A Study of the College Decision-making Process and Influences of Social Capital on Appalachian Non-traditional Female College Students in Ohio During Their High School Years

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This dissertation titled

A Study of the College Decision-making Process and Influences of Social Capital on Appalachian Non-traditional Female College Students in Ohio During Their High School Years

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Abstract

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A Study of the College Decision-making Process and Influences of Social Capital on Appalachian Non-traditional Female College Students in Ohio During Their High School Years

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This qualitative research study examines the experiences of Appalachian non-traditional female students during their high school years. The context of this study is Appalachian Ohio. The research looks at the decision-making process that the female students used during high school in considering higher education. This study fundamentally addresses the following two questions: What were the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio? How did social capital affect the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio? The data include information about Appalachia, Appalachian Ohio, Appalachian females, non-traditional students, rural youth, and social capital. The research literature reveals that culture, place of residence, family, and schools help to shape the identity of children. This study addresses the characteristics of social capital, such that derived from parents, family, schools, and community and the influence of those groups on these women as they consider college.

This research uses a phenomenological approach for the design of the study. The context of the study is Appalachian Ohio and the participants are or were non-traditional
female college students. Participants were interviewed and asked to discuss their lives during their high school years and how they made decisions about going to college. The interview questions are semi-structured allowing the participants to tell their stories. Non-traditional female students in Appalachian Ohio share their lived experiences that allowed this researcher to identify emerging themes of student experiences. This information may be beneficial to teachers, school counselors, college/university admission officers and recruiters as they interface with these female students from Appalachian Ohio.

This research study is significant because researchers, university officials, and high school staff need to better understand how female Appalachian students make decisions concerning college attendance in order to be able to guide them well. Although there is some data about non-traditional college students, there is limited research regarding non-traditional female students in Appalachian Ohio.
This work is dedicated to my loving husband, Jay, who continually supports my dreams and endeavors. Your faith in me guided me to completion of my degree. I also dedicate this study to my daughters, Quincey and Jenna, and their families. Each of your continued support and encouragement helped me get through the process. I am blessed to have your love and support.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research examines the college decision-making process of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio. "Colleges and universities continue to see an increase in the enrollment of non-traditional students" (Jesnek, 2012, p. 1). Non-traditional students are college attendees who are employed, have family responsibilities including responsibility for dependents, are over the age of 25, and are financially independent (Carreiro & Kapitulik, 2010; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Mello, 2004; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). While much research has been conducted on traditional students and their decision-making processes related to choosing to attend college, the choices of non-traditional students have been largely overlooked (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Moreover, although there is some research on non-traditional students, data is limited regarding non-traditional female students from Appalachian communities. Ali and Saunders (2006) suggest that further research is needed to assist rural Appalachian youth as they make decisions in order to achieve their full potential.

I seek to address how non-traditional female college students in Appalachian Ohio communities make their decisions about college attendance. This includes research about the role social capital, which consists of the financial, social, and emotional resources of an individual, plays into the decision-making process of Appalachian non-traditional female students. This research is a phenomenological study which offers Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio the opportunity to tell stories of their lived experiences focusing mainly on the college decision-making process during high school.
This chapter provides the background information for this research, the purpose and significance of the study, and how this inquiry will contribute to future research. I discuss my positionality and how my experience informs this study. In addition, the limitations/delimitations and methodology of the research are examined in this chapter.

**Background of the Study**

Colleges and universities have recently seen an increase in non-traditional Appalachian student enrollment (Jesnek, 2012, p. 12). As institutions of higher education work to support these students, it would be beneficial to understand those factors that influence the decisions of Appalachian females concerning advanced education. Policy makers, high school teachers and counselors, university/college financial aid officers, and higher education admission officers and others may want to understand what factors influence Appalachian non-traditional female students and their decision to go to college. More importantly the aforementioned professionals may be interested in what policies and practices should be present in colleges and universities to ensure matriculation of non-traditional students, particularly non-traditional Appalachian female students.

This research study is important for many reasons. The global economy requires individuals to possess the educational credentials, capabilities, and technological expertise to work in an environment with connections around the world (Beaulieu, Israel, Hartless, & Dyk, 2001). In regards to the changing economic environment, high school graduates cannot depend on higher wages unless they decide to go to college (Hutchins, Meece, Byun, & Farmer, 2012). The completion of a college degree makes a difference in earnings, benefits, and opportunities throughout a person's life (Eccles, Vida, &
Barber, 2004). In addition to the importance of receiving an education, "higher levels of educational attainment are associated with better health, healthier children, longer life expectancies and higher salaries" (Schwartz, 2004, p. 3).

In 2009 Barack Obama, President of the United States, announced that one of his priorities was to increase college readiness, attendance, and graduation (Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2012). Given the importance of a college education in today's workplace, it is important to know why some high school graduates decide not to further their education (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011). In addition, because of the increase in non-traditional college students, "student college decision-making processes are becoming an important policy concern" (Pitre, 2004, p. 16).

Rural colleges need to work closely with communities in increasing the number of high school graduates who attend and graduate from college. Fluharty and Skaggs (2007) found it to be important to rural areas that college graduates remain in the area and help build the community by starting new businesses and incorporating new ideas in the workplace. In addition, Winters (2011) suggests that educated workers help other workers be more productive.

**The Appalachian Region and Appalachia Ohio.** The Appalachian Region in the United States is a "205,000 square mile region that follows the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi" (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010, p. 1). This region includes 420 counties in 13 states. A total of "42 percent of the region's population is rural compared to 20 percent of the national population" (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010, p. 1).
Ohio is included in the north and north central sub-regions of Appalachia (Schwartz, 2004). There are 32 counties in Appalachian Ohio located in the eastern and southern portion of the state (Appalachian Regional Commission - Retrieved from http://www.arc.gov/counties).

Many families in the Appalachia region live in poverty. The median family income in the United States between 2007-2011 was $64,293 compared to the $54,433 in Appalachia (Schwartz, 2004). Median family incomes in Appalachian Ohio ranged from less than $40,000 to $64,293 (Schwartz).

A majority of Ohio's Appalachian counties report that of the population age 25 and over, approximately 10 percent to 19.9 percent have a bachelor's degree compared to the U.S. average of 28.2 percent (Schwartz, 2004). A total of seven out of 32 Ohio counties have less than 10 percent of the population age 25 and over with a bachelor's degree (Schwartz). These data do not give us the breakdown by gender.

An average of 86.9 percent of people in Appalachia ages 25-64 possess a high school diploma compared to the U.S. average of 87.5 percent (Schwartz, 2004). A majority of the Ohio counties have over 80 percent of the people aged 25-64 who possess a high school diploma (Schwartz). Two Ohio counties fall below 80 percent with one of those counties falling below 75 percent (Schwartz). These data do not give us a breakdown of the number of male and female high school graduates.

The literature provides the number of people with college degrees but the stories about how individuals make the decision to go to college is missing. The numbers and percents are stated, but the answer to why is still unclear. The Appalachian Access and
Success Project conducted by Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs surveyed Appalachian Ohio high school students in 1992 and again in 2008 (Lewis, Ruhil, Yandell & Johnson, 2008). The project was motivated by the belief that data could support the development of effective programming to assist students from Appalachia Ohio access and complete a postsecondary program.

The Access to Success Project (Lewis, Ruhil, Yandell & Johnson, 2008) identified the following "barriers to participation in higher education in Appalachian Ohio:

- Lack of information and misinformation;
- Lack of informed guidance and assistance;
- Lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem;
- Lack of encouragement;
- Lack of academic preparation" (p. 1).

One of the major barriers in attending college is the financial commitment required by the student and their parents. In addition, families lack knowledge of the financial aid process which in turn causes confusion (Schwartz, 2004). Accessing financial aid as a resource for college can be daunting.

Phillips (2007) found in his study on identity processes in Appalachian adolescents that one significant feature of Appalachian culture is fatalism revealed in the tendency to live day to day. Youth are raised to focus on the present giving little thought to the future. This fatalism characteristic could impede adolescents from making higher education decisions. In the Appalachian Access and Success Project survey (Lewis, Ruhil, Yandell & Johnson, 2008), many students stated that they did not take college-
preparatory courses. The reasons for this are unknown making this research study important. These numbers are important but as the actual lived experiences unfold over time, the story is told.

**Appalachian females.** There tends to be a pattern of traditional gender roles in Appalachian areas that shows females being strong in family matters and doing whatever it takes to keep their families together (Rezek, 2010). Even though there is an increase of Appalachian women attending college, they often put their career on hold in order to care for and support their family (Rezek). Low-income females are less likely to attend college due to family responsibilities and the need to increase their income by working (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). The events of the "Appalachian region over the past fifty years demonstrate that poverty, low family income, single parenthood, and children in poverty thrust women into unfavorable labor markets" (Couto, 2003, p. 60).

Demographic data show that in the last 50 years in Central Appalachia, women increased their rate of participation in the workforce in locations of declining employment prospects (Couto).

Appalachian stereotypes have been portrayed in many settings for centuries (Massey, 2007). For example, Appalachian women have believed that it is important to be pretty and maintain a perfect body. This perspective has been portrayed in the characters of Daisy Duke and Ellie Mae on the popular television shows of The Beverly Hillbillies and The Dukes of Hazzard (Massey). Being attractive and skinny are shown to be important as intelligence takes a back seat to what is deemed necessary for young females. If females do not fit the perfect body type, sometimes they are thought to be
lazy and often are ignored (Massey). Unfortunately, the power of images can be discriminating and lead to a negative sense of self in some individuals (Massey). This could keep women from believing they are qualified to attend college. The stereotype of Appalachian women portrays them as socially isolated, submissive, and fatalistic (Cheek & Piercy, 2008). In actuality, Appalachian women are strong and resilient (Cheek & Piercy).

**Non-traditional students.** "Enrollment of non-traditional students has increased especially at community colleges due to higher unemployment rates, the unstable economic climate, and employer demand for computer-literate employees" (Jesnek, 2012, p. 1). Today more graduates are delaying going to college (Niu & Tienda, 2013). High school graduates who "delay postsecondary enrollment are at considerable risk of not completing a college degree compared to those graduates who attend college directly after high school" (Niu & Tienda, p. 21). In addition, Niu and Tienda state that delaying college attendance is not necessarily negative if the individual takes the time to mature, to acquire employment experience, and to accumulate financial resources for college. High school graduates can plan for college, but plans can and do change due to a variety of reasons (Niu & Tienda). This research studies the reasons why high school students are not attending college after graduation.

**College preparatory experiences.** High school graduates' decisions about attending college are multi-faceted. The graduate's college decision-making is a process (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000a). Cabrera and LaNasa stated that "in undergoing each phase of the college-choice process, high school students develop predispositions to attend
college, search for general information about college, and make choices leading them to enroll at a given institution of higher education" (p. 5). Students need to decide if they are going to college, what degree to seek, how to pay for it, and what higher education institution to attend (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000b; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). The final decision to go to college depends on parental encouragement, financial situation, and the future goals of the student (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000a). The literature on college choice shows that parents, middle school, high school, and student initiative are important in developing plans concerning college enrollment (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000a). Students who acquire college qualifications for enrollment while in secondary education have a better opportunity of enrolling in college (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000a).

Many employed students with family obligations cannot afford higher education, or may feel they cannot borrow money to go to college (Schmitt & Boushey, 2012). The financial aid applications and packages are complex making it difficult for students to fully understand what is involved in the process (Schmitt & Boushey). Individuals from lower income families have the lowest college attendance and completion rates (Schmitt & Boushey). Some students may not have the ability to travel to college and feel they cannot make a choice to attend (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Low-income rural students from diverse backgrounds may not achieve college aspirations because of barriers that may influence attendance.

"Little is known about the college decision-making processes of young people" (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011, p. 1250). Pitre (2004) suggests it is important to increase research on the college decision-making processes of racial and ethnic minorities as well
as economically disadvantaged students. A decision about college may be the first major
life decision a young adult makes about their future (Galotti, Ciner, Altenbaumer, Geerts,
Rupp, & Woulfe, 2006). This research study explores how Appalachian non-traditional
female students in Ohio make the decision to attend college and what influences their
decision-making.

**Effect of social capital on college decision-making.** According to Epstein
(2011), an adolescent’s path to college is influenced by family members, teachers, and
other individuals in their life. Moreover, Epstein emphasizes the need for reciprocal
interactions between children and their parents, school personnel, and community
members in order to identify common educational and career goals for the students
(Epstein, 2011). In addition, a student's increased educational aspirations appear to be
connected to the high school they attend (Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, & Swan, 2011). Many
students set goals of graduating from high school and continuing their education (Epstein,
2011). Epstein states that "countless surveys and projects with thousands of educators,
families, and students reveal that graduating from high school and continuing their
education are common goals and dreams. Too often though these ideals are unattained
by this nation's children" (p. 3). This research may give some insight as to why these
ideals and educational goals are not attained by students after high school graduation.

It is important for the influential people in an adolescent's life to discuss the
financial reward and intrinsic value of obtaining a college degree (Jung, 2013). Limited
research has been conducted about the decisions students make concerning college, and
even less has been studied about the specific indecisions and the college decision-making
process (Jung). This is another reason why this research of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio is so important.

**Statement of the Problem**

The Appalachian area persistently experiences higher poverty and lower earnings than other areas of the United States (U.S.) (Bollinger, Ziliak, Troske, 2011). In Appalachian regions, college completion and obtainment of an advanced college degree is approximately one-half the rate of attainment compared to the rest of the U. S. (Bollinger et al.). "An educated workforce is regarded as the key to Ohio's future economic competitiveness" (Lewis, Ruhil, Yandell & Johnson, 2008, p. 2). A report by the Appalachian Regional Commission states that "the Appalachian region is catching up with the nation on some socioeconomic indicators but the region is still behind in postsecondary education" (Schwartz, 2004, p. 2). Ohio Appalachian regions need college-educated individuals to help their communities grow and prosper. This research project was designed to identify ways to increase college opportunities for Appalachian female high school students by examining their college decision-making processes.

**Research Questions**

This research examined the lived experiences of Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio, especially in the area of college decision-making in high school. To that end, the following research questions guide this study and examine the college preparatory experiences and the possible effect of social capital on these experiences:
1. What were the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio?

2. How did social capital affect the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio?

I hope that the answer to these questions will provide researchers, teachers, high school counselors, and college recruiters with a better understanding of the pre-collegiate decision-making processes and support systems of Appalachian female youth in Ohio.

**Purpose of the Research**

High school students who expect to go to college and the examination of why circumstances hinder those college plans constitutes a plausible reason to conduct future research (Niu & Tienda, 2013). The majority of the research discusses influential factors such as grades, college preparatory courses, peer relationships, and guidance from adults, involved in the high school student decision-making process, but gives minimal detail about the impact of each of the influences. Through this research, I endeavored to understand the participants' perspectives regarding how and why these Appalachian female non-traditional college students made their decisions related to higher education.

This research illuminates the voices of the participants to better understand how different factors in their lives impacted their decision-making processes about higher education. Consequently, through interviews with participants, I examined the college preparatory experiences and forms of social capital that were lacking or influential in some way in the college decision-making process of the studied students/graduates. The lived experiences of these individuals could be beneficial in finding ways to help current
and future Appalachian female high school students as they make important college attendance decisions. The participants’ stories could also be advantageous to college recruiters and high school counselors, as well as other educational leaders in Appalachia Ohio in helping them glean factors that female high school students think about when considering college matriculation.

There are research studies that give us data on Appalachian students such as the quantitative study by Wallace and Diekroger (2000) who conducted a survey of 127 college students in southern Appalachian Ohio. The survey asked students what "verbal and nonverbal messages they received regarding their pursuit of higher education" (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000, p. 140). The quantitative study by Wallace and Diekroger stated how many and what percent of the students received certain messages concerning college attendance. Wallace and Diekroger's research was intended to be a preliminary glance at various factors related to the pursuit of higher education. Even though this study was important, the detail of the students' decision-making processes is missing. It is important to get a comprehensive view of the decision-making processes that students are involved in when they look at going to college.

This qualitative study goes more into detail by listening to the participants' experiences and sharing of their stories. The stories give us more than the numbers and the percentages associated with non-traditional students. This research extends Wallace and Diekroger's (2000) study by interviewing Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio and obtaining their stories of how they made decisions concerning college matriculation.
Subjectivity

In qualitative research, it is appropriate to acknowledge any relationship the researcher may have with the topic being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As a past non-traditional female student in Appalachian Ohio, I have insights into what I have faced through my own process of making college attendance decisions. Even though I meet the qualifications of the participants, each of us has a different story to tell regarding our lived experiences.

It is possible that my lived experience as an Appalachian non-traditional female college student enabled the participants to feel more comfortable when telling their stories. Rapport and trust are necessary and important in qualitative inquiry (Glesne, 2011). My positionality is unique to my personal life history and experiences (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Takacs, 2003) and hopefully my experiences have guided me to listen and appreciate the participants' stories. While my personal story leads me to be passionate about this research, I attempted to maintain neutrality and objectivity in examining and retelling the stories of the participants in this research project. In addition, I was aware of my positionality at all times during this research (Moser, 2008).

Significance of and Contribution to Research

This research focuses on Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio and their experiences as it relates to their college preparatory experiences and social capital during their high school years. The study may contribute to increasing the college attendance rates of "young people in Appalachian areas where there is a lower level of educational attainment than in other areas of the United States" (King, 2012, p. 22).
Therefore, it is hoped that the answer to the main questions in the study will provide researchers, teachers, high school counselors, and college recruiters with a better understanding of the pre-collegiate thinking processes and support systems of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio. This study can provide educators with information on how to communicate to families who are influential in their children’s lives so they can support their children as they make future decisions concerning college attendance (Helton & Keller, 2010).

The importance of social capital is examined, and the results may be beneficial to those people, school staff, and agency personnel who are working with young people. This research can educate high school and college/university employees who need to learn more about the educational aspirations of students in order to help these individuals overcome barriers. This research can contribute to the focus that schools place on college pathways for students especially female students in Ohio Appalachian counties. Perhaps this research can demonstrate to legislators and other funding sources the need to increase the educational opportunities in rural areas that have limited educational choices (Hektner, 1995).

Framework of the Study

A conceptual framework connects the research questions to larger theoretical constructs (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The framework for this study draws on several theories and concepts. Social capital theory is used to frame this research. Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of resources and networks that individuals use to secure their position (Alfred, 2009). In addition, social capital theory assumes that an
individual's family and other relationships are an important asset that can be capitalized when needed (Alfred). Social capital theory looks at how people learn and construct knowledge through their relationships with others (Kilpatrick, Field, & Falk, 2013).

A look at the participants through a constructivist lens focuses on the socially constructed meanings that participants associate with life events they encounter (Hunter, Laursen, & Seymour, 2007; Tierney & Lincoln, 1994). This approach acknowledges that an individual's understanding of their life experiences is complex (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and must be viewed in a reflective manner. Therefore it was important to have each participant review my written profile of their story to ensure that the participant's story and the retelling of that information is correct and identifies the reflection on their college decision-making process (Tetley, Grant, & Davies, 2009).

In addition, systems theory factors into the framework of this study when looking at schools and school leadership. School systems have been the focus when people want to identify blame for problems in communities and society as a whole (Stewart, 2006). The natural and open systems models are important in developing and maintaining dynamic and harmonious relationships which are important in school and parent partnerships (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). These relationships must be equal for all students. Scott (2001) defines systemic equity in schools as "transformed ways in which systems operate to ensure that every learner has an opportunity to succeed" (p. 1). School administrators, teachers, and school board members must continually be alert to ensure that all school systems are not exhibiting any forms of inequities (Robinson, 2008; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). Schools must also look at old operational practices in
order to streamline the use of the organization's resources (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). If school administrators want to make changes in student achievement, they must be leaders who both work with teachers and who are always mindful of what is happening with students (Kearney, Kelsey, & Herrington, 2013). The literature review, in Chapter Two, provides research documentation that lends support for the theoretical perspectives that frame this study.

**Research Methodology**

Qualitative methodology is used in this research study with a phenomenological approach as the research design. In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand the context or setting of participants (Creswell, 2013). In addition, qualitative research looks to understand the life experiences of people in certain situations (FitzGerald, Dent, Seale, Kerrins, & McElvaney, 2008). Phenomenological studies examine a common concept, or phenomenon shared by several individuals (Creswell, 2013). This phenomenological study allows the researcher to capture the meaning of the participants' lived experiences during their high school years. The focus of this study is on describing the participants' college decision-making process and developing a story of lived experiences for all individuals (Creswell, 2013).

This research study consists of the stories of the lived experiences of seven participants classified as Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio. Purposeful sampling is used to select the participants in order to identify individuals who have an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The data collection procedure used is interviews. Participants completed a biographical information form that provided
additional data pertaining to their background and experiences. The data analysis phase involved systematically looking at the transcripts and identifying statements of significance and reoccurring themes. The themes emerging from the transcription of the interviews assisted in the interpretation and retelling of the experiences of the participants in their college decision-making trajectories (Hendry, 2010).

**Delimitations/Limitations of this Study**

Limitations refer to factors that the researcher cannot control. Limitations of the interview data include the possibility of distorted responses due to personal bias (Patton, 2002). As a higher education faculty member and a previous non-traditional female college student, it is possible that I may have been biased when interviewing the participants and transcribing the data. However, past experience as an Appalachian non-traditional female student adds a richness and depth to the interview and analysis process because I can relate to some of their experiences. I was mindful of the possible bias and conscious of personal perspectives and reflections on the topic studied. The findings in this study cannot be generalized since this study is bound and situated in the specific context of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Since this research involves the perspectives of the participants, the stories of their lived experiences may be limited to individuals in this context and not applicable to other individuals (Marshall & Rossman). If findings in this study are transferable, future researchers will need to determine if the findings in this study are useful for other settings (Marshall & Rossman).
Conclusion

In conclusion, this research is a phenomenological study of seven Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio. The literature focuses on Appalachia, Appalachian females, non-traditional students, college decision-making, and social capital. The significance of the study is to examine the college decision-making processes and factors that influenced the decisions of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio. The research results may provide researchers, teachers, high school counselors, and college recruiters with information that will give them a better understanding of how to support Appalachian female students in Ohio to pursue higher education opportunities.

The research study consists of five chapters. Chapter One presents an introduction to the study and demonstrates the significance of the research. Chapter Two gives an overview of the research literature pertinent to this study. Chapter Three explains the research methodology used in the study. Chapter Four documents the results of the interviews with the participants and the themes identified in the discussion of the participants' lived experiences. Chapter Five summarizes the study and offers suggestions for future research.
Definition of Terms

- **Appalachia.** The Appalachian Regional Commission defines Appalachia as "a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi and includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia." (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010, p. 1). "Forty-two percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population" (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2010, p. 1).

