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Transition from High School to College : The Experiences of Girls in Rural West Virginia

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TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO
COLLEGE: THE EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS
IN RURAL WEST VIRGINIA

A Dissertation submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Curriculum and Instruction

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Marshall University

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ABSTRACT

Transition from High School to College: The Experiences of Girls in Rural West Virginia

LeAnne A. Olson

A degree in higher education is increasingly important in our competitive economic environment, but a 30% gap exists between high-income and low-income students attending college (Bloom, 2005; Corrigan & Hartle, 2007). Rural and urban schools contend with issues of poverty and educational resources, while suburban schools work with “ample resources and stable populations” (Truscott & Truscott, 2005, p. 245). The purpose of this study was to better understand the enabling and constraining factors of five girls from rural, West Virginia as they transitioned from high school to college. Collaborative ethnographic case study allowed the five students to be involved in the research process from the inception of topic through data analysis. Data were collected through educational life histories, observation and participant fieldnotes, interviews, writing prompts, photographs, artwork, as well as from report cards and school-related documents. Single-case analyses were conducted to find enabling and constraining factors for each girl, followed by a cross-case analysis using Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory to interpret their experiences, looking at the influences of social systems, family and school, on participants’ human agency. Four themes emerged that were enabling or constraining based on participants’ experiences: mothers, money, math, and me (role model). Girls identified with their strong mothers in a patriarchal environment, learning that a college education could lead to financial security. In this study, while money was an important issue of college attendance, the upper-middle class student received funding from her parents, and low-income students received grants

based on financial need, but the middle-class student struggled more with acquiring money for college. College entrance exams revealed low math scores for participants, demonstrating the importance of high school advising and teacher quality, particularly with out-of-field math teachers. In addition, I took an interest in the girls and provided support and advice during their transitions from high school to college.

TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE: THE EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS IN RURAL WEST VIRGINIA

Author's Note: I struggled with a topic and narrowing down a "problem" that was worthy of research. I was struck by something Spradley (1979) wrote: "One way to synchronize the needs of people and the goals of ethnography is to consult with informants to determine urgent research topics" (p. 14). During my first meeting with the former members of the Girls' Resiliency Program, a youth development program, in the fall of 2007, we discussed their expectations of their futures, and the five participants mentioned that they were all interested in going to college. With the low college-going rates of rural Livingston¹ County in West Virginia, I wondered if their desires would be fulfilled.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, a college degree has become comparable to a high school diploma a hundred years ago (Bok, 2006). In addition, a college education promises social class mobility to economically disadvantaged students, many of whom live in rural communities. In fact, over 97% of poor counties in the United States are located in rural areas (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). Current literature documents the struggles within urban education due to social class and educational disparity (Anyon, 2005; Fine & Weis, 2003; Kozol, 2005), but the literature on similar issues among those

¹ The name of the county and other place names have been changed to pseudonyms.

who live in rural, economically disadvantaged communities is thin. Urban poverty is frequently perceived as a problem of race and gender, while rural poverty is hidden in the hollows and frequently ignored by society and researchers (hooks, 2000). I conducted a qualitative research study that explored issues of social class, rurality, girls' education, and access to post-secondary education for five female students. I used a collaborative ethnographic method to understand the students' transitional experiences as they completed high school and transitioned to college.

Social Class and Education

We are experiencing a “widening gap between rich and poor” (hooks, 2000, p. 1), with over 16% of United States families with children living below the poverty line (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005). According to hooks (2000), “we should all be paying attention to class, using race and gender to understand and explain its new dimensions” (p. 7).

Schools and universities serve a dual purpose for both social class reproduction and upward mobility; “class, race, ethnic, and gender inequities are reproduced with little notice *and* they are vibrant spaces that hold out possibilities for individual and collective social change” (Fine & Burns, 2003, p. 856). Schools create educational environments that are “reproducing and legitimating large-scale structural inequalities, along the axes of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and disability” (Fine & Weis, 2003, p. 9). On the other hand, we look to schools for equitable resources that will level the playing field and give all students the same education (Gandara, Horn, & Orfield, 2005).

Our societal notion of upward mobility is based on the assumption that students advance academically because of their capabilities and their hard work without taking into account the cultural and environmental factors that shape learners. Ironically, hard

work is a term of praise for working class students, while middle class students are expected to achieve academically based on their ability (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Differing educational expectations and resources reinforce the divide between social class status and higher education aspirations. The United States' idea of social mobility based on merit is frequently obscured by social reproduction, which hinders social mobility (Gandara, et al., 2005). Success is recognized as a personal endeavor, without acknowledging the resources in the home and school that support a student's success (Clark/Keefe, 2006).

Social Class and Post-secondary Education

In our present economic climate, there is a higher demand for a college-educated workforce rather than for skilled laborers. At the same time, a college education is necessary yet unobtainable for many students based on their resources. First-generation, college-going students experience many risks associated with going to college and leaving their family and community (hooks, 2000). Bloom (2007) stated that her research

reveals that students in fact make extremely accurate assessments of the choices the world is offering to them, and the risks that they face in their transition to adulthood; but that these choices and risks are very different for different groups of students based on their social-class location. Most strikingly, poor and working-class students face significant economic, social, and psychological risks that middle- and upper-class students do not. (p. 348)

Low-income high school students who intend to continue their education in post-secondary institutions encounter financial, procedural, and cultural barriers as they negotiate this transition.

More students in high school aspire to attend college than actually enroll every year because of financial reasons (Fine & Burns, 2003; Porter, 2006). The primary barrier to college attendance is financial (Glenn, 2004; Plimpton & Quint, 2007; Porter, 2006). One in three parents believes that college attendance is based on financial ability (Plimpton & Quint, 2007). Based on research and personal experience, Clark/Keefe (2006) reflected on the difficulty that first-generation students face in the admissions and financial aid procedures that must be negotiated for college attendance. Middle- and upper-class students perceive parental financial support of college attendance as an entitlement, while working-class students feel anxiety about the financial obligation of college attendance in isolation (Kettley, Whitehead, & Raffan, 2008).

Over the past three decades, college enrollment and tuition have increased while federal need-based grants have decreased (Clark, 2006; Gandara, Horn, & Orfield, 2005). Nationally, scholarships are offered on a merit basis rather than a needs basis (Davies, Crow, Hamilton, & Salois, 2006). Half of public college students receive financial awards, frequently the Pell grant, which averages \$4,000 per year toward college expenses (Clark, 2006). In addition, scholarships based on merit have left deserving low-income students struggling to find ways to pay for college, usually relying on student loans, which means that they are ultimately paying more for the same education (Howard & Levine, 2004), especially as student loan interest rates are rising (Clark, 2006). Kadison and DiGeronimo (2004) found that “between 1981 and 1994, costs increased

153 percent at public universities and over 200 percent at private universities” (p. 65). They stated further that “the average undergraduate leaves school with a debt of \$18,900, up 66 percent from five years ago” (p. 65) while a college education can increase a lifetime of income by \$1 million (Clark, 2006).

In addition to financial barriers, a first-generation college student experiences procedural details without parental first-hand experience and advice. Education is a “system that prepares people to continue to live where they live. It’s more than barriers. It’s an absence of opportunity” (Howard & Levine, 2004, p. 20). Howard and Levine (2004) argued that institutions of higher education are not committed to providing opportunities targeted at low-income, first-generation college-going students. Because parents of first-generation college-going students lack the first-hand experience and knowledge of the college-going process, these students gain advice at their high school (Clark/Keefe, 2006). First generation college-going students need additional support to negotiate the procedures to access and gain entrance into college. Who is responsible for assisting students in their transitions from high school to college? High school counselors and teachers or college recruiters? Of the state-funded programs to increase college-going rates, services remain disconnected and duplicated because of an absence of an overarching organizational framework (Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, & Li, 2008).

After negotiating the financial and procedural issues of college attendance, working class students frequently feel disconnected from the pervasive middle class culture found on college campuses. First-generation college students face obstacles, such as “anxiety about their ability to succeed and stressful changes in their relations with

family and friends” (Clark/Keefe, 2006, p. 1189). One risk encountered by first-generation college students is their exposure to a new environment where students “often feel they must change who they are and turn away from where they came from” (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004, p. 54). If students conform to their new environment, they frequently suffer survivor’s guilt as they return back to their families, at least a little changed by the experience of college (Clark/Keefe, 2006).

Given the barriers discussed above, it is not surprising that, in the United States, there was a “32 [%] gap in college-going rates between students from the lowest and highest income families in 2003” (Bloom, 2005, p. 64). “A 30 [%] gap exists between the college-going rates of low- and high-socioeconomic-status (SES) high school graduates” (Introduction, 2007, p. 1). Corrigan and Hartle (2007) found a consistent 33% college-going gap between social classes over the past three decades. In addition, there is a 10% gap in students who intend to go to college in comparison with actual college attendance (Plimpton & Quint, 2007).

Girls, Social Class, and College Attendance

According to Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001), social class “massively divides girls and young women in terms of their educational attainment and life trajectories” (p. 4). Due to the cultural values within social classes, Walkerdine, et al (2001) found that first-generation girls in England encountered more difficulties negotiating their transitions from high school to college than girls from middle class backgrounds. In Walkerdine, et al.’s qualitative study of girls and college attendance, no working-class girls experienced direct entrance to college from high school. First-generation girls experienced academic success differently than middle-class girls based

on their cultural and social values and expectations. Working-class girls negotiate the transition to college with a sense of “loss and uncertainty as well as hope and excitement” (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, 2001). In addition to the obstacles of college attendance for working-class girls, the institutions chosen for college attendance are more likely to be state colleges rather than prestigious universities (Tokarczyk, 1993).

Rurality and College Education

Rural students trying to enter and succeed in college encounter barriers to success, such as lack of adequate transportation, academic preparation, and financial resources (Davies, Crow, Hamilton, & Salois, 2006). In rural areas, educational resources in schools are limited (Thomas, 2008), and teachers are found to teach out of subject more frequently (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). As a result, college preparation for rural students is less likely to occur in rural high schools. Beyond the academic preparation, rural students experience difficulties with procedures that get them in the doors of institutions of higher education. Hebel (2006) found that in 2000 15.5% of adults living in rural areas, as opposed to 26.6% of adults living in urban areas, have earned bachelor’s degrees. In rural populations, fewer parents have attained college degrees, leaving their children with an absence of college-going advice about issues such as college admission and financial aid procedures (Hebel, 2006).

While rural girls may have high aspirations for college attendance, their material and social circumstances make it difficult for them to negotiate a transition to a college out of their rural locale. Spatig, Parrott, Carter, Keyes, and Kusimo (2001) found that Appalachian middle school girls had high career and college aspirations despite the poor resources and preparatory curriculum that were offered in their rural school. In contrast,

Brown (2005) found that rural girls saw a future of anxiety, hard work, and struggle to meet their basic needs, with fewer luxuries available for themselves and their families. Higher educational expectations for girls have become increasingly prevalent, but for rural, working class girls there is sometimes a fear that a college education will change them and take them away from their working class parents (hooks, 1993).

Girls' Education and College Going

In the United States, equitable educational opportunities for all females was not a law until 1972, when Title IX was passed making sexual discrimination within schools illegal (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). While women were admitted to colleges much earlier, their educational access, opportunities, and participation occurred with officially and unofficially differentiated curriculums for over a century (Sadker & Sadker). Women typically did not have access to the same campus resources, such as the library, and were not allowed entrance to some programs, such as medical schools (Sadker & Sadker).

The most recent American Association of University Women (Corbett, Hill, & St. Rose, 2008) study revealed that women were earning 57% of the bachelor's degrees awarded in the United States, in comparison to men. Glenn (2004) found a significant rise in income for females who earn a college degree with males earning a comparable income with or without college, based on a five-year study. Clark (2006) further suggested that it is "more expensive not to go to college" (p. 59) especially for women. Blackhurst and Auger (2008) suggest that females are more likely to attend college because of the need for further education to achieve their career goals.

Problem Statement

While a continuing gap exists between low and high income students attending college, little has been written about the transitional experiences of rural, low-income students going from high school to college. This research study addressed this gap in that it documents the transition from high school to college (or other post-secondary experiences) for five rural girls in an economically depressed area of West Virginia.

We know that a smaller percentage of rural students are attending college (Hebel, 2006) and that a college education can be a sound economic investment for females (Glenn, 2004). College-going barriers exist along the lines of rurality based on transportation, finances, and resources (Davies, et al, 2006). The majority of studies have focused on social class and college going among urban students, whereas little attention has been given to the study of rural, post-secondary experiences, especially the transitional experiences of students who desire a college education.

In addition, there is a national need to double the number of low- and moderate-income students entering post-secondary institutions (Christie, 2008). State-funded college recruitment programs were found to be disconnected and provided a redundancy of services while inconsistently meeting all students' needs (Perna, et al., 2008). Findings revealed a need for a more overarching organizational network to be in place to reach and provide services to all students who are interested in attending college. According to Perna, et al., little is known about program interactions that create a smoother transition from high school to college.

West Virginia public high school graduation rates have decreased from 78% in 1994 to 71% in 2004. The decline in high school graduation rates means that, for more

young people, the dream of earning a college degree is destroyed. The college-going rates of West Virginia high school students for fall 2005 were 59.3% and the national average is 55.4%, but in rural areas of the state college-going rates were much lower.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to contribute to the literature on the transition from high school to post-secondary educational institutions for rural, female students in an economically disadvantaged county in West Virginia. The research:

- 1) Explored how high school girls in a rural Appalachian community perceive their educational experiences—past, present, and future.
- 2) Identified and explored factors that enabled and/or constrained their journeys into post-secondary studies. (Where do they end up, how, and why?)

According to Bloom (2007), “the time of transition and choices about the future is under-explored in both the literature on secondary schools and higher education; yet it seemed like a crucial one in understanding why high school students do or do not go on to college, and how they arrive at particular institutions if they do” (p. 348). Furthermore, few studies have explored the lived experiences of rural students in negotiating their way to college.

Significance of the Study

Research on the college-going experiences of rural youth would be of interest to county education officials by providing research data and analysis about students making their way into post-secondary education as well as for college recruiters to understand the lived transitional experiences of rural students.

This study helps fill the gap in literature on social class in relation to students transitioning from high school to college in rural Appalachia. According to Fine and Burns (2003), “class is lived, reproduced, sustained, and challenged through social and historical relations, ideologies, and institutional structures of privilege, power, and inequality. Perhaps no one study can accomplish all this, but the field may need a more ambitious reach on ‘class’” (p. 848). This study explored issues of social class, gender, and the transition from high school to post-secondary education in the context of an economically disadvantaged area in rural Appalachia in the United States.

A better understanding of the transitional experiences of rural girls attending post-secondary institutions will allow administrators and teachers in schools to gain a clearer and fuller view of the risks and enabling factors that are present. By gaining this knowledge, schools can more effectively meet the potential needs of students who are interested in attending post-secondary institutions. In addition, recruiters at post-secondary institutions can better assist and meet the needs of rural students.

Methods

Collaborative Ethnography and Collective Case Study

A collaborative ethnographic case study allowed for a deep description of post high school transitional experiences of five girls from Livingston County, West Virginia. Within our research, I acted as an advocate/advisor during the transitional period from high school to college.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling: As an extension of a previous collaborative ethnography, I continued my collaborative relationships with five of the girls, who previously were

Girls' Resiliency Program members. In addition to the five key participants, I engaged in research with educators in the county, as well as financial aid officers and recruiters in higher education. I used snowball sampling to determine my other participants, allowing the key participants to recommend participants for further investigation.

Data Collection

Through collaborative efforts to understand the lived experiences of the girls as they transitioned from high school to college, the participants and I used a variety of ethnographic tools such as educational life histories, observation and participant fieldnotes, interviews, writing prompts, photographs, and artwork, as well as report cards and projects, and other relevant school-related documents. I met with the girls together as a group twice a month with interspersed individual meetings throughout the months during their senior year (2008-2009), their transitional summer to college in the fall of 2009, their freshman year (2009-2010) and the first semester of their sophomore year (2010) as well as their current situations in the following semester of Spring 2011.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Students actively explored their educational life histories through a series of individual interviews. Their educational life histories were a starting point for single-case analyses of the five participants' enabling and constraining factors as they transitioned from high school to college. Participants and I looked for patterns and themes to emerge as commonalities and differences were revealed. I conducted a cross-case analysis of their findings to explore emergent themes located in their experiences as they transitioned from high school to college. The themes in the cross-case analysis were

interpreted using Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, looking at the influence of social systems on my participants' human agency.

Strengths and Limitations

Qualitative research focuses on a small sample of participants in their own, natural environments. This qualitative study provided a rich description of five girls and their experiences in rural Appalachia as they negotiated the transition from high school to post-secondary education. The purpose was not to generalize to a target population. Qualitative methods allowed for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of particular participants.

Through analysis of literature and their personal research, Ward and Benjamin (2004) found that there was an absence of knowledge about the intersections of gender, social class, and schooling among middle-class white girls' lives, especially in the context of more remote rural settings. Within the lives of white girls, it is important to understand how their lives differ, as well as the commonalities that exist among them (Ward & Benjamin). Qualitative research offered a means of understanding girls' experiences and allowing their voices to be heard (Lawless, 1993).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Author's note: Because of the emergent design of qualitative research, the literature review was an ongoing analysis of literature that continued through the process of data collection and analysis. New issues emerged as the study proceeded. As I explored the literature on social class, rurality, and gender, especially as it pertained to the transition from high school to post-secondary education, I was able to see intersections between and across those categories. In this chapter, I discuss the literature on each of these issues, but I am aware that they overlapped as experienced in the lives of my participants.

Overview

The focus of this study was to understand the lived experiences of five girls in an economically disadvantaged, rural community as they transitioned from their senior year of high school to their post-secondary positions in institutions of higher education or elsewhere. Research into social class often explores the intersections between finances, social structures, and culture that play roles in the perpetuation of the status quo (Fine, 2003). I explored the literature on the intersections of social class and education, urban and rural inequalities in educational opportunities, gender, and schooling, in each case as it pertains to post-secondary attendance.

Social Class and Schooling

The United States ideology that hard work and determination in school will lead to financial rewards is not always realized because of differences in material and social resources. Also, for poor and working-class students, post-secondary education is not

always seen as a tangible ticket to a better life (Howard & Levine, 2004). For first-generation college-going students, role models who have earned a college degree and can provide guidance are lacking in areas of poverty (Bloom, 2007). Frequently, poor and working-class, first-generation college students feel that they are living in two worlds: “The worlds are dramatically different in terms of experience, in terms of values” (Howard & Levine, 2004, p. 22). Students living within dual cultures experience a tendency to assimilate to the middle/upper-class culture to survive in education (hooks, 2000). Teachers, who are frequently from middle-class backgrounds, expect students to behave according to middle-class values and expectations, despite the fact that they were raised according to working-class values (Brown, 2005).

As there is a rise in the level of poverty within a school, “the conditions for academic success (finances, teacher quality, educator stability, small school size, facilities) decline” (Fine & Burns, 2003, p. 843), leaving students in economically disadvantaged areas struggling with fewer resources in their schools as well as their homes. Without educational resources, students are less likely to achieve academic success in high school and continue on to post-secondary educational opportunities. Education is seen as the most plausible way to climb up the social class ladder out of poverty and into the middle class, allowing the easiest transformation of social class status (Clark, 2006; Fine & Burns, 2003). Our United States ideology stresses the importance of hard work as a means of social mobility, while our social structures influence our values of education that are reproduced (Chadel & Neitzel, 2005). The view of social class mobility based on merit is seductive but not always realized because of the lack of resources within schools that contribute to academic success (Fine &

Burns, 2003). In this view, people are expected to prosper according to individual effort, but the social structures that reproduce social class and inequalities are not acknowledged.

Traditionally, educational institutions “structure, enable, obstruct, and silence class-based advantages, opportunities, shame, hope, critique, and activism” (Fine & Burns, 2003, p. 847). The focus on educational achievement is perceived to be an advancement that is purely based on merit, ignoring the external variables that play into the education that a child receives. Educational resources, available at home and accessible at school, vary depending on the social class structure of the school. Thomas (2008) found that 65.5% of low-income students had access to the Internet in their homes, while middle- and upper-class students had 86.7% access. In addition, Gorard and See (2008) found that students are academically influenced by their prior educational experiences, as well as the resources within their homes, such as books and their parents’ reading attainment. High schools have a tendency to “[misrepresent] class as if it were largely carried around in the heads of youth and young adults, and therefore transformed simply by a change in attitude” (Fine & Burns, 2003, p. 845), rather than taking a closer look at the underlying cultural values. Social class goes beyond the purely psychological and financial, but can be cultural experiences that are reproduced.

Social Class and Gender

Chadel and Neitzel (2005) found that girls are “more cognizant of personal conditions and cues of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ than boys” (p. 434). Girls were more likely than boys to recognize class inequalities and to emphasize the need for societal changes to remedy the inequalities (Chadel & Neitzel). According to Bettis and Adams (2005)

“socialization theories maintained that females learn cultural scripts that determine normative female behavior through direct reinforcement and by modeling processes” (p. 9). Positive female role models have the ability to empower young girls in positive directions for their future (Alloway & Gilbert, 2004).

In a study researching the influence of social class on a group of white females including both working-class and middle-class students, Brown (2005) found that working-class girls came to the classroom with a strong work ethic, outspoken behaviors, and care-giving tendencies, while middle-class girls were more likely to conform to feminine expectations (soft-spoken, agreeable, and neat). The middle-class girls were more likely to conform to the feminine ideal because they “understand the rules and codes of the culture of power” (p. 154). Middle-class girls were more likely to perpetuate middle-class cultural values.

Post-secondary Education

Students from upper classes are significantly more likely to attend college than students from lower classes (Glenn, 2004; Smyth & Hannan, 2007). Two-thirds of college students have parents with professional backgrounds, whereas only one-fourth of college students are from working-class families (Smyth & Hannan). Working-class students are more likely to pursue a lucrative associate’s or bachelor’s degree that requires little additional education, while upper-class females tend to pursue liberal arts bachelor’s degrees to be followed by specialized master’s degrees “where their homebred cultural capital can pay off” (Davies & Guppy, 1997, p. 1429). In addition, Gorard and See (2008) found that students from middle and upper classes were more likely to select majors in physics and chemistry while attending college.

Stuber (2006) found that social class perceptions of middle- and upper-class students excluded the experiences of those of lower classes because the middle- and upper-class students have not experienced the struggle to meet basic material needs. For both working-class and upper-middle class participants, the tendency is to compare themselves, as a social group, to those who are perceived as more privileged. Within different social classes, differing cultural values and behaviors were prized and held up as virtues. For working-class students, hard work and cooperation were valued, while middle-class students valued independence and competition.

Parents of low-income children have frequently experienced academic failure and do not hold expectations for their children of attending college. Also, parents struggling financially are constantly in a state of survival and an expensive education for their children is one of the last things on their minds (Howard & Levine, 2004). Working with low-income students preparing for college, Bloom (2007) found that “students grapple with micro-economics of day-to-day survival. Many of the costs of college are invisible to middle-class adults or young people because they do not live on a tight budget” (p. 351). Bloom suggested that a student’s failure to enter higher education may be misinterpreted as the lack of motivation when the reality of their social and economic situation makes the financial decision to attend college impossible.

Scholarships. Recently, there has been an increase in merit-based scholarships, rather than need-based scholarships (Gorard & See, 2008; Howard & Levine, 2004). The irony of receiving a scholarship for exemplary academic achievement is that often the merit has been achieved because of resources available to wealthier students who would have attended college anyway (Howard & Levine, 2004). Merit-based scholarships

ignore the underlying economic situations that produce higher scholastic achievement, such as educational resources within the home.

Privileged students are increasingly receiving more scholarships based on their merit, while students with fewer resources must take out student loans to pay for college attendance (Howard & Levine, 2004), increasing the amount above the “sticker price” that higher-income students’ parents pay outright. The irony is that lower-income students end up paying more for a comparable education because of the interest accrued through the student loan process (Howard & Levine, 2004). In addition, within the next five years college tuition is expected to increase five percent (Clark, 2006).

Financial aid. According to Howard and Levine (2004), the financial aid policies of higher education institutions have deviated from the original intention, providing accessible education to all. “Historically, higher education provided financial aid only to those in need” (Howard & Levine, 2004, p. 21-22). President Truman commissioned a study of higher education institutions in 1947 and found five common barriers to higher education access: “race, gender, income, religion, and geographic location” (Howard & Levine, 2004). Progress has been made in regard to race, gender, religion, and geographic locations of the campuses of higher education, but income continues to discourage post-secondary attendance (Howard & Levine, 2004).

During the Reagan era, belief in the national investment in higher education for all students ended with the responsibility of college funding placed upon the individual, and, as a result, fewer grants were awarded for the education of the financial needy and loans became the norm for financial aid (Howard & Levine, 2004). Similar to the changes in the United States from grant funds to student loans, the United Kingdom has

placed more financial obligations on the students and their families, which most influences working-class students' decisions to attend post-secondary education (Kettley, Whitehead, & Raffan, 2008). The financial aspects of college attendance have left working-class students who possess the academic ability struggling with decisions about the cost of attendance.

Access and opportunities of first-generation post-secondary attendance predict students' future financial security, yet the financial aspects of attendance frequently end higher educational aspirations for low-income students. In order to receive financial assistance, lower income students "must make their way through *more* paperwork than middle-class students, with *less* knowledge and support" (Bloom, 2005, p. 72). Ironically, the increase in paperwork for first-generation, low-income students must be negotiated by students and their families who have the least experience with the financial aid process. The financial expenses that accompany the college going experience "prevent almost half of all college-qualified low-income students from going to a four-year college" (Bloom, 2005, p. 79). The cost of college attendance is compounded by the preliminary expenses of college entrance exams and application fees, among other costs that are required prior to admissions. Bloom (2007) made the point that "low-income students pursuing four-year degrees must borrow more than higher-income students, meaning that (given interest payments) they in fact pay *more* for the same college education" (p. 354).

Barriers to college attendance. Low-income students face a variety of barriers associated with college attendance. The primary barrier to college attendance is the cost of attendance (Clark, 2006; Glenn, 2004; Gorard & See, 2008; Plimpton & Quint, 2007;

Porter, 2006). In addition, barriers for low-income, first-generation students include “lack of college-going knowledge, preparation, expectations, guidance, and encouragement” (Corrigan & Hartle, 2007, p. 10). Porter (2006) found that the United States was experiencing a loss of 1.4 to 2.4 million bachelor’s degrees to the financial inability of low to moderate income academically prepared students due to lack of finances within this decade.

