

**From working-class origins to academia: community college women who have crossed
the great class divide**

by

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DEDICATION

This
dissertation
is dedicated to my grandparents,
Anita and Val,
who shaped me into the unique person I am today;
to my mother,
Ann,
who nurtured this unique person into a caring and genuine woman;
and to my husband,
Ove,
who loves this woman unabashedly.

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ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of research about the experiences of women from working-class families who become faculty or administrators in higher education institutions. Most research and literature about the experiences of female faculty and administrators focus on those women who work in four-year college and university settings. This phenomenology focused on the experiences of nine working-class women who are faculty and administrators at a large, Midwestern, multi-campus community college. The participants shared their perceptions and experiences as children and adolescents in a working-class family, as students, as wives and mothers, and as community college professionals, and how these shaped their lives both personally and professionally.

This research illuminated the experiences of women whose lives bridged the chasm between working-class America and the doors of two-year colleges. Among the findings were the participants' consistent commitment to working two and sometimes three jobs throughout their lives, and a common work ethic that has been a thread throughout their personal and professional lives. A reoccurring theme was the participants' constant search and effort to establish different kinds of community throughout their lives. Their efforts to find supportive educators, peers, and colleagues during their early years, college experiences, and professional lives, is nothing short of remarkable. Their narratives give rise to the premise that community colleges should aim to work together to share innovations in student services, curriculum development, and professional development. Although community colleges are local institutions, their goals for developing human resources should be all-encompassing in scope. The participants in the study revealed that their pathways enabled

them to empathize with, relate to, and encourage students. Therefore, community colleges should seek to develop programs and opportunities for faculty and administrators who are female. Investigations of needs, interests, and talents among working-class women who are faculty and administrators will do much to shape their career tracks, leadership styles, and resultant roles in community colleges.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Women from working-class backgrounds who work as faculty and administrators in community college environments live two lives. Their educational paths are wrought with praise and success, while their professional lives may be marked by feelings of disconnection and isolation. There is a constant pull away from academia and toward family, community, and familiarity. At the same time, women from working-class backgrounds who serve as community college professionals, deal with the complex trappings of academic culture and the community college's role in that culture, each and every day.

Background

Working-class parents often transmit messages about the importance of higher education to their daughters (Kastberg, 1998). These messages are laden with suggestions that the purpose of completing a bachelor's degree is to attain employment that pays well. Once the bachelor's degree has been completed, however, working-class parents frequently do not understand their daughter's desire to complete higher degrees. Equally mystifying is the urge to live life in an academic role. Many working-class parents interpret an existence in academia as something that should be pursued by wealthier and, by extension, more privileged classes of women (Kastberg, 1998).

Little research has been completed about the experiences of women from working-class families who become faculty or administrators in higher education institutions. Not a single study has examined the specific experiences of working-class women who are community college faculty or administrators. These women, as individuals and as a group,

bridge the divide between working-class origins and the distinctive, academic culture of higher education within American society.

Definition of the Term “Working-Class”

For the purpose of this study, I chose to utilize Michael Zweig’s (2004) definition of the term *working class*. Zweig defined the three classes inherent in American society, using power in the workplace as a guide to distinguish each class. The author eschewed more traditional measurements of class affiliation, such as lifestyle and income. Capitalists, the middle class, and the great majority of American workers comprise Zweig’s defined class structure.

Zweig (2004) defined the capitalist class as, “those most senior executives who direct and control the corporations that employ the private-sector working class” (p. 4). The capitalist class includes CEOs, financiers, members of boards of directors, and others who dominate the American economic landscape, media, politics, religion, and popular culture. Two percent of the American labor force is comprised of those whom Zweig would define as capitalists.

Zweig (2004) divided the middle class into three sections: professionals, supervisors, and small business owners. Professors, lawyers, doctors, and accountants distinguish the professional middle class. Frequently, a unionized plumber or electrician makes more money than a professor or a lawyer. The difference between a middle-class professor and a working-class plumber is that professors enjoy autonomy and freedom in their work that a plumber typically does not have.

The supervisory middle class is composed of workers who may function as first-level supervisors and line foremen. Such employees frequently are promoted from a position as a worker; they continue to socialize with and to live in areas populated with working-class people. The third component of the middle class consists of small business owners. The autonomy associated with owning a business is what makes the small business owner distinct and separate from working-class employees.

Zweig's (2004) middle class accounts for approximately 36% of the American labor force. Clearly, this percentage does not reflect the commonly-held idea that most Americans are middle class workers. On the contrary, Zweig ascertained that:

The working class is made up of people who, when they go to work or when they act as citizens, have comparatively little power or authority. They are the people who do their jobs under more or less close supervision, and who have little control over the pace or the content of their work, who aren't the boss of anyone. They are blue-collar people like construction and factory workers, and white-collar workers like bank tellers and writers of routine computer code. They work to produce and distribute goods, or in service industries or government agencies. (p. 4)

According to Zweig (2004), the American working class composed 62% of the work force in 2002. Working class occupations such as truck driver, secretary, cashier, machinist, agricultural laborer, and flight attendant employed 88 million Americans. Of those 88 million laborers, over 13 million belonged to unions in 2002. Zweig's definition of working class encompasses over 500 U.S. Department of Labor-defined occupations.

Most Americans, according to Zweig's (2004) definition, are working class. By extension, most of us come from working-class families of origin. The urge to label ourselves as middle class, however, permeates the American mindset. Zweig's definition causes us to pause and to reflect on our assumptions about class affiliation.

Throughout this work, I have attached the term working-class to the nine participants who shared their stories. This moniker is used to indicate that the informant was, “born to working class parents, regardless of their present social status and identification” (Fay & Tokarczyk, 1993). The term working-class, in this way, does not necessarily indicate the class allegiance that the participant may claim or not claim as an adult.

The Community College

Since the creation of Joliet Junior College in 1901, the community college has borne the ideals of curricula rich in the liberal arts as well as vocational-technical education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The community college embodied the tenets of social programs such as Roosevelt’s New Deal, Truman’s G.I. Bill, and Johnson’s Great Society. Americans, particularly over the last 70 years, have looked to the community college as an all-encompassing educational institution that has extended access and opportunities to people from all socioeconomic groups. Today, 1,250 community colleges exist in the United States. Their enrollments range from less than 100 to over 30,000 students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. xv).

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the G.I. Bill, began the most expansive educational push in American history, which would conclude with a wave of community college students who enrolled in two-year colleges in the early 1970s. The percentage of young Americans electing to attend college during that 30-year period tripled; enrollments grew from 15 to 45%. Undergraduate enrollments alone grew almost 500% (Geiger, 1999).

Since the President's Commission on Higher Education appointed by President Truman issued its report, "Higher Education for Democracy," in 1947, the American community college has grown faster than any other institution of higher education. Today, community colleges serve over one-third of students in American higher education. Community colleges serve students seeking academic degrees, as well as students who are working to gain specific skills in non-degree areas. Community colleges also serve as the major gateway to higher education for students from the working class, lower socioeconomic groups, underrepresented minority groups, and new immigrants to this country (Koltai, 1993).

Women in the Community College

Community colleges clearly have positioned themselves at the forefront of degree attainment for women. Female students have been accepted at community colleges since the institutions were established. Community colleges have proven to be particularly accessible to women over the years, largely because they have served to prepare so many potential elementary school teachers to complete baccalaureate degrees.

The community college's open access mission, coupled with financial accessibility, academic accessibility, and geographic proximity to home, have made the institution a popular choice for women. Many community college students are non-traditional students, reflecting a median age of 24 for first-time college-goers in 2004. In 2008, the American Association of Community Colleges reported that 60% of all community college students were female, while only 40% were male.

The community college also demonstrates a markedly higher percentage of female presidents and faculty than any other type of higher education institution. As of fall 2003, nearly 50% of part-time faculty and 49% of full-time faculty are women (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). During the same year, only 38% of full-time faculty in all academic institutions were female. In 2004, more than 27% of community college presidents were women. By contrast, four-year colleges employed women as approximately 18% of all presidents (Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) reported that women served in the following administrative positions at the following rates: president (27%), chief student affairs officer (55%), chief academic officer (42%), chief financial officer (30%), chief continuing education administrator (45%), business and industry liaison (49%), and director of occupational and vocational education (29%).

Problem

Most research and literature about the experiences of female faculty and administrators focuses on those women who work in four-year college and university settings. There is little research to inform the literature about the experiences of women who work as faculty and administrators in community colleges. Most specifically, how do women who come from working-class backgrounds make meaning of their educational, work, and life experiences as they travel through the system of higher education? How do women from working-class backgrounds make meaning of their experiences as faculty and administrators in community colleges?

Purpose

I have worked in the various capacities of adjunct faculty member, academic administrator, and student services administrator in three different community colleges over the past 16 years. Throughout the years, I have interacted with hundreds of female students, faculty, and administrators. Many of the women with whom I worked came from working-class families and were first-generation college students. Through my interactions I learned that their families and life experiences prior to college did not prepare these women specifically for lives in academia.

The observations I made about my colleagues and students drove me to question how experiences related to employment, teaching, and learning in community colleges could be improved for the benefit of all involved. It was this need to provide opportunities for working-class faculty and administrators in community colleges to share their experiences that helped me to shape the purpose of this research study.

The purpose of the study was to examine the phenomenon of nine, working-class women who have come to be faculty and administrators at a large, Midwestern, multi-campus community college. Participants were encouraged to share constructed meaning from their perceptions and experiences, and to consider how that meaning has shaped their lives both personally and professionally. Participants were also asked to relate thick, detailed descriptions of their experiences as children and adolescents in a working-class family, as students, as wives and mothers, and as community college professionals. The informants' perceptions and ideas were reduced to a common essence, or meaning, through a phenomenological approach. This study illuminated the experiences of women whose lives bridge the chasm between working-class America and the doors of two-year colleges.

Moustakas (1994) credited Georg Hegel with first assigning a defined meaning to the term *phenomenology*. Hegel asserted that phenomenology:

...referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience. The process leads to an unfolding of phenomenal consciousness through science and philosophy... (p. 26)

Moustakas (1994) further posited that describing things in themselves, and allowing what is before us to enter our consciousness is the true challenge for the qualitative researcher. Moustakas conceded that understanding meanings, distinctions, and essences must be done in the respective contexts of researcher reflexivity and human intuition. Finding and positioning those distinctions involves blending the ideal with reality. What results is a unity between that which humans imagine as present with what is truly present. This exquisite unity, examined from the endless "vantage point of possible meanings" (p. 27), is phenomenology.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided direction to this study:

1. How do women from working-class families who now work as faculty and administrators in community colleges construct meaning from their perceptions and experiences?
2. What life experiences and perceptions are unique to these women?

Significance

No literature exists that specifically utilizes qualitative data and research methods to examine the phenomenon of working-class women who work as faculty and administrators in

community colleges. A few studies of working-class women who are faculty and administrators in four-year institutions or in a variety of schools that cross Carnegie classifications do exist (Kastberg, 1998; Miller & Kastberg, 1995). These works were relevant to the proposed study, and are reviewed in Chapter 2. The significance of this study, then, lies in its examination of the subjects' experiences as faculty and administrators in community colleges.

Theoretical Perspectives

The research tradition of basic interpretive qualitative study guided the development of this study. Merriam (2002) viewed this type of study as an attempt to understand how participants make meaning of a phenomenon. The researcher, as instrument, reconciles the connotation: "this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument" (p. 6). This strategy is inductive, and produces a study that is descriptive in nature. According to Bogdan and Bilken (2003), "Objects, people, situations, and events do not possess their own meaning; rather, meaning is conferred on them" (p. 25).

The strategy of basic interpretive qualitative study was layered with the tradition of phenomenology and an emphasis upon symbolic interaction throughout this study. Bogdan and Bilken (2003) recognized symbolic interaction as the meaning humans assign to their personal experiences. This process of interpretation is: "...constitutive, not accidental or secondary to what the experience is...understanding the intersection of biography and society is essential" (p. 25).

The goal of the study was to present thick, rich descriptions of study findings, situated within the literature that surrounded the research. Such descriptions illustrated the

participants' symbolic interaction, assigned to each, distinct life experience. A strong phenomenology of the working-class woman's experience as a community college academic emerged from these descriptions. Merriam (2002) posited:

...a phenomenological study focuses on the essence or structure of an experience. Phenomenologists are interested in showing how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience. This form of inquiry is an attempt to deal with inner experiences unprobed in everyday life. (p. 7)

Bogdan and Bilken (2003) complemented Merriam's (2002) findings:

Researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations...It is also located within the Weberian tradition, which emphasizes *verstehen*, the interpretive understanding of human interaction...What phenomenologists emphasize, then is the subjective aspects of peoples' behavior...Phenomenologists believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality. (p. 23)

Creswell (1998) presented yet another view of phenomenology:

Researchers search for the essential, *invariant structure (or essence)* or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the *intentionality of consciousness* where experience contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning. (p. 53)

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) recognized eight, distinct qualitative research categories:

case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, participatory, clinical, historical, and biographical. Creswell (1998) isolated only five of these strategies: phenomenology, case study, biography, grounded theory, and ethnography.

In any case, Bogdan and Bilken (2003) stated that qualitative researchers approach others with the innate goal of understanding individual points of view. This approach to research, the authors believed, "distorts the informants' experience the least" (p. 23).

Qualitative researchers tend to view their research as an interpretation of reality that is rooted in empiricism, not a “transcendent truth” (p. 24). The end result is an inductive construction of experience and meaning, aimed at the extraction of essence.

Research Strategy

Narrative inquiry

Creswell (2003) asserted that narrative inquiry is a method of research by which the researcher asks participants to relay stories about their respective life experiences. This may be done by way of interview. According to Merriam (2002), semi-structured interviews include a combination of more and less structured questions. Very specific information, required from all participants, is gathered through structured queries. The greatest portion of the interview, however, is guided by less structured questions to be explored.

Methods employed to answer this study’s research questions included semi-structured, individual interviews that provided an opportunity for participants to describe perceptions and life experiences in detail. Finally, group interviews of participants were conducted to explore the women’s constructed meaning of their experiences as females from working-class origins who work as administrators and faculty in community colleges.

Phenomenological research

Creswell (2003) termed phenomenological research as a strategy by which the researcher, “identifies the ‘essence’ of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study” (p. 15). This particular strategy involves studying a small number of subjects, intensively and extensively, to find relationships and patterns of

meaning. During the process, the researcher consciously brackets her/his own life experiences. In this way, the researcher may better understand the voices and experiences of study informants.

A phenomenological approach to this study was appropriate. The small number of study participants shared their life experiences in the context of constructed meaning. The relationships and patterns of meaning emerged readily during the research process. I did everything possible to bracket my own experiences during this process. I worked diligently to do so, in an effort to achieve *epoche*, or fully hearing the voices of each respondent (Creswell, 1998), without imposing my own experiences.

Delimitations

This research study was conducted in a single community college in the Midwest. The participants were female faculty and administrators who had been in their current positions for at least two years. Each participant came from a working-class (Zweig, 2004) family of origin.

Summary

This study sought to contribute to higher education scholarship in terms of finding meaning in the experiences of working-class women who serve as faculty and administrators in community colleges. The study intended to elucidate the life experiences and perceptions of its informants. Further, the study aimed to provide an interpretation of the events, places, and people who influenced the informants' development as people, and as community college professionals.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a literature review of the research associated with working-class women in academia. The literature review begins with an examination of social stratification between Americans from working-class and middle-class backgrounds, respectively. The literature review continues with an exploration of works on women who work as faculty and administrators in academia, and, more specifically, in community colleges. Finally, works on women from working-class backgrounds who work as faculty and administrators in colleges of differing Carnegie classifications provide context for situating the study. The literature review concludes with examinations of the constructed life and work roles of working-class women who have experienced phenomena such as hybridity (living in working-class and middle-class worlds simultaneously), internalized oppression, passing, and marginality.

Chapter 3 explores the philosophical assumptions, methodological approach, participants, data collection and analysis, and design issues associated with this research project. A phenomenological approach (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003; Creswell, 1998, 2003; Crotty 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Husserl 1931, 1965, 1970; Merriam et al., 2002; Moustakas, 1994) is utilized to position the study's data. This particular methodology explores the origins of meaning and role construction for each participant in the study. Criteria for participant selection is explained in this chapter, as are rationale for data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and group interviews. Chapter 3 addresses the researcher's role and credentials for conducting this particular study as well.

Chapter 4 presents the study's findings. Characterizations of constructed meaning, as well as participant conclusions and quotations, animate this chapter's findings. Experiences

and perceptions of the individual participants and the participants as a group are presented and are clearly delineated. Researcher conclusions pertaining to constructed meaning, life experiences and role-related actions, and study outcomes are synthesized in this chapter.

Chapter 5 explores ethical considerations, limitations, conclusions, and recommendations resulting from this research project. Suggestions for future research based on this study are included.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Stratification in America: Autonomy and Freedom

Zweig (2004) postulated that class affiliation and stratification is rooted in power, and is contextually relative to all classes. Zweig defined three, distinct social classes in American society: capitalist, middle class, and working class. He included professions such as truck drivers, flight attendants, secretaries, and agricultural laborers in his definition of working-class employees. The author distinguishes a profession as working class by its lack of autonomy and freedom, and its proclivity for close supervision by middle class supervisors.

Sennett and Cobb (1972) began to explore the divisions between classes nearly 40 years ago. The resulting study examined how stratification marks the lives of workers in the United States. The authors asserted: "...the lines are not now sharp between many blue-collar and low-level office workers. To conclude that class differences are therefore disappearing would be wrong, however...the lines of class difference are being redrawn" (p. 74).

Sennett and Cobb (1972) posited that American workers are subject to values that dictate the respect of others may be garnered only through the validation of self and individual ability. The results of asserting one's individual ability, typically, are: an abrupt ending to the quest for respect from others; a sense of personal responsibility for such an ending; a conclusion that social inequality must exist to justify respect between individuals. Self-accusation provides a label for an adult's social class. The more the adult is required to follow another's direction, the more she/he lacks independence. The result is a perception that she/he is lower than others within the social strata. The authors distinguished the experience in the following manner:

The transportation of class from the world of childhood to that of adulthood makes the badges of ability so much more complex because adults need to define themselves. Yet we distort the meaning of this hidden dimension of adult life if we think of these roles only in terms of separate persons. The real impact of class is that a man can play out *both* sides of the power situation in his own life, become alternately judge and judged, alternately individual and member of the mass. This represents the “internalizing” of class conflict, the process by which struggle between men leads to struggle within each man. (p. 98)

Sennett and Cobb (1972) clearly illustrated the power dialectic inherent in the internal struggle of class affiliation. The conflict between individuals across class lines, however, colors our collective perception of others. The chasm between the working class and the middle class, as defined by Zweig (2004), shapes how people view social classes across the continuum. These perceptions, increasingly, formulate our behavior and interaction with others in American society.

Gorman (2000) explored American perceptions of the “other” classes. The author maintained that middle-class attitudes exhibited in social interactions with working-class Americans:

have an impact on the self-confidence of working-class individuals, causing some of them to experience self-doubt, pain, and hidden injuries. Social class as defined by education, occupational prestige, and income still matters in the United States. (p. 93)

Gorman’s (2000) research on social interactions between the middle and working classes further indicated that class difference can be maintained by virtue of cultural capital. Clearly, cultural capital serves to exclude others from particular social classes and opportunities for education and social mobility as much as it may serve to welcome others into particular social classes or situations.

Gorman (2000) concluded that working-class Americans face true challenges in maintaining dignity and worth. Most of Gorman's informants believed that middle-class Americans "...try to look down on them." Conversely, the working-class people who spoke with Gorman thought that they were socially superior to "people who wear business suits" because the blue-collar workers "work at real jobs" and "are down-to-earth" (Gorman, 2000, p. 104).

Gorman (2000) identified a resistance to the new ideal of American achievement as well. Some working-class parents may influence their children to believe that higher education is not an acceptable part of the American ideal. These parents may place great emphasis on the dignity of working-class occupations, thereby cementing social class standing for their children. College, indeed, is often viewed in such families as a bastion of middle-class networking and stratified snobbery. The result is that children of working-class parents frequently are dissuaded from participating in any type of higher education experience.

Law (1995) echoed Gorman's (2000) idea that working-class parents often discourage higher education for their children. According to the author, parents do so often as a result of their own mixed feelings and ambivalence toward education:

Working-class families, whether they are able to articulate it or not, know that a college degree has everything to do with class, unlike professional or managerial-class families, who believe it has to do with merit and entitlement. They know that somehow the very existence of a college degree undermines and actually threatens their children's and, consequently, their own working-class identity. In the end, they do not want what they would wish for. (p. 5)

Miller and Kastberg (1995) maintained that working-class laborers perform labor that offers little, if any, autonomy. Moreover, although some working-class persons receive

wages similar to those of middle-class professionals, their lives are rooted in a culture that exhibits values distinct from middle-class life. Indeed, working-class people who eventually enter the professional class are rare. Ryan and Sackery's (1984) study, *Strangers in Paradise*, indicated that less than 10% of Americans who rise to professional positions come from working-class families (Ryan & Sackery, 1984, as cited in Miller & Kastberg, 1995).

The reasons reported for limited social mobility are complex. The perpetuation of educational inequalities for working-class students, however, reinforces their relegation to lower social positions. Of the total, 75% of all students in the top 146 colleges in America come from the richest quartile of all families. The lowest-earning quartile of all American families supplies the same 146 colleges with only 3% of their total student population. The chance of meeting a wealthy student at one of the 146 elite colleges is 25 times more likely than the chance of meeting a student from the lowest-earning quartile of families ("Ever Higher," 2005).

Zweig (2000) examined shifts in income distribution as platform for understanding living standards between classes over the past thirty years:

Between 1977 and 1989, production of all goods and services in the United States increased 42 percent (after correcting for inflation). You might think, therefore, that the average person improved his or her living standards by that amount. But it didn't happen. That's because 60 percent of all the gains in after-tax income from 1977 to 1989 went to the richest 1 percent of families. The bottom 80 percent of the population got just 5 percent of the increase. (p. 65)

Although America views itself as a culture that is rooted in meritocracy, significant evidence exists to the contrary. The Economic Policy Institute (2005) maintained that the real family income of American households in the top 1% of earners grew by 184% between 1979 and 2000. Earnings for the top quintile of American families grew by 70% during the

same period. The lowest 20% of the population witnessed income growth of only 6.4% from 1979 until 2000. The top 1% of all American households held 33.4% of the nation's net worth in 2001. The same 1% earned 20% of all American income ("Ever Higher," 2005).

Female Faculty in the Academy and in the Community College

Hagedorn and Laden (2002) explored women faculty's roles in higher education. They tend to spend much more time teaching (58% versus 46%) and less time engaged in research (16% versus 46%) than male faculty. Female faculty are concentrated in disciplines such as education, humanities, and the social sciences. They rarely are found in biology, physics, engineering, earth sciences, mathematics, law, or medicine. Of the 301,000 faculty in American community colleges, women account for 48.7% of the faculty. At four-year institutions, this number is only 36.3%.

The authors maintained that women's larger representation and the existence of female role models in leadership positions make the community college a better choice for female faculty. The multi-dimensional missions of community colleges allow for more significant opportunities for female faculty to have input about programmatic decisions that may affect female students as well.

Townsend and Twombly (2007) argued that the community college has positioned itself at the forefront of degree attainment for women. Female students have been accepted at community colleges since the institutions were established. Community colleges have proven to be particularly accessible to women over the years, largely because they have served to prepare so many potential elementary school teachers to complete baccalaureate degrees.

The community college's open access mission, coupled with financial accessibility, academic accessibility, and geographic proximity to home, have made the institution a popular choice for women. Many community college students are non-traditional students, reflecting a median age of 24 for first-time college-goers in 2004. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, 60% of community college students are female, while 40% are male (2008).

Professional positions within the community college also exhibit a high degree of inclusivity for women. Not only have women students benefited from access to the community college, female faculty have found strong gains in this type of institution as well. Many community colleges find their roots in relationships to high schools, since large numbers of the institutions' founding faculty came from experiences as high school teachers. Community colleges grew at an exponential rate during the 1960s and 1970s; such growth made the hiring of female faculty, particularly from high schools, common practice.

The community college demonstrates a markedly higher percentage of female presidents and faculty than any other type of higher education institution. As of fall 2003, nearly 50% of part-time faculty and 49% of full-time faculty are women. During the same year, only 38% of full-time faculty in all academic institutions were female. In 2004, more than 27% of community college presidents were women. By contrast, four-year colleges employed women as approximately 18% of all presidents (Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

Amey and VanDerLinden (2002) reported that women served in the following administrative positions at the following rates: president (27%), chief student affairs officer (55%), chief academic officer (42%), chief financial officer (30%), chief continuing

education administrator (45%), business and industry liaison (49%), and director of occupational and vocational education (29%).

Clark (1998) asserted that the role of women in community colleges remains mysterious, despite their higher-than-average numbers within both administrative and faculty ranks. Some researchers believe that the high number of women in community colleges points to community college women being marginalized in the wider community of academia. The author, however, indicated:

Although this view puts community colleges at the margins of the higher education system in terms of prestige and status, the numbers of students attending community colleges indicate that these institutions play a dynamic role in educating the nation's young adults and mature adults re-entering the educational system, and will continue to do so for years to come, especially for women and minorities. (p. 80)

Kastberg (1998) echoed Townsend's (1999) search for places in academia that are welcoming to women, particularly women from working-class origins. Kastberg (1998) posited that, "...the psychological, social, and cultural transitions of women from lower social class backgrounds to the middle or upper class are complex and ambiguous" (p. 3). The women who struggle with the transition from one class to another pay for their upward mobility in many ways. They may suffer identity crises, the loss of ability to conduct close and lasting personal relationships, and self-esteem that ebbs and flows with the persistent alterations and modifications that must be made to function between two worlds.

LaPaglia (1995) explained that her position as faculty in a community college lessens the value of her rank and degree among other academics. She ascertained that her students share such societal perceptions. Popular cultural representations of the two-year college ridicule its educational aim and standards. The community college student, typically, is

presented as a re-entering student who is completely devoid of self consciousness. According to LaPaglia: "...the demeaning generalizations about community college people come as much from class bias, sexism, and racism as from any actual presence or absence of academic standards" (p. 183).

LaPaglia (1995) concluded that her commitment to feminism is what allows her to mesh the worlds of academia and working-class roots in her own, personal experience. Nonetheless, she conceded that a patronizing attitude toward her community college affiliation colors her conversations with faculty at four-year institutions.

Sharon O'Dair (1995) synthesized the experience of class bias in higher education. According to O'Dair, "...attempts to dissolve class in sets of common experience actually constitute an abandonment of working-class people" (p. 206). Her efforts to unmask academics' ties to the working class unearth an unexpected dialectic. Books and reading, she posits, distinguish working-class academics from their original peers. Books give academics the power to judge others, and, by the same token, books give others the power to judge academics. When they have the ability to judge and evaluate through the power of the written word, faculty institutionalize subordination. The power to judge, in this case, empowers she who judges to pass or to fail, to allow her student to continue toward academia, or to go home to her working-class roots.

Hybridity

According to Reay (2001), working-class students traditionally have experienced education as an exercise in failure, or an opportunity to be "found out" (p. 334). Class is a strong predictor of academic success in Western educational systems. Reay argued that the

working class exhibits a special dissonance toward education. The desire for a credential to produce material wealth conflicts directly with the feelings of isolation, alienation, and cultural emptiness produced during the working class person's educational experience.

Working-class students who continue on to institutions of higher education try to “negotiate a difficult balance between investing in a new improved identity and holding on to a cohesive self that retained an anchor in what had gone before...” (Reay, 2001, p. 337). Those who struggle with such class *hybridity*, or constant border-crossing (Lucey et al., 2003), harbor feelings of being an imposter in a world that increasingly views the middle-class concept of self as that which is authentic and robust. The characteristics of trustworthiness and genuine character are no longer assigned according to work ethic, but to socioeconomic status.