- **Appalachians.** Appalachians are people "who are born in or have a parent or grandparent born in the 420-county region that makes up the Appalachian region" (Helton & Keller, 2010, p. 152).

- **Cultural capital.** Cultural capital is defined as shared attitudes, preferences, knowledge, behaviors, and values that children acquire through socialization that includes cultural activities, parenting practice, and can be associated with the social class of one's parents (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Roksa & Potter, 2011).

- **Interpretation.** Interpretation in qualitative research involves "attaching significance to the data, making sense of findings, and offering explanations" (Patton, 2002, p. 480).

- **Lived experiences.** The term lived experiences is used in phenomenological studies to describe how individuals look at their life: "how they perceive it,
describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

- **Non-traditional students.** Non-traditional students are college attendees who are employed, have family responsibilities including responsibilities for dependents, are over the age of 25, and are financially independent (Carreiro & Kapitulik, 2010; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Mello, 2004; Saunders & Bauer, 1998).

- **Phenomenological approach.** "Phenomenological approaches seek to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience: how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

- **Purposeful sampling.** Purposeful sampling is often used as one of the primary sampling strategies in qualitative research. "Cases are selected because they are informative of the phenomenon being studied" (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

- **School.** School is "an organization that provides instruction; an institution for the teaching of children" (School, n.d., Web 14); the building in which learning occurs; the students; and/or the teachers, staff and administrators located in the building.

- **Social capital.** Social capital is the trust, norms, and social networks that contribute to economic well-being and positive job and career opportunities (Zhang, Anderson, & Zhan, 2011). Social capital includes resources that help produce positive outcomes. Social capital networks can include educational professionals, parents, caregivers, peers, service providers, religious
organizations, community residents, and community social agencies (Haeseler, 2011).

- **Themes.** Themes which are also known as categories are "significant statements that have particular relevance to the phenomenon being researched" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 387).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review for this research examines the Appalachian culture as it relates to family, school, and community. This includes a section on women in Appalachia. In addition, research concerning rural areas, rural youth, and rural communities are explored in this review. When looking at the lived experiences of people, it is important to consider social and cultural capital. Social capital for this study is defined as the trust, norms, and social networks that are influential in producing positive outcomes (Zhang, Anderson, & Zhan, 2011). Cultural capital is acquired by children through socialization that includes cultural activities, parenting practices, and can be associated with the social class of parents (Roksa & Potter, 2011). As a component of the literature review for this study, I considered the topic of social capital and all the various components of social capital including family, schools, and community that may be influential in the lives of children.

Children live their lives in three major contexts that include family, school, and community. Families do not exist in isolation but are linked to informal and formal networks in the community (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). Supporting children is much more than providing for their basic needs. As articulated earlier, children are influenced by different inputs and networks in their lives. Social capital networks include educational professionals, parents, caregivers, peers, service providers, religious organizations, community residents, and community social agencies (Haeseler, 2011). While interacting with these varied individuals in numerous contexts, students receive
messages about the importance of school and work ethics (Epstein, 2011). These messages can help them to make decisions concerning higher education. Research shows that parents and other family members, schools, community organizations and peers, can influence a young person’s path to college and connection to higher education institutions (Wolniak & Engberg, 2010).

Colleges and universities continue to see an enrollment increase of students over the age of twenty-five (Mello, 2004; Saunders & Bauer, 1998). These students are identified as non-traditional college students who are employed and have family responsibilities including responsibilities for dependents and are financially independent (Carreiro & Kapitulik, 2010; Gilardi & Guglielmett, 2011). Many non-traditional students are first-generation college students who face a multitude of transitional issues including a lack of social and cultural capital (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

The following sections of the literature review look at the topics and sub-topics that are examined in this research study:

- Social Capital
  - Family Social Capital
  - School Social Capital
    - School Curriculum
    - Higher Education Pathways
    - School Personnel
    - School Partnerships
Each of these topics and sub-topics are important to consider when examining the lives and decision-making of young people during their high school years because their decision-making is influenced by the Appalachian culture, rural areas, gender roles, and social and cultural capital. Further, when making decisions, young high school students often factor in input from parents, families, schools, and community members.

**Social Capital**

Social capital is defined as the "trust, norms, and social networks that contribute to economic well-being and positive job and career opportunities" (Zhang, Anderson, & Zhan, 2011, p. 119). Social capital provides information and resources (Price-Mitchell, 2009; Zhang et al., 2011) and focuses on social networks and the ways social connections
are developed and sustained. Hanifan (1916) defined social capital as "those tangible substances that count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among individuals and families" (p. 130).

Social capital represents the interpersonal relations and interactions among family, school, and community members (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Hampton & Gruenert, 2008; Kikuchi & Coleman, 2012). These relationships help connect people to additional resources such as financial, housing, and employment information that can help to improve one's life outcomes (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Trainor, 2010). Social capital can also include facilitating communication and offering social-emotional support to others (Carolan, 2010). The social-emotional support can include giving advice (Kikuchi & Coleman, 2012) to young people making decisions for attending college.

Social capital "focuses attention on the role of social relationships in promoting desirable outcomes for children" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 572). Social capital impacts the cultural, educational, social, and behavioral aspects of children (Curran, 2007). Strong positive relationships with children can connect them to resources that help them achieve in school and be successful in life.

Children obtain social capital from their families, school personnel, and community members because these individuals are important influences on them (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008; Price-Mitchell, 2009). People inside and outside the family guide children in many different contexts such as relationships formed in church, sports, and community organizational activities (Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 2001). Not only do
the social relationships provide information and resources (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006), it bonds children to other people in the school and community (Dufur et al., 2008). Young people live in different social contexts (Wolniak & Engberg, 2010). Children’s relationships with other adults are important as children get older (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008). These other adults can be positive role models for the teens and younger children as well. Young people acquire shared perceptions of adult life through continual exposure to adult members in and outside of their family and social institutions (Crockett and Bingham, 2000). A child who has access to social capital has an increased chance of success in school as well as a more productive adult life (White & Glick, 2000). Research shows that where social capital levels are higher, children are better educated (Putnam, 2007).

**Family social capital.** Family social capital is the "investment of parents in their children and their children’s social structures" (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008, p. 147). A family’s social capital determines the opportunities afforded to the children and the interactions they have with others. Literature suggests that children benefit from and are connected to the social capital of their parents (Shriner, Mullis, Shriner, 2010). When parents reach out and seek opportunities for their children and themselves, there are benefits that impact the family as a whole and trickle down to children individually. Parents both consciously and unconsciously influence the human capital of their children (White & Glick, 2000). Parents provide a wide variety of social capital, such as establishing and reinforcing values and behaviors (Crosnoe, 2004) through guidance (Haff, Fitzpatrick, & Floyd, 2010), interactions with their children (Dufur et al, 2008), and
a variety of nurturing activities (Israel & Beaulieu, 2004). When social capital is lacking, opportunities for families to encourage their children's academic and future life success, can be restricted (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The lack or possible decrease in social capital can also be detrimental to the family as a whole.

One of the ways to increase a child's social capital is to provide socialization opportunities with other children and adults in the school and in the community (Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). Parents’ financial and human capital are also important in the school lives of their children (Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997). Opportunities and positive interactions are important to student success (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001). Plagens (2010) found that social capital in the family is linked to higher test scores that lead to further success in other areas of a child’s education. A parent's participation in their child's education can be beneficial in promoting positive student achievements (Semke & Sheridan, 2012), such as higher grades, better attendance, and development of educational goals.

Griffin, Hutchins, and Meece (2011) acknowledge that studies indicate that parental expectation and encouragement are valuable in the development of their child's college and career goals. The education level of parents is a major factor as to whether their children will go to college (Hands & Payne, 2008). Students whose parents went to college have greater access to knowledge and information on what is needed to go to college (Hands & Payne). "Well-educated parents and those in professional or managerial occupations tend to engage their children in discussions about higher education" (McGrath, Swisher, Elder, & Conger, 2001, p. 247). A parent’s knowledge of the
necessary academic requirements and financial planning resources can help their children move successfully towards college enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000a). High school graduates "having parents who had not attended college is another characteristic that reduces the likelihood of going to college" (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000, p. 46).

In contrast, family support appears to be minimal for many low-income and first-generation students (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009). Thus, a parent's socio-economic status and education can influence whether their children attend college (Johnson, 2008). School personnel need to facilitate a student's knowledge about attending college. It is important to encourage underserved students to strive for higher academic achievement and thoughts of going to college (Weinstein & Savitz-Romer, 2009).

The location of the college is important to parents when their children are deciding about college attendance (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Some Appalachian high school graduates and their families prefer the graduate to attend college close to home (Turley, 2009). Attending college close to home allows the student to continue to be supported by the family unit.

Many low-income parents are not knowledgeable concerning the college decision-making process. Parents may want their children to attend college but they may not know how to obtain financial aid information or how to complete a college application. Students with a minimal amount of information concerning college and financial aid are less likely to seek higher educational opportunities on their own (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009).
Adolescence is a great time for youth to start developing independence in certain aspects from their parents that will help allow them to become independent adults (Yelle, Kenyon, & Koerner, 2009). As students transition into high school and graduate, they start developing a connectedness and separateness from their parents (Yelle et al.). A successful student experience in their move from high school to college can be important for the student's advancement (Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007).

**School social capital.** Schools are an "important source of capital for students by providing advice, guidance, and support" (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p. 554). As noted earlier, school social capital is described as the connections between parents, students, and school personnel that support educational attainment (Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). Schools provide educational and social environments which help increase a student’s social capital due to many hours spent in school and after school in sports and other activities (Crosnoe, 2004). Social capital helps students access other forms of capital (Perna & Titus, 2005), such as cultural and economic capital that can be beneficial when making decisions about college.

Research suggests that "social capital has a major impact on student achievement and promotes good health in children" (Howard, 2006, p. 246). If children are healthy, it can benefit them academically and in other aspects of their life. Although parents are considered their child's first teacher, teachers spend most of the time on weekdays with school-age children (Plagens, 2010). As a consequence, it is important for teachers to be aware of the home life and physical condition of students to enable these educators to have a complete perspective about student needs. The additional information on students
can assist teachers in navigating students toward success in schools. Parents can facilitate efforts in support of student advancement by providing an environment for their children to be healthy and safe.

Social networks at school and in the community can assist students in obtaining further education and making successful educational career choices. It is important that teachers raise the aspirations of their students (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). School leaders need to motivate and involve students in the educational process (Kampits, 1996) and assist them in thinking about their future. Elementary age children can be introduced to different jobs by having people from different occupations visit the classrooms (Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). Research suggests middle school is an appropriate time to begin career and educational goal programs, rather than waiting until high school to work with students (Wahl & Blackhurst). Career planning in middle school teaches students to be purposeful in planning their future (Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005). Wahl and Blackhurst (2000) recommend involving parents and community members in career planning for students. College-preparatory activities and programs found in schools can be beneficial in helping students make decisions about attending college (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000).

Social and cultural capital influence a student’s access to higher education (Swail, 2000). Strong and weak relationships influence a student's educational outcome (Perna, & Titus, 2005). The path to college is influenced by human, social, educational, and cultural capital (Myers, Brown & Pavel, 2010). A student's educational goals are often
influenced by parents, school staff and friends (Choy, Horn, Nunez & Chen, 2000; Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011; Smith & Zhang, 2009).

Factors attributed to higher academic achievement include psychological and biological factors, family environment, school teachers and counselors, and friends (Chenowith & Galliher, 2004). Factors influencing adolescents’ hopes and dreams for their future are societal norms, community characteristics and environment, family variables, and individual expectations (Crockett and Bingham, 2000; Garasky, 2002). The results of a study by Crockett and Bingham (2000) pointed to the possible influence of societal norms, cultural values, community characteristics, family variables, and individual factors on adolescents’ expectations about their future lives. Factors that guide youth toward higher education are college planning, academic achievement, race, family engagement, socioeconomic class, career opportunities, and school and mentor influences (King, 2012).

Prioritizing educational goals is important for young people in maintaining high achievement and planning their future (Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanli, & Worthman, 2009). Some indicators of college enrollment include academic planning, financial assets, information regarding colleges, and parent encouragement (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Parents, peers, and school officials contribute to increasing college enrollment of students by helping them obtain resources and plan for their future college life (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000).

Having friends who attend college can be persuasive in a student’s decision to attend college (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000). High school students get most of
their information concerning college attendance from friends, family members, schools, and the internet (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009). It is imperative for school staff to supply students and parents with information about college (King, 2012). Chenowith and Galliher (2004) suggest parents and peers appear to be more influential for males, while schools and academic preparation appear to be more influential for females. Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanli, and Worthman (2009) highlight the importance of social support and resources that schools provide for the completion of educational goals of students. In that same vein, Smith and Zhang (2009) highlight the importance of partnerships among high schools and colleges and universities as a way to prevent possible disconnect between the two educational systems which can otherwise negatively influence students' desires to pursue post-secondary education and attend college/university courses regularly.

**School curriculum.** Low self-esteem can prevent high school graduates from attending college because they believe they lack the academic potential to succeed (Chenowith & Galliher, 2004). In a research study of rural Appalachian high school students, Ali and Saunders found that "interventions need to be designed to enhance students’ confidence in their abilities to complete every day high school tasks and to help them connect these tasks to their future career goals and advancement within careers that are culturally consistent" (Ali & Saunders, 2009, p. 186). In addition to the curriculum, Yelle, Kenyon, and Koerner (2009) found that schools which offer programs that help students develop independence and self-help skills are beneficial when it comes time for high school graduates to transition to college.
Pre-college programs motivate and prepare students for higher education (Swail, 2000). Education beyond high school is important for low-income students who may not receive the necessary support from their family, community, and schools. Schools building a culture focusing on students attending college have been shown to increase the number of graduates who attend college (Weinstein & Savigz-Romer, 2009). College attendance "can be related to the academic quality of the high school" (Johnson, 2008, p. 791) the student attended.

Academic courses prepare students for college whereas technical courses prepare students for immediate job opportunities (Williams, 2005). Most public schools have curriculum in place that meets or exceeds the minimum requirements for admission to college (Williams). It is important for high schools to partner with higher education entities in developing college outreach programs and identifying what courses and testing instruments are required for entrance to college (Weinstein & Savigz-Romer, 2009). "The principle goal of partnerships is to increase the number of students making successful transitions to college" (Fowler & Luna, 2009, p. 63).

**Higher education pathways.** High school students must decide if the career they desire requires a college education. Developing a vocational identity by focusing on educational aspirations and abilities is important in the development of high school students and their transition to adulthood (Stringer, Kerpelman, & Skorikov, 2012). High schools influence student college preparation and educational opportunities (Wolniak & Engberg, 2010).
Hoachlander (2008) defines pathways as technical study and academic college-preparatory courses. Pathways to educational opportunities should be available for all students (Mojkowski & Washor, 2007). Hoachlander (2008) suggests that students should not have to choose a path toward career or a path toward higher education. Pathways can lead students to both areas for their future. High schools creating academic pathways allows for all students to be successful and prepared for life after graduation (Williams, 2005). Work ethic and academic skills are helpful attributes for students to cultivate in order to transition and succeed in college (Smith & Zhang, 2009).

Continuing education is important to the global and local economy (Siegel, 2009). Education provides the qualifications for secure and higher paid job opportunities (Latimer & Oberhauser, 2005). The ability to make current income versus future income can be a determining factor as to whether high school graduates attend college (Chenowith & Galliher, 2004). It is important for graduates to know that adults with a college education have greater job prospects and usually earn more than adults without a college degree (Wilson & Gore, 2009). Wahl and Blackhurst (2000) suggest that it is important for schools to ensure that occupational stereotypes are not placed on students in ways that might influence their decisions to attend college, such as certain students belong in service occupations while other students belong in white collar professional jobs requiring higher education. These occupational stereotypes are often based on gender, race, socio-economic class, and/or academic ability. High school students question whether higher education makes any difference with regards to their job prospects (Bickel, Weaver, & Williams, 2001). Wahl and Blackhurst (2000) recommend...
that career guidance programs furnish practical and realistic information about postsecondary options. Information concerning different professions can assist students in the college decision-making process. Ali and Saunders (2009) found that students will generally pursue higher education if they are confident in their abilities to complete high school courses.

**School personnel.** It is key for school personnel to support students and promote high expectations for their academic growth (Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005). When students plan and set educational goals, they stay focused on obtaining higher education after high school (Trusty et al., 2005). Trusty et al. suggest that conducting meetings with teachers, counselors, parents, and students would be advantageous to the student in helping her develop and pursue educational goals after high school.

Teachers are important people in the school lives of children. Their relationship with children is a valuable resource that affects student achievement (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Plagens, 2010). When teachers understand how students obtain social capital, school staff are able to assist in making obtainment of these resources accessible for all students (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Students achieve at higher rates when teachers are optimistic and support positive relationships with parents (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011). It is important for teachers to partner with parents throughout the school experience of their children. Cox and Witko (2008) state that school staff should persuade parents to have sustained school involvement once they show an interest in being part of the school activities of their child. This continual
monitoring of parental involvement by educators takes time and teachers do not always have the extra time it takes to connect with parents.

School counselors are vital to student growth by providing academic help and positive guidance about school programs (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). School counselors can provide students with a wide range of information on career and post-secondary educational options (Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000) so that students become aware of which occupations require a college education. As counselors know and understand the aspirations and expectations of students for their future life (Bryan et al., 2009; Mau et al., 1998), they can better encourage and support students’ educational and vocational development (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009; Mau, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998).

Counselors need to be attentive of each student’s home life and other racial and socio-economic issues involved with that student (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009; Mau, Hitchcock, & Calvert, 1998). It is important for counselors to be cognizant of the students’ racial/cultural differences and familial attitudes and expectations toward work and education (Bryan et al., 2009; Mau et al., 1998). School counselors can also fulfill leadership roles as they work with students, parents, higher education staff, and community members. In addition, counselors are also important in establishing and sustaining programs for family and school partnerships (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) found in their study of high school students that students need support systems when thinking about college. They affirmed that school counselors are beneficial in
assisting students in high school navigate the college application procedures. Career counseling programs should be a priority in schools (Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005). It is helpful for students to have consistent advisors during high school in order to feel more secure in their college seeking experience (Hands & Payne, 2008). This assistance can be very important for students whose parents have limited knowledge and resources concerning college and the enrollment process. Hands and Payne recommend that counselors and other school leaders start engaging students and their parents in the college preparation process in elementary school. This is important because students start considering which high school courses they will take during junior high school. It is unfortunate that most elementary schools do not have any counselors in their building. The college and career counseling positions are usually seen in junior and senior high school buildings.

**School partnerships.** Principals cannot be expected to fulfill all of the leadership roles in the schools. School administrators with the support of their superintendent and school board can identify leaders who can write plans that will help in developing partnerships. These plans should establish goals, design activities (Epstein, 2011) and develop mission statements (Sanders & Lewis, 2005) that have student success at its core. These plans are best with continuous improvement mechanisms in place (Epstein, 2011) and conflicts and concerns addressed in a timely fashion. To keep all facets of the program flowing, the plans and activities should be conveyed to all partners.

"School, family, and community partnerships are collaborative relationships among teachers, principals, parents, and community members" (Bryan & Henry, 2012, p.
Partnerships are attitude, vision, and data driven (Bryan & Henry, 2012). "In partnerships, educators, families, and community members work together to share information, guide students, solve problems, and celebrate successes" (Epstein, 2011, p. 4).

Student outcomes are affected by many issues such as social outcomes (Woolley, Grogan-Kaylor, Gilster, Karb, Gant, Reischl, & Alaimo, 2008), parental factors, and the school environment. When students have nurturing relationships with the adults in his or her life, their ability to develop academic and social competencies are enhanced (Mashburn & Piana, 2006). Parent and community involvement in the school lives of students can help students raise their grades, have better attendance, and improve behavior (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2007).

Recent federal legislation has required schools to have more involvement with parents, community members, and community organizations. School reform and legislators require schools to partner with parents and make parent involvement a priority (Catsambis, 2001). Beaulieu and Israel (2005) stated that "while dedicated to the improvement of student achievement, federal and state policymakers, educational leaders, community leaders, and parents must recognize one important fact; academic success is not solely the responsibility of public schools" (p. 44). The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) enacted in 2001 focused on school reform with family and community partnerships identified as important in increasing student success (Beaulieu & Israel; Gordon & Louis, 2009). NCLB requires schools to coordinate parent involvement (Epstein, 2005). "School districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their
parent involvement policies and programs and demonstrate innovative initiatives in order to obtain federal education funds" (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000, p. 101). Parent involvement includes parenting, communication between families and schools, learning activities at home, attending school functions, attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, parent involvement in school decision-making, and parents interacting in the community (Epstein, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). It is important that parent involvement "benefit the children’s educational outcomes and future success" (Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettitt, 2004, p. 1491). Parent-teacher conferences are great opportunities for both groups to exchange information and provide each other with the support needed to help the student achieve success (Minke & Anderson, 2003).

Parents, teachers, and other adults in the community are important in the social and academic lives of children (Epstein, 2001; Vazquez-Nuttall, Li, & Kaplan, 2006). Epstein (2001) refers to these connections as bridges that children travel every day building interpersonal relationships that overlap each other (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). These relationships and resources can be obtained from a variety of people and places. Resources categorized as information, norms, and support flow through these relational ties at different levels and through different networks (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Crosnoe, 2004).

*Parents.* Parents and other adult family members are important in children's lives. Families are considered to be the primary source of social capital (Crosnoe, 2004; Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008). Families regardless of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic
status care and are concerned about their children’s success in school (Epstein, 2001). Families of all socio-economic incomes and backgrounds are involved at home, but "families with higher income and social capital tend to be more involved at school" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 35). Schools need to communicate with every parent in spite of their educational or socioeconomic backgrounds (Muscott, Szczesniul, Berk, Staub, Hoover, & Perry-Chisholm, 2008).

Parent involvement is important in a child's academic, social, and emotional development (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Parental involvement is important in educational programs that support disadvantaged groups of students in helping them build confidence and inspire them to obtain further education (Perna & Titus, 2005). Schools can provide social capital for students who have fewer opportunities for obtaining capital from their home (Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). To do this effectively, teachers must get to know their students, parents, and the home environment of the families to understand their home life and be sensitive to those at risk or are in crisis (Haeseler, 2011). Home visits by teachers can provide this opportunity. When teachers conduct home visits with children and their families, positive relationships can be built. These relationships can help support students in their academic endeavors and provide support when making decisions about college.