Perna, et al. (2008), stated that potential barriers to college attendance are “inequalities of familial cultural and social capital; inequality of resources in neighborhoods and communities; lack of peer support for academic achievement; racism; inequalities in K-12 schools including unequal distribution of well-qualified teachers; segregation of Black and Hispanic students; poor high school counseling; low expectations and aspirations; high dropout rates; and, limited financial resources” (p. 245). In addition, Bloom (2007) found that low-income, first-generation students:

must put their self-esteem on the line, by taking the chance that they will be rejected by the world they hope to enter; they must brave subtle and not-so-subtle messages about who belongs in the world of higher education and who doesn’t; they must shoulder the weight on their own, their family’s and their community’s hopes and fears about moving out of poverty and into an unfamiliar middle-class orbit; and far too often, they must make this journey alone and unaided. (p. 356)

The anticipated cultural differences of higher education might have low-income high school students asking: “Are they prepared? Will they be able to fit in? Who can help them if they falter? And what will failure mean about them and to their families and communities?” (Bloom, 2007, p. 357). Low-income students face conflicting cultural

messages in middle-class, higher education environments that contribute to self-doubt and lack of confidence. Low-income students feel pressure to conform to the middle-class values associated with higher education—a world with which they are unfamiliar (Davies & Guppy, 1997).

Bloom (2007) noticed that “middle- and upper-class students comfortably take credit for their successes, while poor and working-class students and parents take responsibility for their failures—both too often unaware of the difference in resources that lie beneath the differing outcomes” (p. 363). With the availability of educational resources within the middle-class homes and schools, middle-class students own their accomplishments, in comparison to working-class students who lack access to equal educational resources yet accept criticism based on their ability.

Rural/Appalachia and Educational Opportunities

Child poverty in the United States accounts for 14.5 million students and is a challenge that is shared by urban and rural communities (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). In poorer geographic areas, the available property tax base is lower, resulting in less money per pupil for schooling. These poor districts “are disproportionately dependent on federal and state funds and are consequently disproportionately affected by the largely external political and social forces that determine government funding” (p. 128). In rural areas, the poverty is largely invisible, and thus considered less of an issue than in the urban areas where poverty is visible (hooks, 2000; Lapping, 2007). Rural poverty frequently “[remains] hidden to Americans, tucked away in the mountains of Appalachia,” as well as other rural areas of America (Chadel & Neitzel, 2005, p. 16). In rural areas, poverty is more hidden from societal view, thus creating an invisibility that may be a reason that

rural poverty is under-researched. Social science research has tended to emphasize the experiences of those in urban areas, while poverty in rural Appalachian areas has been neglected by researchers (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Spatig, et al., 2001). Research in rural areas may be less likely to occur because of the lack of access to rural areas by researchers and media representatives, as well as stereotyping and invisibility due to geographic location (Lapping, 2007).

In the United States, 244 of 250 poorest counties (98%) are located in rural areas (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). In addition, the “most distressed education systems exist in rural states that are chronically financially depressed, deeply affected by global economic change, and buffeted by substantial out migration of talented young people and families” (p. 126). Such disparities are not remedied by federal contributions to public education, which account for only six to eight percent of the resources needed to fund schools, while state and local funds contribute the remaining funds to support public schools (Truscott & Truscott).

As noted by Perry (2007), common problems in rural areas are lack of “access to health care, immigration of low-wage workers, the need for better schools, and the loss of industrial jobs” (p. 10). In research with rural, academically at-risk students, three factors emerged that contribute to academic problems: transience, single parenthood, and family history of risk (Storer, 1995). Ali and Saunders (2006) found that in rural Appalachian areas students are more dependent on the advice of family members, and, when family members have experienced academic failure, they are unable to provide the needed academic advice to their children. In addition, they found that parents were unfamiliar with the academic preparation needed for college as well as the application process.

Secondary schools may be doing a “poor job” of preparing students for their transition to college (Gandara, et al., 2005, p. 258). In the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, there are “severe pressures on teachers to produce short-term knowledge for standardized tests that are gates to higher education” (Fine & Weis, 2003, p. 3). Schools that experience the most pressure for improvements on standardized tests scores are generally those in poorer geographical areas. Due to pressures to retain specific knowledge, students, who recognize the importance of standardized test scores, are forced to negotiate success through less authentic learning situations. In addition, students in rural areas have “less computer access, use, and skills” than middle- and upper-class students residing in more populated areas (Thomas, 2008, p. 13). Thomas suggested that schools should increase the access to computers and increase computer technology across subject matter because the need for computer skills is becoming more prevalent in our global economy.

In addition to Advanced Placement courses, many high schools offer dual-credit programs in which courses offered meet the requirements for high school graduation as well as meeting college course requirements (Gertge, 2008). Gertge suggested that dual credit programs are particularly useful in rural areas where the high school might be located far from a college campus. Gertge found that admission procedures for the dual credit programs were initially conducted by the principal or counselor, creating a bias on student selection. By the seventh year of Gertge’s study, the post-secondary institution required that the students meet placement scores for admission to the dual credit programs.

As is the case in Livingston County, West Virginia, rural schools are often financed by low property tax bases. Livingston County experienced a state mandated takeover because of poor school building conditions and poor standardized test results. According to Truscott and Truscott (2005) state control over rural community education reduces parental influence over a system that is controlled outside of the community.

Teacher Expectations

In rural areas, teachers are often acquainted with a student's family and community and develop expectations of the students, for better or worse, based on that knowledge (Spatig, et al., 2001). As is true elsewhere, in rural schools, academic expectations of teachers are influenced by their perceptions of students' "family structure and living arrangements, siblings' prior school success, peer group, and 'attitude'" (Parrott, Spatig, Kusimo, Carter, & Keyes, 2000, p. 51). Brown (2005) found that teachers in rural areas recognized aggressive behaviors from girls that were the result of family problems, but experienced difficulty negotiating a genuine dialogue with the girls.

Teachers and school personnel expect girls to be harder working, more motivated, and to excel in cooperative learning more than boys (Myhill & Jones, 2006; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). According to Myhill and Jones, "teacher pupil interaction is reinforcing the social stereotypes of female compliance and conformity and male challenge and individuality" (p. 111). As is true elsewhere, often in rural areas of the United States girls are expected to perform better with written work, while boys' literacy is more evidenced through verbal communication skills (Puckett, 1992). Pegg and Panizzon (2007) found lower benchmark scores for writing in rural areas, consistent across grade levels. Frequently, girls who live in smaller communities are viewed "more

holistically—for their character, family backgrounds, behavior and talents” (Pipher, 1994, p. 56). In rural areas, girls struggle to negotiate their independence, while potentially breaking cultural and familial values that they carry to school (Pipher).

In rural areas, just as in urban communities, girls are treated differently than boys for their protection. According to Spatig, et al (2001), even in rural communities “it is not uncommon for girls to experience danger that is explicitly sexual in nature” (p. 71). In such protective contexts, girls criticize parental and institutional restrictions on them, compared to the perception of boys’ freedom (Spatig, et al., 2001).

College Going for Girls

In addition to high teacher expectations, a study in Ireland found two additional enabling factors for college attendance: flexibility of course scheduling and guidance counseling for higher education (Smyth & Hannan, 2007). Alloway and Gilbert (2004) and Egan (1993) found that success in college for rural females begins with personal empowerment that comes from small academic successes that lead to their search for larger accomplishments. Strong female role models contribute to feelings of empowerment that allow rural girls to accomplish academic goals in a patriarchal culture (Alloway & Gilbert). College does not only offer rural females the opportunity for an advanced education, but it also offers possibilities that break the cultural stereotypes that rural females encounter on a daily basis.

Spatig, et al. (2001) found that low-income Appalachian girls, despite obstacles, still maintained their desire to attend college after high school and aspired to professional careers. According to Alloway and Gilbert (2004), “a university offered a means of escape from attitudes and values towards women in the relatively patriarchal and ‘masks’

rural communities they lived in” (p. 106). Ali and Saunders (2006) found that often the escape into college life was masked by unrealistic expectations of college.

Family supports for higher educational opportunities for rural females sometimes take the form of “internalized messages . . . from those who demonstrated tenacity in difficult situations and who embodied strength and integrity, thereby fulfilling self-object functions” (Egan, 1993, p. 271). The value of a higher education for low-income students may not be realized because of the lack of role models and mentors who have prospered because of their education (Howard & Levine, 2004). A lack of role models and realistic visions of college education hinder college attendance because students have not seen success stories within their communities. Such messages from role models may be important for first-generation, college attending, rural females who draw upon the strength of their female elders in their journeys towards post-secondary degrees.

Gender and Education

In the early nineteenth century, girls began attending high school in single-sex classrooms using a gender-specific curriculum (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). At the time, the primary reason for educating females was to create better mothers who could provide a basic education for their child’s development within the home and to prepare teachers who would be able to educate children until the teachers could become wives and mothers (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). High schools continued to offer a separate curriculum that was gender specific (e.g. home economics for girls and industrial arts for boys). In 1972, Title IX was passed, making sexual discrimination in public education illegal. At that time, schools were seen as “the vehicle to liberate the potential in girls” (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 35).

Despite the legalized equality in schools, boys are five times more likely to receive teachers' attention and twelve times more likely to speak up in class (Pipher, 1994). Sadker and Zittleman (2005) also found that "teachers call on boys more often than girls, wait longer for boys' answers, and provide more precise feedback to boys" (pp. 29-30). Both girls and boys recognize that teachers spend more time reprimanding and disciplining boys (Myhill & Jones, 2006). Optimal instruction for females should utilize cooperative projects and independent learning (Myhill & Jones, 2006), and Pipher (1994) recommended the use of gender segregated classrooms for studying math and science.

Even within the new landscape of educational equality, students learn appropriate, or culturally acceptable, behaviors at home and continue to define themselves at school based on expectations of teachers and peers. Despite early success for girls in primary school, during middle school girls' academic achievement declines (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Frequently, girls are rewarded for compliant and docile behavior and are seen as people pleasers who are worried about the impression of others (Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Zittleman, 2005). The majority of teachers' gender bias occurs as socially learned behavior that is reproduced without the conscious decisions of teachers (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Girls feel pressure to fit in with peers, especially during the high school years. According to Bettis and Adams (2005), "adolescence is a particularly significant time for girls as it signals the time in which girls must make sense of the contradictory messages they receive about their bodies" (p. 11). Adolescent girls must negotiate how they, and others, perceive the changes in their bodies. During early adolescent years, girls' "IQ

scores drop and their math and science scores plummet” (Pipher, 1994, p. 19). Pipher further explained that girls’ resilience decreases as adolescence brings insecurity and conformity. Also, according to Pipher, girls are struggling more as adolescents because of the change in the nuclear family and extended families and are navigating puberty with less security, family support, and time for reflection.

In the mid-1990s, Pipher (1994) and Sadker and Sadker (1994) found that, during adolescence, girls identify more closely with peer groups and intelligence can become a perceived liability. Sadker and Sadker further explained that the intelligent girls are the most at-risk of self-esteem issues because of the conflicting messages they receive. Peer pressure and the need to conform to popular fads transform girls’ schooling focus from academic achievement to peer acceptance. When academic achievement becomes a liability for girls, they choose social acceptance over academic pursuits (Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). More recently, Bettis, Jordan, and Montgomery (2005) found that girls choose social achievement during adolescence because they “are constantly judged and compared to others in body shape, clothing, and ultimately their way of being female” (p. 74). According to Pipher (1994), “ironically, bright and sensitive girls are most at risk for problems” (p. 43) because they understand the cultural messages that they are receiving but do not have the coping and interpretive mechanisms to make sense of conflicting messages that our society presents. Girls are given conflicting messages in school and by society; they feel the pressure to become feminized and silent, while being told that they can do anything with their lives (Pipher).

Due to the physical dangers that exist for girls in schools, Pipher (1994) recommends that “schools could offer clear sexual and physical harassment policies that

protect students and establish norms for conduct toward the opposite sex” (p. 290).

Sadker and Sadker (1994) found that both physical and verbal sexual harassment toward female students is prevalent in high schools. Spatig, et al. (2001) found that even girls in rural areas are concerned about their physical safety as well as about the presence of drugs and violence associated with drug use.

Despite the dangers and risks growing up as a girl, “girls today are being taught that self-determination, individualism, self-efficacy, independence, sexual subjectivity, and assertiveness are all desirable traits of the new ideal girl” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 9-10). On the other hand, some contradictory evidence shows that teachers still expect female learners to be docile, use appropriate behavior, and excel at language skills (Myhill & Jones, 2006).

Curriculum and Instruction

In 1918, the “Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education” revised high school curriculum; high schools were not just educating students to enter college but providing vocational experiences to gain skills for the workforce (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Bettis, Jordan, and Montgomery (2005) suggested creating a curriculum “that made explicit the privileges and limitations associated with [social groups] would be a curriculum about the everyday lives and everyday identity work in which these girls were so passionately engaged” (p. 81). Plimpton and Quint (2007) recognized that students’ academic track is more likely to predict students’ college attendance than their parent’s education or income. For high school students to follow a track of study other than college preparatory “is to consign [students] to a future of dead-end jobs” (Bloom,

2005, p. 66). Because a college degree is a prerequisite of economic mobility, all students should be held to the expectations of college preparatory curriculums.

Pegg and Panizzon (2007) found that girls out-performed boys in reading literacy in most countries. Boys are expected to excel in math and science, while girls are expected to excel in English and the arts (Myhill & Jones, 2006). An increase in math and science courses in a girls' curriculum will increase the likelihood of college attendance (Cho, 2007).

According to "The Benefits of AP Courses" (2007), high school students taking advanced placement (AP) college courses in high school are more likely to attend college and graduate within four years. Perna, et al (2008) recognized predictors of college attendance as "academic preparation and achievement, financial resources, knowledge and information about college, and family support" (p. 246). Dual credit programs, like AP courses, create challenging coursework for students who tend to take easier, redundant courses during their senior year of high school (Gertge, 2008).

Assessment

With NCLB legislation, student assessment is continually being judged according to standardized assessment. Dimitriadis (2005) suggests that standardized testing is disconnected from the everyday lives of youth and an inaccurate indicator of knowledge. The American College Testing Program (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are used as gauges to judge the likelihood of college students' academic success, and females typically lag behind males in standardized academic assessment scores, with the exception of language skills (Halpern, Benbow, Geary, Gur, Hyde, & Gernsbacher, 2007; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). The reliance on test scores creates a system of opportunity,

access, and scholarships in post-secondary institutions (Sadker & Sadker). Despite the evidence of girls' lower standardized test scores, the ACT was found to be less gender-biased than the SAT. While the ACT composite scores showed boys scoring higher, girls showed an advantage in the reading category (Sadker & Sadker). Despite the low test scores on standardized tests, girls traditionally earn higher grade point averages (GPA) (Halpern, et al., 2007; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). The differences in gendered academic achievement between the two (test scores and GPA) were explained by lower expectations and compliant behavior that influence teachers' methods of grading (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

College Going

The higher aspirations of girls, than boys, going to college might relate to the girls' desire to escape their present circumstance of oppression. In Blackhurst and Auger's (2008) study of gender and college-going expectations, the elementary and middle school participants, 82% whose parents attended college, revealed no gender differences in the desire to attend college but did find that girls' career choices indicate a higher need for a post-secondary degree.

Women are still earning a lower income (.77 per dollar) for comparable jobs than men (Corbett, Hill, & St. Rose, 2008; Kingsbury, 2006). With the unequal salaries, is college tuition worth the investment for girls' educations? The cost-benefit calculation for females earning a college degree has been shown to provide a better future income for women, while male incomes are not as affected by a college degree (Glenn, 2004). Kettley, et al. (2008) found that female students worry more than male students about the financial issues of college attendance at the University of Cambridge. Female students

experienced more anxiety about the financial burden on their families and how their future financial loan status will affect their future families (Kettley, et al.).

History of access to higher education. In 1837, Oberlin College became a coeducational institution, but “women only began to enter previously male colleges in significant numbers after the Civil War” (Bok, 2006, p. 211). The loss of male students to the war created the financial need of tuition income from female students (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). At such a time, most women were earning degrees in education and received a specific, gendered curriculum, such as teacher education (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). The capacity of the female intellect remained undocumented, but women were gaining acceptance into institutions of higher education (Bok, 2006). As male soldiers returned home after the Civil War, women became less welcome at universities, and well-established universities opened women’s colleges to meet their specific educational needs (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Between 1900 and 1930, the college attendance rates of males and females were equal, with women majoring predominantly in the field of education (Kingsbury, 2006). After World War II, the GI Bill created a surge in the number of males who were attending college (Kingsbury). The percentage of females attending higher education institutions has increased substantially over the past decades (Cho, 2007).

Werts’ study, published in 1968, “A Comparison of Male vs. Female College Attendance Probabilities,” reveals that at the time of the study, 1961, the national percentage of males attending college was 58%. The study reported a higher percentage of college-going women from upper classes and higher academic achievement than college-going men. Werts also discovered that as social class decreases, the percentage

of females in college declines. For females who come from high-income families, enabling factors for college attendance were found in the additional resources in families and schools (p. 108). The enabling factors for college entrance have changed little over the past four decades.

With the passage of Title IX in 1972, public schools and colleges were required to provide an equitable educational experience for females (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). According to Cho (2007), female college attendance has risen twenty-four percentage points over the past three decades. The increase in female college attendance rates may be due in large part to improved high school preparation (Cho; Christie, 2008). Cho explained that secondary factors that contribute to females' improved high school preparation are: an increase in homework, smooth grade transition, and appropriate behavior. Other enabling factors for female college attendance are the increased academic rigor in high school and actual experiences visiting college campuses (Plimpton & Quint, 2007).

Since 1982, the United States has seen an increase in the percentage of women who are attending post-secondary educational programs, in comparison to men (Halpern, et al., 2007). Smyth and Hannon (2007) found that females in Ireland were more likely to apply for college than males. In 2002, Kingsbury (2006) found that women accounted for 57% of the United States college population, and suggested that colleges are actively recruiting males to balance out the demographic population. In fact, for some colleges the acceptance rates for males have increased by four percent (Kingsbury).

While attending college, males are more likely than females to study at prestigious universities and choose lucrative majors (Davies & Guppy, 1997). In other

words, “females face a double disadvantage of entering less prestigious institutions and less lucrative fields” of study than males (p. 1431).

Conclusion

Based on social class positioning, gender, and geographic location, students experience differences in access and opportunity to post-secondary educational attendance. Middle and upper class students experience smoother transitions to college based on opportunity and expectations. Once on campus, the middle- and upper-class cultural values are dominant in the environment, requiring working class students to negotiate within a new system of values and behaviors.

Low-income females have been found to benefit from a college degree more than males, who are more likely to find a decent income through vocational jobs (Glenn, 2004). While more females are attending college, middle- and upper-class females have higher attendance rates than females from lower income families. Female students have been found to attend colleges that are less prestigious, enroll in courses and programs of study that are less lucrative, and continue to speak less in the college classroom (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Halpern, et al. (2007) further stated that students from prestigious backgrounds are more likely to major in science and technology.

Rural students are geographically located farther from institutions of higher education and must negotiate within a different environment. Frequently, rural high schools offer fewer opportunities to educational resources that can prepare them for college-level academic coursework. Rural students were found to rely on themselves and their family members for college-going advice, while parents are frequently without college-going procedural knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Author's note: In similar studies on the transition from high school to college, researchers became involved in high school college preparatory classes (Bloom 2007). As a former academic counselor at a college, I held back on giving academic advice to my participants during their junior year of high school. During their senior year of high school, I took a more active role as they negotiated their way through the college admissions and financial aid processes. I was approached by various college recruitment programs, offering to waive admission fees, provide advice and assistance from career planning to filling out financial aid documents. I struggled with the role that I took as a researcher, not wanting to bias my findings but realized that I could not ignore the needs of the students who could perhaps be more easily met with my assistance. Therefore, I expected that my influence could change the circumstances of my key participants as they negotiated their way through high school and into post-secondary educational institutions.

Collaborative Ethnography

The silencing of the voices of marginalized students “removes any documentation that all is not well with the workings of the U.S. economy, race and gender relations, and public schooling as the route to class mobility” (Fine, 2003, p. 15). Collaborative ethnography allows researchers to gain a clearer understanding and interpretation of those students whose voices and lived experiences are too often invisible. Studies of rural America tend to reflect outsider positions looking into a different culture from their

privileged positions as researchers. However, collaborative research includes an insider's view by allowing participants' perspectives and voices to emerge (Thorp, 2006).

Patton (2002) acknowledged that collaborative research exists on a continuum with the "degree and nature of involvement vary[ing] widely" (p. 185). Collaborative ethnography can engage research participants from the conception of the project to the final written analysis (Lassiter, 2005a). On the other end of the continuum, collaboration can take the minimal form recommended by Stake (1995) in the use of member checking, where the "actor is asked to review the material for accuracy and palatability" (p. 115). Frequently, collaborative ethnographic texts are written as accessible to the researched population (Gandara, Horn, & Orfield, 2005; Lassiter, 2005b; Patton, 2002).

Lassiter (2005a) suggested that including participants in data analysis moves the privilege of interpretation from the researcher to include those participants being studied, in order to create co-understandings of their lived experiences. In this way, collaborative ethnography breaks with the tradition of some schools of qualitative research by changing "who has control and who has the last word" (p. 11). Likewise, Patton (2002) considered collaborative research as a sharing of power with research participants. Collaborative research can "dissolve traditional boundaries between investigator and investigated, forming instead a community of inquiry" where the most pressing topics come to the surface through conversations and observations (Thorp, 2006, p. 119).

Collaborative ethnography involves the discovering of issues central to the lives of those who participate in a research project from the inception. According to Thorp, "by remaining open to the unknown, we allow space for people to engage with their most pressing issues" (p. 146). Through a dialogue with the five female students with whom I

conducted research, relevant issues and concerns about future college aspirations emerged. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “The direction you will travel comes after you have been collecting the data” (p. 6). As a result of my involvement in a prior collaborative research project with these girls as part of a former youth development program, I learned about an issue the participants found important—college attendance after high school.

The benefits afforded to collaborative research participants are a co-understanding of findings and the development of evaluation and critical thinking skills (Patton, 2002). As suggested by Guishard, Fine, Doyle, Jackson, Staten, and Webb (2005), I involved my participants in the research process to help gather, interpret, and write the data. I involved the five girls from Livingston County High School as co-researchers during their senior years and after graduation to find out how their college aspirations played out.

Participants

Key Participants

Participation in a prior collaborative ethnographic research project introduced me to a group of girls who were members of a youth development program that has ended due to a loss of funding and leadership. I was interested in touching base with them and planned a visit to the high school at the beginning of the school year (2007-2008) following the year (2006-2007) of my prior research commitment. Of the twelve girls involved in the program the prior year, five showed up for a lunch meeting with me,

Marycait, Jennifer, Cassi, Ashley, and Sara². From the prior experiences with the youth development program, I was drawn to the students' broader experiences as individuals, rather than only as youth development program members. During that first visit with the five girls, we discussed their classes and experiences after the program had closed. Three of the girls were enrolled in an Advanced Placement (AP) English class during their junior year. I asked the girls if they were interested in going to college, and I was surprised by their adamant agreement. I listened to their elaborate plans of where they would attend college and what their majors would be. They discussed moving into apartments and being roommates as they laid out their plans for the future. While their ideas about majors and career choices changed from visit to visit, their expectations remained consistent about attending college in the future. If the current college going rate for Livingston County (42%) applied to these five girls, only two would attend college (West Virginia College Going, n.d.).

My key participants were comprised of the former members of the Girls' Resiliency Program that I originally worked with during my research internship during the spring semester of 2007. Out of the twelve participants from the Girls' Resiliency Program from 2006-2007, five of the girls agreed to participate in this research project looking at their experiences with the transition from high school to college.

The five key participants were white girls who were juniors at Livingston County High School. I worked with them during their senior year and through their educational

² Key participants' names were not changed, per their request to be acknowledged, but all other proper names have been changed for anonymity.

decisions following their graduation from high school. Two of the girls' parents attended post-secondary education; one girl's parents both had law degrees. The remaining three girls grew up with working-class parents and would be first-generation college attendees in their families.

Other Participants

In addition to these five key research participants, I was interested in exploring the perceptions of school personnel, such as the principals, school guidance counselors, teachers, and relevant college recruiters. I utilized snowball sampling technique, getting new contacts by asking participants to refer key personnel for interviewing (Patton, 2002). I was interested in gaining a better understanding of the school culture and curriculum by interviewing and observing key school personnel about their perceptions of the low college-going rates and the enabling and constraining factors of college going in Livingston County.

Data Collection

While collecting data on girls, schooling, and their transition to college, I paid attention to the “in-between spaces and places found within and outside the formal domain of schools that we believe to be central to how girls make sense of themselves” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 5). For example, I paid attention to how the hidden curriculum spoke to the key participants' understandings of who they were and where they could go after high school.

Thorp (2006) recognized that researchers collect data through their “ability to make lasting connections, form bonds, slow down, nurture reciprocity, and build trust” (p. 127). During the collaborative partnership of research, relationships were important,

in order to gain access and experience the phenomenon under study. As I began my second year of co-researching with my key participants, I developed a relationship with them with the understanding that any data collected would be discussed with them before presented to any outside sources, with the exception of my advisor. Our meetings provided a forum for open conversations within a safe space for the girls to explore their experiences within and outside of school. The girls were comfortable discussing relevant issues with the audio recorder running, understanding that their words will be protected and respected. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “researchers build trust by making it clear that they will not use what they are finding to demean or otherwise hurt people” (p. 73), so trust was a central issue in gaining a better understanding of the participants’ lives.

My prior experience with the youth development program and collaborative research allowed me more fully to understand the culture of Livingston County. During our prior research, we obtained IRB approval to work with the youth development participants. We renewed the IRB approval through their high school experiences. During the summer after high school graduation, I received IRB approval for this research study and renewed the IRB approval the following summer.

