, and most notable, was Women's Struggle with Multiple Roles. This was observed as a barrier to success in that women had less time and fewer resources than men in similar situations, which, in a lot of circumstances, prevented them from being able to be successful in higher education. The second theme for non-successful recipients addressed in this chapter is Abusive Relationships. This information is a counter-reflection of

the family support received by the successful recipients, and does present itself as an impediment to success in higher education in this study. The last theme in this group was that all had attempted higher education by accessing two-year colleges before entering a four-year university.

The last section of this chapter is dedicated to the shared phenomenological theme of Poor Quality of Instruction. Input from both groups is presented as individual experiences and the relation to their educational experience.

Phenomenological Themes Among Successful Recipients

Career Driven Majors

In the successful group the first theme to emerge was the ability to identify a chosen major they could relate to as a desired profession. Eugene, who chose history, still teaches history. Harriet, who chose psychology, is working in her chosen field of gerontology. Gerald, who also chose psychology, is working as a counselor for the disabled. Barry, whose degree is in human resources, is a drug and alcohol counselor, which is what he trained to be. This finding is important in the fact that the successful recipients, much like Cross (1981) identified as a major reason for adults attempting or returning to higher

education, were using college to gain a career with which they could both enjoy and be comfortable.

Lindeman (1961) also recognized this approach toward education, and, though he did not agree with it, considered higher education to be a training platform for those people wishing to pursue a specialized career, stating, "Higher education, so called, has come to be predominately a form of vocational training" (Lindeman, p. 76). However, he did also acknowledge that this system of specialization is the only way to expand knowledge. This group also contradicted the assertion that people are more likely to enroll for the benefits of "life long learning" than the pursuit of a specific career as Joseph Kett observed regarding education from the 1970s on. "While each wave has differed in contour to its predecessor, one common feature has been the emergence during each period of a new clientele for voluntary learning" (Kett, p.429). However, with the majority of enrollment at most colleges and universities being aimed at occupational and professional fields (Stark, 1998) the need for career advisement as well as academic orientation is essential.

Uninterrupted Attendance

As well as choosing a program they could relate to a desirable profession, all were able to complete their degrees without interruption while attending with a full-time schedule. This constituted the second theme. Eugene,

who joined the Army after one semester of college, returned to higher education and completed a degree in less than the normal amount of time. Barry, who had left higher education for 14 years before returning, also worked through the program without any interruptions. Both Harriet and Gerald had not attempted higher education before they entered college and were able to attend full time without any interruptions. This was largely due to the fact that they were able either to find jobs that accommodated their schedules with school, or did not have to work while attending. Cross noted in her studies that the main reasons listed from her surveys for adults not attempting higher education were "situational barriers" (1981, p. 100). These barriers included such problems as childcare, time and transportation, all of which were impediments to the non-successful group. Within the members of this study, those who could make their budgets work without employment did so, while the other successful members of the group found jobs that would allow them the time they needed to study and would not interfere with their class schedules.

Family Support

Aside from being able to choose a professional goal and attend college full time without interruption, the third theme that was detected was that all of the successful recipients had supportive family in their lives. Barry's parents divorced when he was 14, but he still maintains a

close relationship with both parents. Eugene, Harriet and Gerald's parents never separated and along with having supportive parents, Eugene and Gerald were both married to women who encouraged them to continue with their education and be successful. Spouses, according to Robert Kegan, are "called to 'sign on' to the others' plan or aspiration and to aid out partner in the accomplishment of his or her goals" (1994, p. 83). In this group of successful GED recipients, there was no indication of what Stephen Brookfield (1994) identified as "cultural suicide," an occurrence that surfaces when up-and-coming critical thinkers begin to question conventional wisdoms and authorities. This can sometimes lead to fractures in the learners' community and/or family.

Phenomenological Themes Among Non-Successful Recipients

Women's Struggle with Multiple Roles

In contrast to the themes that emerged with the successful recipients, the non-successful group's first notable theme is that they were all women who had to work and care for children still living at home. As mentioned before with the successful group, Cross (1981) pointed out some of the main considerations for not attempting higher education as being the "situational barriers" (Cross, p.100) of childcare and time. For the women who had no spousal support it was extremely difficult to care for

their families and both afford schooling along with the household. Another member of the group had to travel great distances and was always concerned with transportation. Within this group only one person who attained enough hours to be certified for her work is happy with the level of education she acquired, and does not wish to continue in the future. She will, however, take classes if she is required to do so to maintain her certification.