Parents can be involved at home with educational activities, at school in the classroom, or attending a parent conference or school event (Vazques-Nuttall, Li, & Kaplan, 2006). Research shows that all three levels of involvement are beneficial to children. Parents oversee their children’s educational upbringing by being involved in
their children’s school and encouraging parents/children to be involved in community activities (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). "Parents' availability to care for their children is often determined by their job benefits and working condition" (Heymann & Earle, 2000, p. 835), which could also include availability for involvement with their child's school. Creative solutions by school leaders can reduce barriers that keep parents from being involved with their children’s education.

Collaboration is a pathway towards meeting the educational needs of students (Hands, 2010). Family and school partnerships have been known to impact children's academic trajectory (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008) and enhance the educational process (Comer & Haynes, 1991). To promote student learning, school and home partnerships should have goals and be focused on the assets parents can bring to the partnership in promoting student learning (Epstein, 2001). Family, school, and community partnerships can benefit students by providing them with knowledge and resources that inspire them to further their education (Burbank & Hunter, 2008).

Families and schools face a multitude of challenges; therefore, partnerships with written policies address plans to meet each group’s needs (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Voorhis, 2010). The students, parents, and school staff should be involved in the writing of the policies and plans. The writing of the policies and plans is important, but revisiting and improving them are equally important. It is important that the school environment be encouraging and supportive of their partnerships with parents and for parents to have an honest relationship with school staff and a readiness to put the child at the center of the partnership (Muscott, Szczesiul, Berk, Staub, Hoover, & Perry-Chisholm, 2008).
Through involvement with the school, parents get a better idea on what is expected in the learning environment and how to align those expectations for their children at home (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Parents also have higher aspirations for their children when they feel positive about parental relationship with the school (Smith, Connell, Wright, Sizer, Norman, Hurley, & Walker, 1997). Epstein and Sanders (2000) suggest that it is important for schools to share involvement of educational responsibilities with parents. Epstein (2011) refers to this as "overlapping spheres of influence" (p. 69) that are a part of Epstein's framework for parental involvement in schools. Epstein (2011) stated the degree of overlap is controlled by time, family experience, and leadership experience in schools.

Dewey (1897) stated that school life should complement the life experiences a child learns at home and vice versa. Parents in collaboration with school staff can be instrumental in advancing children's welfare and success (Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010; Hampton & Gruener, 2008). This is key to student/adolescent academic advancement, since we know that family and school collaborations have a positive influence on children's academic success (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008). These partnerships enhance the educational process and are beneficial in promoting student academic success and future educational goals leading toward college (Tedin & Weiher, 2011).

Parental involvement promotes college enrollment by communicating norms and standards (Perna & Titus, 2005). Parent involvement in school activities, parent-child discussions concerning college, and parents saving for college are vital in affecting the decision-making process that influence high school graduates to attend college (Rowan-
Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Parent involvement is also important in career education programs found in schools (Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 2001). Collaboration between parents and school counselors is important when advising students about colleges and careers (Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011). Ali and Saunders (2006) recommend that schools provide ways to include a student's family in developing their children's educational and career goals. One way is for schools to send invitations to parents asking them to be involved in their child’s education at school. "Invitations generated by positive school climate are significant because they suggest strongly that parents are welcome at school and that their involvement is important, expected, and supported" (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005, p. 110).

Hemmings (2007) found that mentors of high school students assist in acquiring the cultural and social capital students require to go to college by providing resources they and their parents need. Access to strong networks and social capital provide resources for students who are interested in attending college (Engberg & Wolniak, 2010). These resources are shared with students and parents in order for decisions to be made about the student's future. Information about college access could also be beneficial to parents who may want to further their own education. When students, families, schools, and communities work together, children have more successful outcomes and higher academic achievement (Sanders, 2008).

Community. When looking back in history, we see communities involved in building schools, as well as hiring teachers and committing resources to be used by students and teachers. Public schools are thought to be an extension of their community
The involvement of the community in schools has grown and decreased at different times throughout history. School and community partnerships can have an effect on the educational progress of students (Beaulieu & Israel, 2005) and help to promote the positive development of children (Hands, 2010).

When families and schools are embedded in communities, they influence each other (Smith, Connell, Wright, Sizer, Norman, Hurley, & Walker, 1997). The center of the home, school, and community partnerships and relationships should always focus on the student (Epstein, 2011). It is important that family, school, and community partnerships be created with a shared vision and a mutual respect among the members (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Epstein, 2011).

Failure in education is linked to almost every other social problem and schools have the ability to play an important role in social cohesion in their community (Kotler, 2010). Kotler suggests that schools should not look at this role as an additional responsibility. In addition, Kotler states that schools should strive to produce graduates who are well-rounded and have the knowledge, communication skills, and the work ethic to help their community grow.

When teachers and principals are involved in the community, it exposes their students to more experiences and resources than the school can provide by itself that would help to increase the social capital of students (Hands, 2010; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004). Educational leaders need to be involved and knowledgeable about the community to inform students and families about the resources that are available to them. These resources can include information about recreation centers, libraries, community
agencies, resource centers, and colleges. Community members must be made to feel welcome when they enter the school in order to feel valued as contributors to the school/parent/community partnership (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011). Community members may share values and be of like mind on social issues (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996) but it is important for the school climate to be welcoming and value diversity (Epstein, 2011).

Rural communities have strong ties among its members (Hektner, 1995). The strong ties include intergenerational relationships. Some young people lessen their academic and career aspirations to stay in their community (Hektner). Rural communities see youth as their future and necessary to sustain the community life (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996). Community residents and businesses have a role in the well-being of young members in the community (Blank, Johnson, & Shah, 2003). Communities provide valuable support systems and nurturing environments for students (Israel, Beaulieu & Hartless, 2001). When young people are provided with a nurturing environment, their academic outcomes improve.

Student achievement is high when schools partner with community members and organizations (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011). "Outside work can complement what goes on in the classroom in ways that benefit both the community and students" (Prentice, 2007, p. 135). Schools involved in community-based partnerships teach students the responsibility of improving the quality of life in the place in which they live (Blank, Johnson, & Shah, 2003). One way to teach civic responsibility is through place-based education that is defined as using the local community and environment to teach
educational concepts (Sobel, 2004). Place-based education demonstrates to students that they can become valued members of their community (Smith, 2002). Building relationships with community members in place-based educational environments provides students with social capital that is beneficial in both life skills and life decisions.

Community members have an understanding of community history, culture, and dynamics of its residents. Community partners can provide schools with resources, experiences, and skill-building opportunities (Blank, Johnson, & Shah, 2003) that can enrich and deepen the curriculum, thus strengthening the learning process of students. These community assets can be associated with the money or human resources that community members donate to the schools (Beaulieu & Israel, 2005). Communities have many avenues of untapped resources of knowledge and skills. Religious and community organizations have the ability to network these supports and reach out to help educate children and support families (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Haeseler, 2011; Smith, Connell, Wright, Sizer, Norman, Hurley, & Walker, 1997). Epstein and Sanders (2000) state that communities influence students’ future and improve their chances for success.

Community members can teach students problem-solving, team-building, and communication skills (Gonsalves, 2011) which can benefit them in their futures. The community members can also teach students a sense of social justice which is a belief in equality for all, a respect for all people, a concern for the well-being of others, and taking responsibility for one's community (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Ludden, 2011). The accumulation of social capital resources found in the community through involvement in social organizations and team activities has been shown to reduce violence related
outcomes in youth (Haff, Fitzpatrick, & Floyd, 2010). These positive social relationships with community members can provide adolescents with support and encouragement when they become overwhelmed by academic or personal problems (Croninger & Lee, 2001). When making decisions to attend college, it is key for students to have personal connections with many adults who will help them through the college counseling process.

Cox and Witko (2008) found in their study that education and church attendance were highly correlated with student participation in activities and success in schools. As children get older, relationships with positive people outside of their family become important and are worth the effort and expenditure of resources (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008; Woolley, Grogan-Kaylor, Gilster, Karb, Gant, Reischl, & Alaimo, 2008). Involvement of high school students in different community activities and organizations often influences their educational performance (Israeli & Beaulieu, 2004) by providing non-family adults who can assist them in making decisions about higher education.

School staff and administrators rely on the support of their communities in order to maintain positive relationships with educational leaders, legislators, and families (Hoy & Hannum, 1997). The organization of community members and parents can monitor the local school’s performance and make demands on the school when the performance is inadequate (Fruchter, 2007). This can indirectly lead to student success. School and community partnerships can include the following support services: health and mental health services, tutoring, adult education and GED programs, job training, career counseling, and social activities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
Schools are a reflection of their community and schools differ in location and their ability to enhance social capital for children (Israel & Beaulieu, 2004). Various components of a community, including proximity and stability, can influence the amount of social capital for its residents. States are reducing educational funding and schools are looking at their communities to help generate resources to support student learning. Sanders & Lewis (2005) suggest that school staff should listen to community partners when establishing relationships that can realistically be beneficial to both entities.

Dewey (1897) believed children learn through the actions and feelings associated with belonging to a group. He felt children’s instincts experienced in different situations would help them learn what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Children receive a moral education, appropriate socialization, and positive values through their relationships with people in the community (Dufur, Parcel, & McKune, 2008; Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001). Community norms, values and employment opportunities influence the educational and career goals of students (Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011).

Adult involvement in schools and community activities is important in the development of adolescents (Wilson & Gore, 2009). Appalachian youth trust that adults in the community look out for their best interests and care about their future (Helton & Keller, 2010; Templeton, Bush, Lash, Robinson, & Gale, 2008). Young people’s hopes and dreams are important to them, and they rely on their supportive relationships when they experience difficulty (Phillips, 2010). Communities can provide opportunities for young people in their community. This could be through sports teams, community activities, library resources, and religious-based activities. By providing these
opportunities, children get to meet and interact with other adults and children they may not have the chance to meet at school or through family life.

When discussing school-community partnerships, Bauch (2001) states that "partnerships are built on social interaction and relationships that promote agency within a community for the development of the common good" (p. 208). By building trust among students, parents, school staff, and local residents and businesses, the community can grow and youth may feel more a part of their community. Dewey (1897) acknowledged that communities should use resources to help educate the children in the community that will assist in moving their society forward. Schools have the ability to improve and support communities by offering a place where people can gather socially and in times of need (Umphrey, 2007). Social connections, economic status, and place attachment influence the decisions of young people as to whether they leave their community (Barcus & Brunn, 2009).

Epstein and VanVoorhis (2010) found it to be important for communities to build strong partnerships with local schools and parents in order to promote student learning by providing leadership and resources to assist schools in developing collaborations. Hampton and Gruenert (2008) emphasize the importance of utilizing time and resources to build rapport between schools and parents. It is important that educators teach young people to look beyond their personal benefits and to look at how they can serve and produce benefits for others in their community (Gilead, 2009). A college education provides individuals with the capacities to help build their community. The decision to
attend college and receive a degree has a trickledown effect that benefits others besides the college graduate.

**School Leadership**

When a school’s culture includes postsecondary expectations, higher-level academic curriculum, and pre-college activities, a student is apt to move forward with higher education (Fowler & Luna, 2009; Weinstein & Savigz-Romer, 2009). Culture is how an organization functions and the manner in which these norms, beliefs, ways of thinking, and values are communicated (Burke, 2008; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Yukl (2010) states that leaders can influence the culture of the school directly or indirectly and this influence may be evidenced through symbols, slogans, rituals, and ceremonies.

An organization is open when there is interaction between the internal and external environments (Burke, 2008). Systems thinking focuses on relationships (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Schools are systems that share and overlap with different environments such as families and communities. Systems thinking in schools involves not only looking at parent/community/school relationships but also viewing the instructional and leadership components (Price-Mitchell, 2009). The development of steps for creating and maintaining parent/community/school partnerships should include school administrators, principals, instructional leaders, board members, and parents (Price-Mitchell, 2009).

Transformational leaders change the outlook and behavior of their followers (Boga & Ensari, 2009). Burke defined transformational change as a change in strategy,
leadership and/or culture (Burke 2008). Ruggieri described transformation leaders as the following:

"Transformational leaders increase their followers’ level of interest, respect the group’s obligations and mission, demonstrate qualities which induce respect and pride, become role models, and examine new prospects for solving problems and reaching goals by encouraging followers to find new solutions and propose new ideas." (Ruggieri, 2009, p. 1018)

Schools administrators must be ethical leaders who respect social justice, care about others, have high morals, and conduct themselves in a principled manner (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). School leaders with good moral character, authentic and honest, and focused on the well-being of others including staff and students allow transformation in programs and people (Bass, 2003; Bass & Steidimeier, 1999).

Principals are critical to the success of schools because as leaders they are responsible for shaping the culture and climate of the school building. Transformational school leaders are considered instructional leaders and they should motivate and challenge educators as well as their students (Stewart, 2006). Principals who cultivate a school culture of academic optimism and high expectations try to promote an environment of academic achievement for all students (Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Stewart, 2006). When principals directly support family and community, the partnerships are long-lasting and beneficial to the educational future of young people (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011). Rural principals may play many roles including teaching responsibilities, administrative tasks, and public relations (Myran, Sanzo, & Clayton,
2011). Principals struggle trying to find ways to balance all the shareholders' interests (Stewart, 2006).

Previous research has shown that "superintendents of academically successful school districts share similar leadership practices and approaches" (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012, p. 1). Superintendents in rural communities lead a public life as leaders in their communities (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012). Since superintendents are seen as leaders, they have the unique opportunity to instill higher expectations in all students and stress the need to pursue higher education (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012). It is imperative that school boards help to guide the role of school leaders so that they can show how their work is vital to the students' educational goals (Stewart, 2006).

School leaders understand that schools and their community are linked (Budge, 2006). Rural communities often face economic insecurity that may affect their school systems (Budge). In their research on rural schools, Myran, Sanzo, and Clayton found that "leaders in rural areas must be well versed in weaving together faith organizations, libraries, public parks, and other social service resource organizations" (Myran, Sanzo, & Clayton, 2011 p. 688). These school administrators who map the assets in their community can see what opportunities are available in order to begin establishing school and community partnerships (Bryan & Griffin, 2010). Assets can be in the form of people, materials, placement opportunities, or money. The focus when completing an asset map is on assets not deficiencies by mapping the gifts and skills of individuals, families, and community organizations (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996; Ordonez-Jasis &
Myck-Wayne, 2012). In their research on school, family and community connections, Henderson and Mapp found that "programs that successfully connect with families and community invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 43). School teachers and administrators must be receptive to parents and connect with them in equal partnership so that everyone can learn from each other in order to support children (Biddle, 2012).

Educational leaders can influence young people and should feel a responsibility to find a multitude of ways to help students be successful. Raffo and Reeves (2000) found that school social capital networks held children at the core, and students were provided with reliable opportunities and resources to enhance learning. Relationships with educational leaders are found to significantly reduce the rate of high school dropouts, increase student attendance, increase academic success, and reduce negative behavior issues (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Sheldon, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). In addition, it is important for educational leaders to understand the concept of capital and how it can work to promote positive outcomes for all students (Johnson, Hess, Larson, Wise, 2010).

**Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital is widely shared attitudes, behaviors and formal knowledge used for social and cultural exclusion which can be shared from one generation to the next (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). These attitudes and behaviors may be shared by family members or in the broader community environment. In addition, cultural capital is seen as cultural competencies, skills, and abilities that are important in a specific setting.
(Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Cultural capital can include access to books, computers, and artwork in the home (Winkle-Wagner).

There has been recent research on whether cultural capital influences a student's grades. Lareau and Weininger described cultural capital as "a supplementary resource - one that is ancillary to ability - that students may draw on in interests of school success (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 574). It is important for educators to understand the cultural capital a student may possess in order to know the student's background and to individualize instruction for them (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

"Students with cultural capital have better relationships with their teachers" (Wildhagen, 2009, p. 173) because it promotes better communication with adults. Wildhagen's study (2009) found that cultural capital influences academic achievement which improves students' expectations for future educational opportunities. The disadvantaged students who have less cultural capital may not have positive relationships with school staff, and therefore do not seek information about higher education opportunities (Wildhagen, 2009). In her study, Wildhagen found the following concerning advantages students:

"Students from advantaged backgrounds have better experiences in high school than less-advantaged peers. Cultural capital is one resource that privileged parents and students can draw upon to maintain their educational advantages. " (Wildhagen, 2009, pp. 173-174)

Students lacking cultural capital are regularly assigned to classrooms that do not promote the importance of higher education (Bernhardt, 2013).
Parent involvement allows school staff to access the cultural capital of parents that helps to improve academic standards (Reay, 2004). A study by Bernhardt (2013) shows how college-readiness programs in schools helps to establish a college going culture in student homes. These programs provide information about college preparation courses and college admission and financial aid applications that could be beneficial in the college decision-making process (Bernhardt).

**Rural Appalachia**

People of Appalachia are those "who are born in or have a parent or grandparent born in the 420-county region that makes up the Appalachian region" of the United States (Helton & Keller, 2010, p. 152). Appalachian regions are sometimes described as areas of high unemployment, extreme poverty, lack of transportation, and a lack of career and educational opportunities (Ali & Saunders, 2009; Ali & Saunders, 2006; Chenowith & Galliher, 2004; Helton & Keller, 2010). The Appalachian regions are more disadvantaged in the areas of educational attainment, employment, and income than in other areas of the United States (Latimer & Oberhauser, 2005).

Educated people, older people, and people who have more longevity in the region are more likely to identify with Appalachia (Cooper, Knotts, & Livingston, 2010). Appalachians view themselves as self-sufficient, trustworthy, and morally sound (Lukyanova & Calsanti, 2009). Some of the values and beliefs of Appalachians are independence, self-reliance, family, and sense of place that refers to attachment to the community, family, and the land (Barcus & Brunn, 2009; Helton & Keller, 2010).
Rural areas are characterized by low-income families, lack of parental education, larger number of children in the family, and lack of economic diversity (Latimer & Oberhauser, 2005; Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). Israel and Beaulieu (2004) found that rural communities face a set of structural issues, such as isolation and inequality that reduce social capital and work against academic success. This limited capacity to build social capital can develop an environment that does not support educational success (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001).

Sometimes rural communities and schools struggle to provide educational resources to young people. "Rural settings present unique conditions that influence the availability and delivery of coordinated family-school services" (Semke & Sheridan, 2012, p. 23). Families in rural areas often travel many miles to participate in school activities and access community services. The cost of fuel can be seen as a deterrent and can limit a student's ability to be involved in the school and community. Rural community leaders need to be proactive in helping children and families to engage in activities and obtain resources that will ensure academic success for children with the promise of a good future in the community.

**Rural Appalachian families.** Key elements of Appalachian rural areas are family and community ties (Diddle & Denham, 2010). Familial relationships are considered to be strong influences on Appalachian people (Helton & Keller, 2010). Appalachian families have a strong sense of commitment to the place in which they and past generations have lived (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). Strong Appalachian family
and community ties could be due to lack of transportation or infrastructure that isolates them from the outside world (Tang & Russ, 2007).

Appalachian families think responsibility for socialization of young people should be shared by community organizations such as churches and social clubs (Templeton, Bush, Lash, Robinson, & Gale, 2008). It is common for Appalachian youth to not want to move away from family because family and community represent an environment that is comfortable for them (Salyers & Ritchie, 2006).

Rural parents are not different than other parents in that they want their children to succeed in life (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996). The definition of success in a rural setting may be defined differently by students, parents, school personnel, and community members. Some families tell their children that college is a waste of time out of fear of them leaving home and the community (Ali & Saunders, 2009). There are still many parents in rural areas that value physical work over professional work (Chenowith & Galliher, 2004). Sometimes the family conditions, such as poverty and lack of employment contribute to the need for the high school graduate to get a job versus going to college (Ali & Saunders, 2009). A high school graduate's desire to help support their family could outweigh their decision to attend college.

Appalachian families value education but not at the expense of the family (Tang & Russ, 2007). Parents are sometimes skeptical of schools that prepare their children for careers and educational opportunities that would require them to leave their family and community (Tang & Russ). It is not acceptable for young people to focus on their individual career and educational goals, especially if they do not include their family and
community in those plans (Tang & Russ). There is pressure for Appalachian youth to stay in their community by not selecting a career or educational path that would require them to leave their family and community (Ali & Saunders, 2009). An Appalachian student's life often reflects choices that are best for the family not what is best for themselves.

**Rural Appalachian youth.** Young people are considered to be a rural community’s greatest asset (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996). A student's self-esteem and job attainment are strong predictors of their outlook on life (Wilson, Henry, & Peterson, 1997). In rural areas, marriage is a predictor of life satisfaction and adults have more traditional roles and thoughts toward marriage (Wilson et al.) such as the husband working and providing for his family and the wife staying home and raising children.

Many rural high school graduates live in areas with no colleges or universities (Burr, 2006; Gibbs, 1998). High school students have conflicting feelings about going away to college or whether to find a good job and stay close to home (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996). Many rural youth connect their quest for higher education as a stepping stone in helping to sustain and enhance the quality of life of their family and community (Wright, 2012). Educational and occupational attainment is considered to be indicators of success for youth (Wilson, Henry, & Peterson, 1997).

Rural adolescents possess less family and school resources that are important for educational achievement (Roscigno & Crowley, 2001). "Students in more rural areas and in schools of lower income were more likely to go to their teachers for information, which indicates the need for counselors to work with teachers" (Griffin, Hutchins, &
Meece, 2011, p. 178). If rural graduates go to college, they are inclined to enroll at local and public colleges/universities and are only half as likely to graduate from college (Burr, 2006; Gibbs, 1998). Rural high school students may not possess aspirations for postsecondary education (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996) which can be attributed to the fact that rural youth may not have a parent who is a college graduate (Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2012; Ley et al, 1996) and therefore less parental influence on their college decision-making.

**Rural Appalachian females.** Gender issues have influenced the causes and effects of educational, social and economic inequality in Appalachian areas (Latimer & Oberhauser, 2005). Traditional gender roles are still found in Appalachian areas (Chenowith & Galliher, 2004) that may limit the employment and educational opportunities for women. Women in Appalachia respect the values of determination, hard work, and persistence (Cheek & Piercy, 2008).

There is minimal literature that talks about the characteristics and strength of Appalachian women during their school years (Helton & Keller, 2010). Women in Appalachian areas face lower income, higher unemployment, and less access to healthcare than in other areas of the United States (Helton & Keller). Still today in some Appalachian regions, women are expected to take on traditional roles relating to household and family responsibilities (Helton & Keller).