Formerly, the girls were involved in a youth development program that provided support and creative activities, and opportunities for the girls to interact outside of school. When we were meeting exclusively at the high school during their lunch period, the time we spent together was both at school and away from the communal space of their cafeteria. Our meetings allowed the students to voice openly their private thoughts and everyday concerns. During their junior year, I met with the girls and worked on

“establishing good rapport [which sometimes] requires hanging out and just plain socializing with” them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 84).

We broke the ten months of their senior year (2008-2009) into several research and discussion issues such as academic life histories, high school, rural life, being girls, and finances. I discussed possible topics/issues with the girls, and we decided which topics were most relevant to their lives and experiences. The preliminary ideas for topics were based on the review of literature. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “concern with following a schedule rather than with understanding the data can undermine the major strength of the qualitative approach” (p. 71). My initial research topics followed those issues that were relevant to the categories within my literature review.

I was interested in how the formal and hidden curriculum of high school influenced their negotiation of the transition between high school and college. Ongoing high school courses and experiences continued to be recorded through photographs, narratives, discussions, and official school documents. Focus groups on scheduling classes and course selection provided information on their high school curricular experiences. Individual interviews on coursework provided additional information on curricular choices and planning for college.

The rural environment of Livingston County provided unique enabling and constraining factors that influenced their high school to college transitional experiences. Participants gave their views on rural life, community, and family through narratives and focus interviews.

Through focus groups and individual interviews, we engaged in dialogues of what high school life was like as a female, what similarities and differences were experienced for the girls. In addition, I wanted to understand what the participants thought about money and the financial costs associated with college. We discussed college-going rates for Livingston County, the income breakdown by sex, and the costs associated with college attendance. We engaged in a focus group interview about social class and the finances of college attendance, with follow-up individual interviews to explore more personal, financial issues.

Upon their graduating from high school, the participants and I met individually and as a group during the summer to discuss college-going issues such as admission requirements, test scores, financial aid, and college attendance. During their freshmen and sophomore years of college, I met with the participants individually to investigate where they were, how they got there, and how they were experiencing their new positions. I acknowledge the fact that my presence and interaction with my key participants influenced their experiences transitioning from high school to post-secondary education.

Interviews

Focus group interviews were conducted twice a month during the regular academic senior year of 2008 to 2009. According to Belgrave and Smith (1995), focus groups allow researchers to access a variety of information quickly. They recommend using focus groups as a “preliminary step in data collection to collect large amounts of varied data quickly and to sensitize [participants] to issues that otherwise might not have occurred to [them]” (p. 75). Through focus group interviews, I was interested in

broaching the topics as a group, with further exploration in individual dialogues to expand on relevant issues.

In addition, I conducted loosely structured individual interviews throughout the study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “a major problem with focus groups can be that individuals may not share important experiences they have had because they are too embarrassed to share them in the group” (p. 101). Due to the fact that some students would hold back comments during focus group interviews, individual interviews were conducted after the focus groups to give individuals the opportunity to discuss relevant issues that might have been too personally sensitive to bring up in a group.

In collaborative ethnography, interviews are conducted that are “more like conversations in that they [are] much more free flowing than structured interviews often are” (Lassiter, Goodall, Campbell, & Johnson, 2004, p. 10). Thorp (2006) also recommended letting go of structured interview guides and “allow[ing] conversations to take unexpected twists and turns” (p. 119). The dialogue was an ongoing process where the direction was sometimes led by the participants. Thorp (2006) noted that “when I let go and follow the conversation to where it takes us, I have discovered insights into my research that would normally not be revealed” (p. 123). As I visited the participants, I recorded our casual conversations that continued to reveal unique understandings of their experiences in high school and college. Belgrave and Smith (1995) also noted that “respondents themselves might bring up issues that [the] researcher would not think to raise” (p. 77). Emergent issues frequently arise when researchers take the time to listen to the interests and concerns of the research participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2003)

encouraged researchers to allow the participants to initiate and expand on topics that emerge out of interviews, rather than sticking to a scripted interview schedule.

Examples of categories and focus/interview questions:

Being students:

How have you experienced school as students in elementary and middle school?

What does education mean to you?

What curriculum (plan of study) are you following in high school? How are you experiencing it?

What do standardized test scores (ACT) mean to you in high school?

Being rural:

How does your rural experience play out in your college-going decisions?

What are your thoughts about staying in the area? About going to college away from home?

Being girls:

What is it like being a female student?

What are the drawbacks to being a girl in high school?

What are the benefits of being a girl in high school?

What are your thoughts/experiences about being female in college?

Planning college:

What does a college education mean to you?

What are your goals?

What do you think could stand in the way of college attendance?

What do you think of the low college-going rate for Livingston County? What does this say about you?

Who has influenced you in general? In terms of educational choices?

When, how, and why did you decide you wanted to go to college?

What are you worried about?

What are you looking forward to?

From whom are you receiving help?

What do you already know and not know about colleges and the differences among them?

How are you making choices about where to apply, and then where to go?

What stumbling blocks did you encounter; what are your doubts and fears?

I interviewed school personnel and college recruiters to better understand the opportunities and constraints within the high school and college environment that these students might encounter. I interviewed the principal of the school and asked the following questions: What do you think about the low college-going rates of Livingston County? What do you see as college-going concerns for your students? How does the school curriculum encourage college attendance? What are your concerns for female students? I spoke with the guidance counselor in the high school to better understand the students' curricular decisions. I asked the counselor the following questions: What do you think about the low college-going rates of Livingston County? What students are taking college preparatory courses? What students are taking career and technical education courses simultaneously? Are students pursuing college preparatory and career and technical education courses? What are the objectives of scheduling students for

classes? I interviewed teachers at the high school to better understand their perceptions of the students' college-going decisions. I asked the teachers the following questions: What do you think about the low college-going rates of Livingston County? What characteristics do college-going students need to possess? What are the most prevalent academic success stories? What are obstacles of college attendance for these high school students?

In addition to the school personnel, I interviewed college recruiters involved in the area schools. I interviewed a recruiter for College Summitt in order to better understand their mission and their target population. I asked the following questions: What are the obstacles of college attendance for these students? What factors contribute to college attendance? I interviewed a recruiter for the TRIO program at a nearby state university to discover what the students need to know about college attendance. I asked the following questions: Why did the program discontinue its work with Livingston County? What are the common obstacles in college attendance? What are the enabling factors for college attendance?

Participant Observations

Collaborative ethnography is used to “reconstruct the reality of a time, a place, or an event involves describing, analyzing, and coordinating the stories of the event given by those who experienced it” (Belgrave & Smith, 1995, p. 71). My primary role in the prior research project was participant observation. I began my collaborative research experience through the observation of the girls' youth development program and observing lunchtime focus group interviews. I focused my observations on the rural setting of Livingston County and the youths' experiences in the youth development

program, as well as their negotiations within the new consolidated high school. I gained a better understanding of their educational experiences and the relationships among participants.

Fieldnotes of participant observation took place in three steps: the actual encounter, the replaying of the encounter, and the recording of the experience in written form (May & Pattillo-McCoy, 2000). I understood the importance of recording my observations and interpretations immediately following our meetings. In addition, I continued to record our meetings and took photographs on some occasions.

Lassiter (2005a) explained that “the ethnographic art of observant participation and the subsequent talk about coexperience have great potential to lead us to collaborative co-understandings as well as to the ensuing collaboratively based representations” (p. 115). I shared my interpretations of the raw data with participants so that they could confirm and elaborate on my perceptions in order to gain a co-understanding of their lived experiences. Thorp (2006) recommended “heart-wide-open witnessing” to discover how best to “access, understand, or otherwise comprehend the phenomena of inquiry” (p. 122).

I conducted participant observations as participants attended college-going events during their senior years of high school. When the students visited college campuses, I shadowed them to observe their experiences and perceptions of college life. During the summer after high school, I shadowed them during their college orientations to observe their first experiences as college students. In addition, I observed them as students in college as we occasionally met for academic purposes, usually to work on mathematics.

Educational Life Histories

Ethnographic research is about “[comprehending] how representation can emerge as a more democratic exchange, as a dialogue between two subjective individuals who come to a given project with particular experiential histories that should be elaborated rather than veiled” (Lassiter, 2005a, p. 109). I was interested in gaining a more complete understanding of the girls’ past educational experiences through their narratives, documents, and photographs.

In Lawless’ (1993) study of women in the ministry, she used life histories to portray similarities and differences while analyzing the power structures within religious hierarchy. Lawless created her participants’ life history accounts through interview recordings, transcripts, and participant revisions. I was interested primarily in gaining my participants’ life histories through their individual interviews about their educational experiences based on prompts such as: their first educational experience, a positive teacher, parental expectations and impressions of education, and their experiences as a female student. Through their educational life histories, participants took more responsibility for their self-representations within this research. According to Ellis (2004), a life history story “often discloses hidden details of private life and highlights emotional experience” (p. 30). Through life history accounts, I could better understand the relevant lived experiences of my participants.

According to Thorp (2006), “stories provide institutional functions: working to provide structure, transmit social truths, guide behavior, and maintain relationships” (p. 131). I worked with the former Girls’ Resiliency Program members on creating their

educational life histories to better gain an understanding of their past educational experiences, their present situations, their desires to attend institutions of higher education, and the intersections that are negotiated during the transitions between high school and college. As the five girls analyzed their prior educational documents, their personal experiences, and their current educational work, I asked about commonalities and differences they experienced as they transitioned from high school to college.

Writing Prompts

Living in a rural county, the girls rarely spent time together outside of school. Because I became the de facto facilitator of the former Girls' Resiliency Program, the girls frequently spent a portion of our time engaged in social interaction. As a means of providing focus, I began printing out writing prompts for the girls to complete before we engaged in a focused conversation. The writing prompts were successful in eliciting participants' ideas about specific issues, gaining their initial ideas and an understanding of how their ideas changed over the course of this study. The writing prompt discussions allowed a space for sensitive personal experiences to be recorded while meeting as a group. I used writing prompts to generate discussions about their goals, about being female, and about their fears, especially about going to college. I was often amazed after reading their writing to discover sensitive personal issues that did not come up in group discussions.

Photography and Art Projects

During the spring semester of 2007, I worked with the girls on life history scrapbooks using the students' personal photographs of their community and family, as well as current photographs taken throughout the semester. According to Lassiter

(2005a), “studying the meaning of photographs in the construction of history and memory” can lead to insights and conversations of their past experiences (p. 112). By using photographs, I found out more about the meanings of symbols and experiences within their lives. According to Thorp (2006), photographs are underutilized in ethnographic research. I used photographs as “visual imagery [to add] a layer of complexity to our texts and representations” (p. 129). Photography was used to generate dialogue about a past experience and create “meaningful scaffolding to learn the art of narration—connecting the past, present, and future” (p. 130).

In addition to photography, I worked with my participants on two self-representational art projects. In the process of research, “[renderings] offer possibilities of engagement. To render, to give, to present, to perform, to become” (Irwin, 2005, p. 899). The first art project was similar to Luttrell (2003), who worked with a group of girls on self-representation activities using “multiple modes of expression, to describe themselves to themselves and to each other” (p. xiv). I was interested in gaining a better understanding of how this group of Appalachian girls saw themselves and each other. Through the process of creating artwork, students tended to be reflective about creating their identities, leading to interesting dialogues along the way. The finished artwork, self-representation, created an additional forum for dialogue about how the individual girls viewed themselves and how their impressions matched or contradicted how their peers viewed them. We also co-created a group art project to represent themselves as a group. The group representations featured their rural environment and used words to represent each girl. The girls co-presented their self-representations at an Appalachian Studies Association conference in 2009. Our second art project was creating works of art

to portray their experiences after high school. The participants explored how their experiences of their freshmen year of college have shaped and changed their identities. (Self-representations are located in Appendix B).

Documents

Official academic records were discussed with the girls to gain a better understanding of how their prior educational experiences have shaped their college going decisions. I was interested in ACT/SAT scores, their report cards, and academic work to discuss their academic readiness for college coursework. What are their academic standings and backgrounds?

Data Analysis

Analysis of data took place through coding of fieldnotes, interviews, and other documents to find common themes. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “you search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns” (p. 161). I used “setting/context codes” that described the rural and school setting. I used “definition of the situation codes” that provided a fuller understanding of the participants involved. I used “process codes” to create an understanding of the transition from high school to college (p. 164). In addition, I used the participants’ narratives to do a cross-case analysis of their negotiations of the transitions from high school to college.

Collaborative Interpretation

Lassiter (2005a) recommended allowing research consultants to read and edit textual interpretations, “especially those parts that include their quotations” (p. 139). After writing initial drafts of the girls’ educational life histories, I asked them to read and

edit the first-person accounts of their educational experiences. Based on their revised educational life histories, I identified enabling and constraining factors for their single-case analyses. I asked the girls, a year after high school, to read and edit their single-case analyses. Based on their responses, I revised the analyses. For example, in Cassi's case, I changed the terminology of a constraining factor from "immaturity" to "sheltered," which more accurately described her situation.

I worked more closely with a few participants through the interpretation of the cross-case analysis. As Lassiter (2005a) mentioned, I consulted with participants in "shaping ethnographic texts as they develop[ed], rather than merely reacting to them after they are written" (p. 139). During the fall of 2010, only two of my participants, Jennifer and Cassi, were enrolled in college full-time. I met with them three times to discuss how their experiences were similar and different from each other. Issues revolved around how their mothers instilled the value of education and college expectations, as well as problems experienced in mathematics. I was surprised when they mentioned my role as an enabling factor to their college experiences, from college-going advice to emotional support once on campus. During the spring of 2011, I met with four of the girls—Jennifer, Cassi, Ashley, and Sara—and asked them to write about experiences with their mothers, math, money, and role models, as well as their recommendations for girls, teachers, counselors, and college administrators.

Theoretical Orientation

Various theories are relevant to my objectives in this collective ethnography, but I focused predominantly on constructivism, autoethnography, and critical theory. As demonstrated by Ellis (2004), the "social constructivist way, [allows] for multiple

interpretations of social realities and collaborative creation of knowledge by the viewer and viewed” (p. 29). I worked with five girls from varying social realities; therefore, I discovered and documented multiple perspectives of similar and differing experiences. According to Thorp (2006), “constructivist/phenomenological methodologies require a certain spaciousness of thinking that allows for things to emerge on their own terms” (p. 117). Using this approach I identified and explored the patterns and themes that emerged from the data. While constructivism was relevant to this study, I explored autoethnography and critical theory more intensively.

Autoethnography and Reflexivity

Belgrave and Smith (1995), Ellis (2004), Lassiter (2005b), Lawless (1993), May and Pattillo-McCoy (2000), and Thorp (2006) recognized the importance of the researchers’ personal experiences in relation to which they view the phenomenon under study. Lassiter (2005b) noted that “one’s experience shapes one’s interpretation of others” (p. 13). In addition, through the use of autoethnography, Ellis (2004) suggests that when researchers come to understand themselves more deeply, they are likely to better understand their participants’ experiences. My perspective of college going was influenced by the fact that my father is a professor in higher education. I was interested in discovering the perspectives of my participants, as related to social class and transitional college-going experiences. Being reflexive required that I put aside my pre-conceived notions of college going as I developed new co-understandings of my participants’ experiences and my own (Ellis). In addition to my own reflexivity, I explored my key participants’ subjective meanings of events through reflexive dialogues about their past experiences. May and Pattillo-McCoy recognized that “realities

ultimately are unstable and personal” (p. 66), but reflection can create a better understanding of this lack of stability and provide deeper personal understanding of experiences. Thorp (2006) recommended using reflexivity “about our self in different contexts as a valuable analytical practice” (p. 135). By continual personal reflection that provided clarification of events, I gained a deeper understanding of our co-experiences as my participants transitioned from high school to college.

According to Stake (1995), “expertise comes largely through reflective practice” (p. 50). I reflected on my perspective, while gaining a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of my participants. Stake further recommended that researchers “include their own personal perspectives in the interpretation” (p. 135). Through reflexive practices researchers acknowledge their influence on the participants through the interactions of fieldwork (Lawless, 1993).

Critical Theory

I explored issues of power within my participants’ community and high school culture that played a part in their transitional experiences from high school to college. As Fine (2006) noted, “public intellectuals turn our attention to ‘awaken’ a sense of injustice in those with material and cultural power” (p. 86). As an educational researcher, I was interested in the power structures within the school and society, and how the students perceived and negotiated these power relationships.

Through the use of collaborative ethnography, I paid attention to “whose perspectives will be privileged, negotiated, and/or silenced” within my ethnographic text (Fine, 2006, p. 90). Collaborative research allows researchers and participants to share authority and authorship (Ellis, 2004). I was interested in privileging the voices of my

participants and gaining a better understanding of their positions within the transition from high school to college.

I was interested in finding out if there are situations within Livingston County that “[revealed] how power works to produce, sustain, and naturalize social inequities” (Fine, 2006, p. 93). What are some key problems in Livingston County? Who or what is to blame for the problems? Are there certain people or groups who have worse situations? Who or what is to blame? Who holds power? In what way? How have girls experienced power in their families and school?

Validity

Triangulation

To enhance validity, Patton (2002) suggested using data triangulation by including multiple data sources such as interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Triangulation can bring out inconsistencies within the data collected, leading to the opportunity for deeper insight into the phenomenon under study. According to Thorp (2006), “triangulation provides the research community with a sort of 3-D vision of reality” (p. 134). In this study, I used data from participant observation, interviews, photographs, and relevant official education documents to triangulate my findings to provide a thorough exploration of the experiences of my key participants as they transitioned from high school to college.

Reflection

Looking back, my qualitative research methods experiences have been quite unique. Dr. Spatig, my current advisor, usually taught both qualitative research courses required by doctoral students interested in conducting qualitative research for their

dissertations. During the academic year of 2006-07, Dr. Spatig was relieved from teaching because she received an award that included time to conduct a year-long collaborative ethnographic project. In her teaching absence, Dr. Lassiter took over teaching the qualitative research courses for the year. Because he literally wrote the book on collaborative ethnography, *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography* (2005), his courses had a collaborative emphasis. The researcher/researched relationships were blurred with an emphasis on the ethical responsibility for those being researched. In addition, one of the required texts for the course was Laurie Thorp's *The Pull of the Earth: Participatory Ethnography in the School Garden* (2006), which was collaborative in nature.

During the spring of 2007, I began a research internship with a project that was in mid-stream. The research project was part of a larger collaborative study, working with students involved in a youth development program. Dr. Spatig, who was the primary investigator on the project, soon became my advisor and the girls in the youth development program, my key participants. Based on my qualitative educational experiences, I have a highly collaborative take on research, sometimes unable to speak about my research without consulting with Dr. Spatig or my participants.

During the fall semester of 2010, Jennifer and Cassi were the two participants attending college full-time. I met with them for lunch discussions numerous times as I was working on my cross-case analysis. As the two students with the easiest transition, I asked Cassi and Jennifer what were commonalities between their experiences. Two issues emerged that I was expecting, lack of math knowledge and their mothers. What I

didn't expect to emerge was that they identified me as a key factor in their transitions.
Those cross-case themes will be discussed in Chapter Ten.

CHAPTER FOUR: SETTING

In order to understand my key participants and their transitional experiences after high school and into college, this chapter provides an overview of the original sites of research and the participants involved in the research. It begins with a description of the county, the new consolidated high school, and college-going information at the high school. The chapter concludes with a brief look at the Girls' Resiliency Program and key participants.

Livingston County

Livingston County is frequently referred to as a poor, rural county in West Virginia. In 2006, the population under the age of 18 living in poverty was 36.9% (U.S. Census, 2006). The population living below poverty level in 2007 was 25.5% in comparison to the national average of 13% (U.S. Census, 2009). During the academic year of 2007-08, 57.36% of the students in Livingston County were considered low-income (W.V. Department of Education). In the academic year 2008-09, 55% of the students in Livingston County High School received free and reduced lunches (W.V. Department of Education).

According to the U. S. Census information for 2000, Livingston County had 50 people living per square mile, in comparison to the national average of 79 people per square mile (2009). As I asked study participants about the rurality of the area, Cassi remarked, "There is not a single red light in Livingston County." Ashley, who grew up in a more urban county, described the beauty of rural Livingston County: "There is so much land in Livingston County, so many beautiful fields." She further explained, "You

can just buy a piece of land with a field and live there your whole life and never have a neighbor.”

My first experience in Livingston County was the drive I took with a fellow researcher who took me to the four former high schools, as well as the new consolidated county high school. It was a cold winter day in January 2007:

The roads were curvy; frequently the road would curve around and run parallel to the road that we were coming from. . . . [We wondered about] not just the distance traveled for students, but also the condition of the roads. This morning the students were on a two-hour snow delay due to the cold weather and the [long] distance that the students needed to travel on foot to their bus stops. There wasn't much snow around, but there were patches of ice on the roads in places.

(fieldnotes, January 31, 2007)

As the national economic climate has declined over the past decade, unemployment rates have risen. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) revealed that from November 2008 to November 2009 unemployment in Livingston County has increased 6.2 percent, from 3.9 percent to 10.1 percent. While the U.S. Census Bureau 2006-2008 American Community Survey (n.d.) recorded the percentage of people in Livingston County who are 16 to 64 years of age in the labor force is 52.9 percent, 70 percent of those employed must travel outside the county for employment.

While they were aware of the lack of job opportunities, the participants felt that it was easier and cheaper for high school graduates to remain in the area, and that great effort and risks were experienced when leaving the rural area. When I asked them why students were torn between staying at home and going to college, they explained:

Cassi: It is easier to just stay around your family.

Ashley: It is cheaper to live in Livingston County, way cheaper.

Cassi: There is very little work opportunities in Livingston County. If you live in Livingston County, you have got to go some place else to work.

Ashley: Like with my job, I want to be a pharmacist, and there are three pharmacies in Livingston County.

Cassi: Just to get basic jobs anymore. If you don't want to work cutting down trees or with heavy machinery or fast food or grocery store, you have to go somewhere else. Teaching is probably the best job in Livingston County that you can get.

When I asked participants what they took pride in about Livingston County, Cassi explained, "I don't know that there is anything that I am proud of. I am proud of getting out of there." While they loved the idea of living in a rural area, they were plagued by the negative stereotypes of their county.

The statistics of Livingston County and Livingston County High School painted a picture of deficits. Kenna Seal, who worked in West Virginia's Office of Education Performance publicly criticized the citizens of Livingston County by calling them "four-wheel ridin,' dope-smokin,' alcoholic rednecks," suggesting that the students' low academic performance was based on the lifestyle of county residents (Seal's Four Wheel Ridin,' 2007).

My participants were aware of the stereotypes of their county. Ashley felt that the negative images came from the "people that are the stereotypes. The stupid red-necks do

all that stupid stuff. They make a reputation for Livingston County because they are the ones who go out and get the attention. That is what people see.”

To my key participants, Livingston County means more than the statistics. As they explained what Livingston County meant to them, they described how members of the community took care of each other. Ashley, who worked at a local grocery store, saw first-hand that how customers came in with different people who needed a helping hand.

I know this one guy who would come into [a local discount grocery store] all the time. He had a food stamp card, and he would buy all kinds of groceries. He would always have different people with him. I would ask him, “Who is that person?” And he would tell me, “Oh, they are living with me for a little while. They lost their home in a flood,” or something like that. He would take care of them, all kinds of different people. . . . There are more people like that than you would know. You wouldn’t know about these people just by looking at statistics. . . . In Livingston County, you don’t see them on the streets. They are good hidiers.

Ashley continued to explain that he had also taken in an abandoned pregnant girl and a recovering drug addict.

When I asked teachers at the high school about potential obstacles for college attendance for Livingston County, all of the female teachers and one male teacher, originally from another county, noted that traditional gender roles of the county could prove constraining. In contrast, all of my participants denied being at a disadvantage because of their gender, but nevertheless held expectations of traditional gender roles, in addition to their career aspirations.

A teacher at the high school also noted other family-related constraining factors for students in the county:

[There is a] lack of parental involvement and interest, lack of confidence by the children and in the children in their skills and abilities. There's a sense of hopelessness in Livingston County. There are generations and generations of Livingston Countians who make it their careers to continue the tradition of being on welfare. So that's a goal when getting out of school. Many are in school because if they don't come to school their family won't get a check, and they find ways to draw a check afterwards. It's like a family tradition.

While in high school, all of the girls' parents worked, but some relied on medical cards for their children's health care, and three of the five participants received free and reduced school lunches. The school provided support for the students, and at the same time worked to raise their academic expectations.

Livingston County High School

During this study, participants experienced a transition from four dilapidated high schools to one new consolidated county high school. I will discuss the problems that led to a state takeover and subsequent consolidation. I will follow up by discussing the college-going programs that were implemented in the new high school.

Drop Out Problems

Consistent problems with high school dropout rates led to Livingston County High School not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). In 2000, the state took control over the Board of Education in Livingston County because of low test scores and low graduation rates. In 2007-08, the West Virginia population earning their high school

diplomas was 72% (Understanding High School, 2009). I asked the Livingston County High School principal about the academic problems that he is dealing with, and he explained:

If you look at Livingston County in the last four or five years, we have not made the mark. Last year, we made the mark academically, or test scores for the WESTEST; we met the mark. What kept us from making the entire AYP was our graduation rate. Of course, my contention was that those kids did not drop out of Livingston County High School, but they dropped out from Marcum, from Green Valley, from Carroll, and from Minetown, but you still have to give those kids to somebody. We needed 80%, and we got 79.81%, . . . we are moving forward. . . and to me that is success. Even though I didn't make AYP [this year], obviously there has been some success, since in the last five years we haven't even been close.

Because of Livingston County High School's concern for graduation rates, some teachers felt that they were becoming too lenient with students. In their desire to retain students, a teacher remarked that they have to "water down" the curriculum and "hand feed" the students:

Personally, I think . . . they are hand fed too much. I was talking to a parent on the phone today, and she can't figure out why her daughter won't come to school. The child is a smart, intelligent child, but the child says that school is boring, and she doesn't get anything out of it. So, why should she go?

Because of the issue of high school graduation rates, some teachers found themselves lowering standards in order for students to succeed: "We sometimes have to

water it down so much just for the kids to get it, but if we didn't then half the kids in high school would probably fail."

I asked participants their opinions about the low high school graduation rates. An academic problem they noted was the apathy and negative messages that parents convey to their children. While the girls felt that the school was trying to retain students, they also noted the cultural, mixed messages the students were receiving:

Cassi: I don't think many parents around here tell them, "You can do it. You can do it." There aren't any consequences for quitting, so they quit. They are saying to stay in school. I don't think the school could do much more. I think it is more individuals and their families.