Abusive Relationships

Along with the responsibilities of rearing children and working while attending classes, all members of this group shared similar experiences with previous relationships. From these experiences the second theme to was the debilitating effect of relationships they have had with either their spouses or significant others. In Motsinger's study GED recipients listed a "cohesive relationship," as being an important influence on choices they made (Motsinger, 1993 p.14). All four of the women reported abuse by either their husbands or boyfriends, and all but one has been married more than once. It should also be noted that the members of this group all came from homes that were disrupted by divorce and/or an abusive parent.

Two-year College Enrollment

The final noteworthy theme within the non-successful group is the deterring enrollment of two-year college.

Three of the members began their attempt at higher education at two-year colleges, and transferred into the university setting. Louann was the only one of the three to complete an associate's degree before entering a four-year college.

Themes By Both Groups

Poor Quality of Instruction

Although the post-secondary educational experience of all eight was varied, similarities did exist within both groups. As mentioned before, over 85 percent of those interviewed had become sexually active before dropping out of school, and 100 percent had used drugs or alcohol. However, these themes, though shared, were not impediments to their success in higher education. One shared theme that did emerge which is notable concerned the quality of instruction expected by the students. These students' expectations of instructors were of a person who identified with their individual needs, not a person who practices a utilitarian type philosophy. Patricia Cross identified this as an "institutional barrier" (Cross, p. 104) in that some institutions do not offer classes that are interesting or relevant to a student's expectations. This proved to be, in some degree, the case with all members of this study.

Eugene, who entered college after serving three years in the military, reported that classes he considered boring or unimportant, were classes in which he did poorly. As well

as his military experience, Eugene worked full time in a trade-oriented business while going to school and had responsibilities outside of academic goals. It was not until he found engaging professors that he was able to place enough importance on the other classes to try and do well. To this day Eugene refuses to sit still and be disengaged, stating "I still find that kind of situation very threatening, ... I'm looking for a way out. I'll bail out. I won't sit through it."

Betty became angry when she entered any class where the instructor just read from the textbook, something she could do on her own. She had a new baby in the home, was working at a full time job, and commuting between three cities. Her time was important to her and she felt it was a waste to sit in a classroom only to be read to. "I mean, if you just want me to read what's in the book, hand me the book and let me go away. ... I didn't want to show up for class and waste my time."

Louann, who didn't enter a degree program until she was in her 30s, was in a chemistry class where the professor prided himself in causing failures in his classroom; an attitude she found intolerable in an educator. Like Eugene and Betty, she had been working and had the responsibilities associated with adulthood. Not only had she been in a profession for several years, she had a family that she was rearing and understood the importance of nurturing. "I feel like a teacher should be one who

strives to teach and learn. And if you pride yourself on those students not being able to master what you're trying to teach, that's not-that's a dictatorship-this is not a teacher."

These three recipients, though their experiences were different, had all entered the military and/or workforce before enrolling in the university. They were experienced at life and impatient with professors that did not immediately address their expectations of the class or treat them fairly. Page Smith addressed this issue, noting that needs to be directed at the ordinary citizen who must work while trying to achieve a "humane life" (Smith, 1990), and that too often the students' needs are lost to those of the professor's (Smith, p. 200).

Two other respondents expressed disappointment in the overall experience of entering into the university setting, in that they felt there were no provisions for people of unusual circumstances. Both had similar backgrounds in that they were academically ill-prepared upon entering college. This is identified as another type of institutional barrier. This points to the need for a different type of orientation program for non-traditional students wishing to enter higher education. New-student orientation is still an important feature for GED recipients, as pointed out by Love & Miller (2002), because of the usefulness of "helping new students identify the amount of personal time required for success in college" (Love & Miller, p.31). Universities

perpetuate the afore mentioned problem by actively recruiting students from varying backgrounds, then placing them all in the same setting without regard to where they have come from (Cross, p.33).

Rhonda had never been successful in school and struggled even with elementary education. Although she knew she never was able to do well with traditional education, she felt that college would offer a setting with a different approach for learning. What she found, in her opinion, was a template-style of teaching used in approaching the students. If students did not fit in the template, they were left behind. Her complaint was that college should not be utilitarian in its approach to education. "Is it assumed that everyone just has these compartments in their brain and they just remember little boring details that won't get you anywhere in life? ... I mean, don't they consider that some people are more intuitive, that some people are more universal in the way they think and the way they approach life?"