There is a pattern of gender roles in Appalachian regions where females are strong and tend to family matters (Rezek, 2010). The importance of family and keeping family together is passed on to women from one generation to the next (Rezek). Though
more women are going to college, many women put their careers on hold for their families (Rezek). "Women are significantly more likely than men to seek input about careers" (Meszaros, Creamer, & Lee, 2009, p. 392). Women depend on people they trust to help provide the needed information about college (Meszaros et al.)

**Rural Appalachian education.** There are limited educational and career opportunities in rural areas (Hektner, 1995). In some rural schools, teachers often expect less from their students than the parents (Ley, Nelson, & Beltyukova, 1996). Low-income students often do not take college-preparatory classes due to a lack of confidence and counselors who do not encourage the students to take advanced courses (Kampits, 1996; Lindholm, 2006). Rural high school students may have high graduation rates, but have limited access to college or college entrance resources (Kampits, 1996; Lindholm, 2006). School personnel may or may not play a factor in students choosing whether to begin work after graduation or go on to college.

"Residents in rural Appalachia have lower levels of educational attainment than residents in other areas of the United States" (King, 2012, p. 22). Appalachian youth are behind youth in non-Appalachian areas in obtaining a college degree, even though young adults are receiving degrees at a higher rate than older generations in Appalachian regions (Shaw, DeYoung, & Rademacher, 2005). Many youth do not see the importance or need for higher education because rural Appalachia often has less jobs requiring college degrees (Wilson, Henry, & Peterson, 1997). "The combination of low educational attainment and high poverty create formidable challenges in fostering success in Ohio Appalachia" (Bradbury & Mather, 2009, p. 262).
Chenowith and Galliher (2004) found in their study that high school staff members in Appalachian regions believe that many parents do not encourage their children to attend college. A lack of college information and financial resources can be a deterrent in high school graduates attending college (Chenowith & Galliher). Appalachian youth may have few role models who possess a college education which can lead to less availability of resources pertaining to college and less encouragement about college attendance (Wilson & Gore, 2009).

High school graduates in Appalachian areas grow up with a set of cultural values and connectedness to family and community that may make the transition to college difficult (Wilson & Gore, 2009). The cost of college may hinder some Appalachian high school graduates from attending. They also view having current income more important than having to wait to receive higher wages by going to college (Ali & Saunders, 2009). A current well-paying job can overshadow the years it will take to obtain a degree. If high school graduates consider higher education, they will probably look at attending a local college close to family (Hands & Payne, 2008).

Some Appalachian high school graduates do not feel prepared to go to college (Ali & Saunders, 2009). Students may not have taken college preparatory courses by choice or they may not have been advised to take those courses. A high school student may not have positive self-esteem or they may believe they do not have the ability to take more difficult and challenging courses.

**Rural out-migration.** Migration represents an individual or family need to move in order to obtain a job or education (Barcus & Brunn, 2010). Many rural areas
experience low incomes and high unemployment as well as out-migration of young people (Jentsch, 2006). Sometimes individuals must make decisions to stay close to family or to move in order to have financial security (Barcus & Brunn, 2009). Garasky (2002) suggests that decisions for high school students to move away from their family and community after graduation are multifaceted and sometimes difficult. "Many young people, in rural areas in particular, leave both parental home and home community as part of the process of transition to adult independence" (Jones, 1999, p. 1). Sometimes in rural communities, young people are disadvantaged in education and employment opportunities that lead to them leaving their community (Jentsch, 2006).

"Rural youth in economically troubled regions develop plans for their future in a context in which opportunities for educational and occupational success generally lie elsewhere, prompting the need to migrate" (Johnson, Elder, & Stern, 2005, p 99). Their futures might be more promising where there are more higher paying jobs (Johnson, Elder, & Stern). Crockett and Bingham (2000) state that among rural youth the close family ties may foster early role transitions by anchoring young people to communities with few high level jobs and few incentives for postsecondary education. Despite strong family and community ties, rural youth face high unemployment and tend to migrate to other areas for employment (Garasky, 2002).

"Young highly skilled migrants leave rural areas, that offer little opportunity, migrating to urban and suburban areas" (Foulkes & Newbold, 2008, p. 440). Yet, some rural youth feel that higher education will lead them to move to areas where there are more jobs with higher pay. "Though some students connected advanced education with
rural outmigration, other students discussed their post-secondary training in relation to local contexts, connecting their education to improved quality of life, both for their families and their rural communities" (Wright, 2012, p. 1). Yet being close to one's childhood home has been perceived to improve one's life because family can offer support when needed (Wilson, Henry, & Peterson, 1997). Liao stated that "both quality of life and community attachment were found to have positive effects on reducing migration intention" (Liao, 2001, p. 435). Involvement in the community also limits the migration of adults and increases their desire to remain in the community (Johnson, Elder, and Stern, 2005).

**Non-traditional College Students**

Non-traditional college students can be considered those who purposefully delayed going to college or those students who were influenced by many factors that stopped them from going to college after high school. Some non-traditional students enter college due to losing a job or seeking a different opportunity for their life (Kasworm, 2008). Many non-traditional college students continue their college journey that was interrupted in prior years. These students may have chosen not to attend college after high school due to poor grades, the need to work, family responsibilities, or the inability to afford the cost (Schmitt & Boushey, 2012). Some high school graduates do not attend college because they join the military or start a career not requiring college (Bozick & DeLuca, 2011). Some families with a military background or heritage urge their children to enter the military (Kleykamp, 2006). The educational benefits offered
through military service might offer the only hope that some high school students can take to attend college (Kleykamp).

Often non-traditional students are first-generation college attendees (Jesnek, 2012). Rural and first-generation college students are often identified by educators to be an at-risk population (Schultz, 2004). Non-traditional students have a high attrition rate (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Many non-traditional students do not finish their degree due to family and work obligations (Schmitt & Boushey, 2012). Schmitt and Boushey found that lower-income college students have the lowest college completion rate. Returning to an academic environment may be challenging for these students (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011).

Low-income students from rural areas often do not realize their dream of going to college after high school. Career and college aspirations were found to be lower for students from lower income families versus those students from families with higher incomes (Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, & Swan, 2011). Wells and Lynch (2012) identified financial factors and lack of social capital due to parent education and parent occupation that influenced the delayed enrollment to college. St. John, Paulsen, and Carter (2005) found in their study that high-achieving low-income students find it challenging to go to college because their time is spent working in order to pay for college.

"Although delaying entry into college may be a necessary or desirable choice for some students, it significantly decreases the likelihood of completing a bachelor’s degree" (Wells & Lynch, 2012, p. 672). Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that many low-income adults who did not complete high school later learned that education was
more important than they once thought. Students may not know what education is needed for certain professions and they may not have the access to the social capital that might provide this information. Niu and Tienda (2013) state that research would be helpful to find out what circumstances hinder high school graduates who want to attend college. Interviews with non-traditional students would assist in identifying those circumstances.

**College Decision-making**

High school graduates face the major decision of whether to continue their education. College choice consists of a student's educational expectations, aspirations, and goals (Bergerson, 2009). If a person expects to succeed, their motivation to succeed will help them achieve their success (Hardre, Sullivan, & Crowson, 2009). Families, schools, and information about college preparation courses contribute to the importance of making decisions about college (Bergerson, 2009). Although students trust their decision-making skills, they rely on advice from people in their close relationships (Laughlin & Creamer, 2007). Laughlin and Creamer believed "decision making breaks the process into three phrases: gathering information from various sources, including self and others; considering how to manage information to reach a decision; and reflecting on the outcome of the decision" (Laughlin & Creamer, 2007, p. 44).

Many decisions are made with the assistance of people who influence a person's life. Social capital includes the obligations, behavioral expectations, and trust in relationships that young people form with parents, school staff, friends, and community members (Beulieu, Israel, Hartless, & Dyk, 2001). These influential relationships can
impact the decision-making of high school students regarding college and future plans (Jung, 2013; Wells, Seifert, Padgett, Park, & Umbach, 2011). The most significant relationship affecting goal setting and educational success is found in the home environment, including parents and other family members (Beaulieu et al.). There is minimal research literature on how family, school, and individual characteristics influence college decision-making (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010). My hope is that this research will fill this gap.

By connecting resources for their children, many parents help students make informed decisions about college (Kim & Schneider, 2005). Children whose parents frequently discuss academic issues with them are apt to attend college and seek either a two or four year degree (Kim & Schneider). The family’s income, resources, and knowledge about financial aid and the college admission process influence a student’s decision to attend college (King, 2012).

Parents’ income and educational attainment appear to be influential based on whether their children attend college (Chenowith & Galliher, 2004). Due to a strong sense of family found in rural Appalachian areas, students may rely entirely on their family for guidance in choosing careers and continued education (Ali & Saunders, 2006). Sometimes parents are not knowledgeable on how to advise or to help their children concerning the admission and financial aid applications needed for college (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). Rural Appalachian youth identify their families as very important in their decisions regarding future goals concerning careers and education (Peterson, Stivers, & Peters, 2001).
Parents' educational expectations and encouragement of their children to attend college is important in the student's decision to attend college (Bergerson, 2009). A student's family structure, socio-economic status, and parental educational aspirations for their children influence a student's decision about attending college (Bergerson). Educational expectations are based on parent education, family socio-economic status, number of siblings in the family, and relationships with other people besides parents (Cheng & Starks, 2002). Students whose parents acquire high levels of social capital benefit from access to resources in making college decisions (Bergerson, 2009). In addition, students whose families have limited social capital can be hindered from attending college because they are less aware of the importance of a college education (Bergerson).

Students have unequal access to college resources that can put them at a disadvantage (Rowan-Kenyon, Perna, & Swan, 2011). At-risk students usually have less access to capital that can help with the decision to attend college (Myers, Brown, & Pavel, 2010). It is important for young people to learn how to maneuver through high school and develop aspirations of higher education because it will prepare them to steer their life forward (Siegel, 2009). Wolniak and Engbert (2010) found it to be necessary for school staff to give students resources to assist them in the decision-making process about their future career and further education.

Some students consider college in elementary and junior high school, but most students think about college during high school (Schultz, 2004). Planning to attend college requires preparation that should begin in middle school with school staff working
with parents to develop educational goals for students (Eccles, Vida, & Barber, 2004). Academic success and higher educational aspirations during high school influences the student's life well into adulthood (Irvin, Meece, Byun, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2011). Jung (2013) recommends that high school teachers and counselors highlight students' successes when they fear they will fail in college (Jung, 2013). It is vital for school staff to promote college visits and bring college students into the school to talk to high school students about college experiences.

Many students in schools with positive family partnerships and available resources about the college application processes were found to seek information and apply to college (Bergerson, 2009). Research on college choice depends on strong connections between public schools and colleges (Pitre, 2004). Little research has examined how schools support the college decision-making of students (Kim, 2012). It is important for high schools to have strong relationships with local colleges in order to provide students with current information concerning college enrollment (Kim). Obtaining information on college choice behaviors of students will be effective in helping schools, colleges, families, and policymakers share the knowledge students need to matriculate to college (Pitre, 2004).

Motivated students want to achieve academic success (Pizzolato, Brown, & Kanny, 2011). Students need to identify career paths and learn how to proceed in the right direction (Pizzolato et al.). When students attend schools with positive and supportive environments, they are more likely to listen to the advice and guidance regarding higher education decisions (Demi, Coleman-Jensen, & Snyder, 2010).
At times, rural youth must make decisions as to whether to stay in the community they love or seek educational and career opportunities in modern urban areas (Petrin, Farmer, Meece, & Byun, 2011). The educational objectives of rural adolescents are based on economic prospects and attachment to their local community (Howley, 2006). Howley states that the attachment to family and community may be stronger than the financial and career opportunities for individuals with college degrees in rural areas. Many adolescents in rural areas also face challenges that limit their opportunities to postsecondary education (Byun, Meece, & Irvin, 2012). Poverty rates are higher, fewer parents have college degrees, and families in rural areas generally have less academic goals for young people (Byun et al., 2012; King, 2012). Byun et al. found in their research that rural students appear to have sufficient social capital due to their small size and strong family, school, and community connections. Yet Byun et al. state that there has been insufficient research on the effects of social capital vis-à-vis the educational attainment of students in rural areas.

"Academic outcomes for Appalachians is partially tied to the cultural values of the region" (Gore, Wilburn, Treadway, & Plaut, 2011, p. 379). Decisions young people make about their future education involves looking at the future of their family (Gore et al.). Some young people in Appalachian regions fear that furthering their education may give the impression that they are better than others in their family and community (Gore et al.). Self-reliance and a strong sense of depending on family may keep Appalachian students from seeking information about college from individuals outside of family (Ali & Saunders, 2006). This can be problematic for those young people whose parents may
not have attended college and often may not have the capacity to help in the college decision-making process.

A study by Wallace and Diekroger (2000) consisted of a survey completed by 127 students with 91 of the respondents being considered Appalachian. The results of the Wallace and Diekroger study revealed that some of the participants had received discouraging feedback regarding their prospects of attending college. Half of the negative comments the students received were from family members and more of the female participants received the negative comments versus the male participants.

**Summary of Literature Review**

This literature review has repeatedly shown the importance of multiple forms of social capital in the lives of young people. The relationships children form and the people who surround them are influential in the decisions they make throughout their young life. Parents, schools, and community members are involved in nurturing children and giving them the resources they need to achieve their educational goals and succeed in life.

The topics addressed in this literature review were examined to provide a basis of information for this research. These topics include information on the importance of social capital in the lives of children; the value of establishing parent and community partnerships with schools; the characteristics of Appalachian culture; the life of rural students; the increase of non-traditional students; the traditions and values of Appalachian females; and the details involved in college decision-making. There is a substantial body of research on social capital and school/family/community partnerships.
A small amount of research examines the college decision-making of high school students, and less research on the college decision-making of non-traditional female students. As the number of non-traditional students continues to grow, it is necessary to be familiar with how these students make decisions about attending college. This study allows Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio to give voice and tell their college attendance decision stories.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter Three discusses the methodology used for this research. The chapter describes the research design and specific procedures used in the study, including the selection of participants and sampling strategy, site selection, interviews, data collection and storage, and data analysis.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to examine the college decision-making processes and the factors influencing those decisions for Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio. In addition, this study examines the influence of social capital on the college decision-making process. There is minimal research on the studied students and how they make the decision to attend college.

To achieve the results, I use qualitative methodology in order to focus on the meaning of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied. This phenomenological study offers Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio the opportunity to tell their story of focusing mainly on the college decision-making process during high school. Detailed pictures of participant stories form the basis of this research study.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology provides an approach to understanding human interaction and relationships among people and their environment and interpreting the fundamental makeup of a phenomenon within a particular situation (Brantlinger,
Qualitative research looks to understand the life experiences of people in certain situations (FitzGerald, Dent, Seale, Kerrins, & McElvaney, 2008). Qualitative studies emphasize the meaning of the participants lived experiences (Mason, 2010) and uncover and interpret how people view and explain their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Toloie-Eshlaghy, Chitsaz, Karimian, & Charkhchi, 2011). Qualitative research also seeks to understand the beliefs and behaviors of the people being studied (Draper, 2004). A goal of qualitative research is to make a difference in the phenomena being studied through people's experiences (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). The research results for this study may provide researchers, teachers, high school counselors, and college recruiters with information that will give them a better understanding of how to support Appalachian female students.

The qualitative methodology aligns with the purpose of this research and adds to its significance because few studies provide knowledge from the perspective of Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio who are the focus of this inquiry. Consequently, qualitative methodology appears to be the best approach to answer the research questions in this study.

The process of understanding individual or group situations involves emerging questions and different data collection procedures, analysis of the data collected, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data they see, hear, and understand (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative data can generate deep and rich descriptive
information about the understanding of the participants' situations and feelings (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). This knowledge is central in this study. "Qualitative research is not done for purposes of generalization but rather to produce evidence based on the exploration of specific contexts and particular individuals" (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005, p. 203). This qualitative study explores the interview data and the extent to which the phenomenon has an impact on the participants and their college decision-making processes. I examined the participants' biographical information form looking for similarities and differences.

The particular focus of this research is the college decision-making process of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio. The people influencing the decisions of Appalachian non-traditional female student in Ohio and the relationships they had during this time period are examined. Qualitative research methods allows me to hear the lived stories of the studied participants and participant views on the influences of their parents, families, schools, community, and culture in their college decision-making process. Thus qualitative methodology allows this researcher to understand the phenomenon being studied by listening to the stories told by the participants.

**Research Study Design**

The research design represents a plan about how the study will be conducted (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). There are many research designs employed in qualitative research. Creswell (2013) details five different designs: grounded theory, biography, case study, phenomenology and ethnography. As noted earlier, the research design chosen for this study is phenomenology. A phenomenological study allows the
participants to describe the phenomenon or common experience of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The participants in this study articulate their story about the college decision-making process utilized during high school and share their feelings, thoughts, experiences, and beliefs. I attempted to understand the participants and their stories through face-to-face interactions during the semi-structured (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

**Selection of Participants**

I chose to purposefully select participants that help me discern the issue and the research question (Creswell, 2009) and who have similar life experiences or have experienced the same phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). For this research study, seven participants were selected in order to assure that most of the insights and stories are told (Mason, 2010) and data saturation is achieved (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Interviews with the seven participants allowed me to be involved in a deeper conversation with each of the participants as opposed to interviewing a larger number of individuals.

Consistent with the ideas of Nastasi and Schensul (2005), the participants provided demographic data such as age, gender, ethnicity, race, level of education, prior experience, family make up and schools on the participants' biographical form. The demographic and personal variables used in this study are as follows:

- The participant must be an Appalachian non-traditional female student in Ohio attending or graduated from Ohio University - Chillicothe Campus. Non-traditional students are college attendees who are employed, have family
responsibilities including responsibilities for dependents (Carreiro & Kapitulik, 2010; Gilardi & Guglielmett, 2011), are over the age of 25 (Mello, 2004), and are financially independent.

- The participant must live or have lived in an Appalachian Ohio county at the time of attending OUC.

- The participant must have graduated from a high school from 1985-1995 in one of the following Ohio Appalachian Counties: "Adams, Ashtabula, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Carroll, Clermont, Columbiana, Coshocton, Gallia, Guernsey, Harrison, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lawrence, Mahoning, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pike, Ross, Scioto, Trumbull, Tuscarawas, Vinton, and Washington" (Appalachian Regional Commission [http://www.arc.gov/counties]).

Site Selection

The site selected for this research study is Ohio University-Chillicothe. Ohio University-Chillicothe is a regional campus that serves students from: Fayette, Highland, Hocking, Jackson, Pickaway, Pike, Ross and Vinton counties. Pickaway and Fayette Counties are not Appalachian Ohio counties. Ohio University-Chillicothe has a blend of traditional college students who begin college directly out of high school, and non-traditional students who are pursuing a degree later in life.

Sampling Procedure

I chose the participants for this study through a purposeful sampling process. In purposeful sampling, "the researcher specifies the characteristics of a population of
interest and then tries to locate individuals who have those characteristics" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 235). All participants met the criteria defined in the previous section detailing participants. Patton defines purposeful sampling as where "cases for study are selected because they are information rich and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 40). In addition, purposeful sampling participants share common lived experiences (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The purposeful sampling strategy of criterion/homogeneous sampling is used. Criterion/homogeneous sampling is choosing participants in order to describe a particular group who meet similar criteria in depth (Glesne, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this research study, the studied group is Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio. Participants were not compensated for participating in the study.

**Timeline**

The collection of data began after approval of the research proposal by the dissertation committee and the Office of Research Compliance at Ohio University. I started data collection in September. The interview process of the seven participants and transcription of the interviews was completed in seven weeks. This seven week time period allowed for a one-hour face-to-face interview and a follow-up email for the participant to clarify and review their profile. The participants received an individual profile based on their answers to the interview questions. They reviewed their profile and confirmed agreement or suggested changes to their profile. The analysis of the interview
data, writing of the participants profiles, the cross case analysis, and the report was completed in approximately two and a half months.

**Trustworthiness/Credibility**

This section on trustworthiness/credibility is divided into two subsections confirming how I ensure credibility and trustworthiness. The first subsection looks at the role of the researcher and the second subsection looks at how the credibility of the data is ensured.

Credibility looks at how accurately the results of the study represent participants' true accounts of the social phenomena that they discuss (Creswell & Miller, 2000). "When qualitative researchers speak of research validity, they are usually referring to qualitative research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 264). According to Patton, "the credibility of a qualitative inquiry depends on three distinct but related inquiry elements: rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 552-553). For this research study, interviews were conducted and individual profiles were reviewed and confirmed by participants. These approaches helped to facilitate credibility.

There are "threats to internal and external validity at the three major stages of the research process: research design/data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 233). This concern makes it important for qualitative researchers to demonstrate that their findings are justifiable and valuable (Rose & Webb, 1998). Researchers using qualitative methodology need to demonstrate that their
research is credible, and they must ensure that they accurately represent the participants in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). It is also important that a researcher ask "where he might have applied his own biases and interpretations instead of those generated from the actual behaviors, interactions, words, and sentiments of his participants" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 220). Qualitative research gives voice to people and groups of individuals who may have been silenced or marginalized by other people or society as a whole (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). The information shared by the studied participants tells a story that may not be told.

The worth of a research study is determined in relation to a set of benefits that might be obtained by stakeholder audiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1980). Qualitative researchers must write their reports so that they are believable and beneficial to others (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Assuring credibility establishes confidence in the correct analysis of the data (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Researchers providing credible findings in their study will be respected by their peers and will validate their future research.

**Role of the researcher.** Establishing trust, credibility and rapport while participating in qualitative research is a crucial aspect that supports building relationships with the people who participate in this research study (Clark, 2010; Lichtman, 2013; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Rapport is built on the ability of the reviewer to express empathy and understanding without passing judgment (Patton, 2002). I established rapport and built a connection with each of my interviewees by telling them about myself (Roulston, 2010; Patton, 2002).
Researchers should maintain the confidentiality of the participants and the information they convey (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). An attempt was made to maintain confidentiality of participants throughout the study. Identifying information that could be linked to the participants was removed from the interview data. Each interviewee was given a pseudonym in order not to reveal their true identity. An interview log with the name of the interviewee and the date of the interview was created and is kept in a locked fire-proof safe in my home. Digital recordings of interviews were kept on an external drive and were also stored in a fireproof safe. The participants were informed about what happens to their information once the research study is completed (Roberts, 2010). The digital recording and interview log will be removed from the computer and external drive six months after the completion of the dissertation process.

Researchers should strive to be respectful of the studied participants in the study by acknowledging and honoring them for who they are and what they believe (Charmaz, 2004). Respect can be shown by allowing the participants to talk freely and play an active role in the data interpretation (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). I was attentive to the interviewee in order to sense, feel, and understand their experiences (Charmaz). Additionally, participant interviews were transcribed verbatim and participants were provided a copy of their profile based on the interview transcript to review, provide comments, and for clarification if needed.