Ashley: The school tries to cure everything in their own special way.

Cassi: Now, it is not such a big deal if you quit. You can always get your GED or get a mining job. There is still stuff out there for you. So, [parents] are like, "That's okay. He can still get a job out there. He will be fine."

Ashley: [Parents] just don't care.

Cassi: Yeah. That is the biggest problem. Their parents just don't worry anymore. "They are old enough. They can do this. They can make their own decisions." They don't try to help them along.

Because of the low test scores and graduation rates as well as old, dilapidated buildings, the state recommended consolidating the four high schools into one county high school.

Consolidation

In 2006, under state mandate, Livingston County consolidated four community high schools into one new county high school. The principal reflected, "I saw those old

schools, where they take care of their folks. We will take care of you. . . but [by] what means.” The principal differentiated between caring at the expense of students’ education and caring enough to be tough and create success with high expectations.

A college recruiter who worked with adults in the county explained that Livingston County “went from the rural tiny schools, where they were close-knit, then went into this consolidation world. Parents can see the advantages, but they hate the fact that they have lost all of that community.” The sense of tradition played into how the community felt about the new school. While parents understood opportunities gained from the new facilities, many were reluctant to embrace change.

The new consolidated high school was located in northern Livingston County. The architect blended the modern designs of two consolidated high schools in a neighboring county. The majority of the residents in Livingston County were against the consolidation because of their attachment to the former community high schools and the long bus rides that would be necessary through the rural county. While many resisted the consolidation, the principal was excited about the new opportunities for students.

As we left the school one day, a fellow researcher noticed that the sign for the school was not in place. The principal later explained the absence of a school sign:

The first time that we buy them, we want it to say, “Livingston County High School, a National School of Excellence. We are a Blue Ribbon School.” You need to be in existence for five years before you can make that application. So, I keep telling my teachers that we are going to hold off on that because once we buy it we want it to say the whole thing. Once we instill that in teachers, hopefully they will instill that in the kids. That is my goal.

The new modern high school represented opportunity, as described by the principal:

We have been beat to death for so long; here is a chance for us to start a new kind of Phoenix effect of some sorts. Out of all these ashes, let's come out as that shining star. Where can we start? Part of this is going to be what our expectations are. If you build a 34 million dollar facility and you bring the same thought process [to] that building, you have not made a change.

The principal continued by explaining that students need to feel a sense of community (caring) in their new school:

You just have to be real to kids. Even though we are big, we have roughly 960 kids, we still have to be able to say, "Hey, how are you doing? How are things going at home?" I think sometimes larger schools don't have that personal touch.

Because of the increase in students from the four former high schools, the consolidated high school appeared intimidating to students who were used to smaller class sizes and small, familiar buildings. The school staff and administration was dedicated to creating a sense of community within the new high school.

School Culture

Due to the concern for not meeting their AYP at Livingston County High School, teachers and administrators made an effort to keep students in school rather than allowing them to drop out. Because of this effort, the girls described situations in class in which the deadlines for schoolwork were extended in order to allow students time to complete it.

The principal explained his curricular goals at the new consolidated school:

What we are trying to do is push our curriculum, so that it addresses those higher level thinking skills. Because, let's face it, when you get a job, they are going to teach you what they want you to do. What we want are people who will be good citizens, can get along, willing to work, and willing to cooperate and listen. That's our push. If you can do all that and develop those soft skills, you will be successful.

Although he addressed cooperative learning, critical thinking skills were not elaborated on.

The principal explained his desire to create a sense of community and caring within the school. He described Monday morning meetings held with teachers and school administrators to determine the students who might need extra support. He explained, "If you have a kid on your radar and you have four or five adults that say, 'Hey. How are things going?' Well, that kid knows that you care." If the teachers demonstrated that they care for the students, the principal felt that the school could have an impact in helping the students succeed. The principal continued by saying, "You have to be visible. You have to be out there. You have to be in kids' faces, talk to them, and let them know you care about them."

Livingston County High School's school counselors, perhaps due to the county's high level of poverty, had to fulfill a variety of roles. During participants' senior year, the school hired a full-time social worker. The principal explained, "We have started a pantry of personal products if people need that kind of stuff. For kids that come in and maybe didn't get a shower, we can give them shampoo." He believed it was important to "take care of the everyday needs."

College Going

In 2000, the percentage of citizens in Livingston County with a bachelor's degree was 5.9% (U.S. Census, 2009). While many of the local jobs are unskilled labor, more and more residents were traveling to urban areas for jobs. When I began my research, the percent of students from Livingston County going to college was 38%. At the time of my interview with the principal during my key participants' senior year, he corrected me by telling me the percentage for the class of 2008 was 46%. He stated, "I think for West Virginia as a whole, we have the least amount of people with a B.S. degree in the nation. Of course, Livingston County because we are a little more rural, little lower SES than the average county, that probably plays a lot into it too." The year after my key participants graduated, I stopped by the counselors' office and was told that the college-going rate for the class of 2009 was 55.4%.

In the new consolidated high school, several programs were implemented to improve the county's college-going rates. In the academic year of 2008-2009, the school began two programs to promote college attendance: College Summit and West Virginia Gear Up.

College Summit. During the participants' senior year, Livingston County High School purchased and implemented College Summit, which is designed to take students step-by-step through the college application and financial aid process. In addition, during the same year, the juniors' homeroom period included an ACT preparatory class. My participants regretted not having had that opportunity during their junior year. For the seniors including my participants, any ACT preparatory practice was handled outside of the school and had to be arranged by individual students on their own.

The principal enthusiastically described the College Summit program:

When I was at the central office, that is one thing that we brought in for the high schools, College Summit. I met the fellow four years ago. It is expensive; I will tell you that. It is expensive, but we are seeing results.

The principal elaborated by explaining:

They have to fill out the FAFSA and all that information, and they have a deadline. Since it is a class, there should be no reason that we have kids slipping through the cracks. A lot of times deadlines will keep you from getting accepted and money and things like that, but with a deadline and certain criteria during the year, I think last year we had, by the first of March, all our kids were just waiting on offers to come to them because all the paperwork was filled out. Where kids struggle by March to get all their stuff out, they have done all that. We were just waiting for colleges to give us offers.

My participants agreed that the purpose of College Summit was to prepare them for college. Ashley explained, “That is all they bark around here. College, college, college.” While the principal raved about the value of College Summit, my key participants believed they gained more support and advice from the schools’ counselors than from College Summit.

Based on their own direct experiences with the program, my participants experienced a different view of the College Summit class. They believed the teachers for the program were apathetic and untrained. Cassi explained, “I have been doing nothing. [My teacher] doesn’t really care. I don’t think she wants to teach College Summit.” In

addition to teachers' apathy about teaching the class, students claimed that "it is still a stupid class," and "I don't do anything in my College Summit."

The message the high school was trying to send the students by providing the College Summit was that attending college was important. In addition, the counselors' office attempted to facilitate the college-going process. When I asked about their experiences with counselors Cassi explained, "We can go see them whenever we want, but they come to the College Summit a lot and our English classes."

During one visit, I asked participants what they were doing in their College Summit class, Cassi said, "We registered for our FAFSA pins." Sara was confused about what had taken place in class, "I thought we were registering for the [West Virginia] Promise [scholarship]." Cassi explained further that their assignments were adjusted because of apathetic students. They were expected to turn in three references for class, but Cassi "turned in one and got full credit for it because so many people didn't turn it in at all. [My teacher] hasn't been trained, so we don't do much."

In addition to the high school class, College Summit offered a weekend program during the summer for incoming seniors to receive additional strategies for the college application process, such as developing and revising their personal statements. Two of the participants attended the summer program sponsored by College Summit.

The summer program was raved about by two of my participants who attended. Cassi and Marycait attended a summer program at a local state university before their senior year, staying on campus for three nights. While they both found it difficult to interact with students from different schools, they enjoyed the energetic staff and activities. Cassi described working on free writes for her personal statement,

We did random free writes. We talked about pottery. . . . Then everyone listened to you read it out loud. They put up key details. You take your first one, and you explain it. Then, you do a more structured writing and put in details. Then, you start working [that] into the actual essay. We had to tell, but also show, describe the atmosphere, what you were feeling and smelling.

After Cassi completed her personal statement, one of the staff mentioned that her statement was a good example of what Yale University would expect.

West Virginia Gear Up. In addition to the College Summit summer program and class period during their senior years, West Virginia Gear Up was a program implemented to encourage college-going in ten counties in West Virginia. These ten counties were deemed “high-need counties” based on the Education Needs Index, of county poverty, graduation and college going rates, and income and economic indicators (West Virginia GEAR UP, 2009a, para. 3). West Virginia Gear Up was based on five goals: “academic performance and rigorous expectations,” “enrollment and success in postsecondary education,” “high school graduation and beyond,” “family support,” and “effective collaboration” (West Virginia GEAR UP, 2009b, para. 1-5).

In mid-April, the West Virginia Gear Up program hosted a governor’s symposium to honor the seniors from those ten counties who were interested in pursuing post-secondary goals. Because of her mother’s inflexible work schedule, I took Cassi to the state capital for the symposium. Jennifer came with her boyfriend, arrived as the large room was beginning to fill with students and their families. Just as the program was set to begin, I noticed the arrival of Marycait with her mother and father. Ashley, who planned to attend with her new foster family, did not show up. Following the

symposium, at which each student received a medalion and photo opportunity with the governor, a wave of people made their way toward the reception of finger food and college recruiters. Because Cassi and Jennifer knew where they were attending college and had already applied and been accepted, they were not interested in participating in the reception. At the reception, Marycait told me about speaking to recruiters with her parents.

Two months after the symposium, a Livingston County High School civics teacher, who was in charge of the Livingston County chapter of West Virginia Gear Up, explained that students could receive a small amount in scholarship money as well as payment for dual credit courses for seniors. He also explained the problem of connecting with parents in the county to assist in the financial aid process. “We did offer financial aid workshops for parents and students [at the high school]. We got the word out, but so few showed up. You are talking about less than ten.” In addition, he explained that some students “have to advocate for themselves, as far as doing all the paperwork, scholarships, financial aid forms. They have to do it themselves because a lot of the parents aren’t able to help them because they have not gone through the process themselves.”

Key Participants

The girls described how they met during their first year of participation in the Girls’ Resiliency Program. Marycait and Cassi grew up in Livingston County and attended school with the same people all of their lives. Jennifer transferred to Carroll Middle School in the sixth grade. Sara transferred to Carroll Middle School in the

seventh grade, and Ashley transferred to Carroll High School during the second half of her ninth-grade year.

Jennifer, Sara, and Ashley expressed a sense of loneliness moving into a rural school system where all the students knew each other; however, they all felt included once they met up with Cassi. During their eighth and ninth grade years, the five girls began participating in the GRP, enjoying the opportunities for activities and relationships.

The GRP was a youth development program in Livingston County that was meant to empower adolescent girls who were recommended by teachers. The founder of the program described it as a “grassroots, girl-driven, social-change-oriented program, the mission of which was to help girls identify their strengths, become active decision makers in their own lives, and advocate for social change” (Spatig, Gaines, MacDowell, Sias, Olson, & Adkins, 2009, p. 180).

As of 2008, the ethnic makeup of Livingston County was 98.8% white (U.S. Census, 2009). All of my key participants are white, while their social class positioning varies. In terms of social class, I looked at their parents’ occupations, their education, and their income. Based on these variables, I have identified Marycait as upper-middle class, Jennifer as middle class, Cassi and Sara as working class, and Ashley, living within the foster care system, predominately as working class as well.

During their junior year, they discussed local colleges they would attend, their majors, and activities they would take part in. Jennifer wanted to be a veterinarian and attend a distant state university because of their agricultural program. Ashley wanted to go to a nearby state university and join a sorority. Cassi wanted to become an obstetrician and gynecologist. Sara was interested in earning a degree in culinary arts

and opening her own bakery. Marycait wanted to join a sorority and worried that she did not have a major in mind.

Reflection

My position within the research is important to consider. Clearly, I can be seen as a “social and personal resource” to the students from lower income families (McGrath, Swisher, Elder, & Conger, 2001, p. 258). I actively engaged in conversations with the girls about college going procedures, while making recommendations and advising, even though I was unfamiliar with the process of applying for college scholarships.

While I considered my relationship with the girls as separate from the GRP, especially during their junior year when the youth development program shut down because of funding, the girls and high school personnel continued to regard me as affiliated with the GRP. For the girls, I became the defacto facilitator for the GRP. I constructed safe places for them to talk, have lunch, and socialize. In addition, I continued to have periodic activities with them outside of school. In the process of asking the girls to reflect on their experiences with the GRP, I was surprised that they did not express regret over the GRP closure, until I realized that they viewed me as a continuation of the program.

In addition to becoming a de facto GRP facilitator, I found myself giving the girls college going advice. Looking back, I realized that even during my first meeting with them at the school, I began advising them on the college-going process. When they mentioned not needing a math class their senior year, I stated, “You’d better be careful about not taking a math class next year.” When Marycait was worried about not having a major, I told her, “You have time to decide. You can take general classes your first year.

A lot of students do that. You can also do that your first semester of your second year. I sometimes recommend that students do that their first year.”

In the next five chapters, I provide single-case analyses, one for each participant describing factors that enabled and constrained their transitions from high school to college. In Chapter Ten, I provide a cross-case analysis of the five cases examining enabling and constraining factors in light of Giddens’ structuration theory. In Chapter Eleven, I interpreted the findings and provided recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: MARYCAIT

The purpose of this study was to add to the research literature on the high school to college transitional experiences of girls from a rural, West Virginia community who planned to attend college. The data presented in this chapter and the next four were collected over a four-year period of time from the key participants' junior year through the second year after high school. Data were collected from a series of focus group interviews, individual interviews, observations, and written documents. During their junior year of high school, we met in Livingston County High School nineteen times for focus group interviews. During their senior year, we met in Livingston County High School thirty-one times for focus group interviews. In addition, during their senior year, I met with each of the five participants approximately four times for individual interviews to construct their educational life histories that can be found in the appendix. During the year after high school, I met with each of the girls for three individual interviews. The next year, I predominantly met with the girls who were attending a nearby college. During the four-year period, we met for group activities, such as attendance and participation in two Appalachian Studies Association conferences, their senior prom, two summer activities, numerous college-going programs, and their high school graduation ceremony. In addition, I attended four out of five college orientations, sometimes acting as their parental figure.

This chapter contains a single-case analysis of Marycait, whose parents both earned law degrees. Growing up in an upper-middle class family, she experienced many enabling factors that eased her transitional experiences from high school to college.

Chapter six contains a single case analysis of Jennifer, whose mother earned a two-year nursing degree and father received nursing training in the military. Chapters seven, eight, and nine, contain single-case analyses of three participants who are first-generation college attendees, Cassi, Ashley, and Sara. Chapter ten contains a cross-case analysis of the enabling and constraining factors that the five girls encountered as they negotiated their transition from high school into college and/or work. Chapter eleven contains interpretations and recommendations for practice and future research.

In this chapter, Marycait is portrayed through her educational experiences from elementary to college. The following section describes Marycait's journey, including personal profiles followed by her educational experiences, identifying key factors that enabled or constrained her progress after high school and into college.

Introduction

Based on her social class positioning, Marycait was expected to attend college directly after high school. Marycait's parents have bachelor's degrees and law degrees, placing her in an upper-middle class position in a rural county. Marycait understood the value of education and the financial benefits that come with a professional occupation.

In addition to valuing academic coursework, Marycait's parents recognized the benefits of extra-curricular participation. Because of her parents' flexible work schedules and extra income, her parents were able to provide transportation and the financial extras that extra-curricular activities demand. Marycait was involved in numerous extra-curricular activities. In fact, she had to miss our meetings occasionally due to her prior commitments with school-related activities.

Marycait: Teacher's Pet

Before I met Marycait, I heard references to the “judge’s daughter.” The message was one of privilege rather than poverty and at-risk characteristics. Marycait’s father grew up in Livingston County, while her mother grew up in Virginia. Both of her parents earned law degrees, and her father is a local judge in Livingston County and a neighboring county.

When I began attending the Girls’ Resiliency Program activities during their sophomore year, I began to recognize her as the “judge’s daughter.” Marycait always appeared more put together than the rest of the girls. She later revealed to me the time and thought she put into applying her makeup and choosing her outfits. She did not wear obviously expensive clothes. The typical dress code for the girls at Livingston County High School was jeans, sweats, and low-cut tops. Her hair was usually professionally dyed, and she later explained that she washed her hair with bottled water, rather than well water, which could leave your hair with an orange tint. She was also careful in her relationships. While the other girls would say anything in front of me, Marycait seemed to filter her thoughts before saying them out loud.

Marycait has two younger sisters. Her mother experienced severe post-partum depression after the birth of her third daughter and was temporarily hospitalized. At that time, their family hired a nanny, Ms. Edna, to take care of the girls. She spent ten years with the family and took care of the girls after school. Marycait remembered, “All I know is I hardly ever saw my parents. Well, just my mom. They were working and didn’t get home until late.” While her parents were not always present, Marycait was taken care of by a nanny.

Marycait seemed to lack the confidence that some of the other girls exhibited. Academically she struggled, but her parents provided resources that could assist her. When she experienced failure in a class, she commented that her parents were going to get her a tutor.

Marycait enjoyed theater and speech classes taught by her favorite teacher. Marycait took her roles in plays very seriously, getting frustrated when other students, especially boys, did not learn their lines. She played supporting characters in *Grease* during her junior year and *Cinderella* during her senior year. In addition, she was involved in variety shows, creating skits she performed with her friends.

Marycait relied on her parents for assistance with ACT preparation, applying to colleges, and financing tuition and room and board. When she scored a 14 on her first ACT attempt, her parents enrolled Marycait in local tutorial services. While Marycait was my participant with the lowest ACT score, she was excited when she brought her score up from a 14 to a 17. At the Gear Up! symposium, where the governor of West Virginia awarded medalions to the students interested in attending college, her parents were the only parents of my participants who attended. At the reception following the program, her parents made sure that she met with numerous recruiters. Marycait explained:

[In April], I got my ACT scores back. I got a 17. I'm so happy. So I can pretty much go to any college I want. Mom was like a leech on Saturday. After the Gear Up! West Virginia ceremony, we practically got almost every application. West Virginia University and Alderson-Broaddus College were really recruiting for me. But I don't know; I don't want to go so far away from home. Mom is just

trying to get me to choose. We also found out about the ACT scores that day. I just hope she remembered to mail in my applications. Besides Marshall University, West Virginia University, and Alderson-Broaddus College, I filled in for Concord, West Liberty, Glenville, and Bluefield State.

Marycait was able to apply to more colleges because her parents could pay the application fees.

From the time that I visited the girls during their junior year, Marycait knew that she wanted to go to college, but did not have a major or future occupation to motivate her. Like many upper-middle class students, her goal in college was to “find myself and figure out what I want.” Marycait, unlike the other girls, was not driven by a future occupation, but expected to discover what she wanted to be through the experience of college.

Marycait mentioned that she “was trying for the [West Virginia] Promise” Scholarship but knew that her parents would pay for college if she did not get a scholarship. When I asked if her parents had started a tuition savings account for her, she explained, “I don’t know. We don’t talk about that.” She recognized that “money was tight because of college,” but knew she would be able to attend college without worrying about the cost.

During her senior year of high school, I asked Marycait about her college concerns, and she explained that she was worried about getting along with her roommate, managing her time, and passing her classes. She was accepted to a nearby state university that she had wanted to attend. While the college was located thirty miles from her home, she knew that she would miss her family, her room, and her “stuff.” In

addition, since she had grown up in the same town all her life, she was concerned about “knowing where everything is. It will take a really long time to know where everything is.” While she wanted to attend college and become independent, she feared leaving her family and community for the first time.

Analysis of Marycait

After analyzing the data from interviews, observations, and documents, I identified four factors that enabled Marycait’s academic success from early education to transitioning to college: (1) parents’ resources and expectations; (2) teacher’s pet; (3) arts and theater; (4) independence. Marycait experienced two constraining factors: (1) lack of confidence and (2) low academic achievement, which she was able to overcome through her experiences in theater and with her parents’ support.

Factors Enabling Success

Parents’ resources and expectations. Because Marycait grew up in Livingston County, her teachers were aware of her parents because of her father’s role in local government and her parents’ active role in her academic and extra-curricular activities. Her high school music teacher, who also taught in the middle school, knew that Marycait’s parents were “great role models.” The family frequently attended plays and musicals that came to a larger city in the area. Marycait’s mother took her and her sisters to New York City during her senior year. They stayed four nights and saw three Broadway musicals.

Marycait’s mother grew up in Virginia. Marycait’s grandmother was an English teacher who was very controlling with Marycait’s mother. She was taught to obey without question. In contrast, Marycait’s mother wanted her daughters to grow up to be

independent. Marycait's mother wanted to instill strong values and a sense of independence in Marycait's relationships with boys. Marycait remembers her mother's advice when she had her first boyfriend:

In eighth grade, I had my first boyfriend, but that didn't turn out very well. Well, we were discovering boys. I think that my mom said, "Don't let any of them pressure you." I didn't feel pressured. We thought we were grown up and independent, but we were just hoodlums, where I thought I knew everything.

Marycait relied on her parents for information about academic requirements and assistance. In September of her senior year, Marycait's parents enrolled her in a preparatory course at a local college:

I signed up for an ACT review course. I'm practically selling my soul for it. I have to give up some weekdays like 5:00 to 7:00, and four Saturday mornings for like four hours. It is at [a local state university]. I take my next ACT on October 25. [Tutoring for] each subject costs \$45.

After her first attempt at the ACT, she was disappointed by her scores. In February, she explained to me that she was again enrolling in additional tutoring, in order to bring her test scores up. She explains:

My mom got me signed up [at a local tutoring service], so I can get my ACT scores higher. I scored a 14 on my first attempt. I've been to [there] once to take a practice test, and we're supposed to go over there soon to talk about the score and what tricks and what things to do before the test. My parents are older, so they can't help me with my schoolwork. They try to, but on some things they just don't know. They haven't been to school since the late 60s and 70s.

Despite Marycait's lack of ideas about a major in college, she knew that she wanted to pursue a college education. She explained that her father had long encouraged her to go to college:

My dad always says to me, "I don't care what you do just go to college, or at least [get] some college education." Mostly I just talk to my dad about these things because he's more calm and won't push.

While Marycait felt more pressure from her mother, she was more likely to listen to her father because of his calm demeanor.

Marycait's parents, as former college attendees, had advice for her in college. Marycait explained that her mother told her "a thousand times" to "go to class, be polite to the professor, try to make friends with them and make sure that they know that you're a good egg. Don't just skip class for no reason." Her father told her to "be careful and call if [she] ever needs anything."

Teacher's pet: Classroom behavior. Marycait prided herself on her classroom behavior and the respect that she has shown her teachers:

I pretty much liked all my teachers. There were occasions I didn't like them, but I'm pretty much a teacher's pet. I never cause trouble and never give them an attitude. I pretty much respect them, or give them respect.

Marycait was aware of her responsibility as a student. She tried to meet her teachers' expectations of the model, female student, through compliant behavior.

As long as she knew what was expected of her, the more confident she became. While the other girls seemed to lose steam during their senior year, Marycait consistently plugged along and tried her best. While Marycait appeared to keep up with things during

her senior year of high school, she saw herself as a procrastinator. Marycait explained how her teachers saw her as a student:

My teachers probably see me as nice, quiet, probably doesn't get much turned in sometimes. I'm a procrastinator. Just today, I totally forgot my chemistry homework. It was just like a self-check problem, but we were supposed to turn it in today. I'm just getting a zero. I mean, it's probably just like 10 points at least. I've been doing good besides that one tiny assignment. I think I might get a C.

Despite her low grades, Marycait considered herself the "teacher's pet."

Arts and theater. Maryciat enjoyed classes that she considered "fun," which were her theater and music classes. Her parents valued the arts and have encouraged her to express herself through performance. Perhaps because Marycait was raised to value the arts, she became more confident when she was performing. Her theater teacher remarked, "I have seen her grow and become a little more confident because I've had her in the plays and different things and if she's given a script, she's going to go out there and learn those lines, but in their family the arts are be-all-end-all because their mother is very interested in the arts."

Marycait enjoyed being engaged with activities and performances, and she was interested in learning about life outside the county. Marycait fondly remembered reading the *American Girl* book series in the third grade:

I really loved that book series. I still have them. Sometimes [my teacher] would read it to us and sometimes we'd get copies of it and read along with her, take turns reading. I liked the way you could learn about different time periods and how they used everyday experiences.

Marycait was exposed to different experiences because her parents traveled and valued diverse cultural experiences. She was aware of life outside her county.

One of Marycait's favorite classes in high school was chorus. She explained to me her enjoyment of music and singing:

I've always loved singing, just the feel of the music. I listen to songs, especially Broadway songs, for the style and try to do my own interpretation. I just played around. I sometimes just go up to my room and put my earphones on and listen to *Rent*, *Mama Mia*, or *Grease*. I bought the Broadway version of *Rent* with my own money. As soon as *Rent* came out my mom bought three copies of the soundtrack for us, plus the movie.

With the resources from her parents, Marycait excelled in chorus and theater classes.

During her senior year, Marycait enrolled in speech class, another opportunity for her to perform publicly, which was a dual-credit course that would count for high school and college credit. Despite the discomfort of making speeches, she related them to her own life experiences. "This year, I had to take an elective to graduate, so I took a speech class with Ms. Huff. It's hard. I don't really like making speeches. I am taking speech as a dual-credit class, so I don't have to have it in college. I just made a huge speech last week on volunteerism. In my speech, I talked about my experiences in the Girls Resiliency Program."

Marycait was excited about musicals and variety performances at school. During her senior year, she tried out for the roles of Cinderella and the Fairy Godmother in the school's performance of *Cinderella*. She excitedly told me: "I received the role of the Fairy Godmother. I am the star! Except for Isabella, she's the big star, but I am the

star.” She excitedly told me about her role in the performance and the issues that went into the production of the musical. She was not just involved in her role but helped out as a stage hand in order to keep the performance running.

While Marycait’s parents were supportive of her academically as well as her ambitions for theater, she felt the need to create her college identity separate from her family. Perhaps because her sisters were also involved in the high school theater program, Marycait wanted to be seen as independent.