Reay (2001) maintained that students' working-class origins solidly situate a sense of personal authenticity. The authentic, working-class self, however, has been convinced that it must escape working-class life; it must aspire to climb into middle-class paths. In doing so, working-class students deny themselves actualization. Those students who continue in higher education assign themselves to a lifetime of struggling with the dual selves they have created.

Overall (1995) discussed a deep-seated contempt for her own class origins, exacerbated by the push to “escape” her working-class roots. Instead, she feels pressured to become a socially-constructed, socially-mobile academic whose success depends largely upon her ability to forget her past. The author termed her experience, “...a result of the operation of internalized oppression” (p. 215).

Overall (1995) continued to examine her constant class dissonance. She vacillated between a sense of superiority at leaving her working-class family and the anxiety of being,

somehow, an academic imposter who will be discovered at any moment. Finally, she queried whether examining her origins was a disrespectful dive into the morass of her family's struggles, or if, indeed, her background somehow prepared her to persist in academia.

Overall concluded that:

We must buy into academia in order to get out of the working class, but in doing so we also buy into the denigration of our origins and the preservation of class inequities. In the end, it seems the price of successful escape is to be intellectually and socially 'nowhere at home'. (p. 219)

Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine (2003) argued that the awkward navigation of hybridity with regard to social mobility emerges from the chaos of constant, emotional negotiation. These conflicting feelings emerge when students realize that success and social mobility come at a high price, such as, "becoming and being profoundly different to your family and peer group" (p. 286). Society and institutions of higher education reinforce the association of social mobility with social improvement. This association, however, discounts the notion that such changes come at an enormous cost in terms of alienation, psychological transformation, and separation from the family and place of origin.

The question is posed: Can the hybrid female academic survive the rough waters of shuttling between two identities? "Can the 'border-crosser' ever find a place or condition of her own and therefore some stability?" (Lucey et al., 2003). The authors maintained that working-class women who move into academia face a complex life shift. Such changes will require external and internal re-inventions of self. In engaging such a process, working-class women may find that they must establish psychological defense mechanisms that can run counter to their conscious choices and goals (Lucey et al., 2003). How, then, do well-

educated women from the working class reconcile their lives in academia with their family origins?

Internalized Oppression: The Imposter

Gardner (1993) spoke to the experience of internalized oppression. The author cited Pheterson's (1986) assertion that internalized oppression is the acknowledgment by individuals within an oppressed group of the dominant society's biases and prejudices. Internalized oppression manifests itself as isolation, self-concealment, self-hatred, and inferiority.

Gardner further established that working-class faculty members often have deep doubts about their skills, self-worth, and respective abilities to succeed and to perform in academia. Frequently, such faculty are apprehensive that others within the academy will discover them to be imposters. Working-class faculty often will attribute their success in the chosen field to luck rather than to competence. As their professional achievements increase, the fear of being called out as an imposter grows exponentially.

Langston (1995) echoed the theme of being an imposter. She wrote:

I have a lot of conflicting feelings and a lot of guilt about my upward mobility in terms of status. I feel that my working-class background marks me in academia and that my middle-class education marks me in working-class settings. I sometimes feel like an imposter in both camps. (pp. 71-72)

Amey (1999) ascertained that organizational behavior and leadership in community colleges has been portrayed as dominated by the ideology and imagery of elite males. The climate often causes employees to feel disconnected and alienated. This setting creates an atmosphere in which feelings of guilt and imposter status flourish. Working-class women who are faculty and administrators in these settings: "...may be forced to adopt dominant

values to work and succeed in the organization, and in the process, lose touch with the unique qualities they bring as women or as women of color” (p. 60).

The problem of cultural capital exists, then, for working-class women who work as faculty and administrators in community colleges. They lack the same type of cultural capital as the dominant structures of their institutions. Because this is true, the women tend to internalize the prejudices of the dominant culture, and to doubt their competence and self-worth on the job. This experience creates the academic imposter within their personae.

Passing

Sowinska (1993) ascertained that female academics from the working class spend their lives *passing*. She explained that she witnessed herself making more and more adjustments in her persona the older she became. She felt herself growing ashamed of her family, herself, and her origins. To compensate, she altered her appearance, dress, speech, conversational engagement, and other social behaviors, without ever really understanding her motivations for doing so.

Years later, Sowinska (1993) came to understand that she lived her life “passing” for middle class. The author recognized, however, that most of her actions as a young adult focused on camouflaging her working-class origins. Her preconscious confusion about her social standing did much to obfuscate her reasons for hiding. She always considered her adaptive behaviors to be a means to an end: “Nor did I think too much about the extra energy I was expending in my attempts to fit in: the trade-off was to become “educated,” which would bring liberation” (p. 152).

Ultimately, the author concluded that class affiliation dictates success or failure in all educational systems. Effort or ability has little, if anything, to do with succeeding in academia. Again, Sowinska (1993) emphasized the need for working-class women to maintain bonds with their families of origin.

Women, Knowledge, and Voice

The development of thought and knowledge delineate the educational experiences of working-class women. Women's knowledge bases may serve as lenses to examine how the family of origin, and subsequent educational experiences, shape women's understanding of the world. Belenky et al. (1997) categorized women's knowledge into five epistemological categories: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. The authors termed silence as a place where women see themselves as beings without voice. Here, women are subject to the decisions of the authority figures around them.

Received knowledge is a category where women see themselves as capable of reproducing or receiving knowledge from external authority figures, but not creating new knowledge from within themselves. The perspective of subjective knowledge defines a point where knowledge and truth are perceived as being intuited, personal, and subjective. Procedural knowledge defines the application and learning of procedures that allow for the communication and gathering of knowledge. Constructed knowledge is a position in which women see themselves as creators of knowledge. Women understand knowledge to be subjective and objective, as well as contextual, in this particular epistemological category.

Belenky et al. (1997) recognized that women may find themselves finding and creating knowledge in any number of these epistemological categories throughout their respective lives. Nonetheless, the authors assert:

The social forces that operate on a family during the daughter's formative years continue to shape her experience. Thus the families, schools, and jobs that involve poor women are likely to be very hierarchically arranged, demanding conformity, passivity, and obedience—all unsupportive of continued intellectual growth. The same institutions that are provided for the privileged are more likely to encourage active, creative thinking and lifelong intellectual development. (p. 156)

Working-class families are not typically poor. Working-class parents, however, frequently are employed in positions that demand close supervision and adherence to strict frameworks. This type of power structure can permeate the ideals of the working-class family, and may signal that intellectual growth for the children is not supported.

The working-class women interviewed in this study went on to higher education and continued intellectual growth. Their experiences growing up in working-class families shaped their experiences, their perceptions, and their individual and collective making of meaning about their respective positions in community colleges.

Making Meaning of Class and Marginality

Jones (2003) suggested that the ideologies of individualism and meritocracy inform how we make meaning of class distinctions. Such ideologies perpetuate the perception of working-class people as inferior to middle- or upper-class people. People at lower class structure levels are not accorded the same respect or dignity as people in upper-level class strata. The resulting conclusion is that "...the working class is viewed as a place to escape rather than a 'place you stand that's okay to stand just like you stand other places'" (p. 817).

Female academics that come from working-class backgrounds experience similar feelings of conflict and self-doubt. Alienation, displacement, and guilt often mark the experience of the working-class women who finds herself in an administrative or faculty position in an institution of higher education. She may find herself grateful for her new position, yet struggling with the question of whether to estrange herself from her original, working-class world in favor of an affiliation with the middle class (Wilson, 2002).

Langston (1993) found herself avoiding the middle class whom with she is forced to interact as a graduate student. The author related her experience of making small talk and adopting the manners of scholars at academic receptions; she found the practice of such niceties to be arduous. She continued:

Academe is a new place of loneliness for me. Most academics from working-class backgrounds end up on the bottom of the academic heap. They receive little guidance or mentoring from professors, which is particularly detrimental because their network of family and friends is not connected to academia. (p. 68)

Gardner (1993) gave voice to the role of marginality as well. Her discussion of alienation and marginality focuses upon a simultaneous fear of and desire for academic *successes*, such as receiving tenure or completing a dissertation. With each achievement, academics from working-class families frequently find themselves further alienating friends and family from their past. Incredible pain can result from such disconnection, because the family plays such a seminal role in working-class culture.

Gardner (1993) posited that she has come to recognize herself as both working-class and middle-class. She encouraged other working-class academics to recognize their heritage, and to share it with other academics and students from similar origins. Engaging in open

discussions and discovery about one's past, according to Gardner, provides substantiation and empowerment for working-class women in higher education settings.

The researcher, hooks (1993), supported students from working-class backgrounds in maintaining their ties to home and family. She stipulated that one must acknowledge the importance of one's upbringing and one's past. By doing so, the working-class person may affirm, "the reality that such bonds are not severed automatically solely because one...moves toward a different class experience" (p. 107).

Summary

This chapter reviewed the body of literature concerning the role of working-class women as faculty and administrators in community colleges. Literature concerning the experiences of working-class women who are faculty and administrators in colleges is limited greatly to studies of four-year colleges. Women from such backgrounds who work as professionals in academic roles may find themselves attempting to navigate a working-class world at home, and largely middle-class roles within the college. The tension experienced from navigating such roles may manifest itself in depression, self-hatred, and a tendency to fear additional, academic achievements. Working-class women may also find themselves feeling that they are outsiders or imposters in their own workplaces; knowledge of their own class affiliation may cause them to feel as though they are inferior to other academics.

Much of the literature asserts that working-class, female academics spend their professional lives overcoming the obstacles of class and gender. The tide pulls them out and under waves of societal and workplace judgment, where they struggle to survive. The fight is

one that is long and marked with surreal conflicts between origin and future, family and peers.

The major topical areas informing this study, including female faculty in the academy and the community college, hybridity, and internalized oppression, passing, knowledge, voice, class, and marginality were reviewed. The following chapter presents and discusses the research methods used in this study.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to examine the phenomenon of nine working-class women who have come to be faculty and administrators at a large, multi-campus community college in the Midwest. This phenomenon is situated in the context of Moustakas' (1994), Crotty's (2003), and Husserl's (1931, 1965, 1970) frameworks for phenomenology.

Participants were encouraged to share constructed meaning from their perceptions and experiences, and to consider how that meaning has shaped their lives both personally and professionally. The study asked participants to relate thick, detailed descriptions of their experiences as children and adolescents in a working-class family, as students, as wives and mothers, and as community college professionals. Their perceptions and ideas about these experiences illuminated the phenomenon of women whose lives bridge the chasm between working-class America and the doors of two-year colleges.

Two essential research questions provided direction for this study:

1. How do women from working-class families who now work as faculty and administrators in community colleges construct meaning from their perceptions and experiences?
2. What life experiences and perceptions are unique to these women?

Philosophical Assumptions

The experiences that shaped this study's nine informants as working-class, community college professionals were shared with me by way of individual and group interviews. The constructionist epistemology gives voice to the full meaning assigned to

these experiences by each, individual participant. Meaning, ultimately, provides the base for interpreted realities in this study.

According to Crotty (2003), the construction of a meaningful reality emerges only from the process of interaction between the physical world human beings. This process, termed constructionism, may be characterized in the following manner:

What constructionism claims is that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Before there were consciousness on earth capable of interpreting the world, the world held no meaning at all. (p. 43)

Moustakas (1994) clarified the concept of constructionism further. He posited that:

Knowledge of objects resides in the subjective sources of self...Because all knowledge and experience are connected to phenomena, things in consciousness that appear in the surrounding world, inevitably a unity must exist between ourselves as knowers and the things or objects that we come to know and depend upon. (p. 44)

Constructionism underlied this study. The informants' experiences and the meaning of their respective experiences were investigated using an interpretivist theoretical basis. Phenomenology provided the framework for analysis and for presenting the research results. Ultimately, the study sought to determine the essence of the women's commonality of experience, both individually and as a group.

Methodological Approach

Qualitative methods were utilized in conducting this study. According to Creswell (1998), "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p. 15). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) established that qualitative research questions and confronts the boundaries of our day-to-day existence. Qualitative research finds value in

thick, rich descriptions of society and the world around us. Indeed, the qualitative researcher is “committed to an emic, idiographic, case-based position that directs attention to the specifics of particular cases” (p. 12). Lincoln and Denzin (2005) further asserted that challenges to the “...modernist master narratives,” such as postmodernism, phenomenology, and postpositivism foster, “...the seeds of a reformulated vision of what the social sciences might accomplish” (p. 1122).

Narrative inquiry

According to Merriam (2002), narratives are “first-person accounts of experiences that are in story format having a beginning, middle, and end” (p. 286). Any number of approaches, lenses, and traditions may influence the narrative, but qualitative researchers agree that all narratives share the common goal of constructing and communicating the meaning of experience (Chase, 1995, as cited in Merriam, 2002).

Chase (2005) posited that researchers who employ narrative inquiry must, “listen to the narrator’s voices—to the subject positions, interpretive practices, ambiguities, and complexities—*within* each narrator’s story” (p. 663). Chase continued her discussion of narrative inquiry by asserting that a myriad of analytical lenses serve to inform contemporary narrative inquiry. In the case of this study, Chase might have employed a lens that considers individual stories to be limited and enabled by social circumstances and cultural capital.

These factors include reality and self-construction possibilities that are understandable within the participant’s social, cultural, historical, and community contexts. Chase found all narratives to be worthy of full consideration in the context of qualitative research. Narrative inquiry, indeed, provides the researcher with the context for finding that

which is meaningful and understandable within the boundaries of the study's specific social context.

Phenomenology

The framework for this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to uncover and to understand the meaning of events, experiences, and interactions of ordinary people in everyday life. This theory focuses on the structure and essence of such experiences. The researcher must bracket, or put aside, personal beliefs and attitudes about the particular phenomenon being studied in an attempt to understand the truest and purest form of the phenomenon itself (Merriam, 2002). Creswell (1998) outlined the core components of a phenomenological research project:

1. The author builds a framework for the key phenomenon examined in the study. In this case, that phenomenon is the experience of being a female faculty person or administrator of particular, social-class origin in a community college.
2. The study conveys a basic philosophy that will serve as a structure for the specific phenomenology.
3. The researcher limits the study to one phenomenon, the experience of being a female, community college faculty or administrator from a particular social class.
4. The author "brackets" her preconceived notions about the phenomenon. "Bracketing" is practiced to preserve the study's integrity, leaving it free of the researcher's personal perceptions or life experiences.
5. The researcher analyzes the gathered data with specific and proven techniques appropriate to a phenomenological study.

6. In the study's conclusion, the researcher again explores and synthesizes the study within the context of its philosophical underpinnings.

Phenomenologists study how individuals interpret the meaning of experiences. The selected philosophical framework grounds the subject(s) of the study, and how the subject(s) will be examined. Phenomenology finds its origins in the concept that life experiences make sense to each individual, based on personal context. The human experience, then, is built from each exclusive experience. The true construction of meaning occurs within each of our own lives; meaning is not imposed by society or external observation. The perception and experience of being a working-class woman in the world of community college faculty and administrators is a group phenomenon. Indeed, it is a phenomenon rich with meaning, constructed through the participants' individual and collective experiences.

The goal of this researcher was to uncover meaning tied to experiences of women who are faculty and administrators in community colleges, and who originated from working-class families. This study explored elements of familial, educational, and professional acts associated with those experiences.

Reflexivity statement

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a reflexivity statement serves to situate the researcher's biases, personal interests, and geographic and historical influences upon her/his work. As an academic dean in a community college, I bring 16 years of experience in the position of administrator to this study. I was raised in a household that, according to Zweig's (2004) definition, would be considered middle class. My mother was a single parent, who

graduated from college when I was four years old. She worked as a substitute teacher, as a social worker, and as a community college administrator throughout my years at home. My grandparents, who spent many hours caring for me as well, worked as a nurse and as a vocational rehabilitation administrator, respectively.

The city in which I grew up would be considered overwhelmingly working-class by Zweig's definition. Most workers in my industrial hometown were employed as agricultural laborers, meat packers, or service workers throughout the 1980s and 1990s, while I was attending high school and college. Many of my close friends came from working-class families and never had the same educational opportunities that I enjoyed upon leaving high school.

Unlike my childhood friends, I have been able to attend outstanding higher education institutions based upon my academic performance. My work as a community college administrator reminds me each day that the students, faculty, and staff with whom I work have not always enjoyed the same privileges I have enjoyed with respect to my education. My awareness and understanding of this grand disparity in educational access fueled my intense desire to conduct this study. Conversations with faculty and administrators who have worked with me have revealed outstanding professionals who are the daughters of furniture refinishers, heating and air conditioning repairmen, auto mechanics, auto body workers, meat packers, milkmen, farmers, and secretaries. Such conversations drove my need to share these incredible stories and experiences with others who work in community colleges.

Role of the researcher

Fontana and Frey (2005) asserted that researchers must treat participants as individual people, so that those whom we interview will assist us in forging meaningful accounts of their experiences. Simply relating what occurred during the interview is not enough for the informant, the researcher, or the study. The interview and its subsequent results depend upon the interaction of the researcher and the respondent, including the manner and negotiations that occur during the collection of a narrative.

Each narrative has two parts, a story (*histoire*) and a discourse (*discourse*). The story is in the content, or chain of events. The story is the “what” in a narrative, the discourse is the “how”. The discourse is rather like a plot, how the reader becomes aware of what happened, [and] the order of appearance of the events. (Sarup, 1996, as cited in Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 717)

To establish my position within the interview process, it was imperative for me to present myself as qualitative researcher and graduate student. I worked to bracket my own biases and beliefs. In this way, I was able to best engage in *epoche*, or fully hearing the voices of each respondent (Creswell, 1998), without imposing my own experiences.

Participants

The phenomenological framework of this study required the composition of a purposeful sample of participants. Merriam’s (2002, as cited Patton, 1990) argument that the researcher must be careful and methodical in selecting, “*information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling” (p. 12).

Participants were chosen from faculty and administrators at Midwestern Community College (MCC). MCC is a large, public, multi-campus, two-year institution. The College has

existed since the 1960s, and serves a large, metropolitan area as well as nearly a dozen surrounding counties. The college has an enrollment of over 25,000 credit students, and over 30,000 non-credit students.

MCC has six campuses and two centers. The campuses are located in four small towns, an urban area, and a suburban area. The centers are located to the north and south of the metropolitan area which the College serves. The College is both rural and urban in character. The College district is over 6,000 square miles in size. It serves rural communities with declining populations, as well as one of the largest groups of minority students at any higher education institution in the state.

Nine women participated in individual interviews, and seven women participated in group interviews for this study. Participants in this study were housed at every campus, with the exception of the suburban location. The administrators were selected from Student Affairs. Faculty were selected from liberal arts disciplines and counseling. Criteria for participants in this study were that the women come from a working-class background, and that they have worked as faculty or as an administrator in a community college for at least two years.

All women who met the criteria for the study and chose to participate were invited to contribute their experiences in a two-hour, semi-structured interview. Each woman who participated in the individual interview was invited to be an informant in a group interview as well.

Human subjects approval and informed consent

This topic was explored first in a Qualitative Research course with Dr. Monica Bruning at Iowa State University in the spring of 2005. The concept was presented again at the Midwest Qualitative Research Conference in St. Thomas University, Minneapolis, in June 2005. I also discussed the idea at length with my major professor, Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan, during a summer course in 2005 and again in the fall of 2006.

The organizational plan for this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University for review and approval, prior to conducting human subjects research (Appendix A-1). Participants were chosen based upon their status as female children of working-class parents who had been employed as community college faculty or administrators at MCC for a minimum of two years. Upon approval from Iowa State University's Institutional Research Board, I contacted potential participants by email. The email delineated clearly the research project, and served as a request for participation in the study.

Each participant agreed to a two-hour individual interview, as well as a 90-minute group interview with other research study participants. Each participant completed an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) prior to completion of the interviews. Unedited, draft transcripts of individual and group interviews were provided to participants for member checking. Final copies of individual and group narratives were provided to participants for member checking as well. Informants were asked to check data, correct errors or inadequacies, and to offer additional information they felt appropriate to the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this project was achieved through semi-structured individual interviews and group interviews. The interviews took place in February and March of 2008. Unedited, draft transcripts of individual and group interviews were provided to participants for member checking. Final copies of individual and group narratives were provided to participants for member checking as well. This study employed two data collection procedures: individual interviews and group interviews.

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were two hours in length, and were conducted at the research site. Ideally, the interviews occurred in the participant's office; some, however, were conducted in the college's library conference room. I audio taped the interview, and took extensive field notes about the physical appearance and ambiance of the surroundings. The audio tapes were transcribed as soon as possible, and converted to MP3 files. The Interview Protocols for the Individual and Group Interviews are included as Appendices C-1 and D-1, respectively.

During the research process, I employed a modified version of Seidman's (2006) three-interview structure for phenomenological interviewing. Seidman found interviewing as a method of inquiry to be best aligned with the human ability to derive meaning through language. According to Seidman, "It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration" (p. 14).

Travel to the research site on several occasions proved to be difficult, as I lived 350 miles from Midwestern Community College during the time the interviews were conducted.

Instead of Seidman's (2006) recommended first interview to gather a focused life history and second interview to build the informant's details of experience, I combined the two interviews into a two-hour, semi-structured interview that would, ideally, inform the requirements of both of these interviews. I traveled to four campuses of MCC to conduct the two-hour, individual interviews.

The two group interviews that were conducted aimed to surface the intent of Seidman's (2006) third interview (i.e., a reflection on the meaning of the participants' experiences). The group interviews were conducted by way of web conferencing. Although not an ideal atmosphere for an interview, the availability of streaming video allowed me to observe the facial expressions and gestures of the participants.

I kept a research journal throughout the interview process and the study as well, to assist in the bracketing of my own experiences or opinions. This journal allowed me to document any pieces not covered in other methods of data collection. The journal served as a place to collect, summarize, and synthesize ideas, and to note shades of meaning in interview responses.

Rawlins (2003) summarized the experience of interviewing succinctly. He asserted that researchers must listen for clues about how our interview questions are regarded and interpreted. In doing so, we open ourselves to the risk of learning that our studies may be misguided or imprudent. The author concluded that qualitative researchers should experience the interview process as a chance to hear and respond to the questions others may have for us, as well as to discover more about the questions we *should* be asking.

Preparation

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided guidelines for the development of the interview process:

1. Decide whom you will interview.
2. Prepare. Do research on your respondents, practice the questions on someone else, and clarify the sequence of questioning.
3. Plan the initial contact. Brief the participant on informed consent; start the study with broad questions.
4. Pace the interview. Keep it productive and on track.
5. Wind down when new information has ceased to evolve.

A brief pilot study was conducted. The study was informal, but allowed me to anticipate and to experience some of the issues related to qualitative research. One interview resulted in a host of very brief and undeveloped responses. This experience demonstrated that I needed to re-write my interview questions to be more open-ended in character.

Another interview, which I had scheduled for a one-hour time frame, touched upon only two of my questions by the time we concluded our work. This experience compelled me to consider a two-hour time frame, allowing for greater depth and detail in answers. Staying on schedule became a more real and important consideration in practice.

The questions I developed initially focused more on early life experiences in the family than on educational experiences and career choices in the early adult years. Questions about experiences as a young adult seemed to bring forward more detail about how the participants came to understand higher education. These questions also illuminated why the

participants chose to continue with graduate work and their subsequent employment in a community college.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) suggestions prompted me to rewrite the interview questions with a more organic, fluid, and flexible interview process as the end result. Van Manen's (1990) conception of interviewing colored my perspective as well:

Often it is not necessary to ask so many questions. Patience or silence may be a more tactful way of prompting the other to gather recollections and proceed with a story. And if there seems to be a block, then it is often enough to repeat the last sentence or thought in a questioning sort of tone and thus trigger the other to continue. (p. 68)

Silence, in its own way, can draw a response like no question can. The participants in this study frequently responded to a pause with more candor and insight than to any specific question.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in tandem with the collection of data. The act of collecting data and analyzing the information simultaneously allowed me to identify emergent categories, themes, and concepts throughout the research and data collection processes.

Clearly, data analysis is an inductive strategy. The researcher selects a unit of data and compares that unit of data with another unit of data. The process of data comparison inspires a search for patterns within the collected data. These patterns are coded, or named, and constantly adjusted, re-adjusted, and filtered as the process of analysis proceeds throughout the research project (Merriam, 2002). Categories emerged as a result of intensive data review, particularly during review of transcribed interviews. Patterns in field observation or visual representations/themes were observed at the community college during

individual interviews. Categories, themes, patterns, and phenomenological concepts surfaced from the analysis of archival data, such as college catalogs, articles, and journals.

Creswell (1998) names the elements of data analysis in a phenomenology:

Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings. The research also sets aside all prejudgments, ***bracketing*** (see ***epoche***) his or her experiences (a return to “natural science”) and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience. (p. 52)

Qualitative researchers typically engage in forms of dialogue with their informants. Researchers’ perspectives, ideologically and theoretically, may be quite influential; nonetheless, these perspectives are shaped by informants’ narratives. The researcher’s practice of bracketing enhances the power of informants’ narratives (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003).

Bracketing, or suspending a researcher’s world view and everyday assumptions, is key to the development of *epoche* in a phenomenological study. *Epoche* dictates that the researcher listen only to the voices of the study participants. One must bracket preconceived ***notions*** of a phenomenon to grapple with the phenomenon as it has been ***experienced***.

The study interviews (narratives) served to collect phenomenological data from the participants. Coding was used to identify common themes, and to develop meaning clusters based on the emergent, phenomenological concepts. These meanings were then woven together to produce, as Creswell (1998) stated:

...the ***textural description*** of what was experienced and the ***structural description*** of how it was experienced...The phenomenological report ends with the reader understanding better the ***essential, invariant structure (or essence)*** of the experience, recognizing that a single unifying meaning of the experience exists. (p. 55)

Member checking

Like Lincoln and Guba (1985), Mattson and Stage (2003) defined member checking as returning one's interpreted research to the research informants for reciprocal participation and review. Mattson and Stage stated that, instead of sharing the final, finished product with participants, they prefer a draft be given to the informants for amendments, corrections, or additional thoughts prior to submission of a final draft. Member checking was conducted, in this study, by sharing raw transcripts with participants for amendments, corrections, and additional thoughts. Final drafts were also shared to collect any further information and amendments the informants deemed necessary.

Design Issues

Trustworthiness is the overarching principle related to quality in the design of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) constructed trustworthiness as a manner of completing research in such a way as to persuade the reader that the findings presented are worth notice. The concept of trustworthiness encompasses aspects of qualitative research such as reliability, validity, generalizability, and triangulation. These aspects also allow the researcher to anticipate criticisms of her/his work effectively. Member checking, saturation, and an audit trail composed of memos, a research journal, transcribed interviews, and detailed field notes all may serve as examples of evidence and credibility in a qualitative study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Each of these methods serves to establish a high level of trustworthiness in a specific research project.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of the researcher to replicate research findings. Of course, the shades of meaning in each human's experience renders reliability a problematic proposition. Reliability may be found in other researchers' agreement that the data collected are dependable and uniform, and that the results make sense. The true question of reliability for qualitative researchers, then, is rooted in "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27).

Study participants were selected to reflect diverse campus locations within the College, to test for consistency in perceptions of employment. The individual and group interviews were semi-structured and consistent in the execution of questions. Participants relayed their experiences in two extensive interviews that were conducted over time. The researcher asked additional questions of participants at subsequent times if responses appeared to lack consistency or clarity.

Validity

Creswell (1998, as cited in Polkinghorne, 1989) provided criteria for "valid" findings in a phenomenological study. Polkinghorne believed validity refers to the concept that an idea is solidly supported and well-grounded. Polkinghorne distinguished the following questions that phenomenological researchers may ask themselves to test validity:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the participants' responses so that the descriptions do not accurately reflect the actual experiences of the respondents?
2. Is the transcription accurate? Does it represent the meaning of the verbalized responses in the interview?

3. In the transcript analysis, could other conclusions have been made aside from those offered by the researcher? Has the researcher identified differing conclusions?
4. Is it possible to examine the overarching structural description against the actual transcripts, and to account for the connections and exact contents in the original example of the experience?
5. Does the structural description situation hold true in general for the experience in other situations, or is it specific?