The researcher is considered the main collector of data in qualitative methods (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005; Patton, 2002); therefore they should attempt to be transparent in his or her strategy of data collection and data analysis (Nolen & Talbert, 2011). The
researchers role in gathering data, conducting interviews, generalizing their findings, providing explanations, and formulating conclusions should be well-defined (Diefenbach, 2009; Nolen & Talbert, 2011). I disclosed my personal and professional information and qualifications that pertain to the study (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002) to my participants. Personal information included the fact that I was an Appalachian Ohio non-traditional female college student.

The researcher is the means through which information is gathered and filtered in the research study (Lichtman, 2013). A journal was used to document all aspects of the study including any problems or issues that were encountered and kept in a fire proof safe at my home. Therefore the researcher needs to be able to articulate her personal strengths and weaknesses and be open to change direction when the research heads toward another path (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Patton, 2002). There needs to be an honest and informative account of how the researcher interacts with the participants, what problems occurred, and how the problems were settled (Nolen & Talbert, 2011).

Reflexivity involves self-reflection by the researcher regarding his or her own biases and prejudices toward the context of what is being studied (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Charmaz, 2004; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Glesne, 2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Reflexivity assists the researcher in seeing how they can relate his or her personal passions and strengths while constructing knowledge (Glesne). Researchers have the responsibility and obligation to consider the effects of their research both on the participants and the wider community (Frost, 2011). My journal was used to record reflections from interviews and the study.
Credibility of the data. Researchers must be mindful that how one collects data must address validity (Matteson & Lincoln, 2009). There are several techniques available to a researcher to ensure the validity and credibility of the data gathered through interviews, observations, and documentation. Validity is defined as how accurately the results of the study represent the participants' true accounts of the social phenomena that they discuss (Creswell & Miller, 2000). "Researchers should use effective data collection and thorough analytic techniques to establish their diligence and persuade readers that their research has produced credible findings" (Kline, 2008, p. 211). Researchers can prove the reliability of data and findings by using credible approaches. I use the following credibility techniques:

- Member checking "consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). This was achieved by having each participant review their information and provide clarification if needed. Two participants corrected a minor detail to the first profile sent to them. Nothing major was found.

- Thick description means that the "data are detailed and complete enough to maximize the ability to find meaning" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 244). Detailed interviews and participant biographical information was documented and from this data, individual profiles on the participants were developed.
Data Collection

The data collection section is divided into sub-categories spelling out the specifics of the process. The sub-sections are instrumentation, method of collecting data, and data management.

Instrumentation. The instrument used in this research study to collect data is the interview and the collection of a participant biographical information document. This study involves the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and beliefs of the participants, therefore it is important for me to understand the participants as they tell their story. The best way to do this is through face-to-face interaction by conducting interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Interviews are an important tool to discover events and collect data that cannot be seen (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Patton, 2002). Listening skills are important during interviewing. Dilley (2000) suggests that the interviewer speak twenty percent of the time and listen eighty percent of the time. I followed this suggestion when interviewing the participants.

Patton states that "the purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) stated that qualitative indicators for interview studies are as follows:

- "Appropriate participants are selected (purposefully identified, effectively recruited, adequate number, representative of population of interest).
- Interview questions are reasonable (clearly worded, not leading, appropriate and sufficient for exploring domains of interest).
- Adequate mechanisms are used to record and transcribe interviews."
Participants are represented sensitively and fairly in the report.

Sound measures are used to ensure confidentiality" (Brantlinger et. al., 2005, p. 202).

Prior to the interviews for this study, the participants received an introductory letter by email and a phone call explaining the research study, its purpose, and personal and professional information about the researcher in this study. It is important for participants to be clear as to how their experiences fit within the research study (Dilley, 2000). The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the researcher and the participant. Signed consent forms were obtained before interviews began. In accordance with professional ethics, the consent forms state that the interviews will be audio-taped (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). All Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures were followed for this research study. The participants were assured that their identities will remain confidential as stated previously.

Nastasi and Schensul stated that "interviews are relatively unstructured informal interactions with knowledgeable stakeholders who can provide general information about the context, population, or culture" (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005, p. 184). "Semi-structured in-depth interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). Semi-structured interviews are planned utilizing open-ended questions based on the study's research questions (Knox & Burkard, 2009) with other interview questions emerging during the conversation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study using open-ended questions that allowed for other questions to emerge based on the
conversation (Glesne, 2011) or additional questions needed for clarification (Diefenbach, 2009). Each interview was scheduled for one hour. More time was given when necessary and agreed upon by the interviewee and the interviewer.

The interview protocol found in Appendix B ensures the basic questions were asked of all participants (Patton, 2002) and that the one hour time period was used efficiently. The interview questions on the interview protocol are open-ended allowing the participants to answer the questions in a manner that was comfortable for them (Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002). The questions should flow logically (Healey-Etten & Sharp, 2010) and a brief transition should be between each category of questions. There are four categories of questions in this study as follows:

- The first category of questions is demographic and will ask all participants questions such as current address, college attending, college attended, high school attended and location of high school.

- The second category contains biographical questions regarding the participant’s family, school, culture, and community during their high school years. Biographical questions were the same for all participants.

- The third category of questions pertains to the decision-making process during high school in regards to college attendance.

- The fourth category of questions included probing or clarifying questions based on previous answers. It was important to gently probe the interviewee when there was a lull in the conversation or there was a need for more clarification or explanation (Glesne, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).
The interviews allowed me to have a direct conversation with the participants and provided me with insights and data pertaining to participant lives during high school and their college decision-making processes. It was important for the participants to read their profiles to ensure their story is told correctly.

**Method of collecting data.** As stated previously, I conducted interviews in a safe, non-threatening environment that was convenient and private for both the interviewer and the participants (Glesne, 2011). A safe and comfortable environment helped to build rapport with the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) which allowed for better data (Glogowska, Young, & Lockyer, 2011).

Roberts (2010) suggests using audio or video recording to obtain accuracy when conducting unstructured or semi-structured interviews. Digital audio-recordings captured the research information without possibly making the participant feel uneasy during video-recording. Digital recording and note-taking were both used in capturing the interview data for this research study. Recording devices provide a nearly complete record of what was said (Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002) and helped eliminate loss of information due to distractions during the conversation. Verbatim interview recordings were transcribed within 48 hours of the participant interview while the information was familiar.

The transcript of the interview is the primary source of data and the participant's biographical information form is the secondary source. Written notes, field notes, and journal information was collected continually throughout the data collection period. Journals, notes taken during phone conversations, emails, and signed consent forms are
the informational sources for this study. My journal included communication memos, dates, times, and locations of the interviews as well as other pertinent information. Non-verbal data that included participants' gestures, facial expressions, and body language were recorded in the field notes. The notes taken during the interview, post-interview, or reflections after the interview complemented and assisted in analyzing the data from the interview. Shenton (2004) states that supporting documents provide a background to help explain the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of a particular context being studied.

**Data management.** The research data is located on a computer in my home and on external jump drives. All written notes, transcriptions, and audio tapes are kept secured in a fire-proof safe in my home. A second jump-drive and copy of notes are kept in my faculty office at Ohio University-Chillicothe Campus in a locked file cabinet. As stated in previous sections, all data and recordings will be destroyed six months after the completion of dissertation.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of data is an important component in the process of qualitative research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). "While there is no single correct method for analyzing data, the approach must reflect the purpose of the study (McMillan, 2009, p. 55). Data analysis involves organizing and storing data in a manner according to the thoughts, themes, and relationships interpreted by the researcher (Glesne, 2011). Data analysis involves organizing and interpreting the data that in turn produces research results (LeCompte, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The following section describes the analysis methods used in this research study.
**Method of data analysis.** The method of analysis used in this research study is thematic analysis that involves analyzing the text by looking for core meanings and concepts (Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002). The thematic approach organizes the data by themes and topics (Glesne, 2011). I read the interview data line by line and coded after each line which allowed me to immerse myself in the data while scanning for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). The transcribed data was coded into categories to enable me to organize, describe, compare, and create explanations for the material from the interview. In addition, the data was analyzed in order to document significant statements or quotes (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007). The findings are related to the research questions and derived from the data which represents reality (McMillan, 2009; Thomas, 2006).

**Identifying themes.** As noted previously and in accordance with thematic analysis, I looked at the characteristics of the data in each category when assembling themes (LeCompte, 2000). Categories were analyzed and compared in order to determine which could be interconnected into one specific theme. In addition while building themes, I looked for similarities and differences in the categories. This is where developing a web or matrix was important. A web/matrix provided a visual aid to use for looking at the data. Poster paper and post-its were great tools to use in making the matrix because they enabled me to consider various findings as the data changed. In addition, I looked for the absence of information (Bergman & Coxon, 2005) which was important in determining if it was necessary to collect further data.
As with categories, each theme has its own folder in the file cabinet as well as a folder in the computer files. After developing the themes, the relationships and processes helped to answer the research questions. As suggested by LeCompte (2000), it is important when analyzing data to continually refer back to the research question(s) and the reason for conducting this research.

Throughout data collection, data was analyzed to allow me to be reflective, organized, and open to new questions to be answered. Notes taken during the interview and my reflection notes were analyzed to describe and clarify the interviews.

**Coding data.** After transcribing the data from the recorder to Microsoft Word, I read one sentence at a time and identified themes by assigning comments and codes to the information. The transcript of each individual participant was given a specific color and the font color was changed for responses to match to a particular theme or code. I developed a codebook as the data collection process began. Each code has its own number or word assigned and page in the codebook (Glesne, 2011). A page per code allowed me to add any sub-codes when needed.

**Categorizing coded data.** Knowledge and meaning is produced and communicated by establishing categories (Bergman & Coxon, 2005). These categories apply to people, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, cultures, actions, statements, events, and other identifiable events. A thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the data was used in my coding to provide thick description before placing the information into categories. After coding, I examined the data looking for patterns that were sorted into categories and subcategories that were more manageable (Dey, 1993; Patton, 2002). A category
book was established listing all the possible categories and subcategories, along with descriptions about the criteria for the placement of data in various categories.

Each category had its own folder on the computer and in my file cabinet. Each folder had pockets for the subcategories and the computer files had sub-categories. Participant demographic and contact information, interview questions, and other information was organized using the following file categories.

- County of high school attended
- Year graduated from high school
- Each interview question had its own file
- Dates and locations of interviews

After interviews began, files were arranged according to the following topics mentioned in the interviews:

- Decision-making strategies in high school
- Family social capital during high school
- Family make-up during high school
- Community involvement during high school
- Cultural capital during high school
- School personnel involvement
- Academic high school courses
- College choices
- High school employment
- Peer involvement in high school
The above topics were also considered a priori or likely themes that were generated from the literature review which were used for analysis of the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Initial categories were concerning school, family, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, decisions, and life events during high school. As suggested by Glesne (2011), additional categories and sub-categories were established after reviewing the coded data. The data was examined a second time to ensure it was placed in the correct category. In addition, I also modified and discarded categories as deemed necessary (Dey, 1993). I developed a web or matrix showing the categories and sub-categories in order to start developing themes. As cautioned by Patton (2002), I was attentive in not allowing the web or matrix to manipulate the data.

**Clean data.** Confidentiality was maintained at all times to strive for clean data. Identifying information which could be linked to the participant was also removed. As stated previously, the personal information of participants was not linked to the transcription of the interview.

**Delimitations/Limitations of the Research**

Limitations refer to factors the researcher cannot control. Qualitative research requires transparency to guarantee the credibility of the analysis of the data (Ryan, 2009) and to ensure that the findings are justifiable and valuable (Rose & Webb, 1998). I attempted to ensure rigor in this study by providing thick and rich descriptions during the data collection and data analysis processes. In addition, all data elements in the process were labeled and coded for identification purposes. Further, the re-reading of transcripts allowed for yet another mode of credibility.
The profiles based on the transcriptions of the interview were shared with the participants in order to ensure the accuracy of their life experiences (Glogowska, Young, & Lockyer, 2011). I also provided the participants with their individual profile after their interview and biographical information was interpreted. It was important for the participants to review the transcript of their interviews and their individual profile (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Additionally, I did not feel a need to use an external auditor to review the dissertation study, because it was expected that the dissertation committee would evaluate the research.

This research study used purposeful sampling that can be considered a possible bias (Patton, 2002). The study is limited to the participant's telling their personal experiences in the college decision-making process. The findings in this study may not hold true for all Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio.

**Self as researcher.** "Interview data limitations include possibly distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, politics, and simple lack of awareness since interviews can be greatly affected by the emotional state of the interviewee at the time of the interviewee" (Patton, 2002, p. 306). Glesne (2011) states that qualitative researchers make meaning of their participant's story. As Glesne suggests, I drew upon my personal experiences and perspectives as an Appalachian female non-traditional college student as I interpreted the data. My interpretive lens (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) may have added additional meaning and insight to the stories of the participants. As a higher education faculty member and a former Appalachian non-traditional female college student, I may have been biased when interviewing the participants and
transcribing the data. I attempted to be mindful of the possible biases and was conscious of personal perspectives and reflections on the topic studied.

The researcher's first responsibility in their writing is to the research participants (Glesne, 2011) by telling their story in an honest manner. I ensured rigor in this research from the beginning of the process to the end. Researchers must have an interest in their study to be truly engaged in the work. I chose qualitative methodology for my research because I am interested in what non-traditional students have to say about how they view their experiences of college decision-making during their high school years.

**Conclusion**

Glesne (2011) states that writing research is a continual process of organizing and re-organizing the material while making sense of your data. A good qualitative paper is well-documented with descriptive data that support the assertions made (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The conversations during this research could lead to findings that might allow high school students and younger students to develop the social capital needed to make them successful in school and in their future. College is not for everyone but it needs to be a possibility for everyone. Parents, schools, and community members should ensure that those young people who want to go to college have the resources and support in order to do so.
Chapter 4: Participant Profiles and Analysis of Findings

Introduction

Through a qualitative mode of inquiry, this research study examines the college decision-making process and influences of social capital on Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio during their high school years. What were the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio? How did social capital affect the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio? These questions evolved from the literature review and this researcher's interests. In addition to discussing their college decision-making in high school, participants shared the experiences of their decision-making to go to college as a non-traditional student. Participants identified the influences of social capital during both times of decision-making. The purpose of this chapter is to share participants' stories, the findings of the research, and the emergent themes.

Chapter Four contains an overview of the seven participants, each participant's profile, a cross-profile analysis of the participants, and the emerging themes and findings.

Overview of Participants

The interviews for the research involved seven participants. In order to maintain anonymity, each participant was given a pseudonym. Certain demographic information of the participants such as their home address is not mentioned in this study to maintain confidentiality. All participants lived in an Ohio Appalachian county during high school and while attending Ohio University-Chillicothe. The Appalachian counties represented
during the high school years and at the time of attending Ohio University-Chillicothe are Pike, Vinton, Highland, and Ross. The participants met the criteria of having graduated from high school between the years of 1985-1995. One participant graduated in 1987, one each in 1988 and 1991, three in 1993, and one in 1994. Their ages ranged from 37-44 years. Two of the participants attended a vocational school during the last two years of high school although they did not attend the same vocational school. The participants represented six different high schools. Four of the Ohio University-Chillicothe graduates received bachelor's degrees, two received associate's degrees, and one of the participants is a current student in an associate's degree program.

The participant profiles are documented in the following section. Each participant was given their profile to review resulting in two profiles requiring minor corrections. All profiles were approved by the participants. The participants eagerly told their stories while reliving family moments, joys, failures, successes, past dreams and future dreams. Each of the seven interviews was very emotional and uplifting to me. The interviews brought tears of joy and sadness along with a newfound appreciation in the strength of Appalachian women.

**Participants' Profiles**

The following section contains the profiles of the seven participants. I discuss their family and school life during their high school years, their college decision-making process during high school, and their life as an Appalachian Ohio non-traditional female college student.
**Rosa's profile.** Rosa is an Ohio University-Chillicothe Campus graduate with a bachelor's degree. At 38 years old, Rosa was currently working on her master's degree. She lived in a southeastern Ohio Appalachian county during high school and while attending Ohio University-Chillicothe. Rosa graduated from high school in 1993.

The makeup of Rosa's family during high school consisted of her mother, father, older brother, younger sister, foster brother, and three foster sisters. During this time period, both of her parents had a master's degree and worked in educational fields. Her parents attended college as traditional students. Rosa's older brother attended college but did not finish and her younger sister who participated in post-secondary opportunities in high school later graduated from college.

Rosa's parents were very supportive of her in everything she did during school. They wanted her to go to college and offered to pay for her education so that she would not have to borrow money. Rosa professed that unfortunately she did not accept her parents' offer because she decided that she was done with school and wanted to get a job and make money. During visits with her maternal grandmother, Rosa would be asked when she was going to college and what plans had she made about her future.

She described the small community in which she lived during her high school years as a high poverty area where everybody knew everybody. Rosa recalled that the people supported the high school's sport teams and community members actively attended all of the ball games. Rosa does not remember anyone in the community promoting or discussing higher education. Additionally, during her recent twentieth high school class reunion, only twelve people out of the thirty-five classmates who graduated
from her high school senior class attended and she was the only one of the twelve who had a college degree.

Rosa's friends were very influential in her college decision-making process. Two of her three best friends were pregnant in high school. One had a baby in high school while the other gave birth shortly after graduation. Further, both of her friends got married in high school. The group of friends never talked about college because they were tired of school and did not want to go to college. One of the three friends went to college for a short time but ended up leaving, getting married, and having children.

Rosa went to a vocational school during her junior and senior years in high school. She knew then that she did not want to go to college because she felt she was more social than academic. All of her friends decided to go to the vocational school and take the same courses. She did not remember having a conversation with the school counselor about attending college. Rosa acknowledged that the school counselors did not contact her and her friends or ask them if they wanted to go to college. In addition, Rosa believed that because she went to the vocational school, the school counselor assumed she did not want to attend college. Her softball coach supported all the students and was easy to talk to, but she never talked to her coach about college.

Rosa attempted college three years after high school, but did not complete a degree. When she decided to go back to college to complete a degree, her husband and parents were her support system. Rosa professed that she wanted to get her degree for her three children. When I asked Rosa if she had it to do over and go to college after high school would she, and she emphatically said "Absolutely". Rosa indicated that she
did not have faith in herself back in high school and that she was not interested in grades. Additionally, Rosa mentioned that during her time as a non-traditional student working on her bachelor's degree and currently working on her master's degree, she did not settle for anything less than an "A" in the courses. She acknowledged all the sacrifices of lost time with her family in order to be able to attend college as a non-traditional student. Rosa noted that if she knew in high school that she would have to sacrifice time with her family, she would have gone to college after graduation. In addition, Rosa did not think she would have done as well in college after high school as she did as a non-traditional student. I asked Rosa for final comments. She stated the following with very heart-felt emotion:

"I could have never of got through school without all the prayers and my faith in God! I never want to fail to mention all the strength he gave me. I lived by the Bible verse Philippians: 4:13: 'I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.'"

When asked what she believed should happen with current Appalachian female high school students in regards to attending college she said,

"Every high school student deserves the right to be asked about going to college. I'm hoping they ask students now. I had the support but did not go, but some students do not have the support."

**Sonia's profile.** Sonia graduated with an associate's degree from Ohio University's-Chillicothe Campus. She attended high school in a southeastern Ohio Appalachian county and lived in a south central Appalachian county during the time she
attended Ohio University-Chillicothe. Sonia graduated from high school in 1988 and was 43 years old. At the time of this study, she was currently working in a field not associated with her degree.

The makeup of Sonia's family during high school consisted of her mother, father, an older brother, a younger brother, and a younger sister. Both parents had a high school education but neither had attended college. Sonia indicated that her family did not have a lot of contact with other family members. Sonia did not have a connection to her grandparents due to both of her parents being raised in single parent homes. Her parents were from families who lived in poverty and her mother grew up in a household with possible neglect and abuse. Sonia indicated that her family did not have a lot of contact with other family members.

Sonia described her parents as caring and hard working. Her mother had been a stay-at-home mother until she went to third grade. The parents were described as supportive of her during her high school years but were sometimes unable to help her with her schoolwork because the subjects were harder than those they took in school. During her whole life, her family lived in the country in the same home. Sonia was not in extra-curricular activities because her family did not have funds or transportation available to attend those activities. The subject of college was rarely discussed among the family. Her older brother was pursued by a technical college to apply, but her parents were very skeptical about college attendance for him. They were very frank about saying they did not have any money and could not help in paying for college. Sonia and her
older brother did not have a close relationship, therefore he did not provide her with information about college.

According to Sonia, the work ethic of her parents was high. Her parents modeled hard work and provided a stable home, food, and shelter for their family. Her mother kept an immaculate home since her mother did not have a nice home growing up. Her parents never required her to pay rent after high school, but they did expect her to get a job.

Sonia noted that she did not remember attending activities and events in her rural community other than attending church. She mentioned that she spent quite a bit of time at the nearby church. The women in her community were stay-at-home mothers and going to work was unusual. She acknowledged the expectation for young women to marry and have children after high school graduation.

Sonia did not recall going to talk to a guidance counselor. She also indicated she was very shy in high school. She claimed she did not want to characterize people, but it seemed like people who had money or who were successful in sports talked about college and she was not in that group. Sonia did not remember her school providing resources for students about attending college and she did not recall any colleges coming to her high school. Further the school did not offer any discussions for students about financial aid.

In the summer between her junior and senior year during high school, Sonia was enrolled in the Upward Bound program that helped students consider going to college and making future plans. She described having aspirations to attend college and took a lot of college preparatory courses. Her aspirations went as far as her being accepted to a
college in another state. Sonia did not have a chance to consider attending the out-of-state college because her parents could not afford for her to go. Sonia recalled losing a friendship due to her attendance in Upward Bound. People in her rural Appalachian county did not talk about young females going to college. She eventually met her future husband during her junior year in high school and he was in college at the time.

Sonia was employed at age 18 as an administrator of an after-school program. After a year of employment, she was required to take a few college classes. Sonia loved taking the college classes but never obtained her degree. Twenty-two years after graduating from high school, Sonia graduated from college with her associate's degree. Her husband, parents and employers were very supportive of her taking courses. She recalled with tears in her eyes that her father told her he knew she had it in her to do well in college and he was proud of her. Although none of her siblings attended college right after high school, her older and younger sister are both non-traditional college graduates and her brother never attended college.