Barry pointed out his concern that there was not enough consideration given to returning students who have been away from education. He felt that special attention should be granted to non-traditional students to help them get back into the routine of college life. He entered the university with an ACT score of 17, two points lower than the acceptable limit. His reading scores were also extremely low for someone entering higher education,

somewhere around a seventh grade level. However, he was able to maintain a high enough GPA to remain in school and was successful in his bid for a bachelor's degree, despite feeling that he had been labeled for his deficiencies. Barry stated his opinion by saying, "Well, I think administration shouldn't label people, and be real easy on the people who have disabilities." These concerns point to Merriam's postulate of the importance of the "context in which learning occurs" and the need to view adult learners in a holistic manner (Merriam, 2001 p. 96) so an appropriate learning style can be identified for individual students. Both Barry and Rhonda had shared in poor classroom performance before entering college, but were intelligent enough to be successful at the GED, indicating they should have both been able to be successful in higher education. However, of the two only Barry was able complete his degree, and did so only by accessing any program offered by the university that he could use to assist him in his shortcomings. This indicates another type of failure by the university of not understanding the needs of the students they admit, or allow, into their programs. Lindeman stated, "If learning is to be revivified, quickened so as to become once more an adventure, we shall have need of new concepts, new motives, new methods, we shall need to experiment with the qualitative aspects of education" (Lindeman, p. 4).

Out of the eight recipients, only three reported a stigma or embarrassment attached to having earned the GED in place of a high school diploma. This sense of not belonging to the group has been identified by Stephen Brookfield as "impostorship" (Brookfield, p. 205). Even though they had presented themselves well enough to enter the university, they did not feel they had gained entrance through the accepted avenues. Harriet, who had always done well in school and only left due to an unexpected pregnancy, stated, "If you went out and asked 10 people what a dropout looks like, what a dropout ends up doing for life, and why they did this, you're not going to have a positive reaction." She never told anybody about her GED and would give the date of her intended graduating class when asked any questions regarding a diploma.

Gerald was not embarrassed about having the GED until he started college and felt like it, as well as some social barriers, separated him from other students. Until entering into the university Gerald had lived in a sphere where he only associated with people who shared the same circumstances as he. In school he encountered a diverse population that was not only, in most cases, younger than he, but also more financially stable. With those two factors and the fact that he did not have a traditional diploma, Gerald sometimes felt out of place. "Really, I was a little older than most people. ... So I didn't have a-like I said-I got kind of an inferiority complex."

The third person was Louann, who was not successful at a four-year degree, but did reach her educational goals. She, as Harriet, feels there is a stigma attached to someone who has dropped out of high school. She had carried on with her life as though she had a diploma, and only took the GED when it became necessary for her to enter post-secondary education for her career choice. She expressed great embarrassment at having to take the test, which was administered by teachers she had come to know through her children. For Louann the experience was "humiliating."

Only one person reported the loss of support from family and friends after entering higher education. Gerald's siblings, and all but one of his childhood friends, will have nothing to do with him since his success at achieving his goals. Although he expresses no regrets for this success, he is bothered by their attitude toward him. He feels that in trying to share his new knowledge with them, they falsely accused him of being condescending. In this study it can be projected that "cultural suicide" (Brookfield, p. 208) is not a major problem for GED recipients wishing to further their education. In fact, in the case of Eugene, at least one coworker encouraged him to finish his degree so he would not have to labor on his feet through entire shifts. It is possible the difference in attitudes toward education of different generations can account for Eugene's experience with coworkers compared to Gerald's with his friends. Eugene, though born during World

War II, was the son of a soldier who served during the war, thus placing him in the category of a baby boomer. However, his coworkers while he was going to college were from the previous generation, categorized as "matures." Eugene, who reported few friends, also maintains contact with one childhood friend whose career path led him to become a truck driver. Gerald, who is 15 years younger than Eugene, had friends that were from his generation and did not reach high school until the 1970s, a time when blue-collar workers were earning high wages and college degrees were not necessary for finding lucrative employment.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

As previously stated the goal of this study was to determine whether or not there were identifiable traits and created circumstances by the successful GED recipients that did not exist with the non-successful recipients. The personal history of each person was segmented into categories and examined for traits that separated the two groups to see if a profile of successful GED recipients could be obtained. Various phenomenological themes did arise in both groups, as well as shared life experiences that add to the richness of this study. Phenomenological themes identified for success were: Career Driven Majors; Uninterrupted Attendance; Family support; Women's Struggle with Multiple Roles; Abusive Relationships; Two-year College Enrollment; and Poor Quality of Instruction.