Seidman (2006) termed validity as a sense of confidence in the authenticity of a particular response. The author pointed to the passage of time between interviews, nonverbal aspects of the response, diction, syntax, and the possible external consistency of texts as ways of examining the phenomenological interview for validity.

Generalizability

Merriam (2002) acknowledged that generalizability in a qualitative research study, “is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 28). The traditionally small, purposive samples assigned to qualitative research are not the same as statistical generalization. In qualitative research, the general conclusion may be found in the particular experience or situation that may be applied to situations encountered in the future. Qualitative research, then, is couched in a universe of concrete commonalities. Readers of studies decide the extent to which study findings apply, and, by extension, validate, experiences in their particular context.

Peer review was used to establish an external validity, or generalizability, to this study. The researcher shared information and findings informally with administrative

colleagues and other graduate students. The results of the findings proved to be consistent with the experiences of others who fit the participant profile.

Triangulation

Denzin (1970, as cited in Merriam, 2002) identified four types of triangulation that may be utilized to test the validity of a qualitative study: “multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings” (p. 25). An interview response, for example, may be checked against documents the researcher has analyze, artifacts that are connected to the study, or observations that the researcher has made during a field visit. This study employed interviews, member checking, and peer review to triangulate study data.

Limitations

The implication of this research should be interpreted cautiously, based on the study’s limitations. This study was based on a small sample of participant interviews, and the themes were interpreted by the researcher. The researcher made every effort to bracket her views and background, as the framework for this study is that of a phenomenology. I engaged in *epoche*, or fully hearing the voices of each respondent (Creswell, 1998), without imposing my own experiences. By doing so, my aim was to extract meaning from the individual and group interviews in an effort to find the essence of meaning in each one. This proved to be the aim of the researcher’s interpretation and employment of the phenomenological method.

The researcher made every effort to represent the participants’ recollections, presented as individual and group narratives, as closely as possible to interview transcripts and field notes. The fact that five of the study’s participants spent their childhoods and,

subsequently, attended private, four-year, liberal-arts colleges in Iowa, may have been factors in the informants' perceptions and meanings of events.

Six of the nine informants currently work as adjunct faculty at MCC. Of the six participants, four work as adjunct faculty as a second job. Two of the six participants work as adjuncts, at MCC or other institutions, as their primary source of employment. The strong relationship to work as adjunct faculty may have influenced these participants' responses in individual and group interviews.

Seven of the nine participants worked in clerical roles as primary employment, or as a second job, at some point. The strong affiliation with what Zweig (2004) termed a working-class profession may have affected responses. Furthermore, the participants currently all work at the same large, multi-campus community college; this affiliation may have colored informants' responses as well.

Implications

This study can be used to inform future studies of how working-class women adapt to *perceived* upward social mobility in higher education, and in subsequent career paths.

Community college administrators and faculty should be well-versed in the narratives and experiences of participants such as the women in this study. Sharing these stories can serve to validate the narratives of other women from working-class origins. The interpretation of life experiences and perceptions in this study may be used to shape community college professional development opportunities, mentoring programs, and curriculum built on the working-class experience.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of the study was to examine the phenomenon of nine, working-class women who have come to be professionals in a large, Midwestern, multi-campus community college. This researcher encouraged participants to share constructed meaning from their perceptions and experiences, and to consider how that meaning has shaped their lives both personally and professionally.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do women from working-class families who now work as faculty and administrators in community colleges construct meaning from their perceptions and experiences?
2. What life experiences and perceptions are unique to these women?

Data were gathered through individual and group interviews, as well as consistent member-checking via email. Chapter 4 introduces the participants of this study. The chapter presents the research findings, and details major themes and supporting evidence.

Individual Participant Narratives

Nine women informed this study. The researcher identified participants using a purposive sampling method. The participants came from a variety of family structure, college, and work experiences, within the parameters of the research study. Two of the participants were in their 60s, three were in their 50s, two were in their 40s, and two were in their 30s. Eight of the participants were White; the 9th participant was African-American.

Two of the participants work full-time as counselors at MCC. The counselor designation at the College is part of the faculty bargaining unit. Three of the participants

work primarily as adjunct faculty for the institution. One participant works as a full-time faculty person at MCC. Three participants work in different capacities in the Student Services area of the College. Of the nine participants, five currently work as adjunct faculty in the areas of Psychology, Speech, Humanities, or English.

Informants were assigned pseudonyms in an effort to protect their identities. The narratives that follow emerged from two-hour-long, individual interviews and group interviews that were 90 minutes each in length. The participant narratives serve to situate and to provide context for the interviews and findings.

Carol

Carol is a 60-year-old, adjunct faculty member at MCC. She was raised as the middle child in a church-going, farming family with five children.

It was a rural church and everybody was just like me and half full of my relatives because my...I think it was a great grandfather that started the church, so you know...I was very much a part of that. I went to a country school the first couple of years. So, when they closed the country school, I was an outsider and pretty much was an outsider until I moved to another town nearby to a new school.

She and three of her four siblings were taken away from her parents by the State in 1963. Carol soon found herself living with the Superintendent of Schools and his family in a neighboring community, attending her freshman year of high school.

When I got to be a freshman in high school, there was no doubt in my mind that I was going to go on. I wanted to be a photographer and writer for National Geographic and travel all over the world. I had these big dreams. But at the time you became a teacher or a nurse or a secretary and I just couldn't see myself as a secretary. There weren't a whole lot of choices for me.

Carol's high school friends all intended to go to college. Her high school English instructor influenced her deeply as well.

I think just all the kids in my class were going to go to school. That is all there was to it. All my friends definitely were. That is all they talked about – which college they chose and everything. The girl I lived with, her father was superintendent and there was no doubt she was going. She was going to go to something in music. I just never questioned that I would go on.

I also had an English teacher that I admired very much. She actually quit at that school before I graduated...What she did then was she started to attend classes at State University and she then became a T.A. and then eventually, she was hired there, which is kind of unusual...I always admired her. Not so much that she was the greatest teacher. She wrote books...I thought, to write books and to teach, what a life! That is the life I want. It took a long time to get there and I am not writing books yet.

Carol went away to college at a state school in a neighboring, Midwestern state. She qualified for financial aid there because her birth parents signed away their parental rights to Carol. She indicated that she never truly realized she came from a working-class family until she went off to college.

Well, I didn't know there was anything different than working class to tell you the truth. I didn't know there was people who didn't have to work that were independently wealthy or anything like that. Being raised in the Midwest in the 40's – I was born in 1948, so all I saw around me were working people. I never knew there was anything different.

Carol's boyfriend, who became her husband a year later, visited her every other weekend at the small, four-year college. Meanwhile, Carol's on-campus experience during the week was not so pleasant. At this time, she became increasingly aware of her affiliation with a working-class background.

It was a horrible experience of getting a roommate who had no intention of every studying. She was... she hated me because I was a study person and I didn't have very good clothes because I didn't have any money. She was from the city and had wonderful clothes and long hair and was very thin and trim and dated all the time and by the middle of the semester, she moved out. She didn't want me as a roommate.

So, then I had the room to myself, which was wonderful, until the second semester and then they moved somebody in with me who was a lot like me and we got a long just great. But the partying that was going on and all that stuff. I put a hair dryer over my head to study for two or three hours every night. It was the white noise I needed to block out the sound. I couldn't study because people were running up and down the halls.

Carol continued her studies at this college through the summer following her freshman year. She moved to a small city, however, and began studies that fall at the University located there. She married in November of the same year, when she was 19. Her new city opened up a world of new cultural and academic experiences for Carol.

Yes, as it went on I could have gone to school forever. I loved attending classes. I love learning; I love reading... Well, then my whole world opened up as far as the first time I ever saw a black man and a white woman walk down the street hand-in-hand. In fact, I had hardly ever seen a black man. Ever. Or woman. Diversity—Chinese and Japanese and all these people. I had never seen that... There were eastern cultures there, so I loved the city.

I loved being part of the culture – going to the theater and the shows. Not the culture of partying all night because my husband and I were Lutheran. I loved being married too because I loved him; obviously or I wouldn't still be married to him. So, we just made our little life all by ourselves away from everybody and came home once in a while. It was nice just having that year all to ourselves. But, at that time I knew I would always be interested in learning. I have been a life-long learner ever since.

Carol's husband took over his father's business in the Northwest part of the state after her junior year at the University. Carol transferred to a small, private, liberal-arts college, where she participated extensively in Theatre. Her husband sent her to London for four weeks on a Theatre study tour as a graduation gift. Shortly after her return from Europe, Carol began teaching in a public school. The experience did not satisfy her urge for creativity and control over her own work.

That was my first job and I taught there two years and it was not creative enough for me. I did not have the freedom that I felt I needed as a teacher. I was the share-time teacher for the Catholic school and the public school and

the bad kids were kicked out of the Catholic school and moved to the public school. You know, the trouble makers and the poor students. I was in constant conflict. Most of the kids in the Catholic school were very nice to me. They would call me sister by accident. I was only four years older than most of them.

At age 23, Carol purchased a small-town, weekly newspaper. At the same time, she taught Journalism at a rural high school. She stopped teaching and ran the newspaper full-time for several years. Carol sold the newspaper in the late 1960's, as advertising began to dry up in that region of the state. By the time she sold the newspaper, she had started a photography studio in the same town. She exhibited a truly remarkable entrepreneurial spirit.

Carol ran the photography studio for fourteen years. She and her husband had decided to have their first child while the farm crisis of the 1980s was in full swing. Her husband had work as an electrician in a neighboring community, but they no longer could make ends meet in their hometown. They made a decision to move to a small town in the North-central part of the state, where Carol had agreed to work for another photographer. She described her experience there:

I am an independent person who can become very opinionated. I hadn't realized that being in business for yourself all that time; it makes you a poor employee. I left within three months and went to work for a friend. You don't do that, but I did it.

Doing sales seminars and booking them for him and that was about a year of hardly any pay and I said that is it. I can't do anything right. I am going to go back to school. I just need to get trained for something different. But what did I want? I really did like the newspaper business, so I was accepted and I got a teaching assistantship.

Rather than accept the assistantship, however, Carol worked for a small newspaper for the next six years. She was in her mid-40s at the time. Over the next few years, Carol faced enormous obstacles. She was diagnosed with diabetes and sleep apnea. She left the newspaper and started graduate school at State University.

After completing her Master's degree, she decided to continue on for her Ph.D. Carol was 45 years old. Going back to school was daunting.

I worked very hard because I thought I had to work twice as hard since I am stupid. I had been out of teaching for so long and everything. So, I always did more than I should have. I remember one of the assignments was in 10 minutes I had to explain and show...a story board. I was supposed to show what a storyboard was. Of course, I have to make this board set up with these little pockets that I can put cards in. I didn't have to do all that, but I thought I had to do more because I was a non-traditional student...feeling like an outcast.

Here is this beautiful black girl with the longest legs and young as any T.A. in the school. We had to walk way down the campus to the Physical Education building in order to take this particular class and she was walking in front of me very, very fast...I wanted to walk with her and talk with her because I found her very interesting, but she walked too fast. I was just huffing and puffing after her. This story tells really, exactly how I felt as this older woman going back to school. And these young people around me and I didn't think I would ever become successful at this.

While studying for her Master's degree, Carol taught at small, area schools. She then found work as an instructional designer at a private university. Carol completed her Ph.D. at State University, where she now teaches as an adjunct. She also does adjunct work at MCC, and at two private universities. Right now, she works with 18 dissertation students in the area of instructional technology. Many of her graduate students are Latino and African-American.

Carol still wants to write books, particularly electronic books. She does not, however, enjoy the financial position necessary to employ an artist or programmer to execute the projects she has in mind. She just turned 60, but must work until she is 67 to receive Social Security benefits. Carol loves teaching adjunct at State University and MCC, but worries about access to a steady stream of work that will allow her to qualify for the good insurance benefits she needs as a diabetic. Her real passion, however, is working with graduate students at an online university.

I could do dissertation students until I die. It keeps me up on the literature. It keeps me keen. I am always learning and I love it. There are some things about teaching that I don't like, but there is lots of thing I love about it. I just have to kind of find my own little edge.

When I asked Carol which of her educational experiences stood out in her mind as contributing the most to her education as a whole, she replied without hesitation:

Yes and I can say that very clearly. We had a wonderful instructor at State University. A black woman, I don't remember her name. She taught diversity basically, but she was housed in the Department of Instructional Technology...Cultural Diversity was the first class I had from her was on that and I was enthralled by her. She used dance to teach.

We had to lay on the floor like we were on a slave ship and we had to pretend like we had shackles on our feet and our arms and the boat swaying. She made us go through all that stuff. What it was like to be a slave at that time...I could not have done that in the 60s and 70s because they wouldn't have done that. But now they do that. This is part of that cultural diversity training and I really got into it. I loved everything we had to read and write about.

So, they asked me if I would be interested in doing – they had a program for diversity students from the grade schools together- and we would teach them everything from technology to math to whatever. They had me working in the technology area and also I got to read to students from books and use voices. I used the felt characters on the felt board to tell the story and the kids just loved it. I had them captivated and I had just had a course in children's literature so to me it was just awesome. That was a tremendous experience and a year later they closed it down and then she left. Too bad, but what a wonderful thing...

Was it because I had grown up in a time where I had never seen a black person and had no cultural diversity? The whole time that I was in...the same town that I bought the newspaper in and had a studio, there were no black people and no Mexicans. The whole time I have never been around that. The whole time I always felt like I had an open mind, but never felt I had a chance to practice that I had an open mind...And I was surrounded by people who did not have an open mind. To me it was – I love foreign exchange students or international students. I just love them. I get such a kick out of teaching them something. They are so grateful. So, that would be it – diversity.

Carol shared her views on how her working-class origins have colored her life as an academic as well. She found this particularly apparent in her expectations of students.

I expect or I was told that I expect too much out of my students. I kind of calmed that down a little bit this last year. I expect a lot out of them. I think that everybody should think like me, be an achiever, always do your best. There is no such thing as a C or even a D and I have to calm that down a little bit. Not everybody feels like they need to be an A student in business communication or anything else. So, I have high expectations for my students, but I feel if I didn't, they would not try to work up to them.

I expect them to work. I say you should have two to three hours of work per week per credit hour of this class. So, you are looking at about nine hours of studying in preparation and work. I know I don't get it from them, but at least I let them know if they do that, they will do well. I think it just that I expect them to have a good solid work ethic. I raised my children that way.

Despite her many years of teaching experience, Carol characterized her relationships with other instructors as awkward.

I don't socialize in the hallways unless I have open door hours for students. I have the door shut and I am working and if I had a hair dryer I could put over my head, I would have it on. I don't want to hear the noise in the hallways. I don't want to hear the chit-chat. I don't sit down in the lounge and drink coffee. I take the coffee to my room. As a result, I don't have really very many social relationships there.

But I am also stuck in an area where everybody is tenured except for me because I ended up being in Smith Hall which is wonderful because I am right there by the printer and the classes are right there. Most of the lecturers are way over there...I don't spend a lot of time with them because I feel a little bit outside because I am not in their league...They are full-time and I am part-time. I am a lecturer. I don't feel that I am in their league yet and I don't know if I ever will be, but I work twice as hard as they do.

Carol indicated she would prefer to teach in a university instead of a community college because she feels that there are more opportunities for online instruction in university environments. She enjoys spending time with her husband, to whom she has been married over 40 years, and with her children. Her husband remains her greatest advocate and champion of her work as an academic.

When asked if there were any other aspects of her life that were critical to understanding her as a working-class academic in a community college, Carol answered:

Probably that I have all my life always felt like an outsider looking in. The newspaper business is a perfect example because you can't be biased. You have to be open minded. You can't get too involved in something. You have to stand back and you have to look and observe, but I was like that in high school as well.

I think it was because of my fear that somebody was going to tease me about my clothes or my parents or something. I was never one of the popular kids and that is ok...I have been asked to manage a newspaper and things like that, but as far as work in a community of learners and become a leader of that group, I never had that opportunity.

I think there are opportunities out there that I have never had. Maybe it is because I don't join groups easily. Not that I don't like to work in groups. I really do, but I don't join them. I am busy. I have so much of my own to get done. And so, I would say that I guess I will always say that I feel like I am always on the outside looking in at other people's lives and studying them and not really getting too involved.

Jenna

Jenna is in her 30s. She is a full-time faculty person at MCC, where she teaches Psychology. Jenna grew up in a family with a father who worked at a large, Midwestern manufacturing company for nearly 30 years, first on the assembly line and later in quality assurance. Her mother worked as a preschool teacher and later as an office manager. She has one sister who is three years her junior.

Jenna indicated that, while she was growing up, the family always had enough money for necessities, but not for a lot of extra items or activities. Vacations, for example, often consisted of trips to amusement parks within a one-day drive of the state capital. In many cases, financial resources for *extras*, such as school clothes, came from Jenna's grandparents. If her parents were in need of a car, they received a hand-me-down automobile from Jenna's grandparents.

Jenna grew up with the knowledge that her father did not like his job. This dislike resulted in an insistence that his daughters attend college.

We grew up knowing not to bother dad when he got home. He did not have a good day at work. But we were always encouraged to do well in school and it was never a question that we were going to college. We would go wherever we wanted to and we would find a way to pay for it. We were to find something we could enjoy doing and something that you could make a good living at.

Jenna recognized her parent's supportive attitude toward higher education as being couched in their own, personal experiences both as young people and as adults steeped in the reality of the workforce.

I think part of it was to have a life that maybe my parents considered to be better than the life they were able to give to us. I think part of it also was that they had probably or I know that they had pursued more college. My mom went to a community college and got sick and dropped out and never went back. My dad actually went to MCC and did the drafting program, but there were no jobs available and he ended up at the manufacturing company then. So, I think it was also doing what you find enjoyable and liking your job and not viewing it as some place I have to go every day and do a job that is very labor intensive and not very rewarding other than monetarily.

I think my parents also saw fairly early on...My dad made good money being a middle-class individual without a college degree. I think they saw early on that in order to have even the lifestyle I had growing up that I was going to have to go to college. So I think that was something they saw and therefore pushed and I always enjoyed learning and I think they felt I should continue that and have an avenue for that and they felt like they should provide that for me.

During high school, most of Jenna's friends were from other, working-class families. She did not recall there being major class distinctions in her small town, nor did she remember possessing a firm understanding about the kinds of expectations college would involve.

I would say most of my friends in junior high and high school were from other working class families. It was pretty unusual too growing up to know somebody whose parents went to college. I think it was always kind of

assumed we would but we really didn't know what it was all about necessarily or what that meant or what we could be when we grew up. You grow up and everybody works at the manufacturing company and you know you don't want to do that, but what is there to do. I think that was probably the biggest impact in high school, being asked what do you want to do after high school or ok you are going to go to college, what do you want to major in?

I was like I don't know. How am I supposed to know this? I don't know anybody who has been to college. I don't know anybody who is a psychologist or a biologist. I don't know anybody who does any of these things. I know my parents and I know my teachers, so it was kind of you are a teacher or you work at the manufacturing company or you find whatever job is available to you in the community....

A lot of my friends growing up I would say we never really talked about college. It was just something that we never really discussed. We really didn't know what each other was planning on doing. Some of my friends went to community college, some of them went to college and some of them didn't go to college at all. It was just something that was never really discussed. I guess friendship and academics were very separate for me.

Jenna did not realize until she was in college that she had grown up in a working-class family. She recalled the experience of hearing stereotypical explanations of working-class behaviors in her Sociology course at a small, private, liberal-arts college.

I remember in my freshman year sitting in an Intro to Sociology class, I remember talking about socioeconomic status for the first time in an academic way. You know, you grow up realizing that different areas of town have people of different incomes that live in them. But most people you grew up with - there were not huge discrepancies in income levels that were really noticeable. We all go to the same high school. We all go to the same middle school, but college was different when you started hearing about individuals who really grew up in a really privileged background.

On the other hand, people who grew up with less than you did. That was a real eye-opener. In this Sociology class, we started talking about socioeconomic status and I remember my instructor started to talk about people from lower middle class families and how they enjoy things like bowling and car racing. I just thought - well, I like to go bowling. We grew up going bowling weekly with my dad. When I was in high school, I had a boyfriend who drove in demolition derbies and I went to the races all the time and I just remember him saying that.

And saying some other things like people from lower middle class families aren't necessarily well educated. Just a lot of really negative things and I

remember thinking wow this is really disturbing that I am being and other people are being lumped into this category of individuals who all like to bowl and are uneducated and have all these not-so-positive qualities and it just really disturbed me. So, when I talk about socioeconomic status in my classes now, I try to be very careful about stressing that or making generalizations and stressing that individuals are different. And really being careful not to offend someone by my comments because I remember that experience and how it affected me.

Jenna constructed a grand vision for her college experience. She enjoyed reading books, and desperately wanted to see the places and things she had read about in person.

I remember in high school that I came up with this grand plan that I was going to be an architect and I enjoyed drafting in high school. I thought well that is similar. I was going to go to Notre Dame because I grew up Catholic and I found out that Notre Dame had this program where architectural students live in Italy for a year or two. That was someplace I always wanted to go, so I had all these grand plans about how things were going to be and when it actually became time to do these things, it was a little bit different story. Going to Indiana when I hadn't even been away to summer camp seemed a little daunting to me. It didn't quite turn out that way.

Jenna recalled first deciding that she would go to college during an elementary school talented and gifted class. She completed an investigatory project about a career as a veterinarian, and discovered that particular job required a college education. Throughout her elementary, junior high, and high school career, learning came easily for Jenna. Frequently, however, she wondered if she would be able to complete college. Jenna was highly competitive and a perfectionist by nature. She questioned what life would be like if she were not the best student at college.

When asked about her first memories of settling in at college her freshman year, Jenna characterized her first experiences as unsettling.

I remember moving into my dorm and thinking that I had to live in this itty, bitty box for the rest of the year. You have got to be kidding me. I was not happy about it at all. I didn't really know how I felt about being away from my parents and my grandparents and my sister and all those sorts of things. I

didn't know anybody there. There was nobody there from my high school. So, I settled into my room and that lasted three days and I decided I am not living here. I am not doing this. If I have to live here, I am not going to college. I can't live here.

I was made to go see the counselor in the counseling center and she was not very happy with me because I had already made up my mind...I said I will keep going to school, but I am not going to live here. So, I would say for the first few days and they were awful. I thought college is not worth this emotional negativity. Then I moved out and moved back home and thought ok now what does college mean because to me college meant leaving home.

College meant becoming independent and learning to live in the dorm and now what does it mean? Does it mean that...What did it mean? That was a big...difficult thing to maneuver through... I think I kind of convinced myself that for me college was about learning and that was about it. It was about learning academically, not learning to be independent or whatever. I think that something else that helped me was I eventually met people who also did not live there. Their reasons were not the same as mine. Lots of them had children and couldn't live there, but they were the same age as me.

Jenna enjoyed talking about academics with her newly-found friends. She started to eat lunch with those students, to do homework with them, and to discuss group projects for classes. She was excited by the prospect of having peers with whom to converse about new ideas. Jenna, nonetheless, experienced some academic struggles during her first year of studies.

She recalled an academic wake-up call in her freshman honors seminar on the 1960s. It was the first time that Jenna realized how hard she would need to work to maintain the high grades she received in high school. In her mind, an A was the only acceptable grade.

It is getting close to midnight and it is unusual for me to be up past 10:00. I am typing away and I am really getting good stuff here and I really got a good flow going. I have a good five pages and I kick the cord on the computer and I lose it all. I had to start over. Then I was like maybe I can't wait until the night before to start my paper. That is not going to work anymore. I got a B- on that paper and I was so mad because that was not ok.

After changing majors four times, Jenna finally decided to major in Psychology at the urging of one of her professors. Her pragmatic upbringing, however, caused her to question the efficacy of her decision.

I remember one of my boyfriend's moms saying to me at one time I think you should be a teacher. I thought no way; there is no way I am going to do that. What else happened after that? Then I think I switched to an automotive engineer. That is still kind of related to the whole drafting thing and I was good at Math. I like cars and I thought I could probably still draw things and I thought this is a good – kind of similar. Then I thought no, I have to take Physics. I thought no, I don't want to do that.

I had been taking all of these Psychology classes and really liked them. But I never really thought about majoring in Psychology. One of my Psychology teachers that I had for several classes for, she asked me why I didn't major in psychology. I remember asking her what I would do with that. I could see really practical things with all these other things.

By the end of her senior year, Jenna came to the realization that she would have to go to graduate school to find gainful employment in Psychology. She applied to a Midwestern university and was accepted to the School Psychology program. On the first day of classes, her graduate advisor, who had missed a meeting with Jenna over the summer, failed to show up for class.

Jenna decided to drop out of the program. She wondered whether she would feel like quitting every time something changed for her during her academic career. She worked for a year, and thought about graduate school constantly. She applied to State University at the end of that year and was accepted to the General Psychology Master's program. Jenna started the program, and thoroughly enjoyed her graduate experience. She felt strongly that her undergraduate advisor and experiences in the Psychology Department and honors program had prepared her well for graduate work.

Jenna indicated that her fellow students at State University shared her working-class roots. She shared that her experiences as a faculty person at MCC have shared elements similar to those of her graduate experience.

...While I was in graduate school, most of the individuals in my program were from working class backgrounds. Most of them. One his dad was a roofer and his mom did in-home day care in California. One her mom was a farmer and her dad was not around when she was growing up. One his dad was a police officer and actually had been killed in the line of duty and his mom didn't work. So, I went to school with a lot of people that were from similar backgrounds. One gal her dad was a doctor, so she was my stereotypical type of people that go to graduate school.

So, we had a lot of talks about where we were, what we were doing and what this meant to our families and to us and things like that. I think that was an interesting way to start. I would say here at MCC there are a lot of people who are from working class backgrounds, so I think it doesn't seem unnatural. It just seems normal. I don't know if I would feel the same way if I were at some other institution elsewhere.

Jenna married shortly after completing her Master's degree, and found a job working in retail. The couple lived in a small community at the time, but needed to move closer to her husband's place of employment. He encouraged her to interview for an adjunct teaching position at MCC. Jenna relayed her experience:

I went and I was so nervous and I drove down to the campus and I found the building and... I went in and I thought what is he going to ask me. He was like here are your books and I was like what? I thought this was an interview and he was like yeah, it is but here are your books...I said you mean, so I am going to be teaching? And he was like oh yeah.

Ok, then, I guess I am doing this. I hadn't really even decided for myself that I wanted to do it, but here I was and I am thinking if I am here, then I must want to do it right? So, I taught for a year at that campus as an adjunct because I just was kind of there and I didn't want to work at Penney's anymore. I loved it. It was great.

The couple moved again, and Jenna returned to the job she had before graduate school, in marketing at a small, private firm. She loathed her work, and felt that management disregarded her concerns and opinions. She feared her pattern of quitting.

Are you going to fire me? Please, then I won't have to quit because at that point, I was thinking I can't quit. I quit living at my undergraduate institution, I quit my first graduate program. I was really attached to not quitting at that point. And I found eventually that I couldn't do this anymore. I would come home from work and just sob for hours because it was not a pleasant environment to be in.

Finally, a full-time faculty position in Psychology opened at MCC. Jenna feels extremely fortunate to work as an instructor in a community college. When asked whether something particular distinguished her life as an academic in a community college, Jenna replied:

I feel lucky that I am able to do what I do and that I was able to get the education that I did because I worked hard to do it...I worked all through college. Sometimes more hours than I should have been working...I think to some degree that it helps me to understand the situation my students are in because so many of them are trying to balance 27 roles at once.

I remembered how hard it was for me and...I wasn't a mom and I wasn't a wife and I wasn't whatever else they are trying to do. Sometimes when our students aren't in class, it is because the baby is sick or the car is broken down and there is not enough money to fix it. Or there is no school today and my husband has to work and somebody has to stay home with the kids. I think that helps me remember those things and be a little more empathetic and understanding...I am glad that I have some personal experiences to help my do that.

Beth

Beth grew up in a family with one older sibling. Her father was a clerk and, eventually, became a manager in the hardware store where he worked for 30 years. Her mother stayed at home until Beth was 12 years old; she then went to work as a substitute school secretary. Her mother is now the secretary to the assistant superintendent in a large

school district in the Midwest. Beth is in her 30s, and works as adjunct faculty in English at MCC. The attitude toward higher education in her family was ambivalent at best.