Independence. At an early age, Marycait wanted to be independent. She remembered her first educational experience attending kindergarten in Livingston County:

I didn’t go to school out of this county. I think I remember the first day of kindergarten, everybody was crying, [but] I just couldn’t wait for my mom to go away. I wanted a little independence. I just wanted to be on my own.

Marycait’s theater teacher suggested that her independence might stem from Marycait being the “oldest and she’s tired of being one of three.” Her middle sister is two years younger and the youngest is three years younger, so they frequently attended the same schools together.

Marycait enjoyed experiences in middle school and high school because she was gradually given more independence. Despite her anxiety about the unknown, she was excited about change and growth.

In middle school, those were kind of the good years including high school years, because we were starting to be teenagers and getting that feeling of being grown

up and independent. I felt a little bit scared because I had never changed classes. I had always stayed in one classroom.

Based on her desire to be independent from her parents, she seemed reluctant to trust some adults. During her senior year, she was elected as a peer mediator based on surveys that students filled out. Specifically, she was recognized by her peers as a trusted listener. She explained that sometimes students needed a peer to talk to when they experienced difficulty.

I mean not to say anything bad, but adults are really hard to trust. I mean I hardly trust my parents. With my dad it's different, well except for personal stuff, I hardly talk about boys with him. My dad trusts me completely. I do nothing wrong.

Marycait felt for other students because she understood the struggle of becoming an adult, and sensed that adults do not understand adolescent experiences.

Factors Constraining Success

Lack of confidence. Marycait lacked confidence, especially in academics. Marycait's theater teacher explained, "Marycait doesn't have a lot of confidence. She's quick to apologize and she's very serious." During focus group discussions, Marycait sometimes got frustrated when she lagged behind in the conversations or when her comments were misunderstood.

In college, Marycait mentioned that she was nervous about classes and remarked that she was "trying to pay close attention" and hoped that she would be able to pass her classes. In speaking about other students in class, she stated, "Some of [the students] might be a little smarter than me."

During a freshman orientation assembly the Sunday before classes were to begin, Marycait enjoyed the choral performance of the university's Alma Mater. She expressed her desire to be involved in the university's chorus but explained, "I don't know if I could do that. I don't think I could keep up with them." Marycait was not sure she was ready, but felt that she could try out in the future if she were to take private voice lessons. In addition to chorus, Marycait expressed a desire to participate in college theater performances, but felt that she needed to be a theater major to receive a role.

Low academic achievement. Marycait explained that she chose classes that would help her get into college, "In high school, I chose the professional pathway to go to a four-year college. They gave us a piece of paper to show us what we should take. I just picked what I was interested in, the arts." Marycait understood that she was expected to pursue college preparatory classes, but used her electives to take classes in the performing arts.

Marycait struggled with her grades during high school. During one grading period, she failed classes, then brought those grades up but failed other classes during the next grading period. Early in her senior year, Marycait told me about her report card:

I got my report card recently. I brought up the failing grades in civics and chemistry, but I am failing College Summit and Algebra II. In College Summit, I didn't turn in some of the stuff. In Algebra II, now that was partly my fault.

What am I saying partly? It is my fault. I didn't do so well on the tests.

While she took responsibility for her grades, she relied heavily on her parents for personal assistance as well as outside tutors.

During their senior year of high school, several of the girls became apathetic about their grades, but Marycait continued to persevere and try to improve her grades. In April, Marycait excitedly told me that she had “an A in civics this six weeks. It turns out everybody’s having trouble in that class too. Well, I think everything is cool with all my classes so far.” Despite her struggles, Marycait was able to bring up her grades during her senior year.

Teachers recognized that Marycait struggled academically and suggested that she might be receiving too much help at home from her parents. Marycait’s theater teacher explained, “With school work, she has to struggle to be a ‘B’ student, but she’s more of a ‘C’ student. And I think many times she doesn’t do her own work. I think there’s some help from home because you know how a teacher can tell a child’s voice.”

During an interview, her science teacher explained that Marycait struggled with the mathematic aspects of her assignments. He stated, “As a student, Marycait is very dedicated and persistent. Marycait has some very weak math skills, and she knows it. Her parents know it, but she tries to overcome that.” While she might lack the confidence and math skills for college, she more than made up for her deficit through perseverance and hard work.

As mentioned previously, Marycait struggled to raise her scores on the ACT. Her theater teacher recalled that Marycait “struggled with making a good ACT score. She was put under an extreme amount of pressure, and she would leave crying sometimes just at the thought of preparing for it and taking it.” Despite her academic obstacles, Marycait persevered through hard work. In addition, her parents provided her with resources that ensured a relatively seamless transition into college.

Post-secondary Experiences

After Marycait enrolled in an ACT preparatory class and brought her test scores up, her parents assisted her with the application procedure and paid her tuition, room, and board. In addition to financial support, Marycait went home on the weekends to receive academic support for her difficult courses.

Academic Integration

Marycait adjusted her schedule during the first week of class. She had been registered for a speech class but had received dual credit for speech in high school. The college did not have a record of her speech credit. Her dad went to the high school and “took care” of transferring her dual credit speech to the college. Because she dropped speech, she needed to add another class, and the advisor explained that political science was the only class that would fit in her schedule and was not full.

Upon attending her political science class during the second class meeting, the political science professor asked if she was related to her father. She replied, “Yes, he is my dad.” The professor replied that her father was a “good guy.” Marycait explained, “I have [my dad] on speed dial for my political science class.” In preparation for her political science tests, Marycait went home for the weekend so that her father could help her study for the test.

After a week of classes, I took Marycait to dinner. As I was turning on my digital recorder, which she regularly saw during high school, she asked me where she could get one. She was worried about keeping up with the lectures for her political science and history courses. I explained where she could get one, and her dad bought her one to

record her lectures. She relied on the recorder and felt relieved that she did not have to worry about keeping up with notes during class.

Major. While Marycait entered college as an undecided major, she was adamant about enrolling in theater classes. She explained to me that she adjusted her schedule during freshman orientation, in order to take the University 101 course designated specifically for theater majors. In addition, she added a special topics course, Youth Theater. She enjoyed the courses, both taught by the same professor, who she referred to by her first name. During her spring semester, Marycait enrolled in Introduction to Technical Theater, a four-credit course that met twice a week for four hours at a time. Students were expected to work on set building.

Withdrawal. Marycait successfully completed her first semester of college coursework, receiving a grade point average of 2.75, but she withdrew from all her course credits her spring semester. She explained that her Introduction to Technical Theater course was taught by a professor who picked on her. Because she experienced difficulty with her theater course, she became so worn out that she began missing her other courses. She spoke to her mother about her constant unhappiness, and eventually her mother recommended that she withdraw from college for the semester.

Marycait explained that her father was coming to campus to help her withdrawal. She told me that she would continue with her math workshop, since it was listed as zero credit hours and met twice a week in the evenings. Her father would take her to campus after he finished work. Unfortunately, Marycait was not successful with her math workshop and enrolled in a math course during the summer after her freshman year.

Math. While Marycait was enrolled in a remedial math workshop her first semester, she frequently came by where I worked providing math assistance to explain a section and work out a couple of problems, and Marycait would work out every problem in the textbook. She diligently worked for hours, asking occasional questions. She later realized that her homework requirements were to complete every other problem, but she continued to work out all of the problems. Despite her efforts, Marycait spent a year and a half enrolled in developmental math.

After withdrawing during her second semester, Marycait enrolled in a developmental math course at another local state university during the summer after her freshman year. After her successful completion, she enrolled in another developmental math course in the fall of 2010. By experiencing small successes, she is currently enrolled full-time at the local state university.

Social Integration

Marycait continued dating her college-going, high school boyfriend in college. He was a junior theater major at the nearby state university where she attended during her freshman year. He provided social and academic support as they spent time together on campus. He commuted from Livingston County and often spent his weekends playing in a band. As a result, Marycait frequently went home over the weekends to receive academic assistance from her parents.

Independence. What began as a smooth transition for Marycait, because of her parents' college-going knowledge and financial resources, turned into an obstacle. Perhaps a key issue in Marycait's experience is her inability to negotiate her future goals independently. While Marycait craved independence, throughout her first year of college

she relied on her parents for the cost of college attendance, and for emotional and academic support. She was unaware of exactly how her parents were paying for her education. When I asked if her parents had opened a college savings account for her as she was growing up, she stated, “I don’t know. I never asked.” When she struggled with her coursework, her parents were available for assistance. Because of her proximity to campus, Marycait could go home on weekends to have her parents tutor her. In addition, Marycait called home when she was struggling with the emotional pressures of college-level coursework. In the end, she decided to move back home during her spring semester because of the stress created from one course.

Reflection

I considered Marycait’s transition from high school to college most similar to my own experiences when, in elementary school, I worked with a tutor on reading. In seventh grade, I received math tutoring when I was placed in an advance math course. My parents assisted me in the college application process. Like Marycait, I was unaware of the cost of attendance. Like many of my high school peers, I expected my parents to cover the costs.

I did not worry that Marycait was in a strange environment on campus but was confident that she would make academic progress toward a bachelor’s degree. I knew that when she experienced difficulties in college, her parents would provide sound college-going advice as well as provide additional resources for a smoother transitional experience.

CHAPTER SIX: JENNIFER

Jennifer: “I Just Want to Make It Through”

When I met the girls during their sophomore year, Jennifer seemed the most rural because of her accent and her carefree natural disposition. She had shiny, long, brown hair, porcelain skin, and bright blue-green eyes. She usually wore clean, worn clothes; fashion was not a necessity. She always had a smile on her face, through various stages of dental work during high school: oral surgery, braces, and a retainer.

Jennifer’s mother was originally from Livingston County where she grew up in a hollow on their family farm. When she was in her twenties, she moved to Tennessee through the Air National Guard, earned a two-year nursing degree, and got married to Jennifer’s father. When Jennifer was born, her father was in his forties and her mother in her thirties. Jennifer has a brother, who is three and a half years older than she is, and an older step-sister from her father’s previous marriage. Her father earned nursing training through the military and worked at the Veteran’s hospital in Tennessee and transferred to the local Veteran’s hospital when they moved to Livingston County.

In Livingston County, Jennifer lived in a rural location at the end of a family hollow. One of her teachers described his initial impression of Jennifer’s family and way of living:

Both of her parents are professionals, but sometimes they don’t portray it. If you were to meet them off the street you probably wouldn’t think they were professionals, so they are very earthy people in my opinion. . . It’s probably just a little bit of a different way of life.

While in Tennessee, Jennifer attended a private, Nazarene school from pre-school to the middle of her fourth-grade year. She enjoyed the small classes, knowing all of the students in the school. She received more attention from teachers, explaining that the standards for the state of Tennessee were higher than those in West Virginia.

When her parents decided to move to Livingston County, they began homeschooling Jennifer and her brother. She explained that they experienced an educational break from the middle of fourth grade through fifth grade when they were homeschooled by their father.

If we would have actually stayed in Tennessee instead of being homeschooled, I would have been way ahead of my level on everything. I got slowed down, where my dad was homeschooling us. He had to sleep during the day because he had to work at night. He'd get us started on something and go to sleep. That's probably why we didn't do most of our work.

Despite the year and a half of homeschooling, Jennifer felt that she was on equal footing with the students in Livingston County because of her superior private school experience.

In sixth grade, when the family had moved to West Virginia, Jennifer's parents decided to enroll Jennifer and her brother in the local public school. For Jennifer, the rural middle school was different from her former private school because of the number of students.

When [I] enrolled in school here in sixth grade, we had to change classes. I thought that was cool because it was like how you see on TV with the lockers and all that stuff. We had half lockers, but we still had to share them. That sucked,

but it was fun. I thought it was so crazy that they had three different classrooms per grade.

The contrast of her previous experience in a small, private school caused Jennifer to feel uncomfortable in middle school, from classes, peers, to lunch time activities (for more, see Educational Life History in Appendix A).

Jennifer described her transition to Carroll Middle School as a lonely process: “I had no friends in sixth grade. . . I really didn’t have that many friends. I was kind of lonely.” She struggled to make friends in this rural middle school, where everyone grew up together and already knew each other.

After Jennifer’s lonely, uneventful sixth-grade year, she joined the band in seventh grade. Jennifer was interested in beginning band in sixth grade, but it was not until seventh grade when she started band.

My cousin was in the band, so we’d come and watch her. I’d talk to Mrs. Matthews. I remember she asked me what I wanted to play, and I really didn’t know because I never did anything like that before. I remember my cousin wanted me to try to play the oboe, so I told her that. Mrs. Matthews said it’s not really an outside instrument; it’s just for concerts. I said I don’t really care what I play. My mom was there too, and she said that I’d play anything she wanted me to play.

She ended up playing the tuba in marching band. Her participation in band continued throughout high school. Jennifer was excited and committed to the band program.

During the summers, she attended band camp and participated in practice at the high

school. She explained that instruments were provided by the school, so anyone who was interested could participate.

In Jennifer's tenth-grade year, four county high schools were combined into one consolidated high school for the entire county. While some students had strong feelings about leaving their former high school and attending the new consolidated Livingston County High School, Jennifer did not feel the deep connection to her original high school and saw the change as an opportunity for more interesting classes with better facilities.

Jennifer participated in marching band competitions during her high school years. Jennifer also became active in other extra-curricular activities. Her mother's nursing schedule allowed her the time to take Jennifer to activities until Jennifer received her license and a car the summer after her sophomore year. In addition to band, Jennifer became involved in the agriculture program and Future Farmers of America (FFA), serving as the organization's treasurer her senior year.

When I came to the high school for our first focus group meeting in their senior year, Jennifer excitedly showed me a picture of her new boyfriend, Drako, on her cell phone. Jennifer mentioned that he lived in a city thirty miles from Carroll. I asked how often she saw him. She explained that he was visiting her on Sunday night, and he would stay the night at her house.

Jennifer's educational goals changed during her senior year because of an unexpected pregnancy resulting from her relationship with Drako. Jennifer remained interested in becoming a veterinarian, but due to her pregnancy her choice of college changed. Because of the financial and care-giving support that her mother could offer

her and her baby if she lived at home, she decided to attend a nearby state university with no program in agriculture.

Analysis of Jennifer

After analyzing the data from interviews, observations, and documents, I identified three enabling factors of Jennifer's academic success, from early education and transitioning to college: (1) her mother's expectations and support; (2) private school; and (3) extra-curricular activities. Jennifer experienced five constraining factors: (1) homeschooling; (2) boyfriend; (3) pregnancy; (4) financial aid process; and (5) math.

Factors Enabling Success

Mother's expectations and support. Jennifer's mother was actively involved in her academic life, from being the PTA president and fundraiser in elementary school to transporting Jennifer to various extra-curricular activities in middle school and high school. Jennifer's mother had high hopes for Jennifer and her brother, expecting them to fully participate in school and earn a bachelor's degree. During Jennifer's high school and college years, her mother was a nurse at a distant hospital, travelling 30 miles one way. She worked three twelve-hour shifts a week, which allowed her a more flexible schedule to provide transportation for Jennifer's extra-curricular activities.

Jennifer grew up in a caring home where her mother frequently took in kids who needed a safe place to live. Her mother, believing that some parents did not take responsibility for raising their children, took in three adolescents who were having problems at home. Jennifer explained that her mom "would feel bad if she didn't."

Jennifer's high school teachers knew her mother because of her presence during numerous activities. Her agriculture teacher described Jennifer's mother as professional,

but “very earthy.” Her band teacher described her as “top-notch” and a “fantastic example” for Jennifer. Her science teacher recognized that her mom was “very supportive and that might be her salvation.”

Jennifer said that she has always been expected to attend college:

Ever since we were really little mom put it in our head to go to four years of college, probably because you get better jobs with a four year degree. . . My mom didn't go to a four year college. She just went to a nursing program for two years. Dad did the whole nursing thing too. Since we were little, she's always told us that we should go for a four year degree. I think Brian's going for a four year degree too. She's been telling us that ever since we were old enough to remember anything. She told us about saving our money, don't get credit cards, and go to college for four years. That's pretty much what she drove into us big time.

Jennifer valued her mother's opinion and frequently said that she would have to check with her mother before committing to something. In September, college recruiters came to Livingston County High School, and the interested seniors were allowed to attend during their second period. Jennifer had her brochures with her, stating that, “I haven't even gotten to look at all of them yet. I want to look at them with my mom.” Jennifer explained, “I have the packets. I regretfully picked up a [nearby state university] packet. I don't want to go to [there].” Jennifer was interested in attending a more distant state university because of their agriculture program.

Private school. Jennifer was the only participant who attended a private, religious school. She attended the school “from pre-school to the middle of the fourth grade.” The school was small and offered limited subjects because of a smaller faculty. Jennifer

responded well to high expectations for her class work and excelled at reading. In addition, she enjoyed the opportunity for fieldtrips.

Jennifer explained, “There were two or three different grades in one classroom because it was that small and had so few teachers. There were ten kids in my grade at most.” Because of the school size, Jennifer missed out on taking classes, like art and gym, but received more personalized instruction in her core academic classes.

Jennifer learned to read and write in pre-school. At her “pre-school graduation [she] memorized a poem and recited it.” She continued to work on her reading and writing in kindergarten. At her kindergarten graduation, she read *Me, Myself, and I*, recalling that “I don’t think that I memorized it; I think that I read it. We learned all that stuff kind of early, at my old school.” Jennifer attributes the quality of her school in Tennessee to the state’s expectations. Jennifer explained, “It was a whole lot higher standards because it was a different state.”

Jennifer explained that students were expected to complete assignments at home: “We had to read to our parents, and our parents had to sign whether we read or not. It was mostly just little stories. I liked reading when I was little. Well, I like it now.” Jennifer didn’t feel intimidated by teachers. She understood that they needed to be strict. Teachers encouraged Jennifer to improve and to value high expectations.

Ms. Woods was my first and second-grade teacher. She was really grouchy though, but nice at the same time. She taught us cursive. When we were doing our work, it had to be in the neatest cursive, or Ms. Woods would rip it up and throw it away, no matter what subject it was. We would have to do it all over. That always sucked, but she was a good teacher.

While at her private school, she went on numerous fieldtrips. The school had a van that would seat all the students in her classroom, usually two different grade levels of students. Jennifer enjoyed learning and especially thrived in an environment when she was engaged in “hands-on” learning. While her private school offered fieldtrips, there were no extra-curricular activities to join.

Extra-curricular activities. In eighth grade, Jennifer joined the band. She learned to play the baritone and tuba. Once she started high school, she began participating in marching band. She enjoyed working with her teacher, Mrs. Matthews, and considered her a second mother. Marching band required teamwork. Jennifer participated in band practice during her high school summer and competed in marching band competitions in the fall of her high school years.

Her band teacher worked at the middle school, where Jennifer attended and then transferred to the new consolidated high school when Jennifer did. Her teacher reflected:

Ever since I met her, she has been highly motivated. She doesn't want to go into something half-heartedly. Jennifer commits to it. You can count on her, always. If she tells you she will do something, she will do it. She has just always been that way.

Through participation in band, Jennifer learned commitment and that hard work pays off. I was able to attend one of her band competitions, but left before the awards were given out. The next week, Jennifer exclaimed, “We got first in our class! There were twelve schools in our class, and we were first of all of them!” Even though the band was small, they performed well and took pride in their accomplishments.

In addition to participating in band, Jennifer became involved in extra-curricular activities related to the agriculture program at the new consolidated high school. Jennifer took Agriculture 1 during her sophomore year, Small Animals during her junior year, and Large Animals during her senior year. Through the agriculture program, Jennifer spent the summers after her sophomore and junior years raising two pigs.

During the summer after tenth grade, I raised a pig for my agricultural class. My parents had to help me pay for stuff, but I was the one who took care of my pig. I gave my pig a shot. When I got him he was about 50 lbs. To be able to show them in the fair, students usually get the pigs that are born in January because if they're over that, the meat's different. They're not as good to eat until they are six months old. The fair's in July. They can't be babies when you take them in there. I got him at some point in April because the first weigh-in is in April.

In addition to raising animals, Jennifer travelled to a distant, large state university for the Future Farmers of America (FFA) competition during her junior and senior years.

At the FFA competition . . . we had to study flowers and take tests on them. You had to identify different plants and then take tests. We just went on the computer and looked up the different plants, then labeled them. We had to know the plant and a little bit more about them.

During her junior year, Jennifer wanted to attend the largest state university and enroll in their pre-veterinary and agriculture program. She expressed an interest in living in the dormitories.

Because Jennifer was involved in so many activities, she had to manage her time well. Despite her busy schedule, her agriculture teacher found her reliable:

And before [her pregnancy] she wasn't afraid to have several irons in the fire, you know. She was in the band, loved the band; and, of course she was very active with my program as well, and at that point I thought she was on the right track. All of Jennifer's teachers with whom I spoke were impressed by her dedication and determination, but concerned about her pregnancy getting in the way of her college plans.

Through extra-curricular activities, Jennifer won numerous awards. While Jennifer did not brag about her individual accomplishments, her agriculture teacher told me that Jennifer won "star placement in southern West Virginia, which means she competed against all of the agriculture students in Lincoln, Ravenswood, Wert, Ripley, Kanawha, Putnam, Cabell, and Mason counties, and she was the number one placement." She kept a record book of her two years raising her two pigs and was judged based on her performance.

Factors Constraining Success

Homeschooling. Jennifer was homeschooled during the middle of her fourth-grade year because her family was in the process of moving to Livingston County. They moved to Livingston County in the middle of her fifth-grade year and continued to homeschool until sixth grade.

Jennifer recalled that in the middle of fourth grade, "my grandmother became sick, [and] my mom wanted to move back to West Virginia. We bought the land in Livingston County from my uncle. It's on the family farm. When we were planning to move, they took us out of school." Jennifer felt that if she had stayed in school in Tennessee, instead of being homeschooled, she would have been well above her grade-

level when she transferred to Carroll. She commented, “Tennessee has so much higher expectations, and then to come here, I kind of dumbled out for a while.”

Jennifer began homeschooling while they were still living in Tennessee. Jennifer and her brother worked on curriculum packets that were similar to what they used in her private school. She remembered going to a community center with other students from the area who were participating in homeschooling and taking a test at the end of her fifth-grade year.

Jennifer does not remember following a packaged curriculum but once in Livingston County, worked on projects that her father came up with.

I think we had a leaf project once. We had to get a whole bunch of leaves and figure out what tree they were from. He’d tell us what to do and the stuff we had to we’d do and the other stuff we’d copy out of the book. We were still doing some school work in the summer when we moved up here. When we moved here, we kind of skipped a whole bunch of stuff. Our parents passed us and everything because they knew we could do it anyways. They passed us and the school went by that.

Jennifer’s father took on the responsibility of homeschooling because he was home during the day and worked at night. When they settled in after fifth grade, her dad decided that the public school system would be a better educational choice.

Boyfriend. While Jennifer demonstrated responsibility in most areas of her life, she has not always made good decisions in terms of boyfriends. During her senior year, she and her boyfriend, Drako, decided to stop using birth control, and she subsequently became pregnant. One of her teachers remarked, “I have seen some changes in that

determination through the recent developments of her personal life.” He further explained that her boyfriend “is probably going to hold her back in life.”

In the fall of her senior year, Jennifer allowed her boyfriend, Drako, to drive her car to a high school football game, as she was taking the bus with the band. Coming home from the game, Drako was arrested for driving Jennifer’s car on a suspended license. As two teachers explained to me, he got “mouthy” with the police and was arrested, leaving Jennifer stranded at the high school.

In May of Jennifer’s senior year, when she was eight months pregnant, Drako was arrested for theft. I was at the school for a focus group interview when Jennifer spent the majority of the time in the hallway crying into her cell phone as she learned of the arrest. During the next week, Jennifer explained that Drako had been arrested because he had helped his mom steal her boyfriend’s lawn mower. In addition, he was charged with selling stolen property.

Jennifer stuck by Drako, explaining, “It’s his fault, but it is also the way he was raised too. I hate it because he could be a real good person, but it’s just the way he was raised.” She explained to me that his mother had a problem with prescription medication and would have Drako take it too.

A teacher, who knew Jennifer well, explained that a barrier to college attendance could be her relationship with her boyfriend:

My fear for Jennifer is . . . [that] the child and her current/present relationship is really going to affect her in her educational future because I’m afraid that what’s going to end up happening is that she’s going to make decisions to either settle down or get a job and settle down and put education on the back burner.

When Jennifer was in the hospital for the birth of their baby, Drako was in jail. Jennifer explained that the police had come by his mother's house and found that she was cultivating marijuana. Drako was immediately taken to jail. In addition, he was responsible for a robbery at his father's house.

Despite her relationship with Drako, Jennifer persevered in pursuing her goal of college attendance. She has had the support of her mother, who continued to include Drako in family activities, fearing that Jennifer could decide to pursue a family and give up on her goal of college.

Pregnancy. When I spoke with the principal about challenges that girls in the county face, he immediately said, "teen pregnancy."

It is huge here. I am glad you brought that up. You know, the county policy is that you just don't do it. But that is not the reality, the sad part about it, is that. . . I had this conversation with our counseling guru, Dave Robinson, last week actually. Any time that it is brought up, whether it is with the board or anyone else, I think abstinence needs to be the battle cry, but the reality is that if you can't abstain, then here are some other avenues that you can look at. Nobody wants to have that hard conversation.

Despite being in the "Bible-belt," the school took the initiative to address the problem. During Jennifer's senior year, she participated in a panel to come up with solutions to teen pregnancy. Jennifer's recommendation was to "have the family planning in the schools and make it more available." She explained that the panel was going to take their suggestions to the Livingston County Board of Education.

Perhaps due to her religious upbringing, Jennifer was uneasy about discussing sex with her mother. In seventh grade, Jennifer forged her mother's signature on a consent form that granted permission to attend a sex education class. Jennifer explained,

I asked my mom, and she asked if I wanted to [attend the sex education talk]. I was not going to tell her that I wanted to. It would have been a really awkward conversation. So, I told her that it didn't matter, so she put no [on the consent form].

Jennifer continued to avoid sexual discussions with her mother throughout high school.

In eleventh grade, when Jennifer's mother found out Jennifer was sexually active with a man who lived in her hollow, she took her to the doctor to be tested for STDs and pregnancy. Her mother threatened to have the man arrested for statutory rape if Jennifer did not end the relationship. Jennifer was grounded and her phone and car privileges were limited.