Phenomenological Themes Associated with Successful GED Recipients

Career Driven Majors

Perhaps the most significant theme identified was that of the eight recipients interviewed only those who chose a career oriented major were successful. Also, the only unsuccessful person who achieved the level of education she sought was in a professional curriculum. These five people

were able to equate their choice of majors to lifelong and fulfilling careers, pointing to the importance of goal selection, career advice and academic advisement. The successful recipients were all able to find attainable goals and work toward them, but none of these recipients received career advisement through the universities they attended. In the cases of Eugene and Barry, they only found their success through trial and error.

From the non-successful group, only one person had a specific goal in mind. Louann knew what she had to have to obtain a certificate and worked toward that goal. The other three members of this group were given either poor advice regarding their abilities, or were not advised at all.

These situations all point to the specific need of accurate advisement before entering the university. Without proper testing and advising students will be left to wander aimlessly through academic corridors looking for a discipline that will fit both their abilities and desires. Intervening with pre-enrollment testing will allow both the perspective student and the institution will know what is expected from each party, and what the potential outcomes will be.

Uninterrupted Attendance

Another important theme highlighted by the research was that all the successful recipients were able to arrange their lives so they could attend a full-time schedule

without interruption. Only one member of the successful group reported working at a full-time job while attending university. The members of this group were able to construct schedules that fit their academic needs because of programs that were available to them, and, with the exception of Eugene, were able to access more than one. Gerald and Barry both received grants on top of state issued Vocational Rehabilitation. Harriet qualified for grants and received money from her tribe as well. Eugene, though he worked full time, entered college on the GI Bill.

Within the unsuccessful group, all members were trying to work while rearing children. The time constraints outside of their academic pursuits were much greater than those of the successful group who, for the most part, were able to apply all of their energy to their studies. Even though Rhonda received grant money for school, it was not enough for her to maintain the household and care for her children, forcing her to regroup on more than one occasion to earn money so she could continue with her education. Betty, who received a scholarship, had to work and travel a great distance to attend classes, which only allowed her enough time to attend on a part-time schedule. Marci and Louann also only attended on a part-time basis, with Marci not receiving any outside financial help.

If an effort is to be put forth addressing the special needs of GED recipients who wish to attempt higher education, there needs to be an acceptance to the fact that

their lifestyle will probably not allow them to attend in a traditional fashion, and therefore a different curriculum design should be implemented. It will also be necessary for these incoming students to be made aware of the obligation of time so they can assess their situation before being enrolled.

Family Support

Also notable within the successful group of recipients was the presence of both parents throughout the childhood years. Even though Barry had an abusive father, he maintains a close relationship with him and respects his father's opinions regarding decisions Barry considers important.

Phenomenological Themes Associated with Non-Successful GED Recipients

Women's Struggle with Multiple Roles

The most obvious theme within the non-successful group was the fact that all were women whose home lives were similar. All four had children at home while trying to attend classes, and they were all working at jobs to support their families. Louann, who reached a level of education she sought, was the only person in the non-successful group to have the support of her spouse while attending college. Her husband assumed the household

responsibilities while she was either at school or studying, which she admits was the only way she could have completed the level of education she sought.

Abusive Relationships

All members of the non-successful group reported having been in an abusive relationships either previous to, or while attempting higher education. Also notable is the fact that all four members of this group came from divorced parents, with only one person not reporting at least one parent being abusive toward the other. The person who did not positively report an abusive parent was too young to remember if there was any abuse in the household when her parents divorced.

Two-Year College Enrollment

All four members of the non-successful group had first attempted their bid at higher education by entering a two-year college before transferring to a four-year university. Only one person received an associate degree, and only sought enough hours in the four-year university to satisfy the needs of obtaining a certification in her professional field. She is not interested in completing the requirements for a four-year degree unless her profession demands it of her.