When asked if she had it to do over and attend college after high school to obtain a degree, would she do it she emphatically stated, "Yes." Sonia felt that life would be different for her now financially and professionally if she had attended college after high school. She does not believe she would have been as good a student after high school as she was as a non-traditional student. Sonia believes the hands-on experience she received prior to becoming a non-traditional student influenced how she saw things in her college courses. She and her husband encourage their daughter to learn everything about college
and they discuss future plans with their daughter all the time. Sonia feels that schools now are more encouraging to young people about going to college.

**Melanie's profile.** Melanie graduated with a bachelor's degree from the Ohio University's-Chillicothe Campus. She attended high school in a southwestern Ohio Appalachian county and lived in the same county while attending Ohio University-Chillicothe. Melanie graduated from high school in 1987. At the time of this study, she was 44 years old and currently working in a field different from her degree program.

The makeup of Melanie's family during high school consisted of her mother, father, older brother, and younger sister. Her mother had a high school education and her father attended a technical school after graduation. Melanie believed that her mother wanted to go to college but was unable to do so due to her life choices. Her mother, who had been a stay-at-home mom, went back to work when Melanie was in high school due to her father being ill. During Melanie's high school years, she was limited to what high school functions she could participate in because she took on responsibilities at home while her mother worked. She became the cook and helped take care of her father. The family attended and was involved in church.

Melanie's family was close to both sets of grandparents and had family gatherings on Saturday. The family spent more time with the paternal grandparents. All of her paternal aunts graduated from college. Her youngest paternal aunt was in college when Melanie was in high school. When visiting her grandparents, she recalled seeing her aunt working on college assignments. She acknowledged that watching her aunts in their professions and as college graduates influenced her wanting to go to college. Melanie's
mother was very adamant about wanting her daughter to go to college and about following in her aunts' footsteps.

Melanie described her community as being very open and involved where everybody knew each other. She indicated that she had a lot of support from the community, but she thinks it was because people knew her parents and extended family.

Melanie mentioned that she had three close friends in high school and they all took college preparatory courses. One of Melanie's friends was a year older and two were the same age. In this group of friends, they all had plans to be college bound, but the older friend never matriculated to college.

Melanie claimed that her high school guidance counselor did not talk to her much about going to college. She remembered her high school English teachers talking to students about attending college. Melanie said,

"The conversations with the guidance counselor and English teachers were more generic like you need to go to college, but they never sat you down personally to talk about your passion and what you wanted to do in your future."

During the summer after her junior year in high school, Melanie's high school guidance counselor came to her and offered her a chance to take a college course at Ohio University-Chillicothe. This was due in part because Melanie was a member of the school's National Honor Society. Melanie enjoyed the course, the campus, and made the decision that she wanted to attend the OUC Campus after high school. In addition, OUC was cheaper than other campuses and her parents could not afford a lot of money for her
to attend college. She was raised by her parents to not get into debt and her parents did not want her to borrow money for college.

Melanie attended college for one year after high school while still living with her parents. She stopped going to college due to the death of her father and during this time, she became pregnant. Her mother took a leave of absence from work to watch Melanie's baby while Melanie worked to help support the family.

Melanie was married for a short time, and her husband was not supportive of her going to college. At that time her husband was a recent college graduate and he wanted her to be his wife as in a traditional marriage. She describes herself as non-traditional and given that her husband only wanted her to be available to him, she felt she could not fulfill that role. Melanie did work during this time but only with her husband's approval. She indicated that he could not understand why she wanted to go to college even though he had that experience. They eventually divorced and she became a working single mother.

Melanie's desire to attend college never waned. She always kept telling herself that she would take one class at a time but she never did. When Melanie lost her job due to her company closing, she took advantage of her company's program which allowed her to receive a salary and attend college free of charge. At this time, college was easier for her than others in the company since she already had one year of college towards a degree. Melanie's mother and stepfather supported Melanie in her desire to go back to college. Her live-in boyfriend was very supportive of her going to college and made sacrifices for her to attend. Melanie's son was ecstatic about her attending college. She
noticed the difference that her college attendance had on her son's studies and his high school experience. Further, Melanie's college interest seemed to influence her daughter because Melanie's daughter did go to college although she attended only for a short time before deciding it was not for her.

When Melanie was asked if she could do it all over and attend college after high school and obtain a degree, would she do it, she said, "Yes." Melanie admits that she would change some of the choices she made and stay focused on her goals if she had attended college after high school. She wishes that during the time period after high school she could have had someone to talk to about her choices and dreams of going to college. When asked if her experiences in life made her a better student as a non-traditional student, she emphatically said, "Yes." When asked if she had any advice for females in high school today she said,

"I would tell them to know what type of life you want to live and try to strive to that. Do not let all the obstacles that get in your path veer you off your course. Women have more obstacles in life than men."

Melanie felt that women should think more with their head than their heart. She ended by saying,

"The world is too small for women and Appalachian female non-traditional college graduates should sit down with girls in high school and try to make a difference in their lives."

Helen's profile. Helen graduated from Ohio University's-Chillicothe Campus with a bachelor's degree. She attended high school in a southwestern Ohio Appalachian
county where she lived while attending Ohio University-Chillicothe. Helen, who graduated from high school in 1994, was 37 years old at the time of this study and is currently working in her field of study.

The makeup of Helen's family during high school consisted of her mother, father, and younger sister. Both of her parents had high school educations. Her mother later went to college as a non-traditional student to become a licensed practical nurse. Both of her parents were employed and were hard workers. Both sets of Helen's grandparents lived close and the family would get together on Sunday and have dinner, go to a movie, or watch television.

Helen's parents were supportive of her and her sister in their high school activities. Her older step-brother and step-sister attended college however only her step-sister graduated. Additionally, Helen's younger sister received a bachelor's degree.

Helen believed that her community was a close-knit fun place to be as far as being involved in school sports and activities. She described the community as a safe place where you could walk downtown in the evenings and not feel afraid. Helen indicated that her community was not involved in discussing college with her or fellow students. The local Rotary Club did invite seniors to one of their meetings but there was no conversation about college.

In high school, Helen's friends would spend the weekend with her. Helen and her friends talked about going to college. She and one of her friends had discussed going to the same college, but the friend chose a college away from home. Helen decided to stay at home and go to college. She wanted to remain close to her family.
Helen remembered that her school held college nights and events where students and their families could go and get more information. Her guidance counselor and her English teacher talked about the importance of going to college. Helen believed that the English teacher talked more about her going to college than did the guidance counselor. The principal of the school never discussed or was involved in conversations about students attending college.

Helen attended college after high school because her parents would not let her get married until she had a degree. She went with her parents to visit colleges but she did not want to leave home. She had ambitions to obtain a bachelor's degree but became involved with a boyfriend and decided not to go away to college but obtain an associate's degree from a local community college. When she married her boyfriend, Helen enrolled in a university approximately an hour from her home to get her bachelor's degree. Following discussions with her husband and because she felt overwhelmed by the size of the university, she decided to quit college.

After obtaining her associate's degree, Helen worked in a preschool. Since she had to have an Associate's Degree in Child Development to work at the preschool, she went back to the community college and got another associate's degree. Six years later, she attended a university to obtain her bachelor's degree after conversation with her husband and parents.

Helen's children were older when she worked on her bachelor's degree. She missed out on attending her children's sporting events and practices since she took evening classes. Helen would see her children for awhile between work and classes but
generally the children would be in bed before she got home from class. The children really missed her in the summer because she was in class most of the day.

When asked if she could do it all over and attend college after high school would she do it and would she be a better student, she said, "Probably." Helen said,

"As far as my life and how things played out, I think it was best the way it happened for me. When your priorities change and you are paying for it, you know that the money is coming from your pocket so you work much harder."

When asked what she would say to high school girls today about college, she stated "I would encourage them to go and give college a try for a year."

Alice's profile. Alice was an Ohio University-Chillicothe Campus graduate. She graduated with an associate's degree. She attended high school in an Ohio county in south-central Appalachia and lived in the same county while attending Ohio University-Chillicothe Campus. Alice graduated from high school in 1993. At the time of this study, she was 38 years old and working in the field in which she studied in college.

The makeup of Alice's family during high school consisted of her mother and younger sister. Her maternal grandparents lived over the hill not too far from them. Alice's father lived in another state but was generally supportive. She indicated that her whole life was centered around her family. Alice acknowledged that her mother worked hard to support them making the decision to go to college as a non-traditional student to be a licensed practical nurse. Alice was not allowed to work because she helped watch her sister and did some babysitting. During the last two years of high school, Alice and her younger sister spent a great deal of time alone. Their grandparents lived nearby and
checked on them. Alice felt that she lacked a support system during high school other than that of her mother and maternal grandparents.

As remembered, the community was not involved in school affairs such as community members discussing college and future career and educational goals with students. During the summer Alice volunteered as a camp counselor because she liked working with children. Alice was involved in the Jobs for Ohio Graduates (JOGS) program. At JOGS, people would come in and help students prepare for job interviews to get them ready for the workforce. The JOGS staff did not talk about college.

Alice believed that she got along with most of the students, those who were part of the in-crowd and those students who most people would not talk to. She expressed always having a good time and always talking to someone. Her group of friends all wanted to go to college and made plans to attend. She claimed many students wanted to leave their home community and go away to college. Alice does not know if her friends ever attended college.

Additionally, Alice recalled that her home economics teachers encouraged her to go to school to be a home economics teacher. The home economics teachers would talk to the students about anything and everything. Alice helped in other classrooms with tutoring children who needed extra help. She does not remember talking to any guidance counselors or other school administrators about college or the college process. She indicated that guidance counselors discussed college with students who were in sports, on the honor roll, or in clubs. Alice believed the school staff concentrated more on these select students and she guessed that the school staff mostly talked to the students they
believed applied themselves in high school. Alice did get good grades and never made the honor society.

Alice shared that the school did have one session concerning financial aid for college. She and her mother attended the meeting. Alice believed that her mother would have backed her decision to go to college, but her mother could not afford to help her. She did not talk to her father or maternal grandparents about college or financial aid.

Just before she turned 19 years old Alice had a son. At this time her mother, maternal grandparents, and sister helped out as much as they could so she could attend college. Alice tried to go to college but working, being a mom and going to college was too much work for her. Her son's father was present even though they weren't married, but he did not support her going to college.

When asked about why she decided to go college as a non-traditional student, Alice said,

"I wanted a better life for my son. I did not want him to have to struggle like I had. I wanted to be an example for him."

When her son was 16 years old, she went to college. At this time her son started working and Alice believed he was doing his thing so she could go to school. Alice said that her son was very supportive of her going to college.

When asked if she could do it all over and attend college after high school would she do it, she said, "Yes." Alice admitted she took high school fairly seriously and really wanted to go to college. The only reason she did not go to college immediately after high
school was because she needed an income to support her and her son. I asked Alice if she could talk to high school girls today what would she say to them. She said,

"I would tell them that in order to be able to come out ahead, you really have to go to college. I would tell them to look ahead and really see where they want to go and make these decisions before having children."

**Betsy's profile.** During this study Betsy was a current student at the Ohio University-Chillicothe Campus working toward an associate's degree and planning to continue into a bachelor's program. She attended high school and vocational school in a south central Ohio Appalachian county and presently lives in the same county. Betsy graduated from high school in 1993. She was 38 years old and unemployed at the time of the interview.

Betsy's family while in high school consisted of her father, stepmother, two brothers, and two sisters. She was the oldest of the five children. Her paternal grandparents and her step-grandparents were involved with the family. Betsy had a poor relationship with her biological mother when she was a child. Betsy was very close to her paternal grandmother and described her as being her "rock.

Betsy lived in the country during high school and had little contact with other people. She recalls that if high school students had money and nice clothes, they were more popular. Betsy believed the school catered to the popular students more but this did not bother her.

Betsy recalled conversations in her church youth group about future ideas for women in spite of the traditional thoughts that young women were to marry and have
children. The examples surrounding her were many stay-at-home moms with fathers going to work.

Betsy describes herself as a loner in high school. She was very quiet and afraid to talk to people. She remembers having had a handful of friends and they talked about their future, marriage, children, and college. Entering vocational school allowed her to begin to break out of her shell and she became involved in a Business Professionals of America group. She indicated that the vocational school pushed students towards jobs and not towards college.

Goals to encourage females to go to college were not promoted in her high school. Betsy stated that males who were in sports were given guidance to continue their education by attending college. She remembered the vocational school staff talking to them about jobs and attending the vocational school. Betsy did not remember any high school teachers, counselors, or administrators talking to her about attending college. She did say that the guidance counselor at the vocational school mentioned it but her vocational teachers were more apt to approach the subject.

Betsy always wanted to go to college, but she came from a military family with several family members having served in the military. Her father wanted her to join the military so that she would be exposed to a career and get free college tuition in exchange for enlisting and serving her country. She graduated from high school with a 3.8 grade point average and she believed she could have entered college with scholarships but her father pushed her to enlist. He said he could not afford to put five children through
college. She entered the Air Force days after graduation and was injured during basic training.

After being discharged from the Air Force, Betsy came home and joined the workforce. At 19 she chose not to live with her parents because she wanted her freedom and since then she has worked in several different jobs in various areas of employment. She resented her father for pushing her into joining the military and disregarding her desire to go to college. She now understands his position. She continues to dream of going to law school but her current career plan has the same emphasis on working with and helping people who are in trouble or in need. She said,

"I figure if I cannot go the route I wanted in high school and be a lawyer, I can go a route that allows me to kind of be where I wanted to be."

Betsy noted that one of her brothers never attended college, but her other brother and two sisters have attended college as non-traditional students. She admitted the challenge of attending college 20 years after high school graduation especially when taking general education classes. She regretted spending 20 years of her life doing what others wanted her to do with her life including what her parents and ex-husbands wanted her to do. Her ex-husbands did not want her to go to college.

Betsy has what she calls "an amazing life story". She and her children have been poor, homeless, have moved out of state and then back home to family. With a renewed relationship with her biological mother, she and all of her family support her college endeavors. Her significant other told her to stop talking and find out about attending college. Betsy describes her significant other as her "rock".
When asked if she could do it all over and attend college after high school would she do it, she said, "That question is hard to answer." Betsy indicated that she wishes she had attended college after high school, but at the same time now she has many life experiences to draw on which help her in college. She is unsure she would have put the time and energy into college then as she does now. Her energy is poured into getting her degree so she can support her three children and her boyfriend, a cancer-survivor.

With her children she is adamant about college and is adamant that they do not wait as long as she did to attend college. They observe her hard work as a mom and as a college student. I asked her if she could talk to young Appalachian high school girls, what would she say to them about college. She said,

"I would tell them not to wait as long as I did. They need to be able to put 100% towards college. I do not know if going to college straight after high school is the right way because it is important to have life experience also."

Betsy believes today's teens live in a "me" world and would not care about their parents' wishes like she did during high school.

**Becky's profile.** Becky has graduated from the Ohio University-Chillicothe Campus with a bachelor's degree. She attended high school in a south-central Ohio Appalachian County and lived in the same county while attending Ohio University-Chillicothe. Becky graduated from high school in 1991 and at 40 years old currently works in the field she studied in college.

The composition of Becky's family during high school consisted of her mother, father, one brother, and two sisters. All of her siblings were older. Only one of her older
siblings lived at home while she attended high school. Her older brother was married with two children, one sister was engaged, and one sister was married. Becky's paternal grandmother and both maternal grandparents were involved with the family.

Becky indicated that her parents wanted her to go to college after high school and would have paid her college expenses. Her one sister graduated from college while her other sister dropped out of college to go into business with their father. Her siblings never talked to her about college and their parents had no college experience. Becky told her parents that she wanted to go out of state to college. Her parents wanted her to attend her first year at the local college as they believed it would give her time to decide on her career.

Becky described her community as small and similar to a village where everyone knew everyone else. Her family developed close relationships with their neighbors. Becky's neighbors often asked her about college plans. Many of her mother's friends who played bingo together asked her about her plans after high school. Her neighbors and mother's friends truly cared about her future and expressed their opinion about her going to college.

Becky noted that she and her friends talked about going to college. Most of them were going to go to Ohio University-Chillicothe, Ohio University-Athens, or The Ohio State University. She told her friends she planned to attend Ohio University-Chillicothe for the first year and then go to college out of state. They all wanted to go to college, but they didn't know what they wanted to study. None of them had jobs while in high school. They talked about graduating from college, getting married right after college graduation,
and that their lives would fall into place just like a fairy tale. Her friends who went to
Columbus and Athens for college came home every weekend because the campuses were
too large and they missed their friends and families.

Becky remembered that her high school guidance counselor talked to students
about college. He talked to them individually and together and students would hang out
in his office. He asked them over and over about their future plans, if they were going to
college, and what they wanted to study. Becky believes the guidance counselor cared a
great deal about the students' future. She mentioned that the teachers and principal never
talked to the students about their plans after high school. As far as she could remember,
the high school did not have a college night for the high school students and their parents.
Becky and her mom visited Ohio University-Chillicothe, spoke to advisors about the
admission's process and both left feeling overwhelmed.

After high school graduation, Becky went to Ohio University-Chillicothe for a
year. Her grades suffered because she was hanging out and socializing all the time.
During this time, Becky lived at home and did not work. She transferred to a college in
Florida where her sister lived and obtained an associate's degree. She worked several
jobs in the field of her associate's degree. When her sister moved back to Ohio, Becky
soon followed. Becky gained employment in Columbus, got engaged, and became
pregnant. When her engagement was called off, she moved back to her home county
with her one-year old son. Her parents wanted her to get a job and support her child. She
worked a job for six years before they started downsizing. Becky's subsequent job,
which she loved, pointed her in the direction of her career and going back to college and
her parents supported her by helping with her son. Although Becky's father died shortly after she started back to college, she continued because she knew her Dad would want her to obtain her college diploma.

When asked if she could do it all over and attend college after high school would she do it, she said, "Yes, I would." Becky said that going to college made her want to do something better with her life. She wanted to graduate from college like her sister. When asked if she would be a better student attending college after high school or as a non-traditional student, she said, "As a non-traditional student, because I had to spend my own money." She acknowledged that she wanted a better life for herself and her son, and knew she needed to stay in college and get her bachelor's degree. Becky said,

"I had to have that failure in the beginning I guess to make me push myself. I was scared to go back to college as an older student, but I did it."

When asked if she had a group of young Appalachian high school girls sitting in front of her, what would she say to them about plans after high school. She said,

"I would say go to college if you can and cherish it because not everybody gets the opportunity. College after high school is not for everyone, but it does not mean you can never go."

Cross-Case Analysis and Emerging Themes and Findings

The participants' profiles examined the life story of each participant in detail. This section is identified as the cross-case analysis of the research and it examines the participants' stories while looking at the patterns that cut across their stories (Johnson &
This study of seven cases allowed for the comparison of similarities and differences in the lives of the participants.

The first part of this section looks at the emerging themes and compares the cases in regards to a theme identified during data analysis. The second part of this section looks at the research questions and identifies the themes gathered from the participants' stories that answer the research questions.

**Make-up of the family.** Before discussing how the participants' families influenced their college decision-making, it is important to take a look and compare the make-up of the seven families.

**Immediate family members.** All of the participants in this study stressed they had supportive and loving parents. Rosa, Sonia, Melanie, Helen, Betsy, and Becky lived in two-parent families. Becky lived with her father and step-mother and was estranged from her biological mother. Alice lived with a single mother. Alice's father and mother never married and her father lived out of state and she rarely saw him.

The whole group of study participants had siblings living in the home during their high school years. One of the participants was the youngest child in the family, three were middle children, and the other three participants were the eldest siblings.

**Education of family members.** All of the parents of the participants had a high school education with one of the parents obtaining their General Educational Development (GED) or High School Equivalence Diploma. Further, Rosa's parents had master's degrees which were obtained as traditional students and they were teachers.
Helen and Alice's mothers studied for their licensed practical nursing credential as non-traditional students and Melanie's father went to a technical school after high school. There were two participants who had siblings that graduated from college as traditional students and two of the participants had siblings with no college attendance. Additionally, three participants had siblings who attended or were currently attending college as non-traditional students.

**Family financial resources.** The parents of all of the participants were employed at some time during their childhood. All seven of the participants described their parents as hard working. Two of the participants claimed they could not participate in extracurricular activities due to a lack of finances and transportation. The parents of four of the participants were willing to pay for their children to attend college. Two of those four participants did attend college for a short time after high school. The parents of one of the participants was adamant about their daughter not borrowing money to go to college. Becky's father wanted her to enlist in the military to enable the family to get some assistance with college funding.

**Extended family members.** Rosa, Melanie, Helen, Alice, Betsy, and Becky were involved on a regular basis with one or both sets of grandparents. These participants shared that their respective families would get together for family meals and activities. Sonia on the other hand had no relationship with her grandparents or extended family. During the interview process, Helen shared:
"We would take rides on Sunday to visit both sets of grandparents. Sometimes they would come to our house on Sunday and go to church with us. We would then eat lunch and watch movies."

Melanie said that her family was very close to both sets of grandparents:

"We would have family gatherings on Saturday. All of my paternal aunts were college graduates. My youngest aunt was in college when I was in high school. When I visited my grandparents, I would always see her doing her college homework."

Sonia was the participant that stated that she had no involvement with her maternal or paternal grandparent or other extended family members.

"I did not have a lot of connection to any of my grandparents. My mom and dad both had single parents. Neither one of them had a father in their life and they were very poor. My dad's mother died when I was five, and my mom's mother passed away when I was 12. My mom's family was estranged and we had no contact with them."

**Finding: Family Influence on College Decision-making During High School.**

The participants talked in great detail about their families and the influence their family members had on their decision to attend college after high school.

**Parents.** All of the participants indicated that they had loving and supportive parents, but some parents provided more support towards their attending college. Rosa's parents were both teachers and had their master's degrees. Rosa said they were always encouraging her to attend college.
"They were very encouraging. They even said that if I went to school, they would pay every dime. I was stubborn and done with school. I wanted a job and to make money. I was not taking the ACT on Saturday. I wanted to have fun."

Sonia noted that her parents did not talk much about college except for acknowledging that they could not afford it. She mentioned that a college recruiter had come to their house to try to get her brother to enroll because he had really high grades.

"The recruiter came to the house to talk to my parents. My parents were very skeptical and thought it was a gimmick. I remember standing outside of the room wishing that it was me the college wanted. My parents worked very hard to provide us with our home and food and were very frank about not being able to send us to college."

Melanie suggested that her mother was very adamant about wanting her daughter to go to college.

"My mother talked about my going to college all the time. I think she had wanted to go to college but didn't because of life choices she made. She saw the world changing and saw the advantages my paternal aunts had because they went to college. She wanted this life for me."