My dad went to college for a while when he came back from Vietnam. He was working the night shift at a grocery store and he slept through his classes, so he decided that was a waste of time. He seems to suffer from perpetual lack of ambition anyway.

My mom and my dad always had sort of a bad attitude toward higher education in that they think people are educated beyond their intelligence. So, I think because my mom is so smart and she knows she could have gone, she resents that kind of. Almost like if you have a degree somehow that makes you more valid than someone who doesn't. Where it really should be that you go on your intelligence. Even now, I have an ambivalence about college...

Beth recalled going to the library with her mother frequently, and winning reading contests that the library would sponsor. She indicated that her mother was home most of the time and that she enjoyed a good childhood. Her family was fundamentalist Baptist, and attended church and ancillary religious activities frequently.

Beth was first cognizant of the fact that she came from a working-class family when her father changed jobs.

Probably when my dad for a brief time – I think it really struck home – I knew that my friends at school had more money. Even our neighbors had better houses. But my dad switched jobs just briefly as a janitor and he was not making much money at all. They talked about it and he was getting free food from the kitchen where he worked. That was sort of a moment where I thought people were giving us free food because we are not making the bills. It was tight.

Beth grew up in a Midwestern university town. She perceived that the children of academics and doctors were treated differently in school than she was. Beth indicated that the school she attended:

...was primarily filled with the more working class type. I went to Johnson School... When you mingled up with kids from the other schools at large, you got kind of a sense that South Main had kind of a stigma on it.

Beth shared that she knew she was not:

...one of the cool kids and especially when you get to junior high you can feel it because you are not wearing the right clothes or what does your dad do? That kind of thing.

Beth viewed college students as drunken hooligans who committed crimes in her hometown. She indicated little respect for academia throughout her childhood. She thought of professors as, “*bloated hippies that all they knew was their subject and that was it.*”

Beth recalled that she:

...held her nose to get her first degree...Even yet, though, my dad and my parents wish I hadn't gone...she [mother] thinks that my going to college ruined my writing...It made my writing worse and...it exposed me to a bunch of ideas and I am no longer how they raised me.

When asked about her memories of her first year as an undergrad, Beth explained that she felt ambivalent toward the experience. She found her classmates to be lazy and unmotivated. She thought of her professors as self-righteous, arrogant Ph.D.s. Discovering that all other students were not as interested in rigor as she was disappointed Beth greatly.

Her parents offered to pay for her books, and Beth lived with them at home while she attended college. Beth worked thirty hours per week as a secretary in an auto parts store from the time she was 18 until she was 25. She began college at 21, and paid the bulk of her tuition from her own earnings. Her parents helped as they were able. Beth did not mingle with students from school, but instead maintained friendships with her friends from church. She finished her degree in three and a half years because she wanted to, “*get it over with.*”

Upon graduation, Beth went to work as a temp in a bank. Almost immediately, she decided that she wanted to work on an M.F.A. in creative writing. She applied to eight schools, and was accepted at a large, well-known university on the east coast. She was not

offered financial aid. State University, however, offered her financial assistance and a teaching assistantship. Beth did not understand that her degree from State University would not be terminal until after she arrived at the school. From that point on, she “*hated*” her experience at State University. When asked why she still lived near State University, Beth replied:

I...wanted to prove to myself and my family that I could live far away and to be a child who was going to make it and get on their own two feet. I could be a state away and I could be just fine. I said I could manage this state even though I hated it.

After completing her Master’s at State University, Beth went to a public university in another Midwestern state for her M.F.A. in creative writing. She again moved home and took a one-year appointment at a private university. Beth returned to State University when her partner decided to attend graduate school there. The relationship ended, but Beth still lives in a small community near State University and teaches for MCC.

Beth explained how her background colors her relationships with her students and other instructors:

I don’t know about other faculty because I don’t really mingle with them that much, but especially adjuncts. With my students...it is like yeah I am not going to tell you something that is not true. I am going to be pretty straight. I tell them that I have a degree. I have a Bachelor’s and a Master’s and I qualified for low-income housing last year. You have to keep it in perspective.

So, when I can I tell them that you are going to use writing. I can tell you I have worked in car parts store and I have worked in a bank and you use writing in every aspect that you do. I can tell them that from first-hand experience. Maybe you will still keep your job, but you will lose their respect. They will make fun of you. I know because I have done it.

I think it is good to be more working class. That is why you can keep it real. I don’t feel like I have to be or prove to my students that I am above them. I participate as one of them...That is what college is about – just learning that there shouldn’t be a hierarchy.

Beth enjoys teaching at MCC, and enjoyed teaching in community colleges in other Midwestern states during her graduate work. While she took four graduate courses, Beth taught a section at the local community college. In the end, Beth thinks of all students, despite class distinctions, as similar.

At the private university, I was every day getting up in front of people that their parents had horse farms. At first it was intimidating and then I read their essays or their narratives and I tell people this too because wishing my students feel like sub-conscious or something. And I say do you know what? All through school I got made fun of because I didn't wear the right kind of clothes.

I said I taught at a private university and I was standing in front of these kids wearing the Abercrombie and the Hilfiger, and all I thought of was that I was in 7th grade again. But I read all of their narratives and I said everybody is the same. It doesn't matter. Everybody is basically the same.

Maria

Maria grew up as one of five siblings in a Midwestern family. Her father was a farmer, and her mother, who was a homemaker, never worked outside of the farm. Her mother completed the 10th grade, and her father graduated from high school. Maria is in her 50s, and works as adjunct faculty in Speech at MCC. She works full-time as support staff at the College.

Maria was not cognizant of class distinctions early in her life. She attended a small, rural school that had 13 children in grades kindergarten through eight. She began to be aware of class difference when she started to ride the bus to high school with children who had grown up outside of her tiny community. There were approximately 40 students in Maria's graduating class.

Maria's family was Protestant and very involved in church activities. Although Maria excelled at and greatly enjoyed reading, higher education was not encouraged for her or her sisters. When asked about the attitude toward higher education in her family, Maria stated, *"Higher education was not looked on as something a girl was supposed to do...this was stated by my father. A girl was supposed to get married and raise a family, not go on to school."*

Maria's county school teacher encouraged her to go on to college. She shared the experience of a parent-teacher conference in elementary school.

...during that time we had a gentleman, a superintendent of schools and he visited the school one day and it was like parent/teacher conferences and he was there. He was going over my grades and everything. He told my parents that I was high in literature, so I would suggest you take her to the library, which was a six-mile drive for them.

Fortunately, my grandparents lived in the same town...They would go in and to visit the grandparents and they would drop me off at the library and I would carry out stacks of books... Basically, when I was from mom's gestation period with me through 1 year of age, my mother lived on the farm with grandparents. My father was in Korea and was a medic in the Army, so I pretty much bonded with my grandparents very strongly and then they had a very strong bond.

Maria's grandparents were a farm couple and, although they were supportive of her reading habits, they never encouraged her to continue her education past high school. Maria thought of college as a goal that was unattainable for her. She always wanted to be an elementary school teacher, and went on several field trips to early education sites in the state's capital city while she was in high school. A few members of her church and her high school counselor encouraged her to continue her education, but Maria did not pursue college until later in life. Even then, she was the only one of her high school circle of friends to graduate from college.

Maria started to attend MCC as a non-traditional student at age 25, after a divorce. She had two small children at the time. Maria articulated memories of her first course at MCC:

Very frightening. The first class I took was Comp I and we had to write a allegory and I wrote an allegory based on a woman sitting in the dark in a rocking chair and she kept peeking out through the blinds to see what was beyond the house. But she was too frightened to take that step to go to that college. That was basically what I was writing about.

That was my first step of saying, can I do this and can I actually go from here. Well, for me at that time the very first time coming to MCC, it was a very frightening process, but exciting at the same time. I was doing something I wanted to do and I had gone through and was no longer under my dad. Basically, I am no longer married. I am stepping out and I moved to a large city prior to that.

Maria dropped out after two quarters. The time constraints and financial pressures were too great to bear at the time.

Maria went back to MCC at age 35. This time, her youngest child was just finishing junior high school. Her oldest son lived with his father at the time. Maria was gone two nights per week at class, while her child was at home doing his school work. Maria indicated that her sons admired her for going to school, and communicated their respect for her efforts clearly.

Maria's employer agreed to pay for the last two years of her Bachelor's degree, as long as it was in communications. Maria transferred her MCC credits to a small, private, liberal-arts college and finished her Bachelor's. As soon as Maria finished her four-year degree, she began work on her Master's. She finished the advanced degree in one year. Mother and son were college students at the same time. Maria recalled the experience.

He was in the full college life at a Midwestern university and I was doing the distance education program there, taking classes here [MCC] and in a larger,

nearby city, so we really didn't have a whole lot of conversations, but I knew he was proud of me and I was proud of him.

Maria's father, however, was not so pleased. *"He said he was proud of me, but it didn't really register because I wasn't married. I was a divorcee and you know; I failed in the area he expected me to excel."*

Her mother was very proud of Maria's accomplishments. Her parents, however, refused to attend her graduations. Maria did not attend her commencements, either.

After completing her Master's degree, Maria was downsized from the telecommunications company where she worked. She took her first teaching job at a two-year, proprietary school and stayed there for a little over two years before she was laid off from that position as well. Approximately one year later, she was offered a full-time support staff position at MCC. She was hired as adjunct faculty at the College one year after she started there in an hourly capacity.

Maria indicated that she sometimes has trouble relating to her students' aspirations. She views the high standards she keeps in the classroom as a way to encourage students to pursue four-year degrees. Her supervisors, however, have given her feedback to the contrary. She has been told that there will be no classes available for her to teach this fall.

I think that I am able to relate to a lot of students that are coming from that middle-class attitude. I am not sure that I relate well to those who are beyond that - who have higher academic goals. I have always been and I was told at the two-year college that I was thinking way above what they wanted me to do and I was encouraging students to go beyond their two-year degree. I approached things in more of a different way with my vocabulary and everything. They say I don't relate well enough to the working class. Which I think is totally opposite, but that is what they were saying at that two-year college, so they didn't feel that I was teaching at a level that they wanted.

Maria feels isolated from her teaching colleagues because of her full-time status as a member of the support staff. She worries about her teaching skills, and wishes that there were mentoring program in place for adjunct faculty. She has applied for five, full-time positions in Speech since she has been at MCC, but has found herself being passed over for interviews.

Maria believes that her working-class origins contribute to a solid integration of ethics within her Speech courses. She views college as an atmosphere where people can explore their beliefs with other students. She encourages her students, however, to consider other people's feelings and attitudes when discussing controversial topics in class. Maria very much enjoys teaching, but worries about her finances and status within the College.

I think with the background that I had I was very fortunate in understanding that a woman can go farther than she is expected. But I still had limitations and those limitations will also stay with me. I am going to be 56 years old and I have been asked a couple of times whether I would consider doing my doctorate. I have always said no. Financially for one reason. It was not feasible.

My life changed and I got married a few years ago. A lot of challenges came with that, so the extra jobs have not only been for financial reasons, but it has been for emotional reasons. Like, am I a good teacher or not... Financially, we have been on a big roller coaster. My husband has been unemployed. He recently got a part-time job. He was working for a builder and they laid him off in November. So, from September to December I had three classes and then my full-time job. It was a huge drop – 700 dollars every two weeks drop for take-home pay, so we are struggling.

Maria's husband works in the construction industry. He has no college education. In the past, he has attended classes, but he never completed any of the courses. The financial struggles she has endured make Maria wonder if her efforts toward college teaching were worth her time. She questions how life might have been had she not completed her Master's degree.

Sometimes, it might be better for me to just be behind the scenes...Not up front. Not a teacher...Would I have been better off if I had just stayed with my B.A. and just continued doing what my boss said I was doing just fine at?

Amy

Amy is in her 40s. She grew up in a single-parent household with her mother. While her parents were married, her father worked as a crop duster and her mother was a homemaker. After her parents' divorce, Amy's mother worked in a factory. The factory work resulted in a disability for Amy's mother. She worked as an in-home day care provider after her injury. Amy now works at MCC as adjunct faculty in Psychology, and as a full-time counselor in Student Services.

Amy's maternal grandmother lived with in the home, and greatly helped to shape Amy as a person. Amy's daughter is named after her grandmother. She feels that the all-female household in which she grew up influenced her development significantly. Amy felt loved and valued as a child, even though the family experienced difficult financial times.

The family placed great importance on storytelling and reading. Amy read extensively as a child, and recalled that there were always books in the house. She lived two blocks from the library, and spent many hours there.

We always had the Scholastic book orders; I would whine and get five dollars and I would always wonder what I would get. Like I said, living so close to the library, I did all the summer reading programs. That was my ticket. I had a love of learning.

Amy recalled feeling out of place in school because, "in the 60s, everyone else had a stay-at-home mom. I was the only child in my class that had divorced parents." The three women lived in a rented apartment; they never owned a house. Amy's mother always drove a used car. The women could never paint the interior of the house or plant flowers or have a

pet because they lived in a rental property. The family's financial status became apparent to Amy when she was six or seven years old.

The only door to our house was through the bedroom. So, that was also like, my home doesn't look like everyone else's. That was hard when you want your privacy. My mom always drove a used car. We never had a new car. My friends would say, oh we got a new car. I was like, what is that like. And the block we lived on, we were the only rental.

Everyone else owned their own homes, so I was really aware that way...Like I said my friend's parents always got new cars and we drove used beaters. When I got my first car, I got a new one because I had seen the things that my mom went through, like is it going to start. That was probably the two things – the home and the car.

Amy was sometimes embarrassed to bring friends home, because her home was located in what had been the downstairs of a single-family dwelling. She was also embarrassed around other children because no one else in her neighborhood had their grandmother living with them. She soon discovered, however, that her friends enjoyed being around her mother and grandmother, who were caring, nurturing people.

All of the people in Amy's neighborhood worked in factories, machine shops, or granaries. None of her childhood friends from elementary school attended college. The only adults she knew who had been to college were her teachers. In junior high school, Amy became aware of the importance of taking college-prep courses.

Even though I was lower class, I was smart and I wasn't going to jeopardize that. Some of my friends took that stuff for granted. To me, it was my only ticket out of here. I got on that higher track in junior high. That is when I hung out with a higher class of kids. Most of the kids on my block didn't go to college, most of them didn't and I started hanging out with a different class of kids in junior high. Towards ninth grade, I started hanging out with the nerds. That carried over into high school and all of my high school friends, really close friends, most of us went to college.

Her mother and grandmother never encouraged Amy to continue her education past high school. Her mother never helped Amy with her homework or asked what she was doing

at school. Nonetheless, Amy was expected to do well academically and to get good grades.

Amy finally decided that college would be a way to avoid financial struggle.

I don't remember when it came, but I knew I didn't want to have my mother's life. I knew education was going to be my ticket out of that. I didn't want to have to struggle like she did. I wanted more for myself. Because I get no sick time, no health care and I didn't want to live like that.

So, my brother went college. He is six years older than me. My parents had two kids. My brother lived with my dad. He moved in with him when he was about 10. He lived a couple years after the divorce with my mom. He went to college. I didn't really have a close relationship with him. I remember thinking if he can go to college, then I can go to college. I remember getting T-shirts with his college's name on it. I thought that was so cool. I thought well if he could do it, I could do it.

Between her junior and senior year of high school, Amy attended a journalism institute at a large, Midwestern university. She went to the institute through her high school journalism class. It was her first time on a college campus.

I was just like this is just magical. I really wanted to go to the University, but again it was out-of-state tuition. It was all about cost. I knew I didn't want to go to the vo-tech in town and I knew I wasn't going to go to a community college because I thought I will never get away. I want to go to a four-year.

Amy remembered the experience of telling her mother she wanted to go to college. Her mother instead encouraged her to go to school to be a secretary, since doing so would allow Amy to have work that was “a step up” from factory work. Amy did not want to go to secretarial school. Finally, her mother supported her decision to go away to college. Amy went to orientation alone, filled out the FAFSA by herself, and traveled to her first college visit with two other students from her high school.

Amy first considered attending a small, private, liberal-arts college, but discovered that it would be too expensive. She also considered the University in a nearby state, because she wanted to major in Journalism. The out-of-state tuition, however, was prohibitive.

The decision came down to Southern State University or Mid-State University. She felt that Southern State was too close, and that her mother would come to see her every weekend if she went to school there. Amy finally decided on Mid-State. Her new university was located three hours from home. Amy was accepted into the honors program at Mid-State, and started school there immediately after high school. Her mother came to visit Amy at college for the first time during spring term of Amy's freshman year.

Amy missed the warm, nurturing atmosphere of her home during her first year at Mid-State University. She was ready to have home cooked meals by her second weekend on campus. Amy was accustomed to creased sheets and pillow cases, and homemade cinnamon rolls. She craved the comfort of being around her mother and grandmother. Even so, Amy never went home for the summer. She decided to stay at school and to remain extremely independent.

Amy's first term challenged her academically as well. She found herself flunking a course, but there was no academic achievement center to which she could turn.

The bar was up here. They figured if you were in the honors program, you had better work for it...I got an F on my first paper. I have never gotten an F. I didn't come to college to get Fs...The paper was on Oedipus. We had to write a paper on whether Oedipus was a victim of circumstance or whether he was a victim of fate. I said it was just bad timing that is all. No, to him [instructor], he was a victim of fate.

The second semester at Mid-State was better; her academic wake-up call inspired her to work harder. She found a sense of community with the students in her honors program, and she became very involved with Student Senate and the Student Activities Council. *"I had fun and I loved college...I loved reading things that I normally wouldn't read."*

When asked about which specific experiences distinguished her undergraduate and graduate experiences, Amy cited relationships with three educators. Amy's undergraduate advisor in Speech became one of her biggest influences and steady academic mentors. The Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs guided her as well, providing assistance with selecting graduate courses. Amy also recalled a Social Science instructor who encouraged her to go to law school.

I think there was still part of me that said I am working class, I don't deserve to be here. College is still for the rich and the wealthy. No one told me that, but I didn't go away on spring break. I went home.

Amy graduated from college in 1982, and found herself in the midst of an economic recession. She was accepted into Northern University's Speech Communications program. Despite her success as an undergraduate, Amy still doubted her capabilities. Her committee chair and one other committee member went on sabbatical during her second year, when she was supposed to be writing her M.A. thesis. *"It was too daunting and I had nobody there telling me I could do it."*

Amy found her first job in higher education as a secretary in student family housing at Northern University. *"I had gone to graduate school and was working as a secretary and ended up doing what my mother wanted me to do in the first place, which was also kind of ironic."*

She moved on to Student Affairs, where she worked as a coordinator for the director who oversaw financial aid, registration, and admissions. Amy then took a position in Student Judicial Affairs. *"I kept thinking I have to go to graduate school. I thought I am not going to be this support personnel forever."*

Amy found her work in Student Judicial Affairs exhilarating. She enjoyed working with students who were in crisis, and counseling those with mental illness. Amy applied and was accepted to the M.S.W. program at a private university; she planned to become a counselor.

Her life as a graduate student was difficult. Working all day was not conducive to studying all night. Her peers in the program were students who had just finished undergraduate degrees.

I went to school with all these little 22-year-olds that were like I am sick of school. I felt like...They were like I did all my coding today and I said well I worked and I am doing my coding at night. And again, I had this nagging thought like I didn't belong there, which again I think comes from my working class.

I remember I had my first paper due and I was sitting in my bathroom crying my eyes out and thinking that I was a fraud and someone was going to find me out. I don't belong in this program. I don't have the ability.

Amy took a Statistics course and found her niche. She excelled in the subject matter, and found a true mentor in the woman who taught the course. She would eventually be Amy's M.S.W. committee chair. When the time came to begin writing her thesis, Amy panicked. Her advisor simply told her: *"just write something and pretty soon you will be bored and something else will come to you."* Amy overcame her obstacles, and finished the M.S.W. She still struggled with feelings of inadequacy. *"It took me a long time to believe that I belonged there. I think my background had a little to do with that because I didn't have any role models."*

Amy has worked in her current position as full-time counselor since 2006. Since 2002, she has worked as adjunct faculty in Psychology at two of MCC's campuses.

...as a therapist I am able to project confidence. I think I am good at what I do...Now, I feel I can hold my own and if I didn't have kids I would go for my

Ph.D., but I value my time with them. Then I think maybe we will go to school together. Maybe I will go when they go.

Amy enjoys an excellent relationship with the students she teaches in her Psychology courses. She tells them, “*you can do this...you belong here...if you want it, you will find a way to do it.*”

Students who have never been in a college classroom before Amy’s course have told her that she has given them the confidence to continue their education. She demonstrates a deep empathy for her non-traditional students in particular. Amy is convinced that her clinical skills help her in the classroom as well as in her counseling. She indicated that she works as adjunct faculty because she loves teaching. She does not, however, desire to become full-time faculty. Amy has always worked at least two jobs, and sometimes three jobs, at the same time.

I think that is from my mother. She always had to work two jobs. I still have two jobs. It is interesting because she tells me I work too much and I think, who did I learn that from?

Amy is not intimidated by other academics. She believes that some instructors demonstrate incredible arrogance, but could not, in fact, ever hold a job outside of the teaching environment. She perceives the faculty as an important component of the student experience at MCC. Amy, however, sees her role as counselor as even more critical to student success. She is a strong student advocate, and finds counseling gratifying.

I come home every night and I am just so happy. Talking about ideas, being on a college campus there is always that learning going on. We are always challenging. Can we do it better, can we do it a different way?

Amy summarized her experience as a working-class academic in a community college:

If my children want to go to a community college, I am not going to feel like they are getting less than. I probably felt that way before I worked here at MCC because I went to a four-year. And then you have to reach those students when you don't have that captive audience. When you read the Chronicle, unless you read the community college edition, a lot of that doesn't apply to us because we don't have the residence hall and you don't have those party fliers on campus.

But I think that it is why it is such a good fit with me with the working class. Again, a lot of us came from parents who didn't have a college degree. I think I am happy. At the time, I wasn't happy. I am glad I didn't grow up in a family of privilege...I don't spend 200 dollars on a pair of shoes. I still have those working-class values...I think I appreciate what I have because of where I came from.

Pam

Pam comes from a family that is first-generation American on her father's side; her mother's side of the family is second-generation American. Her father arrived in the United States after World War II. He worked in the water works division for a small, Midwestern municipality. Later, he was employed as a senior electrician at Iowa State University. Pam's mother worked for the Department of Human Services, first as a secretary and eventually as an office supervisor. Pam is in her 50s; she works as a full-time advisor and adjunct faculty in Drama and Humanities at MCC.

Pam described her family as having a strong work ethic. Her parents and grandparents emphasized helping others and taking responsibility for one's civic duties. Pam's grandfather worked as a horticulturist for State University, and her father displayed a great interest in animals. These two influential people in Pam's life inspired her to develop a deep respect for the environment as well.

Pam first became aware of her class affiliation in primary school. She recalled that her hometown was divided by railroad tracks. The working-class families lived on the north

side of the tracks, while the wealthier families lived on the south side of town. Pam remembered that many students, and some of her teachers, treated her differently by virtue of her neighborhood and the fact that her father was an immigrant.

One of Pam's teachers referred to Pam's father as a displaced person during a lecture on World War II. Pam went home and asked her mother what a displaced person was. Pam's mother was very upset that a teacher had used this term to describe Pam's father.

She asked me why I wanted to know and I told her that my teacher said that dad was a displaced person. She said no your family is not a displaced person. His family chose to come to this country. He was not forced. They came here of their own free will after the war. They immigrated to this country. Your father is not a displaced person.

Pam thought the bias she experienced in elementary school to be more closely related to her father's immigration status than to the family's economic situation. By the time she was in high school, that perception had changed.

I didn't take it as a class distinction probably until high school when all of a sudden there was huge difference. You had your group over here who came from the north side of town and there was a group over here who were ostracized because of where they came from or ostracized the north side group. The kids who were the doctors' kids or the lawyers' kids all lived on the south side of town. They made it very clear that if you lived on the north side of town, you weren't good enough.

Pam's parents and grandparents stressed the importance of higher education throughout her childhood. The message was constant and consistent that Pam would go to college, "no ifs, ands, or buts." She understood from her earliest memory that she was to go to college and to get a degree. Her parents expected Pam to find a field that would generate a good income. They wanted her to be a math teacher, since both of Pam's parents were outstanding at math. Pam did not excel in this field, but showed interest in and aptitude for Speech and Theatre.

Pam's high school counselor told her she would be "better off" as a forest ranger than she would as a woman with a college degree. He also discouraged her from taking college courses while she was still in high school, although her parents were supportive of the idea. Her high school friends were mixed in terms of being college bound. Some of her friends never discussed going to school because they did not see the merit of attaining a degree. Some demonstrated great interest in attending, even if doing so was for the sole purpose of finding a husband.

Pam always expressed interest in going away to school. Her parents made it clear that they could not afford to send her to college in another city, let alone another state. She began her studies at a MCC campus, and then transferred to State University for her final two years of the baccalaureate degree. She rode to work with her father each day, arriving at school two hours before her first class. Pam worked from the time she was 13. Her parents expected her to save the money she made for books and college tuition, which she did.

Pam found her first experience at college to be "*intimidating*." She attended classes with a broad range of students from many cultures, many who intended to transfer credits to State University or who were at MCC to improve their grade point averages. Pam recalled that attending MCC was her first exposure to people of color. Pam drew upon her theatre skills to transition to college life.

I had a theater teacher once who once told me that it is sometimes easier as a performer even just giving a speech, if when you go up to give your presentation, to send someone else up psychologically...That is kind of the approach I took.

I adopted kind of an attitude of I don't care what they think of me. I am whoever I want to be. If they have a problem with that, too bad. I think what kind of opened the doors a little bit to get to know some of my other classmates because I was involved in the drama program on campus and that helped. That alleviated the stress. That allowed me to be myself. I have also

been one who has a tendency to say what they think about things and college gave me the freedom to do that.

Pam attended college in the early 1970s, and recalled that period as, “*a very rocky time.*” She became aware of class distinctions based on race, aimed particularly at Arab students. She witnessed the discrimination in very open ways.

There was even a restaurant near State University that put a sign up that said, “No Arabs Allowed”. The restaurant is no longer in existence, but it was called the Blue Silo. I saw a lot of discrimination occurring. A lot of people were treated as second-class citizens. Anybody with an accent was treated as a lesser class than someone assumed to be a multi-generational member of society.

Pam reacted to such treatment of those around her with anger. She still remembered what it was like to be treated differently because her father was an immigrant.

Pam recalled State University being, “*far more intimidating than going to MCC. Even far more intimidating than going to graduate school.*” Her transition to State University was eased by the fact that she could walk to Jones Hall or over to Physical Plant to see her father or her grandfather. She was astonished by the fact that many of the students called their professors by their first names. Her family had always taught her to treat educators with the highest respect and deference.

Pam spoke of a teaching assistant in her Eighteenth-Century Literature class at State University. The woman who taught the course failed the women in the class, but gave As to the men who did not even show up for lecture. Pam perceived her experience in this course as her worst experience at State University. It served as an academic wake-up call for Pam, who had always been a good student.

I remember when I stopped, she wouldn't look at me. She spoke down to me. She threw my mid-term at me and said you obviously haven't done anything in

this course... There was no communication whatsoever. She would not talk to us about anything even though I tried talking to her about my mid-term.

So I went to my advisor, who was head of the Speech Department at that time. I told him I didn't know what to do. There was no communication with her; this is the way we are treated in class. I showed him my mid-term and I said I didn't know what to do. He looked at the syllabus and he called her.

From the moment he said that he was visiting with me, she went on a rampage and I don't know everything she said. I just know watching from his face turning beat red and him getting more and more angry, he finally said, "You do realize that everybody makes mistakes, don't you?" He then hung up. I don't know what happened after that. I don't know if he called the professor or what he did, but she never taught another class.