Shared Theme of Concerns Regarding Quality of Instruction

All but two members of this study shared opinions regarding poor quality of instruction that was not suited to their needs. All members of the study had been out in the workforce and had adult responsibilities before entering higher education and did not appreciate professors who did not immediately address their expectations for the class. Placing non-traditional students in an environment that is not suited to their needs only adds to the hardships they will encounter in the educational pursuits.

As for the resiliency issue, all eight recipients exhibited a great amount of stamina during their pursuit of education. Betty, Louann, Gerald, and Marci all had to travel more than 30 miles to get to their perspective schools. Of the four non-successful recipients, Marci and Rhonda both desire completing a degree, Louann will continue her education as required to maintain her certification, and Betty will keep her options open for a degree in education at a later date. These are all signs of resiliency in that the recipients have not been broken, and intend to return to complete what they started. The fact that all of the unsuccessful recipients were female, with children, trying to work, and were in an abusive or non-supportive relationship while trying to acquire an education proves that their obstacles were actually greater than their counterparts in this study. The only successful

female recipient in this study had waited until her children were old enough to care for themselves, and she had removed herself from abusive relationships before she started school. If resiliency is to be considered an issue for the successful group, it is only that they were able to make their schedules work to allow them to attend college full-time. The non-successful recipients were not able to attempt a full-time schedule due to family and job constraints.

The comparison of the researcher's history to the respondents in this study in many ways was identical. The early use of drugs, alcohol, and being sexually active fit my background. My parents never divorced, and though I had a poor relationship with my mother, I married young and had my wife's support and encouragement when I entered college. This appears to be similar to Eugene's experience, in that he was able to settle down after he married. With the exception of my work in the doctoral program, I was only successful when I was able to go to school full time and without interruption. Although I utilized career tests to determine my interests and aptitude, I chose a program that was beyond my scope and experience. It was not until I accidentally came across the journalism program that I felt as if I had any direction for my studies. I was able to see that there was an attainable goal, and a desirable career at the end. As did all of the other successful members of this study, I, too, gravitated to a profession that

provides service to others. In my case, the choice has been education.

Recommendations

Appropriate Career/Interest Testing

Two obvious and changeable links between the successful and non-successful groups in this study, as well as myself, did emerge, and both point to pre-enrollment advising with testing. Appropriate career/interest testing needs to be mandatory so that potential students are aware of the possible careers in which he or she might be well suited. Inflexible score numbers should be implemented so that a student who is not prepared for the demands of certain programs will not be set up to fail. Also, special attention must be given to the type of program potential students wish to enter, so they can be assured the possibility of success. Those with lower scores in certain areas they are interested in should be made aware of the probability of not being successful in areas of study that are beyond their present educational scope. The successful members of this study were able to utilize their education as a tool for the type of employment they desired, which can be addressed with career advisement/testing.

Counseling Regarding the Demands of Higher Education

This group was also able to arrange their work/family schedules so they would have enough time for their academic

endeavors. Due to the nature of their lives before entering college, GED recipients attempting higher education need to be made aware of the extra demands on time outside of the classroom more than traditional students. If a potential student is to be successful at his or her endeavors there must be adequate time and resources available for them. This is another type of advising that needs to take place before enrollment so members of this population can decide whether or not they will have an adequate support system that will allow them to attempt higher education.

The objective of this study was successfully met by determining that there are identifiable differences between the successful and non-successful recipients who attempted higher education.

Suggestions for Research

This study also highlights the need for longitudinal research on GED recipients entering higher education. Designs such as Csikszentmihalyi's work with tracking the creative process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) could be employed to discover how students use their time and at which times they are most productive. Using these types of data, educators who are concerned with attrition will be able to understand better the obstacles that impair GED recipients' chances of being successful in higher education. More information, on a larger scale, needs to be collected

regarding part-time students with GEDs and the ratio of success compared to full-time students.

These findings also call out for a study of a larger and more diverse population, taken from more than one region. Included with a larger study should be information collected to compare the ratio of success for full-time and part-time students who are GED recipients in higher education. If the findings of this sample reflect those of other studies, it will be compelling evidence for the need of intervention at the secondary level for students who fit these profiles.

Obviously, the best solution to the problem of attrition with GED recipients is to find a way to prevent students from dropping out of school. However, regardless of how hard public schools try to prevent it, there will always be students who, for some reason or another, can not conform to the educational environment. It is for this growing population of people we, as educators, must continue to search for a means to guide the returning GED recipient to a successful outcome.

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