In twelfth grade, during the summer between her junior and senior years of high school, Jennifer began dating Drako, who lived in a nearby city. Because of the distance, he was allowed to stay the night when he was visiting on the weekends. On those nights, Jennifer slept in her mother's bedroom.

Financial aid process. Jennifer had the confidence to ask questions when she was curious, which helped her when she was having problems with applying for financial aid and scheduling college courses. Jennifer's mom recommended that Jennifer go to the college financial aid office to make sure they had the information they needed to process her aid. Having her brother attending the same university assisted Jennifer in negotiating the process because her brother personally took her to the financial aid office.

Jennifer never appeared to worry about her ability to finance her college goals. She was confident that she would be able to depend on her mother for some financial assistance. When Jennifer became pregnant, she began looking into her financial options as a single mother. She understood that financial assistance existed for the poor, in order to increase their opportunities to escape a cycle of poverty. But Jennifer encountered problems with financial aid because she was seen as a dependent, based on her age and living arrangements at home. She learned that to be seen as an independent, single mother, she would receive more federal assistance to attend college. Jennifer explained, “I’m independent because . . . I’m going to have the baby, but with [the local state university] I’m not independent because I’m not living by myself and doing taxes.”

In May, the financial aid office told Jennifer, “Obviously [you] have to be living with somebody because how else would [you] have food and stuff like that, and [you] had to turn in whoever was taking care of my tax forms.” Despite her confusion with the procedures, she continued to contact the university’s financial aid office, in order to straighten out her independent status.

Based on Jennifer’s experiences, Cassi believed that counselors should tell pregnant teens about FAFSA, so they can make better college-going decisions.

If someone comes to school, like the financial aid, teen pregnancy. Jennifer lost all of her aid, pretty much. The FAFSA people told her that when she was pregnant, she needed to file as independent. [The nearby state university] wanted her to file as dependent because she does not provide half of the care. So, they are thinking about getting, I can’t remember her name, but one of her relatives has a trailer. They are going to try to get the electric and the trailer in Jennifer’s

name. So, that would be considered half care. They took her whole Pell grant away. She just has a little bit of aid now because of that whole screw up. No one explained it to any of us. That is big because there are a lot of teen mothers who think that they can't because they have babies. Jennifer was one of the ones, and I am very proud, who is still going. I was really worried about that. They aren't making it easy for her by not explaining things.

Finally, Jennifer was able to have the title to a trailer in her family's hollow transferred to her name and had the electricity in her name. As a result, she was able to have college paid for with extra money for books and transportation.

Jennifer was persistent in her goals of college and received support and advice from her mother and brother, who both had college experience. Despite Jennifer's successful transition to college, she experienced factors that impeded her progress.

Math. Jennifer took the ACT in April of her junior year. She received a 20 in Verbal, 17 in Math, 22 on Social Studies, and 19 on Natural Science, for a composite score of 20. She felt comfortable with her score and did not re-take the exam. She later realized that she would have to "take remedial classes. As of now, I am in the pre-science major. So I would have to take remedial math or something else for a long time, until I get up to grade level. That way I can master something."

During her junior year of high school, Jennifer took her last required math class for graduation. She explained to me that she would take a math class her senior year because she wanted to be more prepared in college. Despite her intentions, she could not find room in her senior-year schedule for a math course.

During college orientation, Jennifer was told that she was required to complete a college-level math class before she could enroll in college science courses, but she was first required to complete a development math course before she could enroll in her college-level math. Because of her low high school math achievement, she could not take the required science courses until her junior year.

Post-secondary Experiences

Initially, Jennifer was interested in attending a more distant, state university because it had an agriculture program. She visited the campus during her junior and senior years of high school and envisioned attending and living in the dormitories, experiencing the social aspects of college life. When she became pregnant, she immediately knew that her choice in colleges would change.

Mother and Student

In order to attend college, Jennifer knew she would need her mother's support and would need to live closer to home. Her intentions were to move into an apartment with her boyfriend, although she didn't want to broach the subject with her mother until her plans were finalized.

I know I couldn't do it without having my mom there. There are so many times I need someone there to hold him just to be able to do anything. If I was by myself, I wouldn't be able to do all that. It's hard for me to find time to get a shower. During her first semester, Jennifer's mother changed her work schedule so that she could take care of the baby while Jennifer attended classes two days a week. Jennifer changed her college schedule during orientation. Her advisor managed to reschedule Jennifer's classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with one Internet class. Jennifer said that her

schedule makes her “days longer, but I feel like it gives me more study time.” On her days at home, she usually found time to study.

Jennifer was able to successfully attend classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays while her mother took care of her baby. Jennifer explained that if she had to go to school five days a week in the following semester, “mom will probably switch her schedule back to during the week so she can have the weekends with us.” During her spring semester, her mother watched the baby Monday through Thursday, but she had to work on Friday. When her mom and brother were not available for babysitting, she asked Cassi or me to watch her son while she attended classes.

Jennifer acknowledged that having a baby while attending college made studying more difficult. “It’s harder to get my homework done. Mom worked Friday, Saturday, and Sunday and that’s when I do the bulk of my big work and the first weekend he would not let me set him down, all Friday and all day Saturday.” Jennifer recognized that she had to be more responsible than traditional college students because she was raising her son. She felt competent in class, but saw that some students “aren’t really worried about their classes as much as me because they are still in that whole party part of it I guess.” Despite missing out on the social aspects of college, Jennifer perseveres in her college courses.

Well, a lot of times I put him in bed at 8:00 p.m., and I can’t go in my room and study. I usually stay in the living room, and the TV will be on, and I’ll get distracted by that. But I’ve been going in mom’s room and studying after he goes to bed.

Once Jennifer saw Cassi's dormitory room, she felt a sense of what she had given up because of her early parenthood. She reflected, "I never thought about dorm life before. . . [Cassi] doesn't do a whole lot of activities around campus though as far as I can tell. That's stuff I would be doing." Jennifer accepted her choices, but regretted missing the social aspects that she would have enjoyed participating in.

While Jennifer was very supportive of Drako, she was less willing to put up with his behavior once she had the baby. Jennifer broke off her relationship with Drako when he became aggressive with her when she was holding their baby. He continued to have problems with the law throughout Jennifer's college attendance. Jennifer explained to me that he had stolen property from his father. The only way for his father to get back the stolen property, which was in a pawn shop, was to charge Drako with theft.

Jennifer has successfully attended college, going on her fourth semester. While she was competent in most subjects, she struggled with math. She was unable to pass her developmental math course until her third attempt. The delay in her math is likely to prolong her time at college and leave her with only science classes as an upperclass student.

Reflection

On October 31, 2008, Jennifer took me aside to tell me she was pregnant. My heart sank as I thought of her lost goals. I managed to choke out a "Congratulations!" as was expected by her smiling face. Most of her teachers felt that her pregnancy could hinder her college plans, but knew that her mother's support might enable her transition from high school to college.

Because of three semesters spent on her developmental math course, Jennifer is currently planning on transferring to another college and majoring in a veterinary tech program. This move might require moving closer to a more distant campus, leaving her to take care of her son without her mother's constant support.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CASSI

In the following three chapters, three of the five participants, who would be first-generation college students, are portrayed through their most significant educational experiences from elementary to college. Chapter seven describes the first of these students, Cassi, including a personal profile followed by a discussion of her educational experiences, identifying key factors that enabled or constrained her progress after high school and into college, followed by a discussion of her post-secondary experiences.

Cassi: Mom's Only Hope

Within the group, Cassi acted as the rule maker and rule enforcer. She was aware that I was interested in their experiences and, despite the numerous distractions, helped keep us on task. She seemed to understand what was important to my research and appreciated having her voice heard. She managed to keep me posted about what was going on with the other girls during summer breaks and during college.

Cassi is petite in stature. Throughout high school, Cassi's dirty-blond hair grew past her waist. She usually wore her hair in a single braid that lay over her shoulder and onto her chest where she could play with the ends. Cassi appeared confident within our group meetings but was quiet when we travelled outside Livingston County for activities. I frequently noticed that she stayed close by my side. While I found her confident and friendly with peers, once in college she explained that she was uncomfortable talking to her peers.

Cassi is a native of Livingston County, and her parents are also natives of the county. Cassi lives deep in the hollows of the county where her father grew up. Her

parents added onto their home as their family grew. Her home sits on a one-lane paved road deep in the county. Her paternal grandparents' double-wide trailer lies on a road that runs parallel to her road. The family property runs along the two houses, including 14 acres of land that has been passed down from her fraternal great-grandparents. Cassi explained that her great-grandfather,

Papa, set it up to where the only way that you could sell any of that land is if the other two sisters agree, which is why Elizabeth's land is still there. When [she] died, her daughter wanted to sell it, but Mama and Nancy wouldn't sign off on it. So, we will get grandma's 14 acres. We pretty much own it now because we have been paying taxes on it since we have been there. With squatters' rights, technically we have got it.

In addition, Cassi described her fondness for playing on the mountain at the back of her house and exploring the rock that she treasures.

Cassi's maternal grandmother was an irresponsible mother, and Cassi's mother had guardianship of herself and her younger brother at the age of seventeen. Because of her family responsibilities, Cassi's mother was excluded from high school experiences such as prom and graduation. She had to work during her senior year to support herself and her brother, but remained in high school part-time. She always wanted Cassi to have the experiences in high school that she had missed out on. As an adult, her mother has worked a variety of jobs from bartending to customer service at a recreational department store. Cassi's father, an auto mechanic, worked out of his home garage before working in a bike shop in a local town during the end of Cassi's high school years. As a result of her

parents' hectic schedules, Cassi "baby sits" her younger sister and brother after school and during the summer.

As a teacher explained, Cassi got out of her hollow primarily by the school bus: She didn't have much extracurricular activities. Once she got on the bus and went to the hollow, she didn't come out until it was time to get back on the bus. For instance, if she stayed at a friend's house, she would have to bring her stuff and go home with them, and then . . . she couldn't get back home until she rode the bus home.

The teacher suggested that it was an issue of gender: "If she were a boy she would probably have her a big truck and be able to go and run and do, but mom has sheltered her." Perhaps, if Cassi had been born a male, she might have experienced more freedom. As a female, Cassi was stuck at home taking care of her younger brother and sister. Cassi remarked that she or her brother would never have a truck of their own because they were "poor."

Cassi expressed strong ties to her former middle school and high school because her parents attended the schools. She enjoyed being one of the better students in her class. Before the high school consolidation, Cassi hoped to become her high school's valedictorian. Initially, she resisted the high school consolidation and regretted not being a senior at her old school because of the tradition of the school's senior hallway.

While Cassi's goals have changed from her sophomore year when she wanted to become a doctor, to her senior year, when she planned on becoming a nurse, she explained that "I always thought I was going to college." Cassi thought that nursing

would be a more practical career path because she had plans of getting married and having children after graduating college.

Cassi explained that she was going to break the family tradition of having children at 19 years of age. “All the women had kids at 19. I’m breaking the tradition. I’m getting on as many birth controls [as possible]. I was going to stay abstinent until I was 20. I was going to stay abstinent until I got married.” She further explained that she planned on getting married after college, and then she would begin her family:

I only want one kid, when I’m 25, maybe two. I want to get married after college, then kids whenever we are ready.

Her goals included getting her degree in nursing followed by marriage and children. She was anxious to do well in college so that she had financial security to support her family.

Cassi dated Harry during her sophomore and junior years of high school. Because Cassi lived so far out in the hollows, they talked on the phone or sent instant messages on the computer every night and spent time together once a month when Harry came to her house. On a rare occasion, they went out to dinner or a movie. During her senior year, he broke up with her, and she appeared more confident and independent and looked forward to attending college. At the end of her senior year, she began talking to Harry again, at first as just friends.

After attending a College Summit workshop during the summer after her junior year, Cassi flirted with the idea of applying to Yale University. The woman who worked with her on her personal statement explained that her personal statement was a good example of what the Ivy League schools were looking for. After Cassi’s mother heard about her Ivy League-caliber essay, she encouraged Cassi to apply to Yale. While Cassi

considered applying to Yale, she recognized that extra-curricular activities were valued at the Ivy League schools.

I am not going to apply to Yale. I'm not well-rounded. It's not just that, you have to have all kinds of extra stuff. They value people who did sports or student government and community service. I have done some, just can't stand sports. I chose nursing; it's practical. I want to help people.

She felt intimidated about the idea of moving so far from home.

I think my mom has pretty much accepted I'm going to Marshall. She wanted me to apply to Yale. I made it worse by telling her that lady told me I could get a pretty good scholarship with that essay.

While Cassi's goal was to receive the West Virginia Promise Scholarship, she fell short because of her low math scores on the ACT. She received waivers for the exam based on her family's income, allowing her to take the test for free. The first time she took the ACT was in April of her junior year. At that point, she scored 32 on Verbal, 17 on Math, 34 on Social Studies, and 21 on Natural Science, for a composite score of 26. In an essay for her AP English class her senior year, she described her goals:

My calendar is filled with red circled and bold letters. First and foremost on my list is retaking my ACT. Due to my previous unsatisfactory math score, I do not qualify for the holy grail of a scholarship that will be my main source of college funding: the Promise. If I succeed in the first goal, I will find myself buried up to the neck with my next goal. I have to finish all of the paperwork that goes along with getting said scholarship. I have heard that this is a very tedious task, but I do believe that I'm up to the challenge.

Cassi took the ACT two more times, scheduling them in advance and receiving waivers. While her composite score remained the same, she brought up her math score by one point, which was not high enough for the Promise scholarship.

Unfortunately, she did not sign up in advance to retake the ACT one final time before the deadline and could not receive a waiver. She explained that she was not able to come up with the money for the exam, in addition to the late fee that would have to be paid because of her late decision to register.

Periodically during her senior year, Cassi explained to me what scholarships she was applying for, in order to pay for her education. Cassi managed to piece together a Pell grant, several local scholarships that were need-based, and a small student loan. Cassi carefully measured the cost of attendance, major, and choice of college, looking for what course of action would take her to her ultimate goal of being “an RN that specializes in Obstetrics, and it would be really good if I had a degree as a sonogram technician also.”

Analysis of Cassi

After analyzing data from interviews, observations, and documents, I identified four factors that enabled Cassi’s academic success, from early education through high school and into college: (1) mother’s expectations; (2) motivation; (3) love of reading; and (4) nursing. In addition, I identified four constraining factors: (1) sheltered; (2) overly concerned with GPA; (3) lack of scholarship advice; and (4) math.

Factors Enabling Success

Mother’s expectations. Cassi credited her mother with her goal of going to college. From an early age, Cassi’s mother nurtured her and was both supportive and

protective. Cassi had a very close relationship with her mother who has high expectations of her. Her mother would love to have Cassi remain at home in Livingston County, but wants Cassi to have the experiences that she wished for herself.

While Cassi's father has always been in her life, her parents didn't get married until she was eight years old. Cassi reflected on her early years when she had her mother's full attention:

My parents didn't get married until I was eight years old. Mom and I did a bunch of stuff before kindergarten. Back then it was just me and her for a long time. She had plenty of time to play with me. She had a job and everything, but it was still just me and her. I could say my ABCs at 12 months. I knew them, but I thought LMNOP was one word.

Cassi felt that the one-on-one attention from her mother in her early years helped prepare her for academic success. On her first day of kindergarten, Cassi recalled saying good-bye to her mother: "[Mom] cried. I didn't, but I never told her until years later that I wouldn't sit in any other seat than the one she sat in when she brought me to class." Living in a remote, rural area, Cassi was most familiar with her mother and other close family members.

During the sixth grade, Cassi experienced sexual harassment from a male teacher who was known for touching female students. Cassi explained that the teacher had a reputation for touching girls, but no one had challenged him successfully. Throughout this experience, her mother believed and supported her. Cassi felt uncomfortable when her male teacher gave her a "pat on the butt, and he always had me sit in his lap." Cassi explained, "I told the counselor first. Someone had mentioned it, and [the teacher] ended

up finding out. He was just so mean. I went back to the counselor's office, and mom came and got me.”

While Cassi's father expressed complacency about the long-standing problems with this teacher, her mom validated Cassi's feelings and stood by her during a bad situation. Her mother's support encouraged Cassi to stand up for herself:

[The teacher] had problems going way back from when dad had him in school.

Dad didn't think it was a big deal; he was like, “He has always done that.” Mom was the only one who listened. She went berserk, of course. She is super mom. Her mother stood by her as the teacher was investigated and took her to the hearings and Board of Education meetings:

The board actually had to have a big investigation because someone had hid his file because there was stuff from way back that people had reported and nothing had been done about it. They were trying to hide it, so they wouldn't find it during this one. Word got out about it, and all the board pulled a meeting. So many people showed up at that meeting, community members and people who had him in the past. They didn't plan on having that many people. They had to get a big old rack of chairs. Mom went and got them.

Cassi's mother was there for her throughout the experience of confronting and following through with the procedures that were required to remove the offensive teacher from the classroom.

Cassi's mom was torn between letting go of Cassi and keeping her close to her. Cassi explained, “Mom doesn't want me to go, but she wants me to go and do something and be somebody. It was something that she always wanted to do but did not get to do

because of her situation.” On the other hand, Cassi’s mom told Cassi it would be fine with her to “lay on the couch and watch cartoons for a year.” Despite her desire to keep Cassi close, she encouraged her to go to college. While Cassi’s mom was not able to direct Cassi in college-going procedures, her mother, from an early age, encouraged her to go to college, as Cassi explained:

In first grade, mommy wanted me to go to college, but I did not think too deeply about it. It was more junior high and high school that I started thinking that mom wanted me to go to college, but I wanted to, too. You can get a better job, so I could have money to support as big of a family as I want.

In an essay about her experiences in high school, Cassi wrote:

Coming from a background of high school graduate parents, and drop-out relatives, I strived for success in academics. I wanted to make my mother proud and show that the Smith descendants are not the unintelligent, backwoods people like we have been portrayed. Not even the members of my family believed we had what it takes. I can still see my grandmother sitting on the porch, looking out at my five-year-old brother and sighing. The look on her face was not one of sadness, but of reluctant acceptance. She looked over at me and said, “He’s gonna turn out like the rest of them. He’s gonna drop out and become nothing.” It was then I chose not only to make my mother proud, but to set a good example for my brother. So I did. I excelled at everything I tried.

Cassi later explained, “My mom planted the seeds, but it was all me.” Despite Cassi’s mother never attending college, her mother held those values of a higher education for Cassi. Because of her mother’s support, Cassi had the energy and motivation to succeed.

Motivation. Cassi was viewed as a motivated student. She demonstrated her motivation through personal goals and a caring nature. Cassi remembered when she experienced pleasure in math. She discussed her competitive nature and desire to help others. Although she experienced problems with math, she had a desire to succeed when the reward was helping others. In fourth grade, Cassi competed in math against the smartest boy in class:

Once you were finished with your work, you got to help other people. We would race. Nobody else knew we were racing, but we were racing to see who could get up first and help somebody. It was division. . . . I wanted to help people, and I just wanted to get done before [him]. He was the person to beat in that class.

While Cassi was competitive about grades and pleasing teachers, she also was concerned for the other students in her class. In this instance, Cassi succeeded in math but explained that her comprehension of math decreased in middle and high school.

Her twelfth-grade AP English teacher mentioned that Cassi was “really encouraging with the other kids.” While Cassi demonstrated a competitive drive, her teacher recognized that Cassi did not compete with the students, but “she is very competitive with her scores. Her goal was always to better her score on her timed writing. She is very competitive with that. She is a very ambitious student.” Her teacher continued:

Cassi is very motivated. She is very organized. She is very task-oriented. She is very bothered if her work is not to her level of perfection. She is very concerned if everything is not perfect. She wants her work to be very good. She is very responsible for checking about anything that she might have missed. She makes

sure that her work is [completed] in a reasonable time. She is real focused on that. That is a strength. She has a good work ethic.

In addition, her speech teacher from her junior year explained that Cassi will be successful because “she’s driven.” Her AP English teacher during her junior year stated that “she has an inner drive.”

Cassi excelled under high expectations. She was enthusiastic about her academics when she was engaged. While Cassi was an introvert, she did not shy away from asking questions to further her goal of nursing. One of her teachers stated that “Cassi is not shy about asking questions and asking for help.”

Cassi later explained, “I wanted more than to stay in Livingston County. It is really boring. There is nothing to do and nowhere to work. I don’t want to be the stereotypical thing that works at Burger King.” Cassi took pride in her academic achievement and was motivated to make her life better through a college education.

Love of reading. Cassi has had a love of reading starting from an early age. She remembered reading out loud in first grade. She did such a good job that the teacher sent her to read to the principal: “I read [a story] to him, and he gave me a Payday candy bar. He kept a drawer full of candy bars. It was my first Payday, and I became addicted to them, right then.” Cassi blossomed with the recognition of teachers, and frequently took on a leadership role in class.

Both Cassi and Marycait’s third-grade teacher, who read to them in class, made quite an impression on both girls.

[My teacher] used to read us these *American Girl* books out loud. The *American Girl* that I remember the most was *Felicity*. After reading the book about *Felicity*,

we had a tea party. The boys in class wore neck ties. Andy's grandma had made us little bonnets for the girls to wear. We had green tea, cream, sugar, and wafers. It was hot tea.

Cassi continued to explore literary works in various classes.

During high school, Cassi enrolled in two AP English courses: a writing course and a literature course. During her junior year, she took an AP English writing course that she found rigorous and time consuming. During her senior year, she took an AP English literature course in which she excelled. Cassi's AP literature teacher commented: "She is a good writer. She interprets literature on a very deep level. She sees a lot of things in what she reads. She is a neat kid." When reading *The Glass Castle* for her AP literature class, Cassi was able to identify with the story's characters and their rural life. In her assigned reading logs, Cassi wrote: "It reminds me of my mom's stories of her childhood." In addition, she saw the similarity of rural life, writing, "I know what a rural life with more responsibility is like."

According to Cassi's nursing teacher, one of the enabling factors for Cassi's success was reading: "She likes to read, that's a biggie. Reading is going to help her out a lot. And she's inquisitive and wants to know what's going on. She's a good student and has pretty good study skills." Cassi has continued to be an avid reader in high school and college.

Interest in nursing. During her sophomore year, Cassi wanted to be a doctor, more specifically an obstetrician-gynecologist. In order to help her in the field, she signed up for a Career and Technical Education block of nursing classes during her junior

year and continued in her senior year. In the middle of her junior year, she decided to pursue nursing because it was more compatible with her interest in starting a family.

Cassi showed continued excitement about her future in nursing, but her senior year, she was often disappointed with her nursing class because the work-load was not rigorous. As I was waiting to interview her nursing teacher, Cassi brought up a cart and started checking my vital signs. After she finished, she declared that I was normal.

Cassi was frustrated her senior year because the nursing teacher and fellow students “didn’t care.” Cassi stated, “We don’t do anything. Well, I do things because I’m the only one that cares. So [my nursing teacher] is teaching me CPR and first aid. There are only like 11 or 12 of us. They don’t care.” While she was frustrated by her fellow students’ apathy, she continued to express a desire to learn as much as possible about nursing in high school. Cassi later explained:

I really wanted to have a good job that helps people. It was a money thing, but then I knew that I wanted to help people. That’s what led me to want to be a nurse. You get to care for a patient, and the hours aren’t as crazy as a doctor. So, I will have more time to have a family. I wouldn’t be on-call so much. I can still make pretty decent money. Look at my Aunt Rose, she makes a lot of money, but I don’t plan on travelling like she does.

Cassi’s aunt is a nurse, who has inspired Cassi as a role model.

Factors Constraining Success

Sheltered. Her nursing teacher noticed that other students felt that Cassi did not have real-life skills. Based on having Cassi in class for two years, she worried that Cassi was immature and might be intimidated in college.

The thing that concerns me a little bit about Cassi is the fact that she's so immature. In some respects, she's very immature and has not experienced anything that she's going to encounter when she goes down to [a nearby state university] and lives on campus.

Another teacher stated that she was concerned about Cassi's "lack of confidence, but I think that will come with the experience of going to college." She stated further that Cassi had limited experiences outside of Livingston County, which might make it more difficult for her to "tolerate the unknown."

Yet another teacher mentioned that "she's been babied a lot. That's not so bad, but I think that's a thing we do to our kids, especially in Livingston County; we don't equip them for going away from this comfort zone." The teacher suggested that many of the students in their rural environment are not taught to take risks and venture outside of their comfort zone. She expressed concerns about Cassi spending time at home, taking care of her siblings.

I asked her what she was going to do this summer, and she said she'll probably babysit. I am not sure of the whole dynamics of the family. . . . Mom goes and does what she wants and works and this, that, and the other and Cassi is stuck up in the hollow with the kids. I hate that for her.

The teacher explained that Cassi's peers invite her on outings, even promising to provide transportation, but Cassi cannot attend because of her responsibilities at home. A teacher noted, "She said [that her] aunt sent . . . a check and asked if I could run her to the bank. I said I would be glad to." Because her schedule was home and school, she was not able to go to the bank or post office. She didn't work, but watched her younger sister and

brother after school and during the summers. Cassi confirmed that she did not get out much or participate in extra-curricular activities because of “my mom’s work schedule.”

Overly concerned with GPA. Cassi was always conscious of her grade point average, remarking during her junior year that “the only B I ever received was in gym in eighth grade.” At the beginning of her senior year, she was registered for AP calculus but worried that the course might lower her GPA. By October Cassi decided “I don’t need AP calculus. It’s bringing down my GPA. I can’t grasp anything, and it would be different to have someone in there to talk to and bounce things off of.” Because Cassi was worried about her GPA, she decided to drop her AP calculus class. Cassi’s high school GPA, with her weighted AP courses, was a 4.0. She received two Bs during high school, one in a physical education class and one in her senior civics class.

It is ironic that her GPA could handle a low grade in AP calculus, but remaining in the class could have increased her ACT math score as she was one point away from a scholarship. While Cassi was concerned about her GPA for college admissions, she was unaware of the GPA requirements for the West Virginia Promise Scholarship. When I brought in copies of the West Virginia Promise Scholarship requirements, I was surprised that Cassi did not know the requirements. She was surprised by the GPA requirements, thinking they were much higher.