Melanie's parents told her they would pay for college as long as she attended a local school.

"I was raised not to get in debt and my parents did not want me to get into college debt. They arranged for me to go locally and would pay for it out of their own pocket."
Helen stated that her parents were very supportive and encouraged her to go to college. She said her parents told her that college was important.

"My parents wanted me to apply to several colleges and check things out. We visited several colleges but I didn't want to leave home. I wanted to go to a local college."

Alice's mother was also supportive of her daughter and even went to a financial aid meeting at the high school. Alice said that her mother wanted her to go to college but as a single mother could not afford to help her with finances. She did not talk to her biological father about helping her with financing college. Alice said she and her father did not have discussions regarding college when he would come to visit from another state.

Betsy's father and stepmother were always telling her that they couldn't afford to send her to college. She was one of five children and her father said he wasn't financially able to help them. Her parents wanted her to join the military.

"I come from a military family. There is a lot of air force in my family including cousins, aunts, and uncles. My parents told me that the military was the route I needed to go because I would learn a career and get my education all in one whack. I did not want to enlist but felt I did not have a choice."

Becky's said that her parents were always talking about her going to college. They told her they would pay for her to attend college.
"I wanted to go to college out of state but my parents wanted me to attend college locally for one year. I had no idea what I wanted to take. I was more of a social person than academic."

**Siblings.** All of the participants claimed that during high school their siblings who were attending or had attended college did not discuss college with them. The older siblings who had gone to college did not talk to the participants about how to maneuver the pathway to college. Many of the participants did mention their older and younger siblings who were college graduates. The participants indicated that they wanted to go to college like their siblings which led them to be non-traditional college students.

**Other family members.** Rosa, Melanie, Helen, Betsy, and Brandy indicated that their grandparents often inquired about their future plans after high school. Rosa said, "Every time I saw my mom's mother she would ask me when I was going to college and what were my plans. She was always encouraging me to go to college."

As stated earlier, Melanie's paternal aunts were college graduates and professionals. Melanie and her mother wanted this success for her. Melanie said:

"I would see my youngest aunt working on her college projects and want to help. I would hear my aunts talk about their jobs. I just always knew that I wanted to go to college and be successful like my aunts."

Alice saw her grandparents regularly but did not feel that they were supportive of her academic future. She said college was never discussed with them.
Finding: Community Influence on College Decision-making in High School.

All of the participants lived in rural areas either in the country or in a village. The seven participants talked positively about their communities but indicated that none of the community members talked to them about college. Some of the participants alluded to the fact that this may have been due to a lack of knowledge or due to the distance between community members. Rosa said:

"Everyone in my community knew everyone. I lived in an area of poverty. Community members supported the sport teams but no one ever talked about college."

Sonia noted that she lived in the country and the houses were not close together. Maybe due to the distance between community members they did not interact. She said:

"I lived in a small community where not a lot of things were going on. We had a church up the road and we would sometime be involved in activities there. No one in the community or at church talked to me about going to college."

Melanie talked about the small town in which she lived that qualified according to the census as a city. She said:

"The community was very open and involved in school sports. I had a lot of support from the community because I was involved in my church. But no one in the community talked to me about going to college."

Helen and Melanie grew up in the same small city and both identified it as being a close community that gave support to school sports. Helen described her community as a safe place to live. Helen said:
"I don't really remember anyone in the community being involved at school talking to us about college. I do remember the Rotary meeting seniors would attend but I don't remember if they talked about college. Maybe I just didn't pay attention."

Betsy talked a great deal about her involvement in church activities. Her church did mission work outside of the local area. She indicated that on the bus trips the youth would talk about their future but there were never any adults involved in the conversations.

Becky described her community as a small village where everyone knew everybody. She said her neighbors asked her about college.

"They would ask me if I was going to college, where I was going, and what I wanted to do. A lot of my mom's friends, she had a bingo club and they would come to the house. They would ask me what I was doing after graduation what were my plans."

**Finding: School Staff Influence on College Decision-making in High School.**

All seven participants were high school graduates and two of the participants, Rosa and Betsy attended vocational schools, located in different counties, during the last two years of high school. Rosa and Betsy both graduated from vocational school and their high school in 1993. The students who attended vocational schools appeared to have less interaction with school staff in discussing college and future career plans. Teachers seemed to talk to the participants more often than the guidance counselors.
**Vocational school.** Rosa and her friends decided they wanted to go to the vocational school and study accounting and computers.

"I knew I was not going to go straight to college because I was more social than academic. It's like where are we going to go next year. We all decided to go to the technical school."

These two participants believed that school officials did not talk to them about college because they assumed they would not be going. Rosa said that the guidance counselor really didn't talk to her.

"The guidance counselor never even contacted us to say 'Hey are you going to college.' I guess she just assumed we weren't. I don't ever remembering her saying, 'Have you tried for scholarships.' I don't ever remember having a conversation with her about it. Yea, I think that if you went to the vocational school that you were expected not to go to college. That is kind of what they stated."

Rosa's sister who was a year younger stayed at the high school and did post-secondary work. She said that the guidance counselor talked to her sister about college and scholarships. Rosa said:

"Her grades were a lot higher than mine, so maybe that made a difference. I know now they talk to the vocational students about going to college. I think that just in the past 10 years they have made some big changes."

Betsy believed that her vocational school pushed students towards jobs and not towards college.
"Yes, there was a lot more of that. But the classes I was in out there that was more appropriate anyway. I was in the clerical field and did the clerk typist and cooperative business education programs out there. So I was learning pretty much what I needed to learn to have a career in that field anyway without having to worry about college."

Betsy did say that a few of her instructors talked to students about college but didn't talk to the students individually. The vocational school instructors and guidance counselors appeared to be more focused on preparing students for careers than guiding them toward college.

*High school.* Two of the seven participants recalled high school counselors talking to them about college both individually and in groups of students. The same two participants were the only ones who could recall their high school counselor's name.

Rosa did not remember going to talk to a guidance counselor.

"I was very shy in high school. It seemed like people, I don't want to characterize people, but it seemed like people who had money or that were successful in sports, rich popular athletic kids and I wasn't in that group, but I could hear them talking about college."

Melanie recalled her high school counselor coming to her at the end of her junior year and offering her the chance to take a college class that summer. She availed herself of the opportunity to attend class.
"It got me familiar with the local college campus. That helped me to make the
decision as to what school I wanted to go to because my parents couldn't afford a
lot of money for me to go to school."

Melanie also said that she had a high school English teacher that talked to her about
college but that the guidance counselor did not discuss much about it with her.

"It was more generic like you need to go to college, never set you down to talk
about your passion and you are good at this or have you ever thought about......"

Helen indicated that her high school had a few college nights and events during
her senior year. She was the youngest of the seven participants therefore maybe schools
were more focused at this time in providing students with information about college.
Helen said that her guidance counselor talked about how important it was to go to college
but that the guidance counselors kept changing throughout her high school years. She
gives credit to her high school English teacher for being the one who talked to students
the most concerning college.

Alice indicated that her home economics teachers talked to her about college
instead of the guidance counselors. She said:

"They (her teachers) actually wanted me to go into home economics and be a
teacher. They were very supportive. I don't even remember the guidance
counselors. They focused more on the popular kids involved in sports or the ones
on the honor roll. I guess if you are not applying yourself in high school, they
don't feel you are going to apply yourself in college. I had decent grades but
never made the honor roll."
Alice did state that her high school had one night in which people talked about financial aid. She and her mother attended this event.

Betsy did not recall any high school staff talking to her about college. She said: "I'm sure the sports students had a lot of that. I am sure they had counselors at the school talking to them. I was more of the band geek and that kind of stuff. I don't know if they just assumed that wasn't in the cards for me or what. My instructors at the vocational school did talk to me a little about college."

Becky was the one participant that indicated she had a lot of contact with her high school guidance counselor. She suggested that the guidance counselor had a good rapport with students and took an interest in their future plans.

"Individually we would go in the guidance office to hang out. He would ask us over and over what we were doing after high school. He cared a lot about the students and where they were going to go after high school and what they were going to do. Teachers didn't really talk about it. Neither did the principal, but the guidance counselor talked about it a lot."

Becky stated that her high school did not hold any college events but that she went with her mother for a college visit to obtain information about how to enroll and how to access financial aid. They both left the event feeling overwhelmed.

"They talked to us about beginning classes and what classes we could take. They gave my mom information about financial aid, but I did not qualify. My parents were going to pay for my school. I just remember her (mom) being overwhelmed..."
because she didn't understand. I didn't either. There wasn't really a lot of
guidance as far as financial aid."

Out of the seven participants, none of them indicated that school administrators
were involved in talking about college to high school students.

**Finding: Peer Influence on College Decision-making in High School.** All
seven participants described close high school friendships in which they talked about
college, marriage, children, and future plans. The degree of influence of friends was
different for each participant.

Becky was the participant that talked the most about her friends. She described
herself as very social and acknowledged that she liked to party. Becky said that they
would all get together and talk about the future and college.

"My friends and I talked a lot about college and what we wanted to do. We didn't
know what we wanted to do. I can remember sitting at one of my friend's house
and saying I didn't know what I wanted to do and her saying the same thing. We
were going to go to college but didn't know what to expect. We talked about
getting married right after college and everything would fall into place like a fairy
tale."

Melanie stated she had three close friends - one who was older and two who were
the same age as Melanie. They all talked about college and the jobs that they were
pursuing. The older friend ended up not going to college.
Helen and her friends talked about college. She and one of her friends wanted to go to the same college but then Helen decided to go locally for the first year because she wanted to stay home. Helen commented on how friendships change after high school.

"It was funny that after high school you start to have different friends. People you didn't see very often in high school, you may see now every day and form different relationships."

Alice believed she got along with most everyone and could talk about anything to her friends. She stated that she and her friends had conversations about college.

"Most of us wanted to go on to college. We all had plans. Most of us had plans on leaving home to go to college and getting away from our community because of the lack of things to do."

Alice did not know if her friends had gone on to college because she lost track of them.

One of the participants lost a friendship because her friend did not think she should go to college. Sonia was involved in Upward Bound, a program that guided high school students toward college.

"At the time Upward Bound was considered an odd thing I guess. People just didn't talk about college like they do now. I actually lost a friendship by going to Upward Bound."

Betsy described herself as a loner but did have a few friends that talked about college.
"I was very quiet and afraid to talk to people. I had a handful of friends that discussed college, but never with anybody else. When I went to the vocational school, I kind of broke out of that shell a little bit."

Rosa and her friends did not want to go to college as they had a desire to get jobs, make money and earn a living.

"We weren't going and were tired of school. Since I went to a vocational school, it was kind of thought that you wouldn't go to college."

When asked who had the biggest influence on her college decision-making, Rosa said:

"Friends yes, definitely. It is sad to say now. I mean seriously I think they did. My friend who went to college after high school stopped going and got married and had kids. She is now going back to college. She is calling me for advice."

Non-traditional college graduates can be helpful to current non-traditional college students by providing them with ways to care for family, be employed, and attend college.

**Finding: Influence of the Expectations of the Female Role.** All of the participants emphatically stated that during the time of their high school graduation from 1985-1995, it was expected that young women would marry, have children, and in some cases be employed. Family members, church members, and people in their community made these expectations known to the participants. The parents who wanted their daughters to go to college still discussed the idea of their daughters getting married and having children once they were out of college. These participants believed that their
parents wanted them to have a career but only as something to fall back on or to supplement their family's income if needed.

Sonia talked about her mother and the women in her small community and indicated that none of them talked about her going to college. She said:

"No one talked about it where I lived. Most of the moms on my street were stay-at-home moms. In fact when my mom went to work when my brother was in third grade, she was kind of an oddball if that makes sense. She was one of the first ones who went back to work. To even go to work was odd. No one talked about college. I know it sounds weird to say, but it was like we were to marry, have a family, and have kids."

Melanie spoke about having to care for her ill father during high school. Her mother had been a stay-at-home mother but had to go to work when Melanie's father became ill. It seemed that her mother went to work as a necessity because of a sick spouse.

"In high school, I was limited to what I did in my high school functions because I took on responsibilities at home like taking care of my father. I became the cook while my mother worked."

After high school, Melanie did attend college for a short while but had to go to work after having a baby. Her father had died and her mother watched her child while she was at work supporting all of them. Melanie was briefly married.

"I was married for a short time, but my ex-husband wanted me to be in a traditional marriage and I am not traditional. I just didn't recognize it at the time."
I did not see the signs until after we were married. He wanted me to only be existing to him and that is not me. He allowed me to work, but I wanted to go to college. We were only married seven or eight months."

Melanie defied the traditional female role her ex-husband wanted her to fill and moved forward towards college. Her mother supported her by watching her child.

The youngest participant, Helen, indicated that no one talked about her being married and having children. However she had always wanted to be a mother and wife. Her parents told her that she could not get married until she graduated from college.

Alice had a baby out of wedlock shortly after graduating from high school. She tried to go to college but could not handle working, taking care of a baby, and attending college. Her mother, sister and grandmother tried to help her, but she eventually quit in order to go to work full-time. The father of her child did not support her going to college.

Betsy indicated that marriage and children were thought to be the route females were to take after high school.

"Getting married and having children was pretty much the standard thing. Still is a little bit. I think a lot of parents were still stuck in those traditional ways at that time where they didn't push college on their daughters. They pushed it on their sons. Their daughters were raised to get married and take care of family. I grew up in a home where my mom was a full-time mom. She didn't have to worry about working outside of the home."
Betsy's father wanted her to join the military, learn a trade, marry, and have children. As stated previously, Betsy enlisted in the military but did not finish basic training due to an injury.

Becky's parents did not push traditional values of marriage and children. Becky did have a baby out of wedlock a couple of years after high school while she was attending college. Her parents wanted her to get a job and provide for her child. Marrying the father of her child was not seen as an option because he did not want the child or marriage.

Summary. The experiences of the seven participants varied in terms of the exposure, support that each woman had regarding college, the commonalities that they had with their peers, and the expectations placed on them regarding traditional roles and responsibilities for women. In summary one of the participant's father wanted her to join the military, learn a trade, marry, and have children. The parents of four of the seven participants wanted them to have a college education before marrying and having children. Two of the participants' parents hoped that their daughters would marry, have children and possibly get a job.

All seven participants had close family ties and some bonds were tighter than others. Five of the seven participants were very adamant about living in close proximity to their family for the rest of their lives. These participants had no desire to leave their family or their community.

All of the participants indicated some involvement of school staff in discussions about college. It appeared that teachers were more likely to discuss college. Two
participants spoke fondly of their guidance counselors and appreciated their involvement in their college decision-making.

**Research Questions and Findings**

This study examined the college decision-making process and influences of social capital on Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio during their high school years. This section considers the findings in this study in relationship to the research questions.

**Question 1. What were the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio?** Participants listed five main influencing factors when making decisions about attending college. These factors included family, friends, schools, finances, and personal goals. Each participant had their own approach to making decisions about college during high school. There were many similarities and a few differences. The participants listened to parents, friends, and school staff when deciding about college attendance. The options given to the participants during their decision-making process were college, marriage, employment, or the military. Two of the participants stated that their parents did not assist them in finding information about attending college. All of the participants except for Rosa appeared to follow the lead of their parents in making decisions regarding whether or not to attend college.

Rosa allowed her friends to help her make decisions about attending college. She and her friends wanted to get jobs, make money, get married, and have children. Rosa's parents were educators and knew the importance of higher education and what it would
mean for their daughter's future. However, nothing they could say influenced her differently. Rosa allowed her friends to sway her decisions about college attendance. I believe this participant showed the most regret during the interview process lamenting that she chose not to attend college after high school. Rosa realized now that she had been afforded all the necessary resources to go to college but allowed her friends to sway her decisions about her future.

Betsy was the one participant who blamed her father for her not being allowed to make her own decisions about her life after high school. He pushed her to go to the military. Rosa had multiple relatives including her father who served in the military. She said:

"I didn't get to follow through with my desires. Which was really difficult for me. I really resented my father for pushing me to do something I did not want do at all."

Betsy adamantly did not want to go into the military but her father stated he could not afford for her to go to college. The powerful influence of this military family made Betsy's college decisions for her. Betsy resented her father for years but later forgave him.

**Question 2. How did social capital affect the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio?** The findings of this study give us evidence that social capital does affect the college preparatory experiences of Appalachian female high school students. Sometime the
effect can be positive or negative. Social capital begins with relationships that include family, friends, and school staff.

**Social capital - family.** All seven of the participants talked lovingly about their parents and their support throughout their childhood and teens. All of the participants had parents who were always willing to help with their homework.

Rosa, Melanie, Helen, and Becky's parents had the financial resources for them to go to college. They encouraged them to attend college and told them they would not have to pay anything. Their parents appeared to provide educational resources for their children. These parents routinely discussed college and the value of higher education. Melanie, Helen, and Becky did attend college for a short time after high school. Rosa's parents had master's degrees in education and knew all about enrolling in and attending college. They not only had the financial resources but also had the necessary college contacts to make the decision-making easier for Rosa. Rosa did not attend college after high school.

All seven participants had siblings with some relationships being stronger than others. None of the participants said that they talked to their siblings about college, not even those women with older siblings who knew about college.

Six participants indicated that their grandparents would talk to them about college and their future. These interactions with grandparents were relationship that were shown to be caring, supportive and loving.

**Social capital - friends.** Six of the participants and their friends held conversations about going to college. They talked about their future and about attending
college together. These relationships with friends gave the participants the support they needed regarding making decisions to attend college.

Rosa was the one participant who appeared to be negatively affected by her relationship with her friends as far as making the decision to attend college. Her friends supported and encouraged her not to attend college. Rosa's friendships were more powerfully persuasive in her college decision-making than her well-educated parents who had the social capital, knowledge and financial resources to be better informed about college. She had all the resources that would make the transition to college smooth. Yet Rosa allowed her friends to guide her decisions about attending college. As stated earlier, I believe Rosa showed the most regret during the interview process choosing not to attend college after high school. She realizes now that she had been afforded all the necessary resources to go to college and she did not avail herself of the support. This participant made many sacrifices such as time away from family and school debt to be able to go to college as a non-traditional student. Rosa does not comprehend how she allowed friends to have such an impact on her life and her future and she still regrets allowing two friends to sway her life decisions. I keep thinking about this participant and her decision-making process during high school. Friendships are more powerful than I assumed. She had all the resources to go to college and did not go, whereas the majority of the participants wanted to go to college but did not have the resources or support to attend.

**Social capital - school.** All of the participants except for Rosa indicated that there were high school or vocational school staff that talked to them about attending college.
Three of the seven participants stated that they talked to high school staff members about college. Two of the participants talked to teachers and one participant talked to a guidance counselor. All seven participants believed that school counselors talked to students who were in sports about college and these students were mainly male. Four of the participants could not recall the name of their high school counselor. All of the participants said that their high school principals did not discuss college with them. Two of the schools provided college nights for the students.

As stated earlier, Rosa and Betsy attended vocational school during the last two years of high school from 1991 to 1993 in two different counties. During the high school years of the participants, there appeared to be a stigma about attending vocational school. Rosa and Betsy claimed school staff did not talk to them about college because they assumed the students would not be attending college since they were going to the vocational school. Although some vocational jobs could be enhanced by employing college graduates or attendees, the participants both believed that the school staff was there to teach them a trade and not talk about college. Today we see a very different school climate in vocational school whereby vocational school counselors are providing information to their students about college education and/or how to enhance their career choice.

*Social capital - community.* The participants believed their communities supported them through either church and/or sports, but did not feel that their communities provided any educational resources. The participants said that none of the adults who worked with them in camps, sports, or church youth groups ever talked to
them about their future. They claimed that no one talked to them about going to college. The importance of higher education had no presence permeating these rural Appalachian areas. In addition, several of the participants did not recall the community members talking about going to college and returning home to help support the community. All seven participants commented that in their community females got married, had children, and could be employed if the family needed the financial resources. No one in their community assisted the participants in making decisions about college.

**Cross -Case Analysis of the College Decision-making Process as Non-traditional Female College Students**

Even though the lived experiences of the seven participants as non-traditional female college students was not a focus of the research questions, it was evident in the interviews as to how the participant's college decision-making in high school affected their life. The story of their lived experiences is told in their individual profiles, but I believe it to be important to do a cross-case analysis on this part of their life story. This section considers the college decision-making of the participants as non-traditional college students and also looks at influencing factors and social capital affecting those decisions.

Six of the participants were college graduates. Alice and Sonia obtained associate's degrees. Rosa, Melanie, Helen, and Becky graduated with bachelor's degrees. Rosa is currently working on her master's degree. The participants indicated sacrificing time away from their family in order to graduate from college. The completion of the participants' degrees as non-traditional college students implies a great deal of hard work
and commitment in achieving this goal. Betsy is a current college student in an associate's degree program but hopes to complete a bachelor's degree.

Additionally, three of the participants are currently married, one of the participants has been divorced and is currently married, one of the participants has been married and is currently divorced, and two of the participants have never been married. All seven of the participants have held jobs in multiple fields and two of the participants gave birth to children out of wedlock.

As non-traditional students, all seven of the participants had children. The seven participants stated attending college set a good example for their children and made their families proud. Each of the participants discussed the hardships of being a non-traditional student on themselves and their immediate families. All seven participants acknowledged family members who supported them in their decision to attend college as a non-traditional student.

**Rosa.** Rosa's decision to go back to college as a non-traditional student was because she wanted to do it for her children. She indicated her husband, parents, and children were her support system during college. Thinking back to her college decision-making in high school she said:

"If I knew back then that I would have to sacrifice time with my family, I would have gone to college after high school."

Rosa indicated that she was a better student as a non-traditional attendee because she has more faith in herself than she did in high school and would not settle for anything but her best work.
**Sonia.** Sonia's decision to go back to college as a non-traditional student was because she needed some college credits for her job. She had the support of her husband, daughter, and parents.

"My parents were very supportive. They said they knew I had it in me. They were glad to see me go. My Dad said he was proud of me. I'm going to get teary."

Sonia believed that her life would be easier financially if she had gone to college after high school. Yet she did not think she would have been a better student.

"I don't think I would have been a good student back then. Because the experience I got hands-on going that route really influenced how I see things. Would I be happier.....I don't know. School became easier for me with having experience. Yet I learned I couldn't do it all as a non-traditional student......make dinner, perfect clean house, do everything I needed to do for my family, and go to school. My husband and daughter had to help me."

**Melanie.** Melanie credits not finishing college after high school to poor life choices and the need to help her mother after her father died. She kept telling herself that someday she would go back to college but did not do so until she lost her job. She credits her boyfriend, mother, stepfather, and children for supporting her desire to go back to college.