Pam graduated, and was engaged to be married that year. The engagement, however, was broken. She decided to go somewhere far from home. Pam took a teaching job in a very small town on the Great Plains. From this experience, she learned that, "*nothing is ever so bad that you have to live in that state.*" The small community and the instructors at the school embraced Pam, and made her to feel very much a part of their lives.

The people were nice, the kids were nice. I would say the year that I started there, half of the faculty were brand new and right out of college, so we had our own built-in support system... We had a routine every Friday after school... the Home Economics teacher and the Phys Ed teacher were husband and wife. We would get together at their home and have supper. It was potluck; we all brought something. We would all end up sitting around laughing and being silly and we had a good time and it was fun.

I made some wonderful friends from that... The community was wonderful. I still have pictures of the kids that I taught. I still talk about that little town to my own children and I had a great cultural exposure because it is on an American Indian Reservation and 90% of the people that live in the town are not American Indian. There was still that exposure.

The people that I rented my apartment from owned the building. They were Native Americans and they were the best landlords I ever had. They were the kindest people and their grandson was one of my students and it was just a wonderful experience.

Pam got engaged again and left to marry soon after. Her students put an engagement announcement in the school paper that the students were, "pleased to announce the upcoming

marriage of their English teacher.” It was difficult for Pam to leave the students, but she felt honored and valued by their actions.

Pam returned to her native state with her new husband. She worked as a certified nursing assistant for a while. A few years later, after her son was born, Pam took a job as Director of Vocational training at a facility for mentally and physically disabled adults. One day, a friend who worked at MCC told Pam that the College would be hiring a new advisor soon. Her supervisor at MCC encouraged her to pursue her Master’s degree, so that she would be prepared for other opportunities at the Institution.

Pam enrolled in the graduate program in Communications at a Midwestern university. The classes were offered via distance education, so that Pam did not have to travel. She started her program in 2003 and finished her M.A. in 2005. Her mother, husband, and children all supported Pam’s efforts toward her advanced degree heartily.

My mother was tickled pink. She said she would help me pay for my Master’s. She said dad and I didn’t help pay for your Bachelor’s because we couldn’t afford it, but she told me that dad had left her very well off and I will help pay for your Master’s degree and she did. She helped with tuition; she helped with books.

I did not participate in graduation ceremonies at my undergraduate institution. I drove a great distance to participate in this one. My mother drove to this graduation as well. My husband was there. My daughter could not be there because she couldn’t get out of classes, but my son drove from his university to be there.

I think getting my Master’s was probably a greater achievement than graduating high school... It was far more important to me than anything and to hear my mom say that not only was she proud of me for going for my Master’s, she was equally proud of me that it was a dream that she and my father had always had for me was to get an advanced degree.

When asked about the specific experiences that had shaped her educational experience as a whole, Pam indicated that the support from her undergraduate advisors in

Speech and Theatre significantly contributed to her success. She still stays in contact with most of her graduate professors. She found them to be open to her needs and highly communicative. Pam cited a professor at State University as an individual who made a tangible difference in her opinion of higher education after her encounter with the English teaching assistant as an undergraduate. She felt the same way about the assistance she received from the Chair of the Communications Department in her Master's program.

Pam now teaches Drama and Humanities as adjunct faculty at MCC. When she works with students in her classes, her goal is to help them understand that family background and their present situations are no indicators of their potential success as students. What matters is that the students want to gain something from their educational experiences and to benefit from those experiences in the future. Her focus is on making students feel good about their choices and themselves. She emphasizes that achieving dreams and goals is possible and attainable. Pam empathizes with non-traditional college students who have families and work obligations. *"I am more willing to go out of my way, to go extra, than some of the other professors are."*

When interacting with students, Pam feels that a casual appearance helps to alleviate any perception of her being unapproachable. She expressed that her decision to be casual can be problematic for the academics with whom she works.

I dress down, I don't dress up. If I dress up, I feel like I am putting myself above the people I am going to be interacting with...The last thing I want to do is to intimidate that person by being in a suit...I want them to feel comfortable in here. I get criticized for that. I know I get criticized for that because this is a college and therefore we have a look that needs to be projected. I don't always agree with that. There are those who need to wear the suit and tie. I am not one of those...

I classify students in two ways: I have those who come in and sit down and their body language is very relaxed and open. They know what they want to

do and they are ready to make those commitments. Then I have the chair shakers. They are not doing it purposefully, but they are so terrified and so unsure of themselves that they are shaking so hard the chair moves by itself. Those are the ones that I need to focus more on. That does color how I interact with some of the academics here, especially when it comes to some of the other students.

An initial hesitation marked Pam's decision to work in a community college. She has been at MCC since 1987. Pam was certain she had made a horrible mistake when she took her job at the College. When she first came, she thought she would be expected to know everything about student activities, student services, transfer, testing, and admissions within the first week. Her supervisor finally explained to her that learning higher education takes time. She stopped reaching for the phone to call her former employer to ask to return to her old job.

Pam explained that aspects of her personal life are critical to understanding her as a working class academic in a community college. Her husband is a butcher and works in a hog confinement. He is proud of the fact that Pam works in higher education. Pam asserts that living in a working-class family is, "*just a way of life.*"

... I think I refuse to acknowledge class distinctions. We are all here for the same purpose and how we got about doing that it doesn't matter. Class isn't part of it. Just because some of us may have better opportunities than others class doesn't come into it and I refuse to acknowledge that when students come in they may be of a different class. It is not important to me...I refuse it. Even in my own personal life, I refuse to acknowledge it...

I feel lucky to have had the life I have had, the family background that I have had. I do think that sometimes coming from a working class, we do have a stronger work ethic...we are maybe a little bit likely to reach for those goals and work for those goals and take more pride in the process of getting those goals. That is something that I have tried to pass on.

Eva

Eva works full-time in Student Services at MCC; she is in her 40s. Eva's parents both worked through most of her childhood. Her mother stayed at home until Eva was seven years old. She is the middle child in a family of five. Her oldest brother is 17 years her senior.

Eva's father worked as a tour superintendant at the main post office in a large, Midwestern municipality. He worked the night shift most of the time Eva was growing up. Her mother retired as a clerk typist with City Clerk's Office. Eva's parents were a bit older and less active in parenting by the time Eva arrived. She said that she preferred her situation that way, and she avoided causing her parents any problems. Eva believes she and her younger brother, who is 11 months her junior, were "*model children*."

Eva became conscious of the fact that she came from a working-class family in about 4th grade. Her neighbors seemed to be living in the same economic conditions as Eva's family. Her mother and father, however, would occasionally pick up side jobs to buy extra Christmas gifts or a new television. Even so, the family's economic status did not fully convey its standing in the community.

I think I remember thinking that I was an odd bird because I am African American, but I don't always fit into what some people would stereotypically think would be an African-American experience. I come from a family of what you would consider upwardly mobile or people that pretty influential in the community that made things better for folks that didn't have a voice.

So, I usually felt like I was getting shafted by other African Americans because they would see me as really not being part of their group. Like, oh she has nicer clothes or she drives a car or she lives in that neighborhood. So, that was difference. You are not really accepted there and you are not really accepted among the white kids because you are not one of them.

Eva involved herself in high school leadership and clubs. At the end of the day, she did little socializing. She never felt at home with her peers; she never felt like she fit in. The

attitude toward higher education in her family was one of indifference. Her parents, upon hearing Eva's intention to attend college when she was a junior in high school, responded with surprise. *"My mom was like, oh you don't say. They were just kind of like, ok, she thinks she is all that."*

Eva felt that her siblings thought she perceived herself to be better than them. Since three of her siblings were much older than Eva, they had not had the same opportunities for higher education when they completed high school in the 1960s. Eva counted herself fortunate to have family members who were influential in her local, African-American community. Several of her aunts and uncles on her mother's side worked as professionals. One aunt belonged to a sorority that assisted young, African-American women who wanted to go to college. Eva's aunt guided her to be, *"involved in things that definitely showed I was college track and I was doing this and I was involved with the right things and the right activities and organizations."*

Eva chose to attend a small, private, liberal-arts college in her home state based on its academic reputation. Her concept of college evolved from media portrayals of leaving home to go to school.

..So you are going to have dorm room and you are going to pack all your stuff and your parents will help you move in and that is what I thought and that is pretty much what I did. I had that traditional experience...

Eva described her campus visits to two small, private, liberal-arts colleges and a large university experiences that *"mortified"* her. Seeing a thousand students packed into a lecture hall at the university scared her; she decided then and there to attend a smaller school.

Eva's parents told her that they would help her to attend college as much as they possibly could. Money, nonetheless, was an issue. Eva's father viewed college as *"something*

extra” that wasn’t really a necessity. Eva took out a substantial amount of loans and went off to school, where she planned to major in music.

Eva related her experience with financial aid during her sophomore year. She explained that the loans “*were funny that one year and I didn’t have enough money.*” Her father called all of Eva’s siblings and explained that he expected them all to contribute money for Eva’s tuition that year so that she could stay in college. Although her siblings had their own families, each contributed a significant amount of money to cover the bill.

Like I said there has been a lot of sacrifice for me. I told them thank you, but you don’t really realize until later. I have a family and stuff myself now. I realize now how much that was back then. It meant a lot. That was about 1982 or 1983, so that was a lot. I wouldn’t have made it and there wasn’t anymore money coming from anywhere.

So, then I got all of their 300-dollar checks, made payable to the college. I am not sure what happened to the financial aid that year, but everyone has it. It just didn’t pay as much that year. I am really fortunate that I have that many brothers and sisters...I know that you just think about the sacrifices that they made for you. We are family and family is most important.

When Eva arrived at her new college, her advisor began to help her with academic advising immediately. She had to change her major at the end of her first year because Music Theory proved to be too difficult for her. She desperately tried to locate a new major; she thought, “*I am not going to stay here for an extra second. I am out of here in four years, which was how it was back then.*”

Eva saw herself as a pioneer at the small, Protestant college. When she graduated, there were five African-American students out of about 150 in her class. She never considered joining a sorority there because she feared she “*wouldn’t fit in there. And nobody was outwardly coming and looking for me...So, if you are not really kind of recruited into it...you just steer from that stuff.*”

Eva spent most of her time studying, as there was little social life on campus. On the weekends, she drove back to her hometown to stay with her sister and brother-in-law. They fixed up the basement for Eva, and she stayed there on weekends and breaks for four years.

Eva received an academic wake-up call at the end of her first quarter. She was called to the Academic Dean's office because she had been placed on academic probation. She could not believe what happened to her.

I didn't understand GPA and nobody had ever explained to me how that worked...I was called into the academic dean's office...They told me it was just a one-on-one thing and it was a White gentleman, of course...I sat down and he asked me if I knew why I was in there. I said no. They probably thought I was being a smart-alec. No clue. I did think he thought I was being a smart-alec. I really do to this day. No, I don't know. Well, it is your grade point average. And it was very abrupt like I am speaking to you now. I don't like the very abrupt...

So, by then I am kind of sinking down in my seat. And if you don't fix this by the end of next quarter, you are going to be dismissed and that was the end of the conversation. I was pretty much in shock. I don't know if my mouth was open or not...

I uhm was already making a huge sacrifice being there. And there are not people there that look like me at all. So, I just decided I would do whatever it takes so that I wouldn't get dismissed from there. It was a moment for me where I said this is it; I am going to be beat from this school. I got pretty busy and really careful about what classes I selected and how much time I really spent studying.

I tell you, it is a long road if you get into trouble at the very beginning and you have to claw your way back up so that you are not a trouble maker. I kept thinking, man he is really insensitive, but you know, he probably doesn't treat anybody any differently. I didn't know and I just decided I was never going into his office again.

Yeah, there wasn't any sensitivity at all. It was just kind of like, don't know that you cannot be below a 2.0. I think I was like a 1.89, it was pretty bad and I didn't know. Like I said I had already did the damage with Music Theory. I pretty near flunked that one. I passed it, but you know. It was bad. You aren't supposed to get Ds in college.

Eva felt isolated throughout her undergraduate experience. She did not feel that there were administrators or Student Services staff with whom she could talk. She perceived herself as being completely on her own, and needing to make it through the college experience no matter what happened. Eva resolved herself to the fact that she would finish her bachelor's degree at Central. *"One of my proudest moments was when I left that school; I was on the Dean's List."*

Eva changed her major at the end of her freshman year. She decided to continue on in Linguistics. When she made the decision, she was assigned a new academic advisor who remains a strong part of her life even today. Eva believes that her advisor was sent to keep her on track, and to help her succeed.

Yes, that is how god works because a man and his wife are Christians and he was praying for me and things like that. I didn't know about them then, but I know about them now. He is also a White man, but he has the heart for what he is doing and he helps people. So, it was great and there was great faculty. He wasn't in Student Services. This was my faculty advisor and he is the most important person from my experience at college.

A Music faculty helped to shape her academic experience as well. Eva and the professor both played viola in the same community orchestra. Eva found the opportunity to know this instructor as a fellow musician was comforting and calming to her.

Eva found herself spending a lot of time with the international students at school because they felt out of place, too. She considers her ability to draw people from foreign cultures to her a spiritual gift. Eva believes herself to be completely transparent and open, attributes that tend to inspire conversation when students from other cultures meet her.

When asked about her junior and senior years at college, Eva indicated that, although her social experiences were not wonderful, her academic experiences improved significantly.

She found a sense of community with students who were in the honorary music fraternity, and students who were fellow Linguistics majors. Eva maintains that the small college did its best to accommodate her at the time.

It wouldn't have mattered which college I would have went to, it would have been the same things...that is why I am probably a strong alumni for this college because I think they did the best they could and what they had at the time. Now, here we are 30 years later and there are things that they and probably other private schools could be doing better to make folks that don't fit the typical stereotype of what a Midwesterner is supposed to be... So, I did it, but I would not say that I was comfortable at all. You couldn't be because it started with you looking different. You know, you are not really different, but who is going to talk to you long enough to find out?

Eva's parents came to her college for her graduation. Her sisters from large, Midwestern cities attended as well. Her brother, who was in the military in the Middle East, was not able to attend.

Eva worked for about five months at her first job out of college. She met her future husband, and relocated to a Midwestern city, where she would spend the next 17 years. Her path during these years, however, would not be easy. And she would find herself again thrust into the role of pioneer.

Eva moved to the city at the height of racial tensions, fanned by the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Her husband was a White man who was a local radio personality. His position allowed the young couple to become very involved in the movement against the Klan.

My ex-husband was very good. He was in media and he knew how to use that. We knew who to contact like the Southern Poverty Law Center and all the organizations all across the United States. Time Magazine was in there and we brought Newsweek in. Anything we could do to raise awareness and confront that and they said this is too hard here. We had better move on down the road and that is what happened. So, we actually ran the Klan and the

Nationalist Movement out of our city. That took about two years. I was pregnant and finishing my Master's Degree all at the same time.

Eva was attending graduate school at Eastern University. At one point, the editor of the student newspaper there asked her for an interview about her work against the Klan. She agreed to the interview. The editor then asked Eva who was behind her organization. When Eva indicated she was the one who provided direction for the organization, the editor asked her who the organization's leader was.

I have been insulted a lot in my life. That was insulting because I had been working on ...the newsletters. Since I was putting all that information in there, I put my name on it as the editor and then I would send it out. Really, my husband and I worked on it, so they would say, Oh then your husband is in charge of this. Can I talk to him?

I was like, no you are not getting what I am saying. We co-founded this and we both do the work. My husband was a White man. My husband now is also a White man. I like my husband now. I didn't like my old one, but he was very good at what he did. I learned all that stuff because I lived with him for 15 years...I totally understand that world of broadcasting and media and how to do it.

Eva worked in Admissions at a Eastern University and loved the Student Services environment. During her college years, she had done some work as a summer counselor for Upward Bound, and very much enjoyed the experience. The Upward Bound students came from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds. Eva felt compassion for them as they tried to achieve their goals. Even so, she felt that she, “...didn't have anything in common with them, but I loved them.”

Eva's work schedule in Admissions frustrated her. She was the only African American on the Student Services staff, so she was sent out to recruit on the eastern side of the state, in larger, urban areas. She travelled extensively for work. Eva was working on her

Master's degree and doing all of the billing, benefits, and human resources work for her husband's radio station at the same time as well.

It had to happen when it happened because I was younger then and I had the energy level to do all that. I was a crazy person. I always tell people that I had several lives and I had to really re-invent myself several time drastically. Some people I think go from one career and it may be similar and then segue into something else. I have had to have some really distinct breaks.

While I was working in admissions, I knew I was going somewhere. I thought that maybe someday I would be an administrator. I had some things in my head and I had ideas. I had already been out in the workforce and had my own company and I had been around all these other people that had done all these other things and then I am going back as a full-time grad student.

Eva worked in several different areas, including Student Services, University Counseling Services, and Greek Life during her time at Eastern University. The University offered her full-time work in Student Services upon her graduation. Eva remains disillusioned with the result of her employment at the small, Midwestern university.

Then they offered me a job and it was all – it was bogus because the job they offered me in the next fiscal year, it was already eliminated. They do some tricks like that up there. They are great on education and higher education, but they really stink as far as their budget in that state, so where do they cut first? Higher ed. That is what happened to me, so I was laid off there.

Then after all that work and they were telling us all that design for diversity and grow your own and all this stuff and I was the one that got slapped in that so. So, I got laid off from there and then later one, I got laid off from Southern Tech, so I was done. I never wanted to go to that state again. That is terrible – two lay-offs in about five or six years from two different institutions of higher education so I am very negative about how they run their whole system.

Eva decided to return to her home state, despite the fact that she had to take a \$20,000-per-year cut to do so. She believes that, at age 45, she should not have had to compromise her earning power. Regardless, she is in her home state, her parents reside in the state's capital city, and she didn't want to leave the Midwest.

When asked which of her specific experiences during her undergraduate and graduate work contributed most to her education as a whole, Eva responded that her real-world experiences have done more to shape her education than anything academic.

I think that when I look at the experiences and how I had to go through what I went through at my undergraduate institution and at the University where I worked in Admissions, it was painful then. But if you look back on it, it really did shape who I am and what I am able to do. I have all these experiences that I am sure it helped me be better with the students and more effective.

Her relationship with students is characterized by her desire to work with those who are disenfranchised or feel that they have no voice. Students frequently believe they are the only people who have ever faced challenges in life. Eva tries to reach them with her own experiences. When students tell Eva that they feel they don't belong, she tells them:

If I can do it, you can do it... here, at this school, I hope I am the person that students can just go and talk to. What is beautiful is that a lot of them have even made that remark and besides the ones who have said it, others say it in their actions. That is what I want... That is why I stay in it. I need that. Just to know that I have made a difference in somebody's life.

Eva explained her relationships with other academics, faculty and staff, in a more dispassionate manner. She asserted that her race prevents her from being treated with the respect she would have if she were White. She conducts herself in a professional manner, and always strives to be helpful to other staff and faculty. She refuses to play political games.

"What you see is what you get. That is how I need to be because I don't know any other way to be."

Eva felt strongly that other opportunities for advancement at MCC would have come her way by now if she were not African American. She has been in her current position for five years now. She found it insulting that the College brings in another counselor from another campus to do work with multi-racial students. If that counselor is busy, or if the

student needs one-on-one time, the students then are sent to see Eva. *“They want to have it both ways.”*

Eva thought that her relationships with other academics at MCC are strained more by her race than by her family’s working-class affiliation.

I definitely believe it is because I am African American and it is funny that you ask. With the class thing, with the whole economic thing, I don’t really see it at all with this being a community college. I know there are people that think I probably come from an impoverished background because I am African American. That is disconnect. I would just like to strangle them.

Eva asserted that her work must focus on helping students. In that context, she was convinced that, *“this economic thing is huge, and it even trumps the race thing.”* She shared that students probably feel comfortable around her because they make the assumption she is from a less-privileged background. That assumption, she believed, is rooted in Eva’s race.

Eva still feels isolated among her peers at MCC. She indicated that MCC have only five or six African-Americans on the staff and faculty at this time. Only four of those employees, including her, are considered faculty. Of those four employees, Eva is the only woman.

Eva talked about her decision to work in a community college, and shared that she had decided to come to MCC based upon economics; it was the best job offer. She said that she would be willing to work in almost any higher education environment. Eva has worked at a private, liberal-arts college, a public university, a technical college, a private seminary, and a community college. Eva summarized her experiences by sharing her perception that she never fits in, no matter where she is.

I guess I think that has been the hardest thing for me is that I don’t fit anywhere. Once you realize that, you are still who you are. You just have to

go with it. You can't reinvent yourself. This is who I am. I hope I am raising my son to be the same way.

We are doing the best that we can with what we have and hopefully society will stop trying to put us in boxes because you can't. I am happy and proud that I am from a family that did make a difference and I am standing on their shoulders and someone is standing on mine. I am happy about that. That piece is huge for me...It is good to be proud of who you are and where you come from and the things you have been able to accomplish. And keep doing it. Don't give up...

I do it because of the people that come after me and even in my own family...Hopefully, it will be better than what I went through. That is what I am hoping for. That is why I do it. I bet all of our ancestors hope for that...I am so indebted to what other people have done. I guess until you speak the words, it just doesn't register how powerful it is. Somebody did that for me. Hopefully, I will be able to do something for somebody else.

Sharon

Sharon is in her 50s. She works as an upper-level administrator at MCC. Her father started out as a farmer, but lost the farm to weather in 1959. He then went to work as a technician with Janus Pipeline for the next 38 years. Sharon's father took pride in the fact that he was one of the ten best propane pipeline operators in the United States. Sharon's mother worked alternately as a waitress, bank cashier, and a clerical worker in a turkey-processing plant. Both of Sharon's parents did well in high school. Her father and mother were both valedictorians of their classes in their small town, one year apart. Sharon's father attended a small, Midwestern university for one year prior to returning to the farm. Her mother attended State University on a scholarship for one quarter. The family lived in two Midwestern states while Sharon was growing up. She was the middle child of three sisters.

Sharon's grandparents figure prominently in her narrative. She and her sisters spent every Saturday night at her grandparents' house, while her parents went out. The family

spent the majority of the day on Sundays with Sharon's grandparents as well, eating meals and socializing with other relatives.

Sharon's father frequently worked swing shifts. She recalled that she was not allowed to go upstairs during the day, while her father was sleeping. She also remembered that money was tight in her family. The lack of spending cash prompted her mother to become a waitress. Sharon's father worked odd jobs, and occasionally worked extra hours at the local creamery cutting butter, or transporting turkeys to the processing plant in her hometown.

While money was tight, we still did a lot of things together, but it was the little things that you can recall. Like when you go down to the grocery store and get a bottle of milk and after it got half-way down, then we would mix it with powdered milk to stretch. But there was always food and plenty of stuff around the house, so it was never where we were told that we didn't have a lot of money.

Sharon first became aware that she lived in a working-class family in 1st or 2nd grade. Most of the kids in her neighborhood came from families in which the father worked running a small business, working at the turkey plant, or working in some other kind of agriculture-related profession. Most of the children's mothers stayed home, but took in sewing or other light, domestic work. Soon, a new family moved into the neighborhood from a small town on the Great Plains. The family's father, Dr. Grubbs, was a resident at University Hospital.

Mrs. Grubbs would invite Sharon's mother to the house for coffee. Soon, Sharon's mother started doing the Grubbs' ironing for 10 cents per piece. Sharon recalled that the Grubbs family were the first people she knew to own a color television. The children always had new clothes, and Sharon and her sisters wore their hand-me-downs. "...you just had the sense that they were somebody special and everybody else was ordinary."

Wearing hand-me-down clothes was not uncommon in her small town. According to Sharon's recollection, everyone in town, save the doctors and lawyers, were working class. It was not uncommon to know that you were wearing clothing that came from your sister, your cousin, or your neighbor. Everyone at church would recognize you as the daughter of Millie's sister, or Pearl's granddaughter, or some other distant relative. For the most part, everyone in Sharon's small town lived on equal footing in terms of class.

When the family moved away to a neighboring state, Sharon experienced her first, true tastes of classism and racism. The family found affordable housing on the southeast side of town and next to the Army Reserve barracks, an industrial park, and the railroad tracks that separated working-class from wealthy in the small community. Sharon spoke of her oldest sister coming home from high school in tears because she wore homemade clothes. The other girls in her class were buying outfits in large department stores. They teased Sharon's sister because she was bussed to school from across town, her parents didn't drop her off at school.

Sharon was bussed to a junior high school that had been the African-American-only elementary school prior to her arrival there. Razor wire still surrounded the perimeter of the school. Her time there was Sharon's first exposure to African-American students. She remembered that the teachers picked on her in class, and referred to the students as "*White trash*" and "*Black trash*." She noticed that between 7th and 8th grade, many of her female peers suddenly disappeared because they were pregnant. They rarely reappeared. Her daily situation forced her to recognize racial and economic differences.

...this was 60 miles into the neighboring state and you were getting close to the Mason-Dixon Line and when I was in my hometown, it was a lily-white

community. This was the first that I had any exposure to people who were different both economically and socially as well as physically.

The family returned to her hometown between Sharon's sophomore and junior years of high school. Sharon thought that she wanted to be a teacher, so she signed up for student teaching experience at her high school. During the four years she had been gone from her hometown, a large Latino population had moved in to work in the turkey processing plant. A number of the Latino children needed English as a Second Language instruction. Sharon asked her lead teacher whether she might reschedule the Math and English instructional times, so that some of the students could have additional instruction in Math. The teacher replied, "...oh, they are nothing but dirty Spics, so don't worry about it." Sharon went home that day in 1970 and told her mother that she would not go back to student teaching, but would take an extra study hall instead.

Sharon's parents, who have now been married for 60 years, always placed a high importance on education for their daughters. Sharon's mother viewed college as a social setting where her daughters would find good husbands. Her father thought of college as a way to intellectually broaden one's thinking and, possibly, to find additional economic benefits. Sharon's parents intended for their daughters to become teachers. In the end, however, their mother wanted both of them to marry, raise families, and use their education in whatever way it might fit within the parameters of married life. Sharon felt constrained and limited by the choices she had for her college education, and for her life path.

At that time, the glass ceiling was a lot lower than it is today and it was acceptable that you could go into nursing, teaching or secretarial work. Even women that graduated with English degrees ended up being a secretary and that was perfectly fine. That was my mother's thought.

As soon as I got out of my undergraduate program, she was like there is this secretarial job open in a town a few hours away and you should apply for it.

Which I did and I was there for two months before I got something else. If you were a woman and you had a Bachelor's degree, it wasn't like you were going to turn the world on fire. It was enough to sustain yourself until you could find somebody to take care of you.

Sharon's teachers influenced her concept of higher education as well. Her English teacher took her aside in a creative writing class and told her that she had a special talent for making words flow. Her French teacher encouraged Sharon to continue on to college. Sharon's high school counselor, however, did not encourage her to go on. Instead, he invited her to apply for a job in the lab at the turkey processing plant.

Sharon, however, knew better what she would do. Her sister, a National Merit Scholar, went away to school at the University in a neighboring state on a full scholarship. Sharon's parents told her that she could go to the local community college, the University, or a small, private school. Her parents told her that she could live away from home if she was accepted into a four-year, private school. The day of her senior prom, Sharon stopped at the church and applied to Valley College, one hour away from home. She was accepted, and received a scholarship. A few days later, she told her high school counselor that she would be attending Valley, and she would not be applying to work at the turkey plant lab.

I still recall when I got that letter; it was like I have made a decision. I am going. This is it. I feel good. There were other days after that that I wasn't so certain—the usual freshman year.

Her parents were excited about the small, private, liberal-arts college at first, and concerned when they learned that the tuition would be \$3,200 per year. Sharon said that they never complained about the money once. They simply told Sharon that, as long as she had a part-time job, she saved, and she paid for her own incidentals, they would help. The whole family contributed, and Sharon was able to leave college without loan debt.

Sharon was very excited to leave for school that fall. Over the summer, her parents convinced her to compete in the local Fair Queen pageant. She mentioned to one of the judges there that she would be attending Valley College that fall. Another contestant, Jill, the State 4-H Queen, introduced herself to Sharon and told her she would be at Valley as well. Jill was the only acquaintance Sharon had when she arrived at college. She and Jill went to lunch and attended chapel together periodically.