She later explained her high school GPA concerns saying,

That is when I was thinking of going to some place other than [the nearby state university]. I wanted to have the GPA to back it up. I wanted my GPA to be way up there. It wasn’t that hard in high school. I never really had to study or anything.

Lack of scholarship advice. Despite asking me questions about college during my periodic visits to the high school, she struggled to navigate the college-going process on a day-to-day basis. While Cassi's grades were strong, she struggled to negotiate her way through the financial aid and scholarship process. She primarily looked up information online at school, struggling to find accurate, current information. Cassi was frustrated by the difficulty she experienced navigating a nearby, state university website.

The information that they have on the website is for this year, not for next year.

The tuition is the prices for this year, and it is like \$1000 difference from the information that is on my account.

For Cassi, money was always tight. She mentioned, "I have had free lunch for as long as I can remember." In high school, especially her senior year, she talked about wanting to attend events, but remarked, "I don't have the funds." During her early years, she was ashamed about having to go without. She did not want to talk about being at a disadvantage until she realized that she would receive college scholarships because of her parents' financial hardships.

At this point, Cassi put her pride aside and began pursuing scholarships for financially needy students. She questioned me about the term "first-generation college student," and I explained that as no one in her immediate family attended college, she would be considered "first-generation." She began applying for more scholarships, explaining that she was "doubly disadvantaged" because she was a first-generation college student from a poor family.

In addition, Cassi encountered problems coming up with the money for the additional expenses of moving into the dormitories. She was confronted with a \$200 bill

for her dormitory deposit at the end of her senior year. She became frustrated when her parents could not come up with the money, telling me that her mother had always told her that they would come up with the money for college. Cassi's Aunt Rose managed to come up with the money for her dormitory deposit along with a trip to Walmart for dormitory room supplies. In addition, Cassi's Aunt Betsy took her to the store for additional dormitory room supplies. Cassi later told me that her mother cried after she had moved into the dormitory because she was not able to buy Cassi new clothes for college.

One of her teachers mentioned, "I am concerned about the finances, but she seems to have covered those the first year." Cassi later explained that she was able to receive money for tuition, from a Pell grant, "because my parents are poor." Cassi explained how difficult her experience finding scholarships was:

They were out-of-the-way scholarships that you can fill out online. It is on Fast Web, but it didn't help at all. [Scholarships] sort of fell into my lap. I think McKelvy was the only one that I applied for. Everything else just fell into my lap.

Because of her parents' low income, Cassi was able to piece together grants and additional need-based scholarships.

Math. Cassi felt intimidated by math and frequently mentioned that she just did not have the ability. Because of her low math achievement, she did not receive the West Virginia Promise Scholarship. She began taking advanced, high school math courses in eighth-grade, completing her high school math requirements during her junior year. As

mentioned above, Cassi enrolled in AP calculus during her senior year but dropped the course because of her concern for her GPA.

Recently, she revealed to me the point when she began experiencing problems with math. “We started out with good teachers, but they left.” During her eighth-grade year, her math teacher left in the middle of the year because he “got a job at the Board of Education.” During her ninth-grade year, her teacher left because she was going through a divorce from a fellow teacher and transferred schools. Cassi explained:

All this started way back in Algebra 1 and Algebra 2. We didn’t really get good instruction since both of our teachers just left half way through the year and were replaced by incompetent teachers. [My second eighth-grade math teacher] knew what he was doing, but he couldn’t keep control of the class, so he couldn’t teach us.

About the next permanent substitute teacher in ninth-grade, she said:

She was so timid that she couldn’t keep control of anyone. The teacher that we had before would go through the book and make sure that you took notes. She would use the overhead and make sure that you wrote stuff down. You could refer back to your notes when you were doing your homework. We got points for keeping our notes in our notebooks.

Despite earning As in all of her math classes, Cassi struggled with math concepts. She was frustrated by poor instruction, and the teachers’ inability to control the classroom environment.

After receiving ACT scores from her fourth attempt, Cassi entered the conference room at Livingston County High School for a focus group meeting and simply said, “No

Promise!” At first, I did not understand the reference, thinking that someone was involved in breaking a promise. Then she explained further that she did not increase her test score in math. She was disappointed but not discouraged from her pursuit of a college education.

Post-secondary Experiences

Although Cassi did not earn the West Virginia Promise Scholarship that was her goal, she was able to piece together scholarships and take out a minimal student loan. She excitedly planned on living in the dorms, members of her family taking her to get dorm necessities. The day she moved into the dorms, her family all came out to help her move her belongings in. As her family and I waited outside the dorm in the shade from a tree, Cassi’s younger sister watched the college guys, explaining that she wanted to go to college. Her younger brother ran in circles in the open grass, explaining that his sister was going to college. Her father stood by waiting for the heavy lifting, while her mother fought to control her emotions.

Social Integration

While Cassi had lasting friendships in high school, she did not make friends easily in college. She explained to me that she was never one to initiate conversations, and when she got to college she did not change. She knew that a different environment would be difficult for her since she grew up and went to school with the same 50 students since kindergarten:

I finally figured out why I am scared. I have been with the same 50 people my entire life. It’s been the same people, but once we got [to the consolidated high

school] we didn't have as many classes together. At least a bunch of them are going to [the same university], so I might see them.

Once she entered the consolidated high school, she had fewer classes with those same 50 students, but found comfort by having a few familiar faces in class.

During the summer before college, Cassi got back together with her ex-boyfriend, Harry. When she started college, he came to visit her every evening after work. The visiting hours for the opposite sex ended at 11 o'clock, so he went home then. On the weekends, members of the opposite sex could be signed in overnight, so he spent Friday and Saturday nights in the dorm with Cassi.

After her fall semester, Cassi and Harry moved into an apartment close to campus, and she got a part-time job to help with bills. She continued her high school friendships throughout college, rarely making friends with classmates. In addition, she remains close to her mother, calling her daily in the evenings.

Academic Integration

Because Cassi transferred into college with AP English and AP Literature, she was not required to take the introductory English class. She was in the honors' program at the college, so she registered for an advanced English course that covered the first two English course requirements. Cassi already had credit for the first course, but registered for the honors' English course. In addition, she took anatomy, chemistry, math, and an honor's university orientation course. She felt comfortable with her math class, which was an extra hour a week due to her low math test scores.

She has continued into her second year of college, enrolled in mostly nursing classes. She struggled with micro-biology during her third semester, stating "I don't like

the way the teacher teaches, but I have to take him again because there are not other teachers for the class.” She earned a D the first time, but the nursing program requires a grade of a C or better. Currently, she is interested in taking summer school to lighten her load for her junior year. She expects to graduate in two years with a nursing degree.

Reflection

After I had completed my single-case analysis of Cassi, I sat down with her to get her responses to my findings and interpretations. I was surprised when Cassi explained that I was an enabling factor to her college attendance:

You helped a lot with the college thing, with trying to get scholarships and stuff.

The McKelvy thing was kind of a fluke. I applied for it a few hours before the deadline. I didn't think I was eligible because I didn't know what was considered "first-generation." I didn't know if I could be considered "first-generation college" because my first cousin had gone to college. I was so confused, but I just figure that if I get denied, I get denied. I milked the fact that I stay home and watch my siblings, while my parents worked. I couldn't have a job of my own. I really milked that in my essay.

Because Cassi had high grades in high school and appeared committed to becoming a nurse, I had high expectations of college attendance. I worried that the cost of attendance would prevent her from attending college directly after high school. Cassi wrote in a writing prompt, "It didn't matter if I had to take out millions in loans. I was going to go to college."

I also worried about Cassi's over-reliance on her high school boyfriend, as well as myself, for social support. During her first semester of college, Cassi would stop by to

see me at work, and we would frequently have lunch together. She ate most of her meals in her room and did not make any new friends. She explained to me one day that she was “socially awkward” and found it difficult to talk to her college classmates, worrying about finding a lab partner in class.

Currently, Cassi is finishing up her sophomore year in college in the nursing program. She is living with her boyfriend and has found “domestic bliss” more difficult than she initially expected. She has taken out more student loans this year and has quit her part-time job to focus more on college and her nursing practicums.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ASHLEY

Ashley: “No One Was on My Side”

Prior to meeting Ashley, I had heard about one of the girls being in foster care. At first, I did not realize Ashley was the “foster care kid.” She always referred to her foster parents as “Mom” and “Dad.” Ashley rarely complained about her situation when in a group but bragged about the benefits of foster care. Ashley was outgoing, bubbly, and always smiling. She seemed to make the best of any situation and never appeared to struggle with relationships.

Ashley was tall and heavy. She had shoulder-length, light brown hair, sometimes with a streak of red in the front, and wore trendy eyeglasses. She usually wore jeans or sweatpants with t-shirts or sweatshirts. Within our group meetings, Ashley acted as the protector of the other girls, and, because she came from an urban county, appeared to have more street smarts.

Ashley explained that her biological parents grew up around each other in a neighboring, urban county. They both quit high school and her father earned his GED. Ashley spoke fondly of her parents and was close to her sister who is five years younger. Ashley described her early years as good and stable. She described how her father took care of the family:

My dad had really good jobs, plus burglary. So, we had a lot of money. Mom didn't ever have to work at all. He was good to her. Whatever she wanted, he would just give her the money to get it. That's how it was. We would go to

Walmart once a month and spend \$1000, anything and everything. We would have like four or five buggies.

Ashley explained that she made “straight As” up until her sixth-grade year, when her parents started experiencing difficulty. Ashley’s parents began fighting, and Ashley recalled her father drinking more and becoming violent with her mother. Later, she realized that her mother’s drug abuse began around this time.

He came home drunk all the time. During my sixth-grade year on Christmas Eve, my dad really beat the shit out of my mom. He beat her really bad. He went to jail that time. He got out about a week later. His dad would always bail him out. And then, life was okay for about a year. I guess she was doing drugs already because I remember that night, whenever he was beating her, he was saying that she was such a “crack whore.”

During the summer after her sixth-grade year, her father was arrested for burglary. She was home when the police came to arrest her father. That was the last time that Ashley saw her birth father. During the following year, her mother was in and out of their house. Ashley said that her mother managed to hold things together for a year before her drug problem got in the way of mothering. Ashley explained that around that time her mother increasingly disappeared from her house for extended periods of time, leaving Ashley with the responsibility of taking care of herself and her younger sister, Lilly.

I had straight As up until sixth grade. That was when everything with my parents started going downhill. So that was horrible up to eighth grade. I started raising

Lilly really when I was eleven, and she was six. Mom and Dad were always gone. I pretty much raised her until she was eleven.

With Ashley's mother gone for extended periods of time, she took on the responsibility of being a caregiver to her younger sister. During her eighth-grade year, she was responsible for her and her sister's laundry, meals, homework, and getting ready for and attending school. (For more, see Ashley's Educational Life History in the Appendix A).

Before Ashley entered ninth grade, her mother was arrested for drugs, and Ashley and her little sister were placed in foster care. She continued to hold out hope that her mother would get better. While in jail, Ashley felt that her mother was getting better because she was drug free. She explained, "I think jail helped her out a lot." Ashley was disappointed in her mother's drug relapse when she left jail. "She got out a few days before Christmas. She never even came and saw us for weeks. I know that she went right back to drugs." Ashley grudgingly accepted that her mother was not taking responsibility for her children.

When her mother received her prison sentence, Ashley and her sister were taken to her maternal grandmother's house for one night. Because her grandmother was older and ill, Ashley and Lilly were put into foster care. Ashley explained:

Ninth grade was the worst. That is when I got put into the foster care. I was only at Hamilton High School until December. The first foster home I stayed in, I was there for a week, was in [another county]. I got moved into the permanent one Clayton that I was at for three or four months. That was permanent to me.

Ashley came to Livingston County in December of her ninth-grade year, when she and her sister moved into a home with an older married couple who were already fostering a

girl with autism. Finally in a permanent foster home, Ashley was disappointed when months later the family arrangements changed. During the year, the couple divorced, and Ashley and her sister remained with her foster dad. Ashley explained that “as soon as [his wife] divorced him all hell broke loose.”

Ashley struggled to fit into the close-knit community in Livingston County. She described the change as “moving from a refrigerator box to a shoe box.” She felt uncomfortable as her new rural peers asked her, “Where are you from? What are your parents like?” Ashley was used to being able to hide her home problems from her school friends in a larger high school. She experienced discomfort when her peers asked so many personal questions when she just wanted to blend in.

Then, I was in Carroll High School. It was like being pulled from a humongous school like [my former high school] and being put into Carroll. It's like taking a dog that used to have a huge yard and putting him on a patio. I hated Carroll when I first started going there.

After half a year at Carroll High School, the four county high schools consolidated into one larger high school, Livingston County High School. Like Jennifer and Sara, who transferred to Livingston County during middle school, Ashley found the high school consolidation easier than the native local students, who were negotiating a new experience of meeting numerous new students.

I felt like the new girl, until I got to Livingston County High School, and everybody was here. Now, I miss Carroll. Everybody knew everybody. Here I try to get to know everybody, but it is easier said than done in a school of nine hundred. I had friends the first day, because I'm just that type of person. I'm not

one to shy out of something; I'm one of the first ones to throw myself out there. I admit sometimes I'm a little scared too, but I'll get over it. I'm just used to all the social workers being like, "Tell me your life story." I'm so used to it; I just kind of put it out there.

During the summer between Ashley's junior and senior year, she started dating Jacob who was four years older. They met at the local grocery store where they both worked.

During her senior year, Ashley began increasingly complaining about her foster father and his imposing rules. She wanted to spend more time with her friends and Jacob. She did not share her home problems with the group, only during individual conversations with me. I was surprised in the spring of her senior year when she mentioned being placed in a new foster home. It was difficult to keep track of the two additional foster home moves during the remainder of her senior year.

Initially, Ashley talked about going to a nearby state university, in the city where she lived with her birth family in her early years. Ashley's former foster dad, however, was a big fan of a larger, more distant state university that he encouraged her to attend. Ashley applied and was accepted at the larger state university, majoring in pre-pharmacy. Foster care would pay for her tuition, books, room and board for four years, so Ashley did not have the burden of the cost of college attendance. Her social worker told her that she was required to stay in the dormitories, but Ashley insisted on moving into an apartment with her boyfriend, Jacob.

In October of her first semester in college, I went to visit Ashley over Parents' Weekend. Ashley explained that Jacob was getting too possessive, but she was hoping they could work things out. I found out later, that after my visit, Ashley and her

boyfriend broke up, and she began dating another boy from Livingston County. In addition, her mother, who was quitting drugs, moved into Ashley's apartment, along with her new boyfriend. During her first year at a distant state university, Ashley admitted getting "stranded in Livingston County" for weeks at a time, leading to her failing grades.

After her first two semesters, she moved back to Livingston County, and lived with her new boyfriend's family. After failing her first year of college, she had to sit out a semester. During the fall of 2010, Ashley worked at a small, local newspaper and bought a car. When the next semester began, Ashley enrolled full-time at a nearby state university where Jennifer and Cassi were attending.

Analysis of Ashley

After analyzing the data from interviews, observations, and documents, I identified four factors that enabled Ashley's academic success, from early education through her transition from high school to college: (1) early parental expectations; (2) independence; (3) no-cost attendance; and (4) boyfriend/relationships. Ashley experienced four constraining factors: (1) parental abandonment; (2) Computer Aided Drafting (CAD); and (3) unstable foster care.

Factors Enabling Success

Early parental expectations. Ashley's parents had been "together since they were knee high to a grasshopper. They did not graduate high school. Dad quit in the tenth-grade and got his GED." Despite her parents' low educational level, Ashley recalled "ever since I was in elementary school, I knew that I wanted to go to college. My parents told me that I had to go to college." Ashley excelled academically because of the physical threat from her father if she was unsuccessful. She remarked, "My dad

influenced me educationally because I would get the shit beat out of me if I came home with a bad grade. He would whip me, but he wouldn't beat me.”

Ashley also felt encouraged to do well educationally by her mother, who dropped out of school in the ninth grade. She explained:

My mom read to me and my sister from the time we were in her belly. I knew how to walk before I was one. I never remember it being hard for me to learn to read, or anything like that. I knew all this stuff at such a young age.

Ashley's mother sat down with her and her sister to help with homework.

I remember mom helping us with our science homework because I really hate science. It was not my thing, until this year for some reason. I remember that we would be sitting at opposite ends of the kitchen table, and mom would be sitting in the middle. If we needed help, she would be right there. She would not leave us until our homework was done because if she wasn't there, we would just goof off and not do it.

While Ashley's mother was a positive influence in her elementary school years, Ashley was soon left to raise her sister and take care of herself. When I asked Ashley about her experiences in middle school, she continually referred back to her family problems and home life. (For more, refer to Ashley's Educational Life History in Appendix A).

Independence. Ashley gained self-confidence and personal strength through the obstacles that she faced during her parents' imprisonment and coping with the foster care system. She experienced independence at an early age because of her parents' neglect, leaving her with the obligation of taking care of herself and her younger sister during

middle school. Once she was in the foster care system, she felt powerless under the restriction of foster care and fearful about her future.

As a result of her abandonment, Ashley developed stronger life-skills through her experience, at thirteen years of age, running a household and making sure that she and her sister were fed and clothed. In addition, she was responsible for making sure that she and her sister caught their buses to and from school.

During her senior year, Ashley craved independence and counted down the days until she would graduate and a day later turn eighteen years old, graduating out of foster care. At this point, she rebelled against restrictions, which created the friction between her and her foster dad, resulting in transferring foster homes. In her desire to get away, she was sure that she wanted to attend a distant state university, never visiting the campus. Later, Ashley realized that she missed the former relationships she had formed in high school.

No-cost attendance. Ashley learned from her second foster parents that there were benefits for foster children after high school. Ashley was not interested in listening to that message at the time; she still felt that she would be returned to her life with her biological mother. She explained:

My second foster mom was like, “you know if you graduated from foster care, you can get a full paid scholarship, and they’ll buy you a computer and all that stuff.” And I’m just like, “I’m not planning on graduating out of foster care.” I overlooked it, like that’s not for me, but for somebody else. That’s the first time I ever heard about foster care paying for college.

During our lunch discussions, Ashley frequently talked about the benefits of being in foster care. As the other girls worried about ways of paying for college, Ashley would brag about her free ride to college. As long as she kept up academically, her college tuition, room, and board would be paid for four years.

In order to qualify for Chafee, a federally-funded organization to support foster kids' futures, Ashley had to complete the paperwork for college assistance, which she found to be cumbersome, but not difficult.

The beginning of my junior year was when I found out everything about Chafee. You have to do these binders. They are filled with life-skill stuff, worksheets that you had to fill out, like learning about checkbook stuff. There are four of them, and you have to complete them all before you can be eligible. The answers were in the back, so I just copied the answers down, just to get it over with because I knew everything anyway. It is not like it was hard. I don't think they graded it, just looked to see if you completed it. I did them my junior year. In all, I probably finished them in about a month. If I actually went through and thought about it all, it probably would have taken a year. There was just so much. I finished them my junior year.

Ashley explained that if she were to live in the dormitory, she would receive an additional \$200 for spending money, but her plan was to get an apartment and work part-time for spending money. Because the financial burden of college attendance was removed, Ashley was confident that she would attend college for four years at the very least.

After failing out and taking a required semester off, Ashley lost coverage of college through Chafee but was able to qualify for a Pell grant and took out a student loan. To requalify for Chafee assistance, Ashley will need to do well in 15 hours of college work, in which she is currently registered.

Relationships – GRP and boyfriend. Because Ashley was frequently changing foster care homes during her senior year, her relationships with friends and her boyfriend were important to her.

Jacob was a big part of why I left. Kirk wouldn't let me see him. He wouldn't let me do anything with him, so he was a big part of it. Kirk was just way too protective. It was killing me.

Ashley described her boyfriend, Jacob, as “wonderful. He really is, he's great. I don't know what I'd do without him.” Because of Jacob, Ashley was able to remain a student at Livingston County High School through her senior year. During her senior year, Ashley moved to her fourth foster home in that year, which was a greater distance from the school. She became more dependent on Jacob for transportation to school, work, and home. She felt comfortable with her new foster family, and they were willing to be flexible with her travel and overnights closer to the school.

Jacob took me to school all those days, and I still lived way out in the middle of nowhere. I stay with him a lot now, but [my social worker] can't know that. Anytime they do call or whatever [my foster dad] is like, “they're coming to see you, what do you want me to tell them?” I'm like, “Tell them I've got to work, reschedule so I know I'll be there.” Because if I'm too tired, because it's an hour and a half drive here and at school all day, I'm not wanting to drive up there at the

end of the day. That's why I stay at Jacob's so much. They come and get me if need be, so they're awesome. I think they are the best foster parents I've ever had.

At this point, Ashley was primarily interested in graduating and turning eighteen so that she could begin to experience independence.

One day Ashley exploded during one of our lunch time discussions. She rarely complained, so I was a little surprised. Her boyfriend, Jacob, who was usually so supportive, complained to her about their relationship:

He thinks he has it hard, but he has it so freakin' easy. I have to worry every day about how I am going to get back and forth to school. I have to worry about graduation and having enough money for that shit. I have to worry about moving in less than a month to Mountaintown. I have to worry that he is going or not because we don't have a car. He thinks that he has got it so hard. It kills me how much he whines.

Ashley believed that surviving her senior year was important to her story. She explained, "If it wasn't for Jacob and my friends I wouldn't have gotten through my senior year." During her senior year, Ashley felt that "no one was on my side." She explained further that "it was all in my hands, like if I didn't get it done it wouldn't get done, and I had to have the drive to do it."

While Ashley was dependent on Jacob during her senior year, she received emotional support from her close friends. Ashley was particularly close to the girls within our group but also socialized with other students in class. Ashley explained that in high school, Cassi was her primary academic asset, aside from her own determination.

[Cassi] was so much like a mother figure to me. We would be sitting there at lunch and she would ask me, “Ashley, did you do your chemistry homework?” I would say no, [and] she would rip a piece of paper out, give me her homework, and say, “Copy it.”

During her senior year, Ashley experienced difficulty remembering to complete outside assignments because she usually finished her work in the classroom. In addition to academic support, Ashley praised Cassi for keeping her spirits up: “She is just so positive; she is my little ray of sunshine.”

Sara also cheered Ashley up through humor. She explained that Sara “can be positive, but she knows that joking helps me get through things. Sara knew more than any of them how much hell I was going through.” Ashley did not let many people know about her problems, but Sara was the closest geographically while Ashley was living with her first Livingston County family, so they were able to spend more time together.

Ashley explained that Sara knew first-hand some of the problems Ashley experienced:

If there was no one I was allowed to call, I could call Sara. Kirk never really cared because Sara had been to the house so much. She saw things first-hand because she stayed at the house. She just knows. If something is wrong with me, she knows. It’s the fat kid thing. I really think it is.

During their senior year, both girls were heavy-set and frequently joked with each other about their weight. In Ashley’s case, being skinny represented being on drugs, as she worried about her mother when she lost weight.

Also, Ashley found strength in Jennifer’s compassion, which gave Ashley hope for her future. Ashley described Jennifer as “one of the most caring people I have ever

met.” Ashley felt sympathetic with Jennifer’s pregnancy, but recognized that Jennifer had parental support to help raise her son. Ashley found Jennifer inspiring because she was pursuing her dreams despite having a young son to raise while attending college.

Finally, Ashley enjoyed Marycait’s naivety about life because she has not had to struggle like Ashley. She described Marycait as a “go with the flow kind of person; she has no ideas of her own, she just goes with yours.” Ashley envied Marycait’s ability to be carefree, so different from her own feelings of having the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Factor Constraining Success

Parental abandonment. Ashley felt that she had it all early in life, only to find out that her parents made serious mistakes in their lives that took them away from her. While she tried to hold things together until her mother got better, she was only thirteen years old.

As Ashley was in eighth grade, and her father was in jail and her mother was rarely home, she was left to fend for herself and take care of her younger sister. Despite the abandonment, Ashley stepped up to the responsibility. She can recall crying on the phone with her mother, begging her to come home.

When I was in eighth grade, my grades dropped, really low. I remember when my GPA was like a 2.3. I would stay up all night crying and have to get Lilly up for school the next morning, and then I wouldn’t go to school. I was in some kind of depression. It was so bad, so there was that. That was only like one six-weeks. During that summer, Ashley’s mother was arrested for possession of drugs. For awhile, Ashley and her sister stayed at her mother’s boyfriend’s house, or neighbor’s home.

Once the arrest was seen as more permanent, Ashley and her sister were placed in foster care.

Ashley talked to me frankly about her parents' struggles and their effect on her, but she rarely seemed resentful. After four years of living in foster care, moving into six different homes, Ashley still yearned for relationships with her parents. Throughout her freshman year of college, Ashley was able to forgive her mother, blaming her behavior on her drug use. Nevertheless, she realized that "she was a horrible mother."

I will never hold anything against her. Me and mom never get into arguments, and I never remind her of anything. I don't throw it up in her face that she wasn't there. If what she is doing makes her happy, I want her to do it. Whether it is hurting her or not, it is her life and she can judge. She knows she has the power to change things; she just has to want to.

Her mother continued to encounter problems with the law and was in jail several times. During college, Ashley told me that her mom "tried to steal a TV from Wal-Mart. She is an idiot. I told her there are easier ways to get money, and it is called a job."

Ashley was relieved that her mother's continued problems with the law have forced her to be more responsible and stay off drugs because "she will be doing drug tests for her probation. . . . It is funny how tables turn. It used to be her telling me what to do; now it's me telling her. I am the one mailing her money, not her giving me money." When her mother was released from jail in November of her freshman year, Ashley invited her mom to move in with her and help her to become sober, again trying to take care of her mother.

Computer Aided Drafting (CAD). As Ashley experienced instability at home, she made sure to keep up with her schoolwork in high school. Her senior civics teacher described her as a student:

She always participates in discussions. In group activities, she is the leader of the group. I would not have guessed she was in foster care. . . . Not everybody can adjust to bad situations. She is going to take what she has and do to the best of her ability.

She was interested in learning and did not want her home situation to affect school.

At the end of her sophomore year, Ashley wanted to register for the new Computer Aided Drafting (CAD) program at the consolidated high school. She was interested in the program because of the “brand new equipment” and her desire to be a graphic designer. When she spoke to a school counselor about registering for her junior year classes, her schedule was written down by the counselor. Ashley explained that her junior schedule was “just an accident. [The school counselor] wrote down what I wanted, and they put me in both of [CAD classes].” Ashley was registered for two years of the program in one year’s time.