"My boy-friend made many sacrifices for me to go to college. We lived together at the time and he took on responsibilities and worked in a bad situation so that I could go."
In looking back at her college decision-making in high schools Melanie said:

"I would make different choices. Yes I made those choices I understand I made those decisions. I wish I had stayed working on my goals."

Melanie does admit that she was a better non-traditional college student than her first year as a traditional college student.

Helen. Helen went to college after high school and obtained her associate's degree. She had to go back to college as a non-traditional student because she needed a bachelor's degree in order to keep her job. Helen's husband, parents, and children supported her going back to college. She said her grades were good when she was a traditional student, but she was a better student as a non-traditional student.

"I was paying for it myself. I was a good student when my parents paid for it the first time. When your priorities change and you are paying for it, you know that the money is coming from your pocket so you work so much harder."

Alice. Alice said she went back to college because she wanted a better life for her son. Alice said that her son was her inspiration to go back to college.

"I didn't want him to have to struggle like I had. I wanted to be an example for him. He said he was very proud of me."

Alice would like to continue her education and get her bachelor's degree but her money is tight.

Becky. Becky obtained her associate's degree as a traditional college student, but had to go back to college years later in order to get a better job. She said her parents were very supportive of her going back to college. Becky's father died and she was
determined she would finish her bachelor's degree because that is what her father would have wanted.

"Going back to college made me want to do something better. It pushed me to want to be better. I wanted to do this for my son. I was scared to go back. I thought I would be oldest one in the classroom. I saw it wasn't true. My son was in elementary school and was always telling me that he was proud of me." Becky tells her son that he will go to college and choose a degree where he will love his job.

**Betsy.** Betsy is a current non-traditional college student and has yet to feel the joy of obtaining her degree. Her boyfriend, children, and her parents are her support system. Betsy said family members stopped her from going to college for 20 years. Going to college has always been her dream.

**Summary**

All seven of the interviews were informal. Each of the participants were willing and comfortable to share their story. All participants became reflective and emotional discussing their decision-making in high school and how those decisions affected their lives. The participants appeared to appreciate my having been a non-traditional college student. The participants were encouraged by my continued education in college saying they too could possibly further their education regardless of their age.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Chapter Five summarizes the preceding four chapters, offering a brief summary of the study including: an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology, and findings. It discusses the implications for action based on the findings and the recommendations for further research. As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted under the framework of social capital theory. Systems theory also factored into the framework of this study looking at how schools give equal opportunities to all students. In addition, I looked at the participants through a constructivist lens focusing on their meanings to their lived experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Summary of the Study

This research project examined the college decision-making process of Ohio Appalachian non-traditional female college students. There is some research on non-traditional students, but data is limited regarding non-traditional female college students in Appalachian areas. This study looked at the role of social capital on the participants' decision-making concerning college.

Overview of the problem. The local and global economies require individuals to have the educational credentials, capabilities, and technological expertise to work in an ever-changing environment (Beaulieu, Israel, Hartless & Dyk, 2001; Hutchins, Meece, Byun & Farmer, 2012). It is important for college graduates to remain in rural Appalachian areas to help build and sustain the communities by starting new businesses and integrating new ways of thinking (Fluharty & Skaggs, 2007).

Students may have to work, be responsible for their family, or try to afford college (Schmitt & Boushey, 2012). Parents may not know how to complete college entrance
and financial aid applications. High school students may be influenced by parents, family members, school staff, and peers (Epstein, 2011).

**Purpose statement and research questions.** There are many high school students who aspire to go to college and yet there are circumstances that hinder them from attending college (Niu & Tienda, 2013). The majority of the research on college decision-making discusses the influential factors in the lives of high school students, but does not discuss the impact the student's social capital has on the decisions they make for their future. Throughout this research, I wanted to understand the participants' perspectives regarding how and why they made their decisions related to higher education. The study focused on the following two research questions:

- What were the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio?
- How did social capital affect the college preparatory experiences during high school of Appalachian non-traditional female college students in Ohio?

**Review of the methodology.** This study involved qualitative research whereby interviews were conducted with seven participants. Participants were purposefully selected in order to understand the issue of college decision-making in high school and interview those Ohio Appalachian non-traditional female college students who had experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2009; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The semi-structured interviews included open-ended questions based on the study's research questions (Knox & Burkard, 2009) with other interview questions
emerging during the conversation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each interview was scheduled and lasted for approximately one hour.

**Review of the Findings in the Framework of the Study**

The framework for this study included the theories of social capital and systems theory as it relates to schools. Social capital theory emphasizes the significance of resources and networks that individuals use to secure their position (Alfred, 2009). In addition, social capital theory assumes that an individual's family and other relationships are an important asset that can be capitalized when needed (Alfred). Kilpatrick, Field, and Falk (2013) found in their study that people learn and construct knowledge through their relationships with others. Each of the participants constructed their knowledge base regarding college attendance as non-traditional students through their life experiences building upon their college decision-making in high school. The data collected in this qualitative research study supports the research literature that social capital possessed or not possessed by high school students affects their decisions regarding college attendance. The social capital themes identified by the participants related to the social capital acquired due to the capital of their parents, other family members, peers, school staff, religious organizations, and community members. The data in this research study demonstrates how the social capital or lack of social capital impacted the life of the participants in their college decision-making in high school and also how those decisions impacted them later in their life as non-traditional students.

Systems theory factors into the framework of this study when looking at schools and school leadership. School systems have been the focus when people want to identify
blame for problems in communities and society as a whole (Stewart, 2006). The participants in this study appeared to believe that their schools did not provide enough information about college. Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, and Perna (2009) found that students with little information concerning college and financial aid were less likely to seek information on their own.

The participants also believed that some students, such as athletes, higher income students, and students on the honor roll were included in conversations about college and scholarships. These relationships must be equal for all students. Scott (2001) defines systemic equity as:

"the transformed ways in which systems and individuals habitually operate to ensure that every learner – in whatever learning environment that learner is found – has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence, independence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life" (Scott, 2001, p. 2).

School administrators, teachers, and school board members must continually be alert to ensure that all school systems are not exhibiting any forms of inequities (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004).

The participants identified individuals, teachers and guidance counselors who talked to them about their future and/or college. None of them identified any conversations between school staff and their parents regarding college attendance for their child. The natural and open systems models are important in developing and maintaining dynamic and harmonious relationships which are important in school and
parent partnerships (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Kearney, Kelsey, and Herrington (2013) discussed the importance of school leaders being mindful regarding what is happening with the students in their schools. It is important for school leaders including teachers, guidance counselors, and principals to communicate with parents and students when talking about the future of the students. Semke and Sheridan (2012) found that it was vital for parents to be engaged in the school life of their children by helping to develop their educational goals that include plans toward higher education and their future career.

I looked at the participants through a constructivist lens which focuses on the socially constructed meanings that participants associate with life events they encounter (Hunter & Laursen, & Seymour, 2007; Tierney & Lincoln, 1994). This approach acknowledges that an individual's understanding of their life experiences is complex (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and must be viewed in a reflective manner. Therefore it was important to have each participant review their individual profile of their story to ensure that the participant's story and the retelling of that information is correct and identifies the reflection on their college decision-making process (Tetley, Grant, & Davies, 2009) and their lived experiences.

**Additional Findings**

The following two sections discuss two findings which do not answer the research questions but are powerful findings concerning this research study. The first is the importance of participants sharing life stories to inform others in similar circumstances followed by the impact that this research had on me.
**Importance of sharing life stories.** As all seven participants told their stories, they seemed to gain a new appreciation for their own strength and determination. When I contacted each participant, they were more than willing to share their story and be interviewed for this research study. Initially they thought they were just sharing their story to help my research. As the interviews progressed, it was obvious that telling their story became increasingly important to them. They reflected upon their high school years and their college decisions. This was the first time for all seven participants to talk about these decisions to someone outside of their family. Lieblich (2013) discussed the healing powers of people telling their life story through reading and writing. I believed I watched the healing power as some of my participants told their story. It was difficult watching some of the participants become emotional when they realized that their struggles as non-traditional students related back to those decisions they made in high school. At some point during the interviews, all seven participants had tears in their eyes. Some participants got teary when talking about their parents and wondering if their parents had been disappointed in the life decisions of their daughters. All seven participants acknowledged their parents were proud of them and supported them as non-traditional college students.

It was inspirational watching the six participants recognizing their own strength as non-traditional college students. The wake-up call for the participants was that they made it and were pleased with themselves for their accomplishments. One participant currently struggles as a non-traditional college student wanting desperately to accomplish
her goals. She was inspired when I told her of other non-traditional students who experienced the same struggles but yet accomplished their goals.

When I asked each of the participants what they would say to the Appalachian female high school students about making decisions about college, they all became animated and said they would like to talk to these young women. They believed the stories of their struggles as non-traditional college students could possibly help these high school young women when making decisions about college. The participants knew that teenage girls might not heed their suggestions, but they all believed if they could change the mind of one young woman, it would be worth it. I believe each of the seven participants were empowered after telling their story and wanted to help young women make good decisions about college and their future.

**Impact of research on me.** One of the most personal findings for me was the impact that the participants' stories had on me. Hamilton, Dunnett, and Downey (2012) found in their study that a researcher's own self-concept can be changed based on the setting and the people being studied. When I listened to the participants' stories and saw the emotion on their faces and the tears in their eyes, I became emotionally involved in their stories. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, and Liamputtong (2007) concluded that researchers open themselves to the stories that their participants tell. I empathized with my participant's pain, excitement and joy for the path they had taken to get to college. It was empowering for me to witness the realization of the studied women that their college decision-making in high school changed their lives and impacted the intrinsic make-up of who they are today. The participants' stories awakened my life experiences about college
decision-making during my high school days. I became reflective of my life and remembered the pain, frustration, and sacrifices I made to become and succeed as a non-traditional college student.

As a higher education faculty member, I have a deep respect and admiration for non-traditional college students. After hearing the participants' stories, I am more determined to be available to my students who are struggling with the demands of going to college, supporting children and family, and working.

**Scope of the Study**

The findings of this research are specific to the context studied that focused on Ohio Appalachian non-traditional female college students. The stories of other Ohio Appalachian non-traditional female college students may or may not be similar to the stories told by the participants of this study. However, the results of this study contribute to a limited research literature base that examines the life stories of Ohio Appalachian females who attended or are attending college as non-traditional students.

**Conclusions**

The following sections look at the implications of the findings from this study, areas for future research, and concluding personal remarks.

**Implications for action.** A part of this study considered how social capital during high school influenced the college-decision making of the Ohio Appalachian non-traditional female college students interviewed in this study. Therefore, it was essential to inquire about the high school the participants attended. One of the findings from this study is that the participants claimed their high schools provided limited college
preparedness assistance, they did not hold college information nights, or distribute information concerning college attendance. In addition, only three of the participants mentioned that high school staff discussed college with them. Research shows that college-preparatory activities at school are beneficial in helping students and families make future educational plans and decisions about attending college (Choy, Horn, Nunez & Chen, 2000). The participants of this study implied that maybe they would have had the opportunity to go to college if their schools had provided them and their parents more resources concerning financial aid and how to complete college applications. In addition, two of the participants, who attended vocational school, implied the school staff made assumptions that they would not be attending college.

In light of No Child Left Behind (2001), it is imperative that schools focus on system-wide improvements that include defining roles of school staff and the development of partnerships with parents (Boykin, Dougherty & Lummus-Robinson, 2010). Part of these district-wide improvement efforts could look at all standards and criteria necessary for high school students to be career and/or college ready (Haycock, 2010). The school system could provide ongoing resources that assist students and parents in navigating the road to college (Hill, 2008; King, 2012). The climate of the school is important because when students look at their school in a positive light, they will value education and aspire to establish educational and career goals for their future (Berzin, 2010).

The seven participants implied that they had a limited relationship with their high school or any higher education institution. During their high school years, six of the seven participants lived in counties in rural Appalachian Ohio where there were
colleges/universities. Smith and Zhang (2009) discussed the importance of high schools forming relationships with higher education institutions in order to positively influence their students. The success of rural high school students means success to the rural communities (Hendrickson, 2012). Therefore it is vital for colleges and universities in rural Appalachian areas to establish relationships with local high schools.

**Recommendations for further research.** Although the findings in this study provide an understanding of how these Ohio Appalachian non-traditional female college students made decisions about college during high school, it also gives us an understanding of how these women made the decision to go back to college as non-traditional college students.

There are several possible future research endeavors based on the findings of this study. The first study might be to look at the six high schools attended by the seven participants and interview some of the current female seniors. The questions asked of the current Ohio Appalachian female high school students could be similar to the ones asked in this study. The participants in this study graduated from high school between 1985 to 1995. Therefore it has been 18 to 28 years since the participants graduated. It would be important to look at how these current female seniors are making decisions about college attendance. Are the current high school teachers, guidance counselors, and principals in these high schools talking to the students more now about college decision-making or is it the same as it was when the studied participants attended high school?

It is key for school staff to comprehend the influence of social capital on the college matriculation goals of their students (Dyce, Albod, & Long, 2012). This includes
the building of school partnerships with families to help students achieve these goals because parents must share and take ownership of their children's goals (Dyce et al., 2012). A positive school climate is required in order to develop collaborative relationships between schools, families and communities (Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002). None of the seven participants in this study remember their schools having college visits and only one remembers college staff coming to their school. Masumoto and Brown-Welty (2009) discussed the importance of high schools offering academic planning for gathering college information, including financial aid advising, along with college and career guidance. Future research of these six highs schools is important in order to examine who is currently helping Appalachian Ohio female high schools students make decisions about college and how they are being helped.

The second area for future research would be to examine the two vocational schools that two participants in this study attended. Two participants described their vocational schools as institutions that only focused on careers with no mention of higher education. Vocational schools during the time period of the participants were not designed to prepare students for college (Boykin, Dougherty, & Lummus-Robinson, 2010). Future research could look at the programs offered currently at these two vocational schools and inquire what career and college pathways are offered to the current vocational students? Additionally a future study could explore which vocational school staff are working with students on their educational goals? Another area of inquiry could examine whether parents are involved in helping to establish the future plans for their children?
Another possible research topic from this study would be to examine the roles of females in the Ohio Appalachian counties of our participants. Rezek (2010) found that there was a pattern of gender roles in Appalachian areas. Each of the seven participants in this study believed that their families, school, and communities guided them toward the traditional female roles of marriage, children, and employment but only if needed to help supplement family income. A study of current high school seniors in these counties could involve documenting their stories of where they are being led, whether it is towards familial relationships, careers, college, or the military.

An additional possible area for future research would be looking at the influence of peers on the decisions made by high school students residing in various Ohio Appalachian counties. Parents, other family members, school staff, community members, and peers influence a high school student's path to college (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000; Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011; Smith & Zhang, 2009; and Wolniak & Engberg, 2010). As noted previously, one of the participant's friends had a huge impact on her college decision-making. This same participant is the woman that had educated parents and the social capital to guide her decision towards college attendance. The power of peer relationships is apparent in the scenario related to this participant. A study regarding peer influences on their friends could examine high school students and how their friends influence their future career and educational decisions. It would also be interesting to see how high school students rank the influential people in their lives as far as to whom they listen to more often or whose opinion carries more weight.
The final suggestion for future research involves looking at the impact of a person's life when they are asked to tell their story. I strongly believe that each of the seven participants needed to tell their story in order to validate their successes and struggles as Appalachian Ohio female non-traditional college students. I feel that the participants' lives were changed as they told their story to someone outside of their family. I also think that the participants embraced sharing with someone who appreciated hearing their life experiences. As stated previously, the emotions and reflections emanating during the interviews were very powerful and heartfelt. I believe that research examining the power of sharing life stories would be valuable.

**Concluding remarks.** This section concludes my dissertation by stating my personal insights, beliefs, and inspirations concerning this research study. I have found that finishing a research study is somewhat bittersweet. A doctoral program involves a great deal of hard work and is very time-consuming. The courses, assignments, dissertation, and defenses are building blocks that contribute to the accomplishment of gaining the doctoral credential and being able to put those three initials after your name. Writing one's dissertation is an enormous amount of work and it takes over your life. The dissertation journey required perseverance and determination to stay focused on the reward at the end. The saying by Walt Disney "If you dream it, you can do it," kept me going.

This doctoral degree gives me a sense of accomplishment and serves as a bucket list item for me. It helped me prove to myself that I could do it. I stated that one of the findings of my research study was the impact interviewing the participants had on me
personally. Non-traditional college students, Appalachian families, and female roles have always been areas of interest for me. I knew going into this research that I would enjoy doing it. I never realized that the participants' stories would motivate me to know more and continue my research. These seven women are an inspiration. Their stories encourage me to know more about non-traditional college students, Appalachian families, and female roles in rural Appalachian areas. I trust that this study has contributed to the body of research concerning Appalachian Ohio female non-traditional college students.
References


doi:10.1007/s10964-010-9536-3


doi: 10.2224/sbp.2009.37.8.1017


doi:10.1177/1098214005283748


Appendix A: Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Dissertation: A Study of the College Decision-making Process and Influences of Social Capital of Appalachian Non-traditional Female College Students in Ohio During Their High School Years

Researcher: Jamie Harmount, M.Ed., MS.

You are being asked to participate in research for dissertation completion. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks of this research. Also, it explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being conducted to examine what was happening in the life of Appalachian non-traditional female students in Ohio during their school years in relationship to their higher education decision-making process. The high school attended by these non-traditional female students must have been located in an Ohio Appalachian county. This research looks at the role family, schools, and communities play in decision-making of these non-traditional female students. It is important to look at postsecondary decision-making processes so that young people can have all the possible resources available to them when making these important decisions. By examining the lives of Appalachian non-traditional female students during their high school years, hopefully reasons will be uncovered as to why young people delay post-secondary education. The results of this study could be used to help high school students, families, schools, and communities provide better support to prepare Appalachian female adolescents in the future.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher and answer questions pertaining to your life during your high schools years. The questions will examine your decision-making process concerning going to college after high school graduation and influential factors and people involved in the process. You will be asked questions concerning the location of your high school and college, as well as information concerning your family at the time of your high school years. You should not participate in this study if you have any hesitation in answering questions pertaining to your life during your high school years related to your educational choices.

Your participation in the study will include approximately one (1) hour for the interview and approximately one (1) hour for any follow-up or clarification of interview transcription by email or phone.
Risks and Discomfort

No risks or discomforts are anticipated.

Benefits

This study is important to science/society because it will give further evidence as to why young people in Appalachian areas do not attend college and what is needed to be in place for high school graduates to attend college if they desire to do so.

Sharing your story to others may benefit the larger society and community.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by the researcher. Your personal and demographic information will be kept in a locked file. There will be no mention of names of participants in the research study. Your interview will be assigned a number.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU; and
* Members of the dissertation committee.

Compensation

No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Jamie Harmount at harmount@ohio.edu or Dr. Dwan Robinson (dissertation chair) at robinsd3@ohio.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you
might receive as a result of participating in this study

- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Printed Name

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

All of the interview questions will be semi-structured and will allow for clarification and expansion of answers as necessary.

Demographic Questions

1. What is your current address?
2. What college are you currently attending and where is it located?
3. What are you currently studying in college?
4. If a college graduate, where did you attend and where is it located?
5. What did you study in college?
6. What high school did you attend, where is it located, and what year did you graduate?
7. If you received a GED, what high school would you have graduated from, where is it located, and what year would you have graduated?

Biographic Questions

1. When you were in high school and at the time of graduation, what was the makeup of your family (mother and father, single mother, single father, grandparents, foster parents, etc.)?
2. Tell me about the members of your family?
3. Do you have siblings that attended college after high school graduation?
4. Do you have a parent who went to college after high school graduation?
5. Do you have a parent who went to college as a non-traditional student?
6. How would you describe the community in which you lived during your high school years and at the time of graduation?
High School Decision Making Process

1. Please tell me about your decision to enter college? For example, when did you make the decision and what and who prompted you?

2. How were your parents involved in your college decision-making process as to whether to attend or not to attend college after high school graduation?

3. How were other family members involved in your college decision-making process as to whether to attend or not to attend college after high school graduation?

4. How were your high school friends involved in your college decision-making process as to whether to attend or not to attend college after high school graduation?

5. How were other individuals in your community other than family or peers in your college decision-making process as to whether to attend or not to attend college after high school graduation?

6. How did the community support your education beyond high school. Do you feel the culture of your community in which you lived at the time of high school graduation encouraged or discouraged you to attend college? Explain.

7. What school staff was involved in your decision-making process of whether to attend college after high school?

8. What support systems assisted you with the college decision-making process.

Probing or Clarifying Questions

1. Do you have anything else to say that maybe we did not cover during my questions concerning this time period of your life?

2. If you could change your life and go back to attend college after high school, would you do it knowing what you know now about college? Explain.

3. Is there anything else that you think is important that I did not ask that influenced your decision about college?
Reflective Questions (Follow-up by phone or email)

1. Since our conversation, have you thought of anything else you would like to say?

2. Since our conversation and after reading the transcript, is there anything you would like to clarify?
Appendix C: Participant Biographical Form

Participant’s Biographical Information

Name: _________________________________________________________________

Gender: ______ Male     ______ Female

Age: ______

Address: _______________________________________________________________
*For above location, give city, state, and county.

Contact Phone Numbers: _________________________________________________

Current Occupation: ____________________________________________________

College/University Attending (if applicable): _______________________________

Above College/University Location: _______________________________________
*For above location, give city, state, and county.

College/University Graduated From (if applicable): __________________________

Above College/University Location: __________________________ Year: _________
*For above location, give city, state, and county.

If college graduate, degree obtained: __________________________________________

High School Graduated From: __________________________ Year: _____________

Location of Above High School: ____________________________________________
*For above location, give city, state, and county.

If you received a GED, what high school and year would you have graduated:
________________________ Year: ____________
*For above location, give city, state, and county.

Parent and Family Information

During your high school years, did you live with both parents? ______ yes     ______ no

During your high school years, what was your father’s highest level of
education? ________________________________
During your high school years, what was your mother’s highest level of education?
____________________________

How many siblings did you have at the time of high school graduation?
____________________________

At the time of your high school graduation, did you have a sibling who was attending or had attended, or graduated from a college or university?  _____________________
Appendix D: Office of Research Compliance IRB Approval

Ohio University
Office of the Vice President for Research

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2. research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: A Study of the College Decision-Making Process and Influences of Social Capital of Appalachian Non-Traditional Female College Students in Ohio During Their High School Years

Primary Investigator: Jamie Elaine Harmount

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Dwan Robinson

Department: Education Administration

Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

Aug. 29, 2013

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.