Her transition to college proved to be difficult in some ways, and very enjoyable in others. Sharon disliked her Zoology class, but it was required for her Psychology major. She enjoyed her writing classes, and kept in touch with her instructor until she passed away in 2007. She took a broadcasting course and worked part-time in the television production studio. She pledged a sorority after going through rush her freshman year.

Sharon experienced an academic wake-up call shortly thereafter. She received a poor grade in her American History class that would have made her ineligible to student teach. She spoke with the professor about her options for taking the course again, so that she could get a better grade. He told her that he would allow her to take the class by correspondence through a large, Midwestern university, but that she would have to provide copies of all of her papers to him. He explained to her that he would allow her to do so because she recognized that the poor grade was due to her own actions. Sharon expressed a certain awakening about academics at this point:

It was probably at that point in time that I realized that I had control of my actions and my world. Before that I was just kind of floating through life...So, I think I began to grow at that point and to me that was a very pivotal point in my educational career. I knew I didn't want to student teach because I didn't want to teach, but I knew that was the agreement I always had with my parents.

By her junior year, Sharon became a resident assistant so that she could have her own dorm room. She almost dropped out that year when she split up with her boyfriend. Sharon felt angry about her mother's insistence that she find a husband. The limited career possibilities she faced upon graduating compounded her frustration. She discussed her dilemma with her grandmother during a summer home from college, and with the Dean of Student Services she befriended at Valley:

...while I was in college, my parents got transferred up to the northwest part of the state and there were no part-time jobs up there. So, I lived with my grandmother during the summer and she told me that I didn't need a man to take care of you. When she passed away, she left me her diamond ring with a note that said you now have the diamond, go out do what you want to do...I can recall talking with my mentor during college. Ann, she was the Dean of Student Services and I was a resident's assistant when I first got to know her. She and I have remained friends still.

I can recall sitting in her office and she would ask me about what my mom was asking me these days. I would tell her she always asked when I would get married. When am I going to bring somebody home? There was like 12 years of this trying to get past I need somebody to take care of me and a lot of failed relationships because I went into them thinking that each one was the one. I am going to raise a family.

After Sharon graduated, she went to work as an Admissions Counselor at Valley. Her friend and mentor, Ann, intervened after about six years. She told Sharon that she needed to either, "marry the institution or go get that damned Master's degree."

Sharon looked at about 14 different graduate programs, and finally decided on the University. She moved back home with her parents, and enjoyed the opportunity to get to know them as other adults. While attending her first class at the University, she wondered how she could leave a \$20,000-per-year job for an assistantship. She met her friend, Mary, through that assistantship. They were the best of friends until Mary passed away in 2006.

Sharon shared that some of the educational experiences that shaped her life as an academic occurred through simple happenstance. A speaker from a private university told her Student Services survey class at the University that if one is place bound and cannot get work at the institution you want to work in, one should go to the particular department in which you are interested and volunteer. Upon completion of her Master's, Sharon and her husband moved to the state's capital city. She volunteered as a secretary in the Career Planning and Placement Office at a private university, and managed to get a full-time job about six weeks later with the State College Student Aid Commission.

When asked how her experiences as an academic from the working class have colored her work experiences in academia, and most particularly with students, Sharon replied at length.

I think it makes me more cognizant of the struggles that they go through especially at a community college. I have a number of colleagues that I talk with at four-year colleges and they say oh, the student should be able to afford this and that. I am thinking that they are totally out of tune with what they are going through.

Having had to work through college and having had to work through high school and having to watch my parents pinch their pennies...we have a program right now where I am constantly at odds with my Director of Financial Aid on. We have an emergency grant program. It is only 400 dollars and the point of the grant is not to give them enough money to pay for everything, but it is a carrot to bring them in so you can sit down and find out what is your situation. What resources within the community can we get you in connection with and help you to empower yourself to move beyond where you are at right now. I understand that because I had to go through that... Yes, there is a need here.

My younger sister with her learning disabilities has made me very much aware that the learning styles of students vary in the classroom and if you can tell that they are glazing over, then perhaps the lecture isn't the right way to go. You should go more hands-on or get them into an academic achievement center where they can find assistance.

All the experiences that I have had growing up where other people see those as oh those are terrible circumstances to have to overcome, to me it was life.

But I think it has made me more in tune with what our students are doing. Even I have not experienced some of the things they have done nor do I want to. But I think it has made me a more receptive administrator...We don't have to do the same thing day in and day out. It doesn't have to be glitzy.

Sharon felt that her interactions with other academics are shaped by her upbringing as well. She indicated that she does not have patience for people who do not work hard. Most of Sharon's work days last from 7:30 am until 6:00 pm, and she expects the same kind of commitment from those around her.

Sharon came to make the decision to work in a community college after being employed at the State College Student Aid Commission. MCC had an opening for a Director of Enrollment Management; Sharon saw this as the perfect opportunity to combine her skills in Admissions and Financial Aid. She went to her interview and liked what she saw on the campus. *"I was sold within a month on just learning all the different things that the community college can do and meeting people where they are at educationally and empowering them."*

Sharon enjoys the diversity of students at the community college. She likes the fact that welding students and those taking advanced Math courses are side by side, right in the same building. She also thinks that her experiences as a Ph.D. student at State University have opened her eyes to the challenges MCC students face.

Our students work 30-plus hours per week, they have families that they are juggling, they have jobs that they are juggling, they are juggling their classes and I am no better off than they are in life. I shouldn't get any special perks. I really thought at that point in time that I have a much better understanding as far as what they are doing with students because of the Ph.D. program.

Her work with the Latino community, in her graduate studies and in her professional life, brought back many memories from Sharon's youth. Sharon feels that her background

with this particular community of learners has allowed her to make reasoned decisions about employing tutors and instructors, and creating special services and courses to meet Latino students' needs. *"...the research and working with that group, made me acutely aware that we are leaving a whole generation of very capable individuals in the dust. Again, it goes back to working class."*

Sharon recalled her high school classmates at the end of our conversation. She wondered what their lives may have been like if someone had encouraged them to go on to college, and talked to them about the possibilities that higher education creates for people. Perhaps she will discover more about those questions at her 35th high school reunion this summer.

Jean

Jean is in her 60s. Her father first worked as a manager for a large chain of grocery stores, and then as a commercial artist and manager of a printing company until he retired. Jean's mother worked as a receptionist in a doctors' office. Jean's parents both came from farming families in two, Midwestern states. Her father finished high school, but her mother did not. The family lived in a very large, Midwestern city until Jean was in 4th grade. When Jean was 10, her parents divorced. She and her brother were sent to live with her maternal grandparents in Iowa.

Jean recalled her life in the city as being pleasant. The family travelled everywhere on street cars, and her neighborhood was a tightly-knit community. Jean did not remember seeing areas of her hometown that were distinguished by middle-class or upper-middle-class homes. The people in her neighborhood, *"were just like us—working-class people...I was*

never raised to think about class because we just didn't do that. We just went out and worked."

Her father worked very hard, and purchased a home shortly after World War II. The family attended church each Sunday; her father was an usher and her mother was a Sunday school teacher. Every summer, Jean and her brother spent a few months in another state with their paternal grandparents.

Jean, like her brother, experienced a deep depression when her parents divorced in 1951. The following two years were difficult for her. Jean recalled:

I came from a big city, apparently with an accent. Our schools in that state were ahead of the schools here. I could answer the questions and I would get teased about that and get teased on the playground about that. My parents weren't with us and so when anyone asked about my parents, I lied. I told them that my parents were selling the house or whatever.

I was very embarrassed because they were getting a divorce and my grandmother, who was very socially conscious, was always concerned with how it would look to other people. We always had to be dressed just so and groomed just so. We had to watch what we said and what we did because other people might look down on us because of that.

Her parents, however, reconciled and remarried; they remained married for the next 40 years. Jean and her brother were changed by the experience. They missed their lives in the big city, and they had lost the sunny dispositions and innocence of their earlier years.

After Jean's parents remarried, the family settled in the eastern part of the state. They lived with Jean's maternal grandmother in the upstairs of a large house. Jean's grandmother rented out the downstairs to boarders, and the children continued to go to school and to adjust to their new surroundings.

Jean said that her life began to change in junior high school. At that time, she began to find her own identity. She developed a small circle of friends. Jean's grandmother, who

worked as a seamstress, taught Jean how to sew when she was very young. Jean indicated that, because of this skill, she always had nice, fashionable clothes to wear.

Reading was extremely important in Jean's family. She and her brother always had many books, newspapers, and magazines to read.

When we went to school, my dad told us, look my job is to go to the grocery store, your mother's job is to go to the doctor's office to work and your job is to go to school. That is your job. We were expected to excel...I just soaked it up.

I can't even remember...They were giving a talk on something in Reading, I don't exactly remember the title. I was asked to speak and we were all trying to remember when we learned to read and none of us can remember. We just knew it...I read all the time.

Even though I never got to go back to school when I was 15 when I got married, I never stopped reading. Education has always been very important in our family. That was just a given. You didn't question it.

Jean was raised to believe that colleges were filled with the world's smartest people. She dreamed of attending college and attaining a baccalaureate degree. Jean, however, married at 15. She finished the 9th grade, and she and her husband, who was three years her senior, moved back to Jean's hometown, where her husband planned to go to trade school. She quickly discovered that her husband was a workaholic who was never home.

When my husband and I were together, he worked and we had food on the table. We had a place to live, we had a car and we had a truck. We worked. I didn't work out of the home because I had the kids to take care of. I did dress making and I made drapes and did that kind of work for money out of my house.

I picked up the paper one day and it said a family of four making this amount of money is considered poverty level and below. He came home and I asked him if he knew we were poor. He said, "What?" I asked him again and he told me we were not. He made two or three thousand dollars less than that. I made all of our clothes including his. We didn't think we were poor and he said they didn't know what they were talking about.

The couple moved again in 1957. At that time, Jean went back to her high school to get registered for her sophomore year. Attending school was not a possibility for Jean at that time.

I wasn't pregnant, but married girls were not allowed to come back to school and of course in those days, we didn't know... There was no State Civil Liberties Union, we didn't know to challenge that, we didn't know to get a lawyer. The school was god. The superintendent said you can't come back, end of story.

I did sign up for a correspondence course once and I signed up for other classes. Accounting defeated me, so I didn't finish high school there. I went along and my kids – I didn't want them to feel bad or be ashamed of me because I didn't have a high school education. I didn't see a way to get that.

Jean started GED courses at MCC in 1967. She took course one night per week, and now proudly holds a GED from the first year MCC offered the award. After completing the GED exams, the instructor asked if Jean intended to go on to college. She replied that she had two teenaged boys and a new baby, so she did not think she would continue.

Jean's husband did not support her in her quest for an education. In 1969, the couple lived approximately 15 miles from a small, private, liberal-arts college. Jean indicated that she wanted to go back to school, but her husband told her that she had children to raise and that she didn't need to go to college. Within a year, he left Jean for another woman. For the next 15 years, Jean cleaned houses and ran a sewing machine in a factory in a small town about 20 miles away. She did whatever she could to supplement the 220 dollars per month she received in child support. In 1984, Jean was in a terrible car accident. Her back injury would not allow her to continue work at the factory. She went to Vocational Rehabilitation for help.

Vocational Rehabilitation evaluated Jean and determined that she should continue to do the freelance reporting work and photography she had recently started at the newspaper

her father managed. Unfortunately, Jean did not have the credentials to be hired full time. She began to attend MCC on Vocational Rehabilitation funding, so that she could complete her Associate's degree. Jean was 42 years old at the time, and although she was scared to go to college, she was excited. This had been her dream for many years. Fortunately, Jean had never stopped reading, writing, or learning during all of the years she was not in school.

I was in a Speech class with a bunch of kids that were 18 years old. We were all sitting around and talking and they were discussing their ACTs and SATs and it came around to me and they asked what I had taken. I told them I didn't take either. They asked how I got in here. I told them I got old and when you get old, they let you in. They just sat there all straight faced. They didn't see the humor in it.

Jean talked about how her perception of class affected her own journey as a learner:

The external world puts a tag on it and if you grew up in a home where the parents don't give you that sense of well-being and that sense of self-worth, you look at that tag and you see this, this and this and you think, gosh I must be that. That is where we are and then we have to listen to political candidates who stand up there and say we need to take back and rebuild the middle class. The day they said that they lost a whole group of people who think the people who are not middle-class by salary and by status are the ones that need help...I think it is a state of mind.

If I had thought I was poor, I would never have tried to go to college. If I had ever been allowed to think that way by my parents, I probably wouldn't...But my parents always expected me to achieve whatever I wanted to and to go as high as I needed to.

When I came home from my evaluation at Voc Rehab and said guess what I am going to college, my parents were ecstatic because they knew that is what I wanted. I couldn't have done it before because I didn't have money to live on to go to college.

Jean soon discovered that she was not the only non-traditional student taking courses at MCC. She enjoyed her classes in Advertising, and found that she constantly skewed the bell curve for the other students. *"I need to take this class for my degree. I am not going to dumb down because they can't handle it. They just need to work harder."*

Her history instructor took advantage of Jean's experience by asking her what she thought of certain events, such as the Cold War or John F. Kennedy's assassination. Jean's instructors invited her into their offices and nurtured her talent for learning.

Jean's biggest challenge at MCC was trying to balance her life as a parent and worker with her life as a student.

When you get older and have to go to college, you still have another life. It is trying to keep all the balls in the air at one time. There were nights when I was still up writing papers at 3:00 in the morning and had to be back in class at 9:00.

As my daughter got older and was in high school and I was doing this project...It was a freelance job. It was way too big and I couldn't get it down to size. She got up and said you are over thinking this. Let's cut this down and pull it apart.

That was my first year of college and I over thought. I am thinking that might be from being an older student. I would over think, over note take and I had too much. By the second year I kind of got over that and by the time I got to Lake University, it was much easier. The first two years were probably the hardest.

Jean spent two years at MCC, and completed her coursework with a 3.9 grade point average. She applied to Lake and to State University to complete the rest of her Bachelor's degree. Jean lived in a small town near Lake University at the time, and thought the commute to Lake would be much easier than the commute to State University. The reputation of Lake's Journalism school impressed her as well.

Jean worked diligently and graduated from Lake with a degree in Journalism. She found, however, that the possibilities for a 45-year-old woman to find entry-level work in journalism were limited. She started to do part-time volunteer work at MCC, and went on to work at a large magazine publisher as a contract worker in their real estate publications department. She was laid off from the publishing house about two years later.

Jean continued to do freelance work, and also took a job selling furniture. After about a year and a half, Jean secured a part-time clerical position with the MCC Foundation. She worked two days per week at MCC and five days per week at the furniture store. Soon, her supervisor at MCC was let go, and Jean lost her job there. She spent another year working full-time at the furniture store. At the end of the year, a new Director took over the MCC Foundation, and Jean accepted a full-time position with benefits there.

For 20 years, from the time her husband left until she was offered a full-time position at MCC, Jean had no insurance, benefits, or retirement plan. She indicated that she still is recovering financially. Jean does not intend to retire any time soon.

I love my job and I love what I do. I appreciate my education because I realize it doesn't matter how intelligent you are, there is something about college that puts the polish on. It gives you that extra confidence and it gives you... Although that is not something I didn't have. My family taught us that there is nothing you can't do if you want it. They always told us they were behind us always.

Jean thought that her experiences at MCC made her life as a student at Lake much easier for her. Her Vocational Rehabilitation funding for school was on a tight timeline that dictated her progress. Jean said that she very much enjoyed her program of study at Lake, but that MCC will always have a special place in her heart because she believes so deeply in its mission. *"I am still there...I came and I never left."*

When asked which of her experiences contributed the most to her education, Jean indicated that her belief that college was filled with the smartest people in the world was shattered, and replaced with the discovery that, *"they were some of the dumbest people I had ever met. That was a real shocker for me."*

Jean referred to some of the young professors who taught at Lake University. She articulated that some of the instructors in private, liberal-arts colleges tend to become caught up in their own academic status and lose sight of the students who they are teaching. Jean cited that failure as one of the greatest mistakes educators in colleges make. She strongly believes that instructors should recognize and honor the experiences, talents, and disabilities of the students they are teaching. Jean remains convinced that the community college is an outstanding higher education institution because it meets the needs of students with learning and physical disabilities, students who are working and have families, and students who are working toward GEDs, and adapts instruction accordingly.

This year, Jean was invited to be the guest speaker at MCC's GED graduation. She felt proud and honored to recognize the graduates in their caps and gowns. Jean told them that the GED is the key to opening all the doors, *"if you have been locked out of education all of your life."*

Jean shares her experiences with students readily. When they bring forward complaints about faculty, she tells them that they have recourse and that she can help them to address their concerns. Frequently, students do not want to lodge complaints because they fear retaliation from faculty later. Jean viewed this reluctance as the naïveté of youth.

As you get older, you learn you are not going to walk on me... This is the way to fix it, so let's fix it. When I was at Lake and there was no elevator and all of the professors' offices were on the second floor, and all the graphics course were on the lower floor, because I could not walk up and down the stairs, I could not go to those and I complained about it. Well, they said there way nothing they could do about it...it would destroy the esthetics of the design...

I went to the Women's Center and talked to the counselor there and she started to do some research and discovered that a person had left the College 125,000 dollars a number of years ago for the sole purpose of making accessible an area that was not accessible for people who had disabilities.

I went back to the Dean and I talked to him about putting an elevator in the building...I said if you are going to refuse to update this building so that people such as myself who are disabled can take advantage then maybe my friend, so-and-so, at the City Journal needs to know that...

Well, they built my elevator. It took a while and I was ready to leave before it got done...After I got out of school, I went around and did programs on access for handicapped students for the State to show people how places have to realize that wheelchairs can't go everywhere. Of course, the ADA came along and a lot of that has changed.

Jean spoke candidly about how her academic colleagues treated her with relationship to her working-class background. Jean indicated that her class affiliation never had been an issue at MCC because she has found that many people who work in community colleges come from working-class backgrounds. Jean indicated that the academics at MCC, even those with Ph.D.s, always had treated her with kindness and respect, and had encouraged her to pursue more education. She felt that no one in the field of higher education had ever treated her badly until she went to Lake. Jean reiterated that some of the professors at Lake exhibited arrogance and a condescending attitude toward students. Their arrogance was rooted in their academic credentials, and in the reputations of the schools that had conferred the degrees.

Jean relayed that she loved MCC so much; she would have been a student there for four years if possible. The more she came to know the College, the more she realized how much she enjoyed working there as well.

I believe very deeply in the community college mission. It is not that I don't think we need the seniors, but community colleges are like dream makers. They are life fulfilling educators. They put shattered lives back together. That is what happened to me.

When I came here, my life was just a mess because I was disabled and I didn't have any money and I still had a child to raise. I had lost my original job, which I didn't want to be there anyway, but it was a job. My life was pretty much in shambles and they just put that together.

Jean asserted that the thing she is most proud of in terms of personal achievement is going to college. She found it to be an incredibly life-changing experience on a personal level. *“College is to put the polish on, to give you that extra self-confidence. If you get through it that is a big accomplishment.”* She achieved her degree despite adversity and many obstacles. She could have given up her dream many times, but persevered instead.

Jean works with students of all different ages and backgrounds in her position at MCC. Some of those students coming through the Veterans’ Administration Vocational Rehabilitation are in their late 50s and early 60s. They are going to college not only for the skills and knowledge attached to their degrees, but for the personal satisfaction of knowing that they were able to complete an academic award.

Jean viewed her students’ decisions to pursue college at a later age commendable. She asserted that her life experiences allowed her, as a non-traditional student, to get far more out of her college education than the younger students around her did. Jean believes firmly that learning should go on throughout one’s life, and that college teaches those who go patience and the ability to overcome life’s obstacles along the way.

Group Participant Narratives

Two, separate group interviews were conducted as part of this study. Participants self-selected the group in which they desired to participate based upon meeting time. Each group interview was 90 minutes in length.

Group one: Amy, Carol, and Jenna

Carol, Jenna, and Amy participated in a group discussion. All three of the participants indicated that they enjoyed great support from their families to attend college. Carol shared

that she had never expected to go to school, but found incredible champions in her husband and in-laws to do so.

All three informants spoke about how their working-class backgrounds allow them to feel very connected to first-generation college students in their present roles as faculty and counselor. Jenna asserted:

When they are first-generation college students, their parents don't have a lot of information to share with them. Yes, you can do this. It is just nice for them to know that other people like them have gone through the same thing. I have gone through the same thing they have gone through.

Carol added that her background imbued her college-going experience with an ever-present work ethic:

I think being raised on the farm working on the farm along side with my mother and father and my siblings, I always learned how to work hard. That is just the way it was. You had responsibilities. To me, going to school was just like a job. You had to work hard...When I decided to go back to graduate school...for my Ph.D.; I treated my classes like they were work.

The women alternately conveyed feelings of community and isolation among their co-workers and colleagues at MCC and other institutions. Amy shared:

I think what I do in a roll is just sit back and see the lay of the land is. I think I know because of the feedback I receive. I think with my support staff, I don't think I am better than them. I think that comes from the working-class background.

Jenna complemented Amy's statement by relating that her small campus seems to employ many faculty from working-class origins, but that she now understands the class affiliation of her colleagues as a matter of course.

Carol, however, exhibited a different point of view. Her explanation articulated her feelings in a particularly eloquent manner.

I teach for two schools online, which is a very lonely place...I have advantages and disadvantages. At State University, as an adjunct, I am isolated. I work with grad students, which I am not, and with tenured people, which I am not. Talking with students, I think they feel pretty isolated. I feel I am sort of working in a little glass dome where I see everybody else and I just do my work.

When asked if they noticed class differences among their colleagues, Amy indicated the most readily apparent differences were between faculty and students at MCC. Jenna spoke of class differences between herself and fellow graduate students as she grappled with the decision go on with Ph.D. work.

I remember them saying to me, what do you mean, why can't you just finish here? I said well, I don't know where my husband is going to get a job and they were like what does that matter...They were like well, you can just stay here and your husband can live somewhere else and work. Why don't you stay here and you can just fly back and forth on the weekends?

I thought first of all, what kind of money do they think I have that I can just fly back and forth on the weekends? And second of all, if I am going to get married, I don't intend to live apart from my husband.

The participants expressed mixed interpretations about how much support they received from MCC as faculty and counselors. Their respective positions as full-time or part-time employees colored their responses. Carol pointed out that MCC required her to complete another 12 graduate hours in English, specifically, before she would be allowed to teach English on an on-going basis. She was told she would not be able to teach at MCC more than one semester without completing those hours, even though she already possessed a Ph.D. in another field. She shared that she did not believe MCC does not extend good pay, benefits, or health insurance to retain adjunct faculty.

Carol does, however, enjoy working with a diverse student body, and sharing her teaching experiences with the graduate students she teaches at MCC. She finds that MCC

students who are in the military, particularly, *“have a good work ethic and respect that I don’t get from other students.”*

Jenna and Amy talked about how they enjoyed learning at MCC, and being allowed to participate in a variety of ways at the College. Jenna serves as a Phi Theta Kappa Advisor, and sits on the Judicial Hearing Board. She is grateful for the opportunity to have had her first teaching experience at the College. Amy echoed Jenna’s comments about opportunities for learning, and added that she feels she is an integral part of the team on her campus. All three women agreed that their employment at MCC provides them with a sense of stability and community in their professional lives.

Amy and Jenna also spoke of how their educational experiences had produced shifts in what they valued in their lives. Jenna said that, prior to finishing her baccalaureate and graduate degrees; she viewed her cousin, who married a lawyer, with envy.

I look at things differently now, I see and interact with their children and some of the things their children say, I really feel bad for them because it seems that they are valuing their money more than their opportunities that are available to them...I used to value the money, but that is not the most important thing. I am glad of being able to live well.

Amy indicated that she and her husband both come from working-class backgrounds, and appreciate the life they have today because they worked hard for it. Amy reiterated that a working-class background makes one appreciate what one has, because you must earn it.

“No one just gave it to you.”

Carol agreed with Amy’s assertion. She said that she had worked hard for everything she has achieved. She believes most people who work at MCC come from similar backgrounds. Working with colleagues from similar class standing is comforting for Carol.

The group of participants appreciated the opportunity to interact. They felt that the group interview provided a chance for them to process their individual interviews. The group session also served as a path to add more information to the study by way of a discussion.

Group two: Eva, Jean, Maria, and Pam

Eva, Jean, Maria, and Pam participated in a group discussion. Eva, Jean, and Pam all agreed that their families were extremely supportive of their respective decisions to attend college, as well as of their subsequent career paths in community college work. Eva shared that her son is very proud of her, and he views her role as a college counselor as a position that carries high prestige. Pam was the first in her family to go to college; her family regarded this achievement as both important and remarkable. Her husband and children also view Pam's choice to work in education as well as commendable.

Jean indicated that her parents were supportive of any choices she made. When she told them, however, that she had secured full-time employment at MCC, they were thrilled. Jean felt that her commitment to go to college and subsequent work at MCC inspired her children to attend college as well. She was very proud that her grandson is now planning to attend MCC to study culinary arts. Jean asserted that her associations with MCC, as student and employee, have been critical to shaping her life and that of her family.

Maria replied, *"According to my father, as long as you make money it is ok."* Clearly, her family was not as supportive of her career choice in terms of pride, prestige, or academic achievement.

When asked how their working-class origins distinguished their professional lives, the participants concurred that their class backgrounds affect their work ethic, and provide context for many of the issues that their students bring to the College. All four of the informants started their professional lives in advisory capacities in Student Services or Academic Foundations. All of the women agreed that their working-class backgrounds and professional experiences allow them to empathize with and to relate to working-class students, and to provide insight into those student experiences and issues that other professionals from middle- or upper-class backgrounds may not be able to access.

Eva then spoke about how her working-class background affects her relationships with faculty and staff at the College. She indicated that, if she is invited to attend a country club function or a golf outing, she does not feel comfortable attending. *“I would rather go home and order a pizza and maybe watch the tube with my husband or something like that. At the end of the day, I separate the work stuff.”*

Nonetheless, Eva asserted that she now feels more confident around her colleagues by virtue of her Master’s degree. She said that faculty and staff began to treat her differently once she completed the advanced degree. At that point, others started to treat her as a professional.

Maria shared that she enjoys talking with staff, faculty, administrators, and students at the College. She did not feel that her class disconnected her from any particular group. In fact, Maria feels she is included on her campus. Pam contributed that, prior to completing her Master’s degree; she felt that she had been treated as a subordinate, particularly by faculty. She felt strongly that her interactions with faculty had improved significantly since she had become an adjunct instructor.

Jean and Pam felt that the relationships they had at the MCC campuses they attended as students were different from the work relationships they had at their current campuses. The relationships Pam and Jean made as students, they maintained, had changed very little in character over the past 20 years. In both instances, they still are treated more as students on those particular campuses. The campuses where they now work, however, function as “home.” Eva agreed with their assertions.

I think what Pam is saying right now is so valid because there is a difference in how I feel that I am approached if I am here at my own campus or if I am off at one of the other campuses. I think you kind of hit the nail on the head right there. The people that you work with they support you and you support them and you work with a closeness.

The group then discussed how they have experienced class differences as clerical staff, faculty, or counselors. The participants agreed that their respective work ethics sometimes seemed to get in the way of finding promotions or new opportunities within their organization. Maria summed up her experience this way:

I started out as clerical support staff...and I should be moving out of that position into something better because I have the Master's degree, versus the non-degreed person that is in a similar position to what I have. So far, it hasn't worked. I haven't gotten the raise or the title yet...Our superiors are very happy that we do the job that we do and as long as we don't rock the boat very much, they are glad to keep us around. Maybe that is because of who we are. That we are from the working-class background and we do our jobs well. The door is not opening for something better and brighter for us to move up the ladder.

Maria, Pam, Eva, and Jean discussed whether their working-class backgrounds held them back from promotions, or whether the true obstacle was the fact that they were female. All agreed that the situation was not unique to MCC; Jean reminded the others that she had heard similar discussions take place at different community colleges she had visited in her work. Jean posited:

That is part of my upbringing – class doesn't mean anything to me in that context, but I see it around all the time. I have seen that a lot in education and I don't know how we will ever get rid of that. It is everywhere and it is continually ebbing and flowing, depending on how strong the current climate in our culture is and how much it is driven by the media and the power. You can raise your kids to feel like they are just as good as anybody else and then they go out and they are taunted by other kids because their folks make more money and they have better clothes and all of this. It is in our culture.

Maria echoed Jean's stance, and extended the discussion of class into a broad-based, higher-education problem:

I kind of agree that it is all interconnected, but I think that in itself creates class systems. The whole good old boy system has developed a class system where if you are part of the good old boy network, you are in a higher class and are more useable to us than we have been vying for those same positions. But on the same token, there is a class system that is in existence between faculty, administrative professionals and administration.

Jean and Pam agreed with Maria's assertion, and added that the problem of a class structure extends into corporate life as well. Jean then asked the others how much of their workloads were based upon class, or the fact that they were women.

How much of that is our work position or how much of that is because we are women? Because we are the keepers of the culture. We are the people that keep it going. I think it is built into us either biologically or positional that we are the ones that take care of everybody else. It is not just in our work. It is also on the sidelines. There are times when the day job gets in the way of my life because I have kids and grandkids that need this and they need that. It is different now because my mother is gone, but there was a time there when I was taking care of her and I had three full-time jobs – two in the office and one at home.

I know when my mother in the last few weeks of her life, she was in her hospital bed and I would get ready to go to work and the caretaker would come and she would say to me I wish I could do the dishes, I wish I could do the laundry or I wish I could help you because I know this is a lot of work. She was 87 years old and she still had that idea that it was her job as my mother to help. I think a lot of that is gender or biological or conditional.

The group moved on to a discussion of the reasons that they have chosen to work in a community college. Maria, Jean, Eva, and Pam concurred that they enjoyed their work at

MCC, and had chosen it largely because it gave them the opportunity to work with students. They specified that they enjoyed working with students who came from working-class backgrounds, and that they felt their work with those students, particularly, was important. The informants all spoke about how the students they serve might not have the opportunity to be successful in a four-year institution when they first return to school. Jean gave a passionate response about her reasons for being at MCC.

I work here, at a community college, instead of somewhere else because I came here in the beginning, when I had a life that was in shambles; and my experience here helped me put my life back together. I loved it here. If I could have stayed here four years, I would have. It was an environment that I could really function in because it was full of people that was just like me. People that had been out there and we came here and we had things happened in our lives. We were older and I found a lot of like people here...

I love the environment, I love the people who work here and I love the kind of people that come to my office every day. I love my job and that is why I stay...I want to be right here in this institution. I also think the community college system is the thing of now because not everybody is cut out to go to a four-year institution right out of the chute. It is different, the environment is different and a lot of people start and don't make it through because it is too difficult. I think community colleges serve that purpose well and for those of us that were not born into families that have money and we cannot expect to go to Lake University or a Harvard or any of those expensive schools, this gave us a chance. And that is why I have a respect for this kind of system.

But again back to your question of why you work at a community college because I think it is the college of the people and that means something to me. We started out with something and we made something of ourselves. I think we all have that potential. I really and truly feel that is because we help people find that potential within them. I think we do that here very well...

The participants in this group discussion agreed that they treasure the contact they have with students, while they are studying at the institution and long after they graduate. They discussed how many lives they have touched, and how much they care about the work they do at the community college. They found their careers to be rewarding and purposeful. Jean, Pam, Maria, and Eva all ascertained that their working-class backgrounds provide them

with the humility, grounding, and ability to care that students from similar backgrounds so desperately need to be successful. Indeed, they felt that their experiences have assisted many first-generation college students who came from families unfamiliar with college. Ultimately, the informants found that helping those students allowed them to share their lives, experiences, and backgrounds in positive and productive ways, every day.

Themes and Analysis

Seven, distinct themes emerged from the study's data. The themes are described here, supported with evidence, and contextualized within existing literature. Each of the themes addressed were found across the narratives of at least six study participants. The themes of the study included:

- *Working-class family: roots, literacy, guidance, and ties*
- *Working-class consciousness*
- *A sense of community: at home and at school*
- *Work ethic*
- *Working two jobs*
- *Empathizing with, relating to, and encouraging students*
- *A sense of community at the community college*

Working-class family: Roots, literacy, guidance, and ties

Participant narratives in this study contradicted Law's (1995) and Gorman's (2000) assertions that working-class parents often discourage their children from participating in opportunities for higher education. On the contrary, the majority of respondents in this study indicated that their families were supportive of their educational goals and attainment, and that they first came to know about college from their parents. One participant, however,

referred specifically to her father, who was extremely unsupportive of her efforts to complete a Bachelor's and a Master's degree.

Literacy played a significant role in the participant narratives about educational influences in this study as well. Sharon O'Dair (1995) ascertained that the scholars should be mindful to examine class distinctions closely, lest we abandon working-class people and their unique characteristics altogether. The author posited that books, for working class families, convey the power for the reader remove you and make you distinct from your peers. They confer the power to judge, and to allow others to judge you. Literacy, then, is what serves to allow the working-class woman to control her educational destiny.

Six of the nine participants indicated that their mothers stayed home with them until they were at least ready to begin elementary school. Seven of the nine women cited their extended families or grandparents as major influences in their childhoods. Often, their narratives that involved extended families spoke of books, reading, and traveling to libraries.

Amy recalled that her grandmother lived in the same house with Amy and her mother. Her grandmother supported Amy's reading extensively, and encouraged her to develop literacy skills as a child. *"I always remember having a lot of books growing up. We lived two blocks from the library, so that was wonderful."*

Maria's grandparents supported her reading as well, driving her six miles each way to the library to check out books:

There were always things I was interested in, not necessarily academics. I always bragged that I read every horse story that there was in that small library because I was big into farm animals and horses. Eventually, I went into the relationship books like Nancy Drew mysteries and the Hardy boys and all those series books. Black Beauty and the Black Stallion, all of those.

Jean and her family resided with her maternal grandmother from the time she was 10 years old until she graduated from high school. She reflected on her experience with literacy as a child:

I was very fortunate to grow up in our family because reading was important. We did that before we did anything else. We always had books and we always had magazines and newspapers.

Jenna's grandparents lived in her same, small community, and provided her with extensive emotional and financial support. She remembered how reading shaped her worldview as a child. *"Growing up I always wanted to go places and see things that I had seen in books, but that I had never seen in person."*

The working-class ideal of surpassing the educational attainment of one's parents or other immediate family is a common thread in this study. Overall (1995) states:

And, insofar as I live as an academic more comfortably, more freely, and less precariously than my parents did, I have in this way at least escaped from my working-class background. (p. 211)

The parents of this study's informants, and, in some cases, extended family members, worked diligently to convey the concept of education as a way to be free of low-paying employment and limited options for their daughters. Six of the nine participants came to know about college through their parents, or other members of their extended family. Eva recalled that her aunt was a major influence in her efforts to attend college:

...my aunt helped me...she was in a sorority that helps young African-American people go to college...I was involved in things that definitely showed that I was college track and I was doing this and I was involved with the right things and the right activities and organizations.

Sharon first learned about the importance of college from her parents:

I knew from the moment that I could pick up a book that my older sister and I were supposed to go to college. They always told us that college was very

important. There was a different emphasis placed on college being important. My mother saw it as a social setting where you could meet somebody to get married and my father saw it as this is a way to become intellectually broader in your thoughts and also if there was an economic benefit that was fine.

Pam's parents made it clear from the time she was in elementary school that they expected her to one day be a college graduate.

You were going to college, no ifs, ands, or buts. You are not going to work a minimum wage job. You will do better than we did. It was understood from my first memory that I was expected to go to college and get a degree.

I don't think I ever thought about anything else. I know my brother did, but I didn't. I just knew that ok, this is what is expected of me and if I wanted to get somewhere then this is what I would have to do.

Several of the participants also indicated that they kept close ties with their working-class families, long after they had left home. Pam recalled how her relationship with her mother grew stronger through the pursuit of her Master's degree.

Getting my Master's degree was something that I had thought about for a long time. Not knowing that it was something that my mother had thought about me getting ever since I graduated with my BA. When I told her I was going for my Master's. My father passed away in 1993 and I got my Master's in 2005. My mother was tickled pink. She said she would help me pay for my Masters. She said dad and I didn't help pay for your Bachelor's because we couldn't afford it, but she told me that dad had left her very well off and I will help pay for your Master's degree and she did. The one thing that I insisted upon was I told her I said mom I have to have a picture of you in my gown and hood with you beside me because I wouldn't have been able to do this on my own...

Jean fondly recalled the steady influence of her father on her life. *"When my dad died that was devastating because he was always my rock. I could go to him with my problems because he was always level-headed."*

The author, bell hooks (1993), reinforced the positive effects solid family connections can have for working-class women in academia:

Often I tell students from poor and working-class backgrounds that if you believe what you have learned and are learning in schools and universities separates you from your past, this is precisely what will happen. It is important to stand firm in the conviction that nothing can truly separate us from our pasts when we nurture and cherish that connection. An important strategy for maintaining contact is ongoing acknowledgment of the primacy of one's past, of one's background, affirming the reality that such bonds are not severed automatically solely because one enters a new environment or moves toward a different class experience. (p. 107)

Clearly, the narratives within this study reflect the respondents' choices to have close relationships with their parents, grandparents, and children. The informants spoke consistently of the importance of family connections in their lives.

Working-class consciousness

Gorman (2000) posited that working-class people in the United States exhibit a class consciousness that is based on interactions with other social classes:

The American working class may not be class conscious in the classic Marxian sense of the concept—a class for itself—but it does have a deep understanding of the inequalities between 'us' and 'them' based on education, income, and occupational status. (p. 118)

Six of the nine participants became aware of their family's working-class status by the time they were in high school. Each informant attached a distinct experience to the realization that she was working-class. Jean recalled Kansas City in the late 1940s and early 1950s:

Well, I was a kid in grade school. This was right after the War in the city. I suppose there were areas in the city that were middle class or upper middle class, but we were never exposed to that because we didn't travel there. Everything we did revolved around the group. That was our social group and they were just like us – working-class people.

Sharon remembered becoming conscious of her class affiliation in 1st or 2nd grade; a doctor moved in next door, and her mother began to take in the family's ironing for extra

income. "...he was a resident at the University Hospital and he had three kids and they had come from out on the Great Plains."

Eva related that she noticed her parents worked more when the family needed something extra. Her class consciousness registered with her around age 10. *"I did know probably by the time I was in 4th grade that my dad and pretty much my mom too would pick up other jobs or do whatever because they liked having those extra things."*

Pam recalled learning about social class early as well. Her earliest memory of such a distinction registered in elementary school.

In primary school. I think a part of that was – the town...is divided by the railroad tracks and the working-class families all lived on the north side of the railroad tracks and the wealthier families all lived on the south side. Going to school, it was like where do you live? If it was like where I said, you got treated differently.

Beth shared how a period of her father's underemployment affected her perception of her family's class affiliation.

Probably when my dad for a brief time – I think it really struck home – I knew that my friends at school had more money. Even our neighbors had better houses. But my dad switched jobs just briefly as a janitor and he was not making much money at all. They talked about it and he was getting free food from the kitchen where he worked.

Amy remembered that her elementary school friends came from the same working-class environment that she did. Her neighborhood exemplified a consistency in class membership.

All the people on our block were working class. They worked in factories, they worked in machine shops, and they worked in the granary. The only people I knew that went to college were the teachers.

A sense of community: At home and at school

Six of the study's nine participants found a sense of community and comfort in their small, home towns. This sense of community permeated the respondents' memories of childhood.

Jean thought fondly of her early years in a large, Midwestern city. *"So, it was like you just lived in this little community. It was great and it was fun because you went to school and of course in those days there was no such thing as latch key kids."*

Sharon reminisced about traveling around her town as a child:

...the community...was about 3,200 people...everybody except for the doctors and the lawyers, everybody was pretty much working class and it was not uncommon to know that you were wearing somebody else's clothes or your sister's clothes or the neighbor's clothes. When you would walk into church...everybody would know who you were.

Eva remarked that she found homogeneity in her community and in her social interactions while she was at home with her parents. *"I didn't really think anything of it because I guess our social circle or the people we would know, our neighbors and everything, were pretty much the same economically as we were."*

Maria found her small community, in terms of school and town, to be a nurturing environment. *"In elementary years, I went to a small rural school and in kindergarten through 8th grade, there were 13 children. That number varied. We were predominantly farmers or working-class people in that area."*

The theme of nurturing from a small, supportive community carried on through the college experience for six of the study's nine informants. Eva continued to find a strong sense of support and community in her small, private, liberal-arts college. Even though she

would graduate as a Linguistics major, her first year was distinguished by the rapport she found with those in the Music Department.

...those folks in the music department that were kind of there and you could go and be with that you might see when you were coming out of the practice room or whatever. It was kind of a little sense of community. It is a small sense of community, but it is there because you all love music. That was better than not having any.

Amy felt uncertain during her first few weeks of undergraduate work. Soon, however, she found a community of learners to support her in her Honors courses.

The honors program was really good for me because we became a community because you had a lot of the same classes. Then I did get involved in that program and I was on the curriculum committee and I helped pick instructors.

...I did end up getting very involved in the Student Life. I was on the Student Senate; I was on the Student Activities Council. I was one of three students on the presidential search committee in my senior year.

Pam looked to the Theatre Department for her community of supportive faculty and learners. She found that the comfort of a discipline she enjoyed helped her to relax in her new, college atmosphere.

... I was involved in the drama program on campus and that helped. That alleviated the stress. That allowed me to be myself. I have also been one who has a tendency to say what they think about things and college gave me the freedom to do that.

Carol attended two public universities before finishing her baccalaureate degree at a small, private, liberal-arts colleges. She found the setting to be comfortable and full of people who believed in her. It was here that Carol found a community that helped her to succeed.

The teachers there were very personable. They became my friends. I worked for one of the English teachers grading papers for him and I actually got paid to do it. I had a nice scholarship to go to a small, private, liberal-arts college because they always have money for scholarships. I was in theater and I won the best actress award... I was in several other plays and the teachers would be part of the cast because we didn't really have enough students to take on

these bigger roles and it was just a great experience at that school...Seriously, it was probably one of the best experiences that I have ever had.

Work ethic

The path of the working-class, female academic in a community college is beset on all sides with pushing and pulling employment factors. According to Sowinska (1993):

The participation of most poor and working-class women in academia, however, is frequently not easy or comfortable and is often attended by chronic interruptions while we seek outside avenues of cultural validation, financial support, or whatever else is necessary in order for us to continue. Yet there are many of us who are successful in obtaining jobs inside academic institutions. (p. 149)

Every respondent in the study indicated that she had a strong work ethic. Most voiced that they had learned a strong work ethic from their parents, and that this theme had continued to be a dominant theme in their educational and work experiences. Jean's family taught her from an early age to work hard. She knew that exhibiting the same kind of work ethic when she started college as a 42-year-old, divorced mother of three children would be necessary for her to complete her degree. Jean remembered telling an Advertising instructor, who had asked her to allow other students to answer questions:

I told her I was sorry, but I am not going to apologize for the fact that I know this stuff. I need to take this class for my degree. I am not going to dumb down because they can't handle it. They just need to work harder.

Sharon displayed a similar attitude about working among her colleagues. Her work ethic is evident in the following passage:

I don't have a lot of patience for people who are all talk and no show. Coming from a very working-class, German background where you don't expect kudos. You are just expected to do 110% all of the time. Every now and then you may be told that you are doing a good job, but assume that you are doing a good job unless somebody tells you otherwise. I am usually here from 7:30 in the morning until 6:00 at night and I take things home with me. I have other

colleagues that they are like well it is 9:00 and I guess I will finally get to my desk.

Pam remembered that her work ethic developed early in life. Her father, an electrician, and her grandfather, a horticulturist, played major roles in shaping Pam's approaches to study and work. *"There was a strong work ethic in our family. I was taught by my grandparents and my parents ...both parents stressed helping others."*

Jenna verbalized her appreciation for her education. She acknowledged that she would not have attained her degrees without hard work.

I think I value my education and the fact that I am able to do something I like because of it. Maybe more than some people might who maybe didn't have to work quite so hard to get the scholarships or get to where they wanted to be. That may not be the case. I feel lucky that I am able to do what I do and that I was able to get the education that I did because I worked hard to do it. I think also to a certain degree, I worked all through college. Sometimes more hours than I should have been working.

Carol carried her work ethic from her early days on the farm to the undergraduate and graduate classrooms in which she teaches today.

...Everybody worked. That was very...we had a very strong work ethic and I don't think anybody doubted that...So, I have high expectations for my students, but I feel if I didn't, they would not try to work up to them. I expect them to work. I say you should have two to three hours of work per week per credit hour of this class. So, you are looking at about nine hours of studying in preparation and work. I know I don't get it from them, but at least I let them know if they do that, they will do well. I think it just that I expect them to have a good, solid work ethic.

Working two jobs

Six of the study's nine informants discussed regularly working at least two jobs. In some cases, the drive to work more than one job has continued throughout full-time, professional employment. Three of the six respondents who discussed the theme of working

two jobs are currently employed in such situations. Two work full-time in Student Services positions at the College, and one works full-time in a clerical position. All three of these respondents also work as adjunct faculty for MCC.

Amy currently works full-time as a counselor at MCC. She teaches courses in Psychology for the College as an adjunct. Amy was cognizant of the fact that she has always worked more than one job.

I have always worked two jobs. I think that is from my mother. She always had to work two jobs. I still have two jobs. It is interesting because she tells me I work too much and I think, who did I learn that from?

Maria verbalized the financial and emotional pressures she feels to work at her full-time clerical position and as adjunct faculty at the same time.

My life changed and I got married a few years ago. A lot of challenges came with that, so the extra jobs have not only been for financial reasons, but it has been for emotional reasons. Like, am I a good teacher or not?

Jean's life as a single parent dictated that she work two jobs with some consistency. She spent 20 years of her work life without insurance or benefits before she came to the College, despite her diligent efforts to earn for her family.

... I lost my job. So, I worked around at some freelance stuff and then I came back here and worked at the furniture store. Then about a year and a half into that, they called me to work part-time at MCC in the Foundation Department. So, I worked seven days a week – two days at MCC and five days in the furniture store.

Jenna recalled working two jobs when she was fresh out of her graduate program in Psychology.

Then we moved again and I quit and I went back to my job I had before graduate school that I hated. It was a bad decision, but it was what worked at the time...they needed adjunct instructors at night and I thought if I can do that at night, then I can cope with my job during the day. I worked at a small, private university in counseling classes and learning and memory and really

exciting stuff with students who already had all the intro stuff, which is even more exciting. But I couldn't take my job any longer. I couldn't deal with it. It was way too stressful. I was going to have to quit.

Empathizing with, relating to, and encouraging students

La Paglia's (1995) narrative of working in the community college conveyed the sense of precariousness that community college students, staff, and faculty face in their complex world:

When I think of the impact of this background on my life and work, I picture someone with one foot in the working class and one foot on a ladder going up, unwilling to commit to a single, more stable stance. To do so would mean betrayal and treachery in some nebulous way...I am on the faculty of a community college...I usually don't feel like an outsider with my community college colleagues...I identify strongly with my working class students...(p. 178)

All of the respondents, however, indicated that their working-class backgrounds and the challenges they faced as students provided them with the tools to empathize with, to relate to, and to encourage the first-generation college students with whom they work each day. The participants recognized student experiences and challenges in their respective positions as community college faculty and staff. All of the respondents indicated a desire to encourage students to reach their goals, and to attain the degrees that they seek.

Pam spoke about her ability to be empathetic with students as an adjunct faculty person in the Humanities.

I think I am far more lenient with college students that are non-traditional, that have a family, have to work and commute than many of the other professors are because I empathize with that knowledge.

Jenna talked about her experiences growing up in the same community as most of her students. She feels a need to share her knowledge with the students she teaches.

I think I feel lucky that I teach here and I think I can understand a lot of my students in a way that some other people wouldn't be able to quite so much. I grew up here so I know in general what the community is like and what kind of experience they had in high school. And what kind of messages they were given by instructors. I think that I can say I was you.

I grew up here, I went to college and I went to graduate school and now I am back here to give you what I have to give you. I think just the idea that everyone has different interests and different abilities and we need to find those and help people find those and use them.

Maria asserted that she sometimes thinks she has not worked hard enough to retain her students. Even for her empathy, she cannot force someone to stay in class.

But it was – in fact – in the grocery store today, I saw one who had dropped out. It really tore me up because he looked at me and recognized me and put his head down and kept walking. He was one that I really felt needed to stay in the class. But even after phone calls and e-mails, he chose not to come back. It is hard for me not to take that personally.

Eva eloquently outlined her approach to empathizing with and working with students. She felt strongly that students should have an opportunity to work with faculty and staff in community colleges who have similar backgrounds, and who understand their challenges.

With the students also, they still think they are the only ones in the world that have ever been through anything and you don't know what you are talking about, but I still try. I want to work with students that don't have a voice or maybe feel disenfranchised. They just don't really feel like they belong and I don't want them to be here long enough to see that they can. I want to say gosh if I can do it, you can do it. Definitely I have that as one of my reasons that I am here and that I am still here.

We need to help students. This is what we need to do. We need to help students. Even back when I was finishing my seminar paper in grad school, that was my topic. Yeah, we know that this economic thing is huge and it even trumps the race thing. That is what I wrote about back then. It is still true. Here we are 15 years later and whatever.

People need to be comfortable with whomever that helping professional and counselor is. If that counselor is wealthy and that client is not, there is disconnect. It is just not happening. The counselor just needs to be more cautious or maybe go work with some well-to-do clients because that is the thing that is of concern for that client. They don't feel a connection. They

don't feel comfortable because that person is a different economic class than they are. That matters more.

Where I am at right now, not because most all of my students are from impoverished backgrounds and they perceive me as somebody who can understand that. That is what I said that some people make the assumption that I come from a less than privileged background. So, they are really comfortable.

Jenna put into context her role as a faculty person. She reminded us that students face life challenges that may affect their ability to be in class, to learn, or to participate fully in a specific activity. Jenna remembers her life as a student, and she empathizes.

Sometimes when our students aren't in class, it is because the baby is sick or the car is broken down and there is not enough money to fix it. Or there is no school today and my husband has to work and somebody has to stay home with the kids. I think that helps me remember those things and be a little more empathic and understanding. Sometimes I catch myself getting too attached to the importance of the people in my life and my class...I am glad that I have some personal experiences to help me do that.

Sharon is a high-level administrator in Student Services. She believed strongly that her working-class background allows her to empathize with her students, and to more fully understand their economic challenges.

I think it makes me more cognizant of the struggles that they go through especially at a community college. I have a number of colleagues that I talk with at 4-year colleges and they say oh, the student should be able to afford this and that. I am thinking that they are totally out of tune with what they are going through. Having had to work through college and having had to work through high school and having to watch my parents pinch their pennies.

Finally, Jean expressed that her working-class background and experiences as a non-traditional learner inform her work in Student Services well. Jean finds that she empathizes with her students. She encourages them to be vocal about what they need as learners at MCC. Jean's experiences as a student inspired her to remember, *"I also learned from my four years*

is that one of the mistakes that we make in education is that we fail to recognize the experiences in the people we are teaching.”

A sense of community at the community college

Reay (2001) asserted that women from working-class origins exhibit a solid sense of personal authenticity, but that those women who continue in higher education will struggle with the push to become more middle-class in character. Gardner (1993), Jones (2003), Langston (1993), and Wilson (2002) all maintained that working-class women in academia are encouraged to throw away their affiliations with the working-class world in favor of a deeper association with middle-class values and standards. This pressure, however, may not permeate community colleges to the extent it may permeate four-year institutions. Four-year faculty exhibit deeper ties to a structure that recognizes research over teaching (Townsend & LaPaglia, 2000). Publishing and research pressures are not as apparent for faculty in community colleges.

Townsend (1998) ascertained that the majority of women in her study found the community college to be ideal employment for them. The institution was considered to be ideal or very satisfactory because it provided for flexible scheduling, competitive salaries, freedom from the pressure of publishing, creativity, a focus on teaching, and personal autonomy. Townsend and Twombly (2007) further posited that female faculty in community colleges often are more satisfied with their work and with the college climate than faculty in other institution types. The authors asserted that reasons for this satisfaction may be:

...belief in the community college mission of open access to those who might not otherwise participate in higher education, and the lack of pressure to publish. Additionally, if it is true that women prefer teaching to research...then the community college is a good institutional fit...many women community

college faculty choose to work at the institution because of their need to balance family and community commitments with their professional work. (p. 212)

The women in this study eschewed pressure to abandon their working-class origins in favor of the middle-class orientation described by Gardner (1993), Jones (2003), Reay (2001), and Wilson (2002). Seven of the nine informants indicated that they find comfort and solace in working with their students and their colleagues at the community college. They feel that they benefit from the working in this particular type of educational milieu. The participants spoke freely about the sense of community they find at work in their group interviews most particularly.

Jenna emphasized that she enjoys the small setting of her campus, and the variety of activities in which she is encouraged to engage as a faculty person.

I really like the community college setting because of the small class sizes. I can really get to know my students and I typically have them in more than one class over a year or two, so I really get to know who they are and what they are interested in. I really get to do a lot of different things, not in addition to teaching. I am a Phi Theta Kappa advisor. I get a lot of interesting views. I am on the Judicial Hearing Board, which is always interesting. I like the variety of the different things I get to do. And just get to do what I love everyday.

Amy spoke to the team atmosphere and positive attitude she has found in her community college work.

I like working as a counselor in the community college setting because I feel there is a lot of support for what we do. I don't feel like we have to justify our jobs, which sometimes you feel you have to at a four-year school. We are viewed as an integral part of the team here. I enjoy working with students. I enjoy the enthusiasm that comes with it.

Eva related the excitement she feels when she attends a community college graduation.

You know you are doing a good job for the student or not. You hope that you can retain that student so they can continue on as that person. For me, it has been going to graduation and seeing the finished product. I need to see them as they walk and graduate. That is how I say ok, I had a part in that and it feels pretty good.

Jean continued to demonstrate an exuberant zest for her work at MCC.

I love this place. I love the environment, I love the people who work here and I love the kind of people that come to my office everyday. I love my job and that is why I stay. I could have retired years ago. Every year they ask me. I don't go because I loved my job. I want to be right here in this institution.

Maria again spoke of her working-class background in the context of her work at the community college.

Thank god because without that working class background, I probably would not care as much about the work I do and the people that I work with whether it is students or co-workers. Thank god for that working class background.

Additional Findings

Seven of the participants spoke openly about clothing identifying them as working-class during their junior high and high school years, college experience, or professional life. Jean, Eva, Beth, Jenna, Sharon, and Carol all indicated that, at different points in their experiences, they had been distinguished among their peers for having especially fashionable clothing that was made at home or purchased by parents or grandparents (Jean, Eva, Jenna). Sharon, Beth, and Carol all recalled wearing clothes that demonstrated their working-class affiliation because the clothing was homemade, inexpensive, or unfashionable. Pam spoke of dressing casually in her professional capacity to help her better relate to students.

Six of the participants indicated that going to church played a major role in their respective childhoods. All six who cited church as a major influence came from Protestant families.

Five of the informants indicated that they perceived leaving home to go to college as a necessary step to attaining the bachelor's degree. Of those five respondents, one graduated with BAs from a public university in Minnesota, and four graduated from small, private, liberal-arts colleges in Iowa.

Five of the study's respondents received their baccalaureate degrees from small, private, liberal-arts colleges in Iowa. Of those five, one began her education at a community college; the other began her higher education studies at a public university. Three of the respondents held baccalaureate degrees from public universities; one of those three participants began her education at a community college. One informant held a bachelor's degree from a private university; she began her education at a community college.

Seven of the nine respondents held undergraduate degrees in communications-related fields, such as English, Speech, Drama, Linguistics, or Journalism. The remaining two respondents held baccalaureate degrees in Psychology.

Eight of the study's nine participants held at least a Master's degree. The Master's degree is the terminal degree for five of these eight women. Of the eight participants holding Master's degrees, six received their awards from public universities; two received Master's degrees from private universities. Two of the informants held Ph.D. awards from a public university in Iowa. One of the participants held an MFA from a public university in Indiana.

Of the nine respondents, all began work in a community college through happenstance or for economic reasons. Three of the participants began their associations with community colleges as adjunct instructors; these three women still function in faculty roles in either full-time or adjunct positions. Four of the participants followed various paths in Student Services (counseling, advising, financial aid, or admissions). Of these four, two also

worked as adjunct faculty. Two of the informants began working at MCC in clerical roles. One of those two now serves in a Student Services position. The other maintains her full-time clerical position while working as adjunct faculty.

Six of the nine informants currently work as adjunct faculty at MCC. Of the six participants, four work as adjunct faculty as a second job. Two of the six participants work as adjuncts, at MCC or other institutions, as their primary source of employment.

Seven of the participants have worked, at some point in their respective careers, as secretaries. Four of the participants worked as secretaries in institutions of higher education. One of those four participants still finds her primary, full-time employment in that clerical role.

Four of the nine respondents indicated that they felt like they “didn’t fit,” or were an “outsider” during their educational and work experiences. One respondent of the four recalled feeling this way after she heard a speaker who was invited to her campus talk about how first-generation professionals sometimes feel themselves to be frauds or imposters. Although the literature suggested a strong tendency toward the theme of imposter for female academics from working-class backgrounds (Amey, 1999, Langston, 1993, Reay, 2001), this particular study’s respondents did not exhibit the specific, self-identification as a dominant theme.

Context of Phenomenology: Constructivism and Constructionism

The themes inherent in the study participants’ individual and group narratives may be viewed within the wider, constructivist theory of phenomenology. Crotty (1996, 2003) posited:

Phenomenology suggests that, if we lay aside, as best we can, the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning. (2003, p. 78)

Crotty (2003) asserted that the constructivist nature of phenomenology, or the aspect which points to making meaning of our engagement with objects in the world, serves to frame only part of the phenomenological experience. He ascertained that constructionism is the other half of the duality that is phenomenology. Constructionism speaks to the world of meaning in which we are all introduced, early in our lives.

The mélange of cultures and sub-cultures into which we are born provides us with meanings. These meanings we are taught and we learn in a complex and subtle process of enculturation...for the most part, we simply do not do what constructivism describes us doing. Phenomenology, however, invites us...to engage with phenomena in our world and make sense of them directly and immediately. (p. 79)

Bogdan and Bilken (2003) echoed Crotty's (2003) assertion that phenomenology helps us to find meaning in our culture and surroundings. The authors suggested that phenomenologists believe our interactions with others make multiple methods of interpreting our life experiences available to each one of us. The meaning of those experiences, then, is what constitutes our individual realities that are socially constructed.

Each participant in this study related unique experiences through individual and group narratives. Their stories are constructivist *and* constructionist in nature. While the literature relating to the experiences of working-class women in academia pointed to feelings of inadequacy (Gardner, 1993, LaPaglia, 1995, Overall, 1995, Pheterson, 1986), thoughts that one may be a fraud or an imposter (Amey, 1999, Langston, 1993, Reay, 2001), and an isolation from those around them (Gardner, 1993, Jones, 2003, Langston, 1993, Wilson,

2002), the women in this study embodied the nuances of meaning apparent in individual, life experiences.

This study's informants possessed strong self-confidence, assuredness that they are doing good work on behalf of students, and a sense of community among themselves as colleagues. Their narratives largely pointed to childhoods full of love, with supportive parents, grandparents, extended families, and siblings. The participants recalled reading vociferously, excelling in educational venues, and finding satisfaction in their work in community colleges.

Bogdan and Bilken (2003) asserted that individuals interpret meaning in their lives with the assistance of those around them. The "others" in their lives might be family, people from their past, educators, work colleagues, or friends. The other people in our lives, however, do not interpret our meanings for us. It is through interactions, with all of those "others" around us, that we construct our respective versions of truth.

People in a particular situation, such as our study informants, may: "...develop common definitions (or 'share perspectives' in the symbolic interactionists' language) since they regularly interact and share experiences, problems, and background; but consensus is not inevitable" (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003, p. 25).

Perhaps, from a constructionist standpoint, the fact that the informants all grew up in Iowa, Minnesota, or Ohio, among a majority of families that Zweig (2004) would term working-class, had much to do with the way the women saw themselves in the contexts of learning, working, and nurturing others. They shared somewhat common perspectives as a result of their interactions at the community college, but their narratives, ultimately, were unique in making meaning of their individual lives and contributions to education.

The understanding that working-class women who work as professionals in community colleges share perspectives, and construct meaning through their interactions, lends itself to an examination of how community colleges can encourage and foster the professional contributions of this particular group. The next chapter summarizes the findings of this study, and suggests possible directions and implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Summary

This purpose of this study was to examine the individual and collective life, educational, and work experiences of nine women from working-class backgrounds. The women currently serve as professionals in a large, Midwestern, multi-campus community college. The project anticipated that the participants' reflection on experiences, and respective interpretations of meaning related to those experiences, would help to inform scholarship about how working-class women experience their positions in community colleges. Data were gathered through individual interviews, group interviews, member checking, and field notes.

The following questions framed this research:

1. How do women from working-class families who now work as faculty and administrators in community colleges construct meaning from their perceptions and experiences?
2. What life experiences and perceptions are unique to these women?

Conclusion

The participants' responses to the first question exhibited a variety of interpretations. The majority of women who informed this study came from families who supported them in the pursuits of literacy and higher education. However, one participant spoke of a father who was extremely unsupportive of her efforts to complete a Bachelor's and a Master's degree.

Themes that emerged from the respondents' answers focused on their respective enthusiasm for reading and learning, developing an awareness of working-class affiliation, pronounced work ethics that emerged as the result of early socialization, the need to work two jobs, whether that need be for emotional or financial gain, and finding a sense of community. Finding a sense of community emerged as a theme within in the family and early neighborhood life, during the years as a college student, and as a professional in the community college.

The participants mentioned the effects of their parents, grandparents, extended family, professors, undergraduate advisors, and community college work colleagues as major influences in the development of their educational aspirations and professional experiences. Feminist themes, such as limited options for women in the work world, a father who was unsupportive of his daughter's education, or experiences that involved preferential treatment of men in classrooms during the college experience, were mentioned in three of nine individual participant interviews. One individual interview and one group interview surfaced Amey's (1999) and Clark's (1998) assertions that the community college is dominated by white, male, elitist attitudes. This was true, as well, of the ideas that working-class women in higher education often feel isolated from colleagues (Gardner, 1993, Jones, 2003, Langston, 1993, Wilson, 2002), and that they are frauds or imposters in the academic system (Amey, 1999, Langston, 1993, Reay, 2001). These ideas emerged in three of the individual interviews without prompting. One additional participant indicated she recently had heard someone speak on the topic of first-generation professionals who feel that they are frauds. She recalled the issue in her interview, indicating that she only reflected on idea of being a fraud or imposter when prompted to do so.

Implications

Analysis of the study's data clearly demonstrates the participants' great variety of experiences, and meanings attached to those experiences. This study was accomplished through narrative inquiry and phenomenological interviewing techniques. The research is framed by a phenomenological approach. Each participant in this study related unique experiences through individual and group narratives. Their stories are constructivist *and* constructionist in nature. While the literature relating to the experiences of working-class women in academia pointed to feelings of inadequacy (Gardner, 1993, LaPaglia, 1995, Overall, 1995, Pheterson, 1986), thoughts that one may be a fraud or an imposter (Amey, 1999, Langston, 1993, Reay, 2001), and an isolation from those around them (Gardner, 1993, Jones, 2003, Langston, 1993, Wilson, 2002), the women in this study embodied the nuances of meaning apparent in individual, life experiences. The informants possess strong self-confidence, assuredness that they are doing good work on behalf of students, and a sense of community among themselves as community college professionals.

Recommendations for Practice

Several recommendations for practice are made based on the findings of this study.

1. Provide Professional Development and Leadership Opportunities

The participants in this study did not vocalize the need for organized, professional development and leadership opportunities. Six of the participants, however, work as full-time and part-time faculty in the community college setting. Four of the participants voiced feelings of being "outsiders" in their respective job roles at the institution. Clearly, a need exists to provide professional development opportunities for women from working-class

backgrounds who are faculty and administrators in community colleges. The same is true of leadership institutes and cohorts.

Only one of the nine participants in this study was employed as an upper-level administrator in the community college. Four of the participants worked in counseling or advising roles in Student Services. Two of the participants worked as adjunct faculty; one of the participants worked as full-time as clerical staff and part-time as adjunct faculty at the institution. One participant was employed as full-time faculty. The majority of informants in this sample worked in lower- to mid-level positions within the community college.

Clark (1998) pointed out that large numbers of women are opting for or are being directed by influences that may be blatant or subtle, toward employment as community college faculty.

However, empirical research into their experiences and progress as new faculty members has been sparse. The numbers of women faculty members teaching at all levels are higher at community colleges than at research universities, liberal arts colleges, and comprehensive state colleges and universities. Similarly, like their peers at four-year institutions, women faculty members in community colleges are not moving up the academic career ladder to positions as department leaders and college administrative leaders in the same proportions as they are being hired at lower levels. (p. 80)

Clark (1998) asserted that the majority of part-time instructors in community colleges now are women. In this position, women faculty find themselves marginalized and isolated from inform and formal professional and social networks within the organization. Socializing new and part-time faculty members within community colleges is imperative to communicating the college requirements for recognition, promotions, and tenure.

Murray (2001) outlined the pressing need for community colleges nationwide to provide faculty development. He cites Gaff's (1991) assertion that faculty development is an

imperative strategic initiative, in that it rejuvenates faculty, strengthens general education opportunities for students, and revitalizes the community college as an institution. The author presented four crucial conditions for an effective, community college faculty development program: (a) a supportive, institutional climate that promotes faculty development; (b) a goal-based, orderly, and formal program of faculty development; (c) a reward structure that is connected to the faculty development program; (d) ownership of the program by faculty; (e) colleague support for time devoted to the program to improve teaching; (f) the message that administration values outstanding teaching.

Murray's (2001) study revealed that faculty development at most community colleges is little more than an arbitrary grouping of activities. Most of the time, these activities lack any connection to the college's strategic plan, faculty needs, or the wider mission of the college. Leadership at 130 community colleges responded to Murray's survey. One hundred nine of the 130 responses indicated that faculty development professionals spend less than half of their time on duties associated with the intentional coordination and structuring of faculty development activities.

According to Ebbers, Gallisath, Rockel, and Coyan (2000), programs such as the Leadership Institute for a New Century (LINC), created through the efforts of the Iowa Association of Community College Presidents (IACCP), the Iowa Association of Community College Trustees (IACCA), and the Iowa State University Higher Education Program, provide opportunities for women and people of color to advance into roles of administrative leadership within the system of Iowa Community Colleges. LINC participants are nominated by their institutions; all participants are employed in Iowa Community Colleges.

Three levels of community college leadership provide participants for LINC: entry-level administrative and non-administrative positions, mid-level administrative positions, and upper-level administrative positions. The program's objectives are to:

(a) provide networking opportunities in an effort to increase diversity of participation within leadership roles in community colleges; (b) increase program participants' understanding of the functioning structure and issues related to community colleges; (c) improve participants' communication and analysis of state and local governance funding; (d) allow opportunities for participants to study the roles of community college president and other top administrators; and (e) encourage participants to develop and enhance their own leadership styles. (p. 377)

LINC encourages participants to set goals for their individual professional development, and provides for internship experiences on other campuses or in businesses and government agencies. The program matches participants with women mentors, who provide feedback and role modeling. LINC encourages the pursuit of advanced degrees, membership in professional associations, and attendance at leadership institutes.

Meaningful opportunities for faculty, professional, and leadership development are critical to the promotion of experienced and enthusiastic community college professionals into higher-ranking administrative positions within their own institutions. According to Amey and VanDer Linden (2002), nearly 20% of female presidents, nearly 60% of female chief academic officers, and nearly 80% of female senior student affairs officers in community colleges were hired from within their current institutions. Offering those opportunities for women in Iowa institutions would do much to promote the growth of leaders in our own state.

2. Provide Mentoring

Amey and VanDerLinden's (2002) survey of senior community college administrators asserted that mentoring relationships are vital to professional growth. More than 56% of the respondents in the study indicated they had mentors. Nearly 20% indicated they were actively mentoring one person, while 42% answered that they served as a mentor to several people. Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to be involved in a mentoring relationship. Of the administrators surveyed, approximately 36% indicated that a mentor had assisted them in acquiring their current position. Clearly, Ebberts, Gallisath, Rockel, and Coyan (2000) placed emphasis on the mentoring relationship within the LINC program. Murray (2001), however, indicated that only 34.6 percent of the colleges surveyed provide new faculty with peer mentoring. Again, peer mentoring for faculty, administrators, and those who desire to become administrators, is imperative for community colleges to prepare the next generation of leadership.

3. Provide Opportunities for Informal Faculty Interaction

Clearly, community colleges would be well served to provide opportunities for adjunct faculty to interact, to connect, and to share ideas. Outcalt (2002) asserted that community college faculty are diverse in character and fragmented from one another. He noted that adjunct faculty work in isolated conditions, and need increased opportunities for interaction to improve the effectiveness of community college teaching and learning. Such opportunities for interaction may include:

...informal gatherings for faculty. If these sessions were held during those hours after the close of the usual workday yet before the beginning of evening classes, they might be effective in bringing together predominantly full-time day instructors with predominantly part-time evening instructors...Faculty themselves can assume responsibility for the well-being of their colleagues

and the collegiality of their community. Faculty isolation and the fumbling, trial-and-error method by which many community college instructors learn to teach (Grubb, 1999) can be countered simply and effectively through one-on-one discussions between veterans and newcomers. (p. 114)

4. Change Classroom and Curricular Contexts

In the fall of 2002, 59% of part-time and 55% of full-time community college students were women. Community colleges have served women students well, mainly because of their financial accessibility, open admissions policies, and geographic availability and proximity (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Many of these female students, according to Zweig's (2004) definition, also are part of America's large, working class. They also compose a large portion of the diverse community of learners in any community college.

Brookfield (2002) asserted that community college faculty should exercise caution when using autobiographical experiences to guide their work in the classroom. Studying one's own biographical experiences as a learner can help to, "explain to teachers why they gravitate to certain ways of working and instinctively turn away from others" (p. 33). In addition, Brookfield suggested faculty should use a variety of classroom assessments to maintain a sense of how students work through the learning process. The author asserted:

...students report that seeing their teachers talk out loud about how critical reflection is confirming or challenging their pedagogic assumptions models for those same students the process of critical thinking. In community college settings—perhaps the ultimate in diverse, open-entry, mixed ability classrooms—critical reflection on core assumptions can ground teachers in a moral, intellectual, and political vision of what they are trying to accomplish. (pp. 36-37)

The question of political, moral, and intellectual context for instructors in community college classrooms is, indeed, controversial. Scholars such as Sharon O'Dair (2003) called for recognition of working-class culture and affiliation within the community college

curriculum. According to O'Dair, "in the twenty-first century, we cannot talk about class and higher education without talking about class *in* higher education" (p. 602). The author posited that the way to restructure and improve the divisive distinction between classes is not by offering a path to middle-class affiliation, but to accept, "that middle class culture is not superior to that of the working class" (p. 603).

O'Dair (2003) believed that working-class culture places more emphasis on family and group accomplishments, and is less consumerist, individualistic, hierarchical, and competitive than middle-class culture. She proposes that colleges become locations for *class activism* that recognize the value of working-class people and working-class culture.

Tai (2005) echoed O'Dair's (2003) push for the silenced voices and experiences of working-class, female faculty to be integrated into the community college curriculum. She asserted:

The goal of general education, after all, is to expose students to multiple languages, voices, and ways of knowing...community college faculty are constantly compelled back to the beginning of the learning process—to retrace the steps that lead them to intellectual self-discovery in order to help students forge their own path of possibility. Such modes and objectives—empathy, cultivated in order to empower—can perhaps be said to parallel goals articulated within some currents of feminist thought. (p. 189)

Integrating the voices and experiences of working-class women into the community college curriculum could do much to validate and acknowledge the life narratives of those who attend and work in our institutions. Teaching and learning about the experiences of working-class women can serve to inspire new meanings, both constructivist and constructionist, within our academic and local communities.

Brookfield (2002) further suggested that teacher reflection groups be utilized to enable faculty members to talk with colleagues about curricular or classroom problems they

may share. Doing so “increases teachers’ chances of stumbling across interpretations that fit what is happening in a particular situation” (p. 34). The author maintained that instructors can ameliorate feelings of isolation and incompetence simply by understanding that they all struggle with issues related to pedagogy and andragogy.

Pedagogical, andragogical, and curricular changes based upon the experiences of community college faculty and students should be created and tailored to fit the needs of all involved. Dialogue among faculty, administrators, and students is critical to generating instructional techniques and curricular design that are interesting, meaningful, and reflective of individual and group experiences by discipline and by classroom.

Future Research

Clark (1998) called for research and inquiry into the experiences and institutional realities that women who work in community colleges face. According to the author:

Given that women make up such a large percentage of the community college faculty...Researchers should design studies to explore the organizational structures and the formal and informal social, cultural, and political experiences in the lives of women in the academic profession as they advance up the career ladder...By studying the daily and yearly experiences of women at various levels in the academic career path...more information could be gathered to determine if a common set of patterns for the entire higher education system exists in terms of women and their participation in the various types of institutions...They should explore women’s personal experiences and daily interaction with peers, senior faculty, academic deans, divisions, and the institution as a whole. By asking women to describe their activities during a particular day, week, or month during the year, and their feelings associated with their experiences and with their colleagues and the institution, researchers may be able to pinpoint common negative experiences and problems, whether they be institutional problems preventing socialization or common adjustment problems women experiences as a group in the competitive world of academe. (p. 84)

Clark (1994) also cited Twombly's (1993) study which revealed that, although women comprise over 33% of community college faculty members, only 6% of articles reviewed in this area concerned women faculty. Clark further asserted that women exert a limited scope of influence, and are offered limited interactions with, faculty activities. The author views this as a result of workplace discrimination and as, "a product of the systemic dominance and control of the academic organizations and culture by men" (p. 82). Amey (1999) echoed this view of community colleges as "male-dominated" institutions.

There is no question that additional research about the experiences of women faculty, administrators, staff, and students in community colleges should be conducted. There is a particularly critical need for research to be conducted in this area using a feminist lens, employing qualitative and quantitative research methods. The majority of participants in this study made no reference to feeling oppressed by a male dominated culture in the community college. Within individual and group narratives, however, references were made regarding the preferential treatment of male students in the classroom, the practice of giving job promotions to White males before women, fathers discouraging higher education for their female children, and men positioning themselves in dominant ways during discussions of academic progress.

Some scholars concluded that the lack of discussions of such themes within the narratives is a result of internalized oppression, that is, the acknowledgment of individuals within an oppressed group of dominant society's biases and prejudices (Amey, 1999; Gardner, 1993; Pheterson, 1986). Marginality may play a role in the lack of discussion of feminist themes as well. Articles by Gardner (1993), hooks (1993), Jones (2003), Langston (1993), and Townsend (1998, 1999, 2000) all speak to the notion of women feeling

displaced, alienated, or suffering guilt about their working-class origins within the wider community of academia. The lack of emergent feminist themes in this study's narratives indicates a strong need to research women's experiences with greater depth, and with a greater emphasis on feelings, perceptions, and investigation of the college climate in research questions.

Policy Implications

As Clark (1998) suggested, the day-to-day experiences of women who work in community colleges requires more research and greater attention from the scholarly community. Developing programs and opportunities for faculty and administrators who are female must be a key component of this research and its results. Investigations of needs, interests, and talents among working-class women who are faculty and administrators will do much to shape their career tracks, leadership styles, and resultant roles in community colleges. Making *assumptions* about exactly what working-class women who are professionals in community colleges need in terms of professional development, leadership training, and community building, may do more damage than any present indifference or marginalization in our institutions.

Best practices for faculty and professional development, mentoring, informal faculty interaction, and the contextualization of instruction and curriculum should be shared and implemented across Iowa, and across the nation. Murray (2001) called for faculty and professional development that is structured, organized, and supported by the institution. There is no question that the talents, capabilities, and experiences of female community college professionals who come from working-class backgrounds should be shared with

researchers, colleagues, and, students who come from similar backgrounds. Validating colleagues' and students' life narratives through those of others who are employed at the community college can do much to ameliorate feelings of inferiority, marginalization, or being an outsider to the institution.

Reflection

Writing the recommendations section of this study makes me realize how much there is to learn about working-class women in community colleges. Little research has been accomplished about the experiences of women in community colleges. Even fewer studies have been done on working-class women in community colleges. It may be, perhaps, that only women from working-class backgrounds in such settings truly know who they are.

Most notably, I was struck by how the participants in this study constantly searched out and made efforts to establish different kinds of community throughout their lives. Their efforts to seek out supportive educators, peers, and colleagues during their early years, college experiences, and professional lives, are nothing short of remarkable. Above all, their struggles to survive academic and personal challenges, rough economic times, and professional roadblocks illustrate the experiences of women in community colleges in meaningful and personal ways.

The participants' individual and group narratives convinced me, beyond any doubt, that community colleges must work together to share innovations in student services, instructional and curricular change, and professional development. Although community colleges are local institutions, our aims for developing our human resources must be inclusive and all-encompassing in scope.

I was also struck at how diligently the respondents have worked to achieve their educational goals and their professional positions. They continue to work as well. Their consistent commitment to working two and sometimes three jobs throughout their lives illuminated their working-class origins. The participants shared a common work ethic that is a thread through their personal and professional lives.

As I reflect on this study, I am surprised at the small number of feminist themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. At another level, however, I am not surprised. In each case, the participants in this study had worked at the level necessary for survival. These women focused on a personal drive so necessary to attaining their goals and to succeeding in an academic world. After overcoming obstacle upon obstacle, it may be that speaking very simply about achievements, challenges, and triumphs proved to be enough. Their individual and group narratives told their stories eloquently—free of others' interpretations.

I met nine remarkable women on this journey. I am eternally grateful for their generosity, their stories, and their beings. I am grateful as well to count them as people who work in community colleges.

APPENDIX A. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Assurances
Vice Provost for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4267
FAX 515 294-4566

DATE: 21 August 2007
TO: Lyn A. Brodersen
132 Belle Rae Circle, Brainerd, MN 56401
CC: Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan
N243 Lagomarcino
FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances

IRB ID: 07-358

Approval Date: 13 August 2007 Date for Continuing Review: 2 August 2008

The Chair of Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved the protocol entitled: "Female academics from working-class origins: Navigating the waters of hybridity." The protocol has been assigned the following ID Number: **07-358**. Please refer to this number in all correspondence regarding the protocol.

Your study has been approved from 13 August 2007 to 2 August 2008. The **continuing review date** for this study is no later than **2 August 2008**. Federal regulations require continuing review of ongoing projects. Please submit the form with sufficient time (i.e. three to four weeks) for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study, prior to the continuing review date.

Failure to complete and submit the continuing review form will result in expiration of IRB approval on the continuing review date and the file will be administratively closed. All research related activities involving the participants **must** stop on the continuing review date, until approval can be re-established, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard to research participants. As a courtesy to you, we will send a reminder of the approaching review prior to this date.

Please remember that any **changes in the protocol or consent form** may not be implemented without prior IRB review and approval, using the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form. Research investigators are expected to comply with the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website or available by calling (515 294-4566, www.compliance.iastate.edu).

You must promptly report any of the following to the IRB: (1) **all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to subjects or others.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

ORA 06/07

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

DATE: 13 February 2008

TO: Lyn A. Brodersen
132 Belle Rae Circle, Brainerd, MN 56401

CC: Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan
N243 Lagomarcino

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office of Research Assurances

TITLE: **From working-class origins to academic: Community college women who have crossed the great class divide**

IRB ID: 07-358

Approval Date: 13 August 2007 **Date for Continuing Review:** 2 August 2008

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Assurances
Vice Provost for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4267
FAX 515 294-4566

The Chair of Institutional Review Board of Iowa State University has reviewed and approved the modification of this project. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by completing the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form>
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems involving risks** to the subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office of Research Assurances website [www.compliance.iastate.edu] or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

ORA 06/07

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: From working-class origins to academia: Community college women who have crossed the great class divide

Investigator: Lyn A. Brodersen

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of female community college faculty and administrators who come from working-class families of origin. The specific research questions being addressed in the study include: 1. How do women from working-class backgrounds, who work as faculty and administrators in community colleges, construct meaning from their perceptions and experiences? 2. What life experiences and perceptions are unique to these women?

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will consist of participating in a two-hour, individual interview. Interview questions will cover your experiences as a child, a student, and as a community college professional. You may also be asked to provide pieces of literature, journal entries, blog entries, pieces of music, and/or photographs that relate to your experiences. You will also be asked to participate in a ninety-minute group interview with four to five other study participants. Interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission.

Prior to the beginning of the interview, there will be discussion of the informed consent form and confirmation of your eligibility for this study. You will have the opportunity to ask any questions about the study or the informed consent form. Following the completing of the informed consent form, we will begin the interview.

RISKS

The potential risks to you involve only those inherent in self-reflection. As such, risks to you are minimal.

BENEFITS

Benefits to respondents include greater self reflection and the opportunity to contribute to the further understanding of the experiences of those who have moved from blue-collar upbringings, through undergraduate and graduate education, to the position of community college professional.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

Participants will receive \$20.00 for the first part of the study, i.e., the individual interview, and \$20.00 for the second portion of the study, i.e., the group interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. It is possible that these records could contain information that personally identifies you. Interviews will be tape recorded to foster accuracy in data collection and analysis. You will not be identified by name, either in the coding or the reporting of the data in this study, in an effort to maintain confidentiality.

Audiotapes and notes will be stored by the principal investigator in a locked file cabinet for 3 years. Should you withdraw from the study, at any point, all recorded materials will be returned to you and will not be used in the study. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to review the written report prior to its dissemination. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. As previously mentioned, should you withdraw from the study, your comments will be deleted from the transcript and not used in the study.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact: Lyn A. Brodersen, (218) 838-4300 or lbro@iastate.edu. The supervising faculty for this project is Dr. Frankie Santos Laanan, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Iowa State University. Dr. Laanan may be contacted at (515) 294-7292 or at laanan@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, Office of Research Assurances, (515) 294-3115, 1138 Pearson Hall, Ames, IA 50011.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study as explained. You will receive a copy of this form.

Respondent's Name (printed): _____

(Signature of Respondent)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I have discussed the above points with the respondent. It is my opinion that the respondent understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in the research study.

Investigator's Name (printed): _____

(Investigator's Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX C. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What did your parents do for a living?
2. Describe what it was like to grow up in your family.
3. Tell me about the first time you realized you were from a working-class family.
4. Describe how you experienced class differences in your family, in your community, and in your school.
5. What was the attitude about higher education like in your family?
6. What messages did you receive about college when you were growing up?
7. Describe how you learned about the concept of going to college. What were the circumstances surrounding the way(s) you came to know about college?
8. When did you first decide to attend college? Please describe how you felt about your decision.
9. How did your family react when you first told them that you planned to go to college?
10. Tell me about the experience of first enrolling in college.
11. Tell me about your transition to college life.
12. Describe your experiences in college and graduate school.
13. Which specific experiences during your undergraduate and graduate education had the greatest effect(s) on your educational experience as a whole?
14. How did your experience in undergraduate and graduate school affect and shape your life as an academic?
15. Tell me about your experiences as an academic from the working class.
16. Describe how you made the decision to work in a community college.
17. Tell me about aspects of your personal life that are critical to understanding you as a working-class academic in a community college.

APPENDIX D. GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about how your families view your choice of profession.
2. How do your working-class origins distinguish your professional life?
3. Describe your interactions with other faculty and administrators at this institution.
4. Describe how you experience class differences as a faculty person or administrator.
5. Describe the reasons you choose to work in a community college.
6. What other comments would you like to share about your working-class origins and their relationship to your work?

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