When Ashley began her junior year, she recalled “getting my schedule and just going with it. [My CAD teacher] did tell me this, ‘You can take both sections, but to get a certificate you have to be enrolled for two years.’ It was pointless. I still passed the classes. A graphic designer is what I would have been with that degree.” Ashley took the CAD program in two blocks, two class periods in the morning and two class periods at the end of her school day. “At the beginning of the day, he just wanted everyone to run to [a breakfast restaurant] and come back, and we would watch movies.” Because of

the “accidental” scheduling in her junior year, Ashley was required to enroll in two science classes during her senior year, environmental science and chemistry.

While Ashley was excited about the CAD program, she realized that it was not a serious class. In addition to poor advising, the teacher had a job in industry working with the computer program but had no teacher training or experience teaching. Ashley explained that her CAD teacher “was working in computer science in North Carolina, but when he came here they made him a teacher. He was never taught to be a teacher. He wasn’t a teacher; he just knew CAD.”

Due to poor advising and enrolling for CAD out of sequence, Ashley did not benefit from the comprehensive understanding of the program. In addition, the teacher of CAD understood how to use the equipment but did not have knowledge of teaching.

Unstable foster care. While Ashley’s parents’ problems with the law, drugs, and alcohol abuse created instability, Ashley took responsibility and became an empowered caregiver to her sister. Once she entered foster care, Ashley had less control over her life. “I rebelled. I rebelled a lot. But then I had to come to terms with foster care. The best thing you can do once you get in foster care is to learn everything you can about the system.” She discussed her philosophy further:

If you are like eleven and up, you are automatically the “bad kid.” That is how they treat you from the get-go. All the teenagers in foster care are going to hate it. You are a fish out of water. You are not in your natural habitat. You don’t know anything. You don’t know them. You don’t know what the rules are in the house. It is like you are staying in a really bad hotel for a long, long time.

After it was apparent that her mother would be staying in jail, Ashley and her sister were placed in a temporary home located in a neighboring county. Ashley was transferred to a more permanent foster home before her ninth-grade year. Ashley explained, “I started Hamilton High School then, so I had my friends and stuff. That is probably the only thing that held me together. I was so emotionally distraught.”

At the beginning, I did not trust my foster parents, not at all. My foster parents had been through 60 kids already. Apparently, they are pros at this shit. Then, they turn around and do that stuff that they did. Like they took our clothing vouchers and spent the money on themselves. They never gave us our allowance that we were supposed to get. The whole time we were there it was bad. We were there from July to December.

From the beginning of foster care, Ashley experienced distrust that remained with her and initiated a strong craving for a good family.

In December of her ninth-grade year, Ashley met with a social worker who told her she was being moved on Thursday. When Thursday came around, Ashley learned that she would be moving to a different county.

So, I was basically in the dark for a whole week. She came and got me on Thursday and got me out of class. I had a knotty feeling in my stomach, like I was going to puke. I was like, “Okay, where are we going?” She was like, “You are going to Carroll.” I was like, “Where is Carroll?” “It is in Livingston County.” “Where is Livingston County?” I won’t forget the drive either. There were all those kiss-your-ass turns.

When she and her sister were taken to Livingston County to meet her new foster mom, Ashley recalled:

We went to [the local foster agency], and Margie is there, just smiling. I will never forget the first words she told me, “I am going to take care of you.” I felt a little comfort then. There is just so much going on in your head that you think you are going to explode. I was just getting used to being in the home in Hamilton. I made friends around that house. Then, they ship me here to this little hick town. What is this place? She said that she was going to take care of me and then we go to their house. “Wow! This is a beautiful house.” She showed us our room, and I was glad that she was letting me and Lilly stay together. Kirk scared the shit out of me because he has a big, deep voice. He was intimidating, and now he is my daddy. I love him with all of my heart. . . The way [his] house was, you know, at first it was wonderful; and then after Margie left [him], after the first year, it was shit.

Having experienced so much autonomy prior to foster care, Ashley was impatient about re-gaining her independence. As she and her boyfriend grew closer, she became more resentful of the fact that her foster dad was so strict with her. As Ashley became increasingly agitated about her foster dad’s strict rules, she began speaking with her social worker about moving to a different foster home. She said that her foster dad was treating her differently than her younger sister. Ashley explained, “There wasn’t anything I could do right; it was just bad. Lilly had the upper hand with me, and she was freakin’ thirteen.” Ashley felt her foster dad was only interested in her because he

wanted a servant. She explained that he was closer to her sister because she was “butch” and was willing to “go outside and dig a hole.”

Leaving that foster home was a difficult transition for Ashley. She said, “I took it day by day. Towards the middle, when I moved out . . . I felt like I had lost everything, but at the same time I gained so much because I was out of there. But after you live somewhere for three years . . . that was home.”

Ashley never spoke specifically about her family problems when we met as a group, but, when we sat down for individual interviews, she revealed her true feelings. She later explained that “the whole moving thing, I didn’t even have a decision. He just got mad at me and didn’t want me anymore, so then I had to decide what the hell I’m going to do.” She went on, “He was sick of me, but I was sick of him. I just kind of strayed and would never talk to him, and he got sick of it because I was not giving him full attention and the cleaning full attention. He wanted a servant, not a daughter.”

During the spring of her senior year, Ashley lived in four different foster homes in three different counties. At the beginning of February, Ashley was delighted to move to a new foster home in Livingston County. The family had an in-ground pool and an RV for vacations. She was excited about a trip to the beach during her spring break with her “family.” The family had three other foster care girls living in two bedrooms. Unexpectedly, all the foster kids were removed from the home.

Ashley moved to her third foster home after all of the foster children were removed from the home of her second Livingston County foster family. During the move, she was taken to a family in a neighboring county. She was able to stay at

Livingston County High School because her boyfriend took her back and forth to school every day.

Ashley continued to refer to her numerous foster parents as “Mom” and “Dad,” so at first I was not aware that she had in fact been moved to a fourth foster family in April, to a county yet farther away. She explained that her social worker was continuing to try to find a new foster home for her in Livingston County. In the meantime, Ashley’s boyfriend continued to drive her an hour and a half to and from school. Frequently, her foster parents allowed him to stay the night on the couch because of the distance. On occasion, Ashley’s foster family allowed her to stay the night at Jacob’s parent’s house, especially if she was working at a local grocery store after school.

Post-secondary Experiences: “A Big Smack in the Face”

Ashley met her college social worker before she graduated from high school in May. Ashley described her social worker as “more like an aunt” than a social worker. She frequently called her “just to see what’s up.” While the social worker was not always available, Ashley commented that she “is good about getting back with me.” Ashley was told several options for her college room and board through Chafee. She experienced several problems finding a place to live. She explained that “my [monthly] subsidy is \$650.00, and they take out \$600.00 for rent.” She went on to say that “if I was in the dorms, I would only get about \$200.00 a month.” Ashley recalled that her social worker said that “you do have a choice. I was like alright; I’m not going to the dorms then.”

Ashley's expectations of the more distant state university did not match her experiences once she started her freshman year. She was disappointed that she found it difficult to meet close friends. She explained:

With [the distant state university], I figured it would be a big party, but it is real college. I always did look forward to going to [the nearby state university]. It was my dream school because I was born and raised in [the nearby town], but I decided I really wanted to do pharmacy because it is good money for an easy job, I think. Lots of other places had it, but I fell in love with [the distant state university], everything about it. It is a cool place, but I think I would be happier in [the nearby town] because I'd be closer [to friends]. I thought I would be happy being far away, but when it happens and you don't have friends you are screwed.

After an unsuccessful freshman year, Ashley was placed on academic probation and required to sit out of college for one semester. After sitting out for a semester, Ashley is currently enrolled at a nearby state university.

Academics

When I spoke to Ashley in October of her first college semester, she was excited about classes, but she felt that her high school experiences had not prepared her for college in terms of time management and completing outside assignments. She stated, "It's a big smack in the face. College is a big smack in the face when you are not prepared."

During Ashley's fall semester, she enrolled in a University 101 course, a course to assist students in their transition to college. Her professor went over time management

issues with the students. Her professor “makes sure that we are doing it. She’s like, ‘let me see your phones, planners, whatever you are using, and you better be writing stuff down.’”

Like Marycait, Jennifer, and Cassi, Ashley’s ACT math scores were low, requiring developmental instruction before enrolling in a college-level math course. Ashley did not register for her developmental math course during her first year, which as a pre-medicine major similar to Jennifer as a pre-veterinary major, could affect her ability to take science courses in the future, prolonging her college career. Ashley acknowledged that she needed to take math but put off the class, planning on taking it in her sophomore year.

Ashley found biology difficult, and she began missing the class. Ashley explained that she had not been attending her biology course because it was early in the morning, in a large lecture room with two hundred other students (so she would not be missed), and all of the lectures were posted online. Ashley said, “I never go to my biology class. She’s online with everything, so going there at 8:30 in the morning is pointless.” She explained that if the professor took attendance, “I would go.” Ashley also mentioned that her biology teacher frequently changed a student’s grade “if you write her a convincing argument.”

Ashley enjoyed her history course because the professor was dramatic and engaging, and she enjoyed interacting with him. At first, he came off as intimidating. At the beginning of the semester, he said, “I am just going to tell you guys that you are a bunch of losers.” He said, “You are a complete loser until you pass my class.” As

Ashley recalled, he further explained to them that “‘Nobody fails my class.’ He’s just very blunt. He’s awesome though. And it is so funny; he reenacts history.”

Ashley enrolled in a social work course as a required elective for her major. While she was unsure about what program requirement the course fulfilled, 90% of her classmates were also pre-pharmacy majors. She dreaded the social work topic but found that she had an “upper hand” because she had lived within the social work system. Ashley explained, “I thought I was going to dread it since I have been through social work shit all my life, [but] it’s the side that you want to get *in* rather than wanting to get *out*. The textbook is really good too.” Ashley stated that she studied all the time. She said, “When I am sitting there and don’t have anything else to do, I read my history book.”

Ashley did not enroll in a developmental math course during her freshman year at a distant state university but enrolled in developmental math during her second year at a nearby state university. She is currently enrolled in her first developmental math course, explaining that she remembered the material from high school. “We are on polynomials now. I can remember being good at it.” During the fourth week of class, Ashley asked for help studying for her first math test. We worked for two hours on factoring. After taking the test, she excitedly reported that she passed her test.

Absences

Ashley put up a brave front, but her experience at a more distant state university was difficult because she was isolated from her friends, who had become like a family to her. When I asked her initially about her fall semester, Ashley reported that she did real well, but did not give me specifics. I was unable to visit during her spring semester, but

during the summer, she told me that she had done really well. Because of her enthusiasm about college, I was surprised when she told me she was going to take the fall semester of her sophomore year off.

More recently, she was discussing her plans to attend courses during the spring semester of her sophomore year, I asked her specifically about her freshman year experiences at the more distant state university. She revealed more about the difficulties she experienced during her freshman year. Because she missed her friends and met another boy in Livingston County, Ashley had extended absences during both her fall and spring semesters of her freshman year.

Ashley broke up with her high school boyfriend, but they remained living together for a month. In that time, Ashley began dating another man from Livingston County, who moved into her apartment as her ex-boyfriend moved out. Ashley explained:

In the middle of November, I was stranded [in Livingston County] because no one would take me back [to the distant state university]. So, I missed at least three weeks of class. My grades were good before I left. I didn't know that I was failing all my classes because of too many absences. So, there wasn't even a point to go.

Her study skills teacher explained that she had earned a B in the course, but “really you failed.” I said, ‘Why?’ She said, ‘You missed too many days.’ Then, I figured out that that applied to all of them.” At that point, Ashley realized that because of her absences, she was failing all of her classes during her first semester.

In addition, Ashley explained that her mother came to live with her on November sixth of her first semester and stayed through her second semester.

She lived with me for six months. It was the first time having her back in my life for such a long time, but at the same time, I didn't even know her. Everything that I knew about her before was completely different.

Ashley said that her mother was sober while living with her. "She didn't use up there because she didn't know anyone to get it from. She never left the house or anything. To this day, she has been clean since the day I took her back with me." While Ashley was proud of her mother's sobriety, she took on the responsibility of taking care of her mother. She stated that her mother "went through withdrawal and everything."

During her second semester, she was determined to do better in college, but she again spent too much time in Livingston County rather than at college. She explained:

I came back [to Livingston County] for spring break and didn't go back for two weeks. That is what screwed me, being stranded [in Livingston County]. Staying down here pretty much killed me.

Ashley explained further that "spring break was a retreat. I was so sick of my mom. After a while, I just wanted her to go. I did, but I didn't." Ashley had wanted a relationship with her mother, but the additional responsibility proved too much for her to handle.

After successfully completing only three hours during her freshman year, Ashley was placed on academic probation and required to sit out for a semester. During that semester, Ashley lived with her boyfriend's family in Livingston County and worked at the local newspaper. She was able to buy a car and claimed, "I don't have to depend on

anyone because I have a car now. I know I can do it.” She felt that she now had control over her attendance in college.

Currently

Ashley was late going through the procedures of transferring to a nearby state university but registered for classes on the last day of the first week of class. Ashley considered her new college experience a “fresh start” and was enthusiastic about classes this semester. She was still living with her boyfriend’s family, commuting from Livingston County two days a week for classes. She explained, “I know that I am going to do a hundred times better [at the nearby state university].”

Because Ashley did poorly during her freshman year, she lost her Chafee scholarship. She explained, “I got my Pell [grant], and that covered tuition.” Because of her late financial aid application, she was still waiting on her student loan. As of the fourth week of class, she was still waiting on her student loan in order to buy textbooks for the semester. To re-qualify for a Chafee scholarship, she was required to pass 15 hours of classes, in which she is currently registered.

While Ashley was proud of her mother’s sobriety, she was disappointed when her mother was again taken to jail. She explained that her mother remained out of jail during the fall after her freshman year because she was taking care of her mother, Ashley’s grandmother. After her grandmother died, Ashley’s mother was again placed in jail for her prior criminal activities and because the courts considered her mother to be a “menace to society.”

Reflection

After attending college, Ashley explained how I was an enabling factor in her transition from high school to college:

You helped me emotionally more than anything. Always coming to visit me and being there for me on parents' weekend. That was just great! You are still on my FERPA if you ever wanted to call and check up on me. There was just you, my social worker, and my real mom. You have earned a special place.

In Ashley's case, I felt very much like a mother figure, probably because of the absence of a consistent parent during her senior year of high school. She was determined to attend a more distant state university. When she was still in high school, she asked me if I would like to attend her college orientation with her. I had previously mentioned to all of the girls that I would be interested in attending their orientations.

As a foster care kid, Ashley seemed prone to telling people what they wanted to hear and being careful with what she revealed. Throughout our relationship, Ashley has revealed many personal stories of her journey through parental abandonment and foster care. Many of Ashley's decisions have been based on her desire to be independent, but she struggled to develop relationships that will give her the security of family.

CHAPTER NINE: SARA

Sara: “Classic Under-achiever”

During her sophomore year of high school, Sara tended to remain in the shadow of the other girls. Sara rarely spoke out loud in group lunch discussions. She would not blurt out comments, like the rest of the girls, but would give short answers when directly asked a question.

All of her teachers that I spoke with commented on her lack of voice, often wondering about problems she might be experiencing with her class work. After Sara dropped his class during her senior year, a teacher commented: “She is real quiet. I honestly couldn’t tell you what her voice sounded like. I could never get her to talk. Did you?” I explained to him that Sara did not open up and talk around me until I had known her for a year. By her senior year, I was often surprised at how candid she was about her experiences in our tight-knit group.

When I initially met Sara, she had long, light-brown hair, rarely smiled, and kept her eyes downcast, rarely making eye contact. I frequently noticed her whispering or speaking in small groups, usually to Cassi and Jennifer. I later realized that Sara hid her smile because of dental problems. Her dental problems held her back from “socializing” and fulfilling her dreams. Sara worked part-time during high school, earning money for a nice blouse every once in a while and getting a manicure. She rarely wore makeup and frequently wore blouses and jeans. While she was heavy-set, she did not talk about her weight until her senior year, when the other girls began to catch up to her size. During her senior year, Sara had her hair cut in a bob and dyed dark brown.

Sara was close to and protective of her mother. Sara was two years old when her birth father left them. Shortly after that, Sara was diagnosed with a heart problem and had to have surgery. Sara can remember her mother talking about how worried she had been about Sara's survival. At that time, her mother used her paycheck to shower her with gifts, not knowing how long Sara would be around.

When Sara's mom met her second husband, Sara's step-father, Sara was four years old. During that time, her step-father lost custody of his three birth children. He married her mother and within a year, Sara had a baby sister, Molly. Sara continually mentioned that her step-father loved his birth children and that she felt like the step-daughter who did not receive his love.

Because her step-father managed chain restaurants and was transferred often based on managerial needs, Sara's family moved frequently. From kindergarten to fourth grade, Sara changed elementary schools numerous times during the school year.

The trust Sara had built for her step-father was destroyed when Sara was in fourth grade and her step-father abandoned her family. She became increasingly protective of her mother and younger sister, babysitting while her mom worked several jobs to support them. During this time, Sara, her mom, and sister moved to be closer to her mother's family. Sara returned to elementary schools where she had initially felt like an outcast, only to find the same students and the same unfair treatment. She remained at that school for fifth and sixth grades, complaining about the favoritism some teachers showed for the popular kids and athletes.

Early in her seventh-grade year, Sara transferred schools again when her mother and step-father got back together. During that year, Sara's family moved to Livingston County where a step-uncle could provide a trailer to live in.

During her sophomore year, Sara began working for her step-father at a fast-food restaurant he managed. She generally worked on weekends. Because she rode to work with her step-father, she ended up working extended, managerial hours. Sara recognized the insecurity of fast-food restaurant management. She was often frustrated by her parents' work schedules and was adamant about not ending up like them.

Initially, Sara wanted to become an archeologist. At the beginning of her junior year, Cassi and Sara met with an advisor, and Sara changed her schedule to match Cassi's. While Cassi took nursing in a two-period block, Sara registered for Pro-Start, a culinary career program at the school. During her junior year, Sara had to change her major from archeology to Pro-Start, changing from a professional pathway to skilled.

At first, Sara's college going plans were to enroll in a culinary program. She stated that she was interested in attending a nearby college, majoring in the culinary programs, which would be financed by her parents. "When [my parents] invest their stock options, they invest in [a fast food restaurant]. When they get that back, he is going to help with college. Then, I'm going to try and open my own restaurant, my own bakery." She felt dependent on her parents for providing for the cost of college attendance because she did not academically qualify for scholarships.

Because Sara was interested in a culinary education, I told her about a program at a local community college where I worked. The community college admissions officer told me that Sara's fees could be waived if a counselor at the high school wrote a letter

stating that she was in financial need. I mentioned this to Sara, and she filled out an application and had a counselor write a letter of financial need. I hand-delivered the application and letter. Sara was accepted and made plans to attend their orientation.

Because Sara did not have her license or a car, she asked me to take her to the community college orientation. I picked her up early and we had lunch at a local restaurant. She was excited and wore the t-shirt the community college had sent her. The community college advisor had made a tentative schedule, which was adjusted based on Sara's SAT scores: Reading 540, Math 430, and Writing 500. A week before classes were to begin, Cassi told me that Sara was not going to college because she was unsure of a major.

Analysis of Sara

After analyzing the data from interviews, observations, and documents, I identified two factors that enabled Sara's academic success from early education through her transition to college: (1) early learning with Mom and (2) intelligence. Sara experienced seven constraining factors: (1) transience; (2) abandonment; (3) unstable relationships with peers and teachers; (4) lack of motivation; (5) lack of advising; (6) parents' expectations; and (7) dental problems.

Factors Enabling Success

Early learning with mom. Sara explained that before entering Head Start, "I knew most of my ABCs and was reading a few words. I could recognize CAT." Sara credits her mother for her early educational success. Her mom "would go to work, come home and talk to me. She didn't have anyone else to talk to, so she would talk to me constantly. I guessed I picked up language easily." Sara later explained, "[Mom]

realized that I was catching on and actually learning. At first, she was just talking to me. Then, she went on to teaching me stuff and sitting down with books. . . . After I started school, she got more involved in work. Then, there was dad, and she had Molly. Then, I kind of slipped.”

During Sara’s early education, her mother was around to help her when she was struggling with classes in elementary school, but she experienced difficulty in school after her step-father left her family in fourth grade. She explained:

I remember when I got my first D in science class. I was heartbroken, and mom yelled a lot. She got really mad and couldn't believe I got a D in a class. After that we studied a lot of science. I think I brought them up to Bs.

While her mother was angry about Sara’s grades, she took the time to sit with her and help her study. Sara’s parents as academic resources ended once she entered middle school. At this point, Sara began making better grades on her own. By the time Sara experienced academic problems in high school, she had begun creating fake report cards, and her parents were none the wiser until the summer after her junior year.

Intelligence. Sara is an avid reader, but she is selective about what she is interested in reading or writing. Because resources were thin when she was growing up, she enjoyed visiting local libraries and checking out books to read: “I would always read the little kid books, then we would go to the library. I started checking out Nancy Drew, the mystery books.”

When Sara took her reading test in fifth grade, she scored at a ninth-grade level. She remembers her “teacher was announcing the name of who scored the highest, and everyone like pointed at the smartest guy in the class, [but] it was me, and I was like,

‘What?!’” Because Sara experienced difficulty making friends, while frequently moving from one rural school to another, she found solace and escape through literature. She explained, “I really like reading and English because I always had my books.”

While Sara was slow to make friends in Livingston County, she concentrated on doing well in school. In eighth grade, Sara tested into an advanced math class. She continued to enjoy reading, and in tenth grade, she was placed in honor’s English. During her junior year, Sara took AP English. Despite enjoying the teacher, she did not pass the class. During her senior year, Sara was required to take English 11 and 12, successfully completing both. While Sara slacked off on her grades, she scored well on standardized tests, doing relatively well on her SAT.

It is difficult to explain Sara’s intelligence because it was not apparent in her grades during high school. While she was quiet and shy, her powers of observation are worth noting. Sara was very aware of her surroundings and listened to what was going on around her. I was surprised that she knew so much about the policies at the school. One day, she explained that the school received a financial grant for promoting abstinence. During our group discussions, Sara would usually make a witty joke that took all of us time to process. In a psychology class she dropped during her senior year, the teacher felt that “she could have made it,” believing in her ability. Also teachers often mentioned her intelligence and hard work when she was interested in a topic. Unfortunately, Sara was seen as lacking a consistent goal. She demonstrated that she was capable of difficult assignments, leaving teachers curious about her poor academic outcomes. In addition, another English teacher explained that Sara had the ability and intellect but did poorly because she lacked motivation. Sara showed little concern for

working in a timely manner and completing homework assignments. Sara explained that most of her teachers did not have due dates, so she adopted the habit of waiting until the last minute to complete work.

An English teacher commented, “Sara is a good student. She could be a better student than what she is. She is a good writer.” Sara clearly had the ability, but her teachers recognized that she could be inconsistent. The English teacher further explained:

She works hard when she works. She worked most of the time. . . Now, with Shakespeare, she was on that. Everything was great. They do a Shakespearian project, and she worked with Cassi on that. They did a really nice tri-fold display with that. That is pretty big. She was great with that.

Sara later explained, “I was lazy. If it didn’t interest me, I would just blow it off.”

Factors Constraining Success

Sara’s early life was filled with insecurity because of her periodic abandonment of father-figures and the constant moves that her family made. Moving and changing schools often caused Sara to become shy around teachers and classmates.

Transience. Sara experienced instability as she was transferred from one rural school to another, depending on where her step-father was working. Sara describes moving around a lot during her elementary school years: “I was born in North Carolina, but we kept moving everywhere. I lived in Tennessee, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia; I lived everywhere.” Because Sara moved so often, she had a difficult time making friends especially in small, rural areas where everyone knew each other.

When Sara's step-father left for two years, Sara's mother moved closer to her relatives. Sara stated:

In fourth, we were also in Kentucky, then I went to Virginia in fourth. Then we moved back to Kentucky, but then I was in a different school. Then, I moved back to the school that I was in Kentucky that I was in the first place, for fifth grade. Then I was there until the first part of seventh grade. In November, we moved here. I have been here ever since. Then, they got back together the first part of seventh grade; that is why we moved out here.

During that time period of constant change, Sara mentioned that she "used to get picked on constantly." She suggested that she was picked on because she was "the little outcast. The little bad kid." Because Sara was an outsider, she had no friends and gave up trying to make friends.

Sara struggled with change and described the frustration and loneliness she experienced in all the different schools she attended:

I started seventh grade in Kentucky, and we were living with my grandpa. I went the first two weeks in Carter, where we lived in my grandpa's basement. Then we moved out here. So, all together I went like a week. I couldn't really find that one friend that was all alone. I didn't really talk to anybody else. I just kind of kept to myself.

Despite feeling lonely at her new school, she did well in seventh grade, making As, Bs, and Cs, and continued doing well in eighth grade. She struggled to make friends, but was relieved that she was no longer viewed as an outcast and teased.

When Sara moved to Livingston County, she eventually felt a sense of permanence. They lived in one place long enough for Sara to make lasting relationships. Sara mentioned, “This is the longest I have ever lived anywhere. I’m going to actually graduate from one place and have the same friends. After the third move, I just stopped trying for friends.”

Abandonment. Because Sara was the only one of the five girls who knew how to get to Cassi’s house, I always picked up Sara first and dropped her off last. Because of this, we had many opportunities to talk one-on-one. During these private conversations, usually in my car, Sara explained more about her relationship with her step-father. After her birth father left her at the age of two, her step-father, a neighbor, became a stable male figure in her life. But then, he also left when Sara was in fourth grade. She questioned his permanence in her life and his ability to love her as she was not his birth daughter.

Sara remembered excelling at math when she was younger and her step-father worked with her. After her step-father left, when she was in the fourth grade, her math achievement dropped. Because she didn’t get help at home, she became discouraged and “quit” trying.

Dad was always a math person, and I was good at math up [until] fourth grade. Then, my parents split up, I think that was fourth-grade, we moved to my grandpa's house. That is when they split up, and we were going over the multiplying and dividing. I didn't like that, so I just quit. I know I started early at slacking. I just got lazy and quit trying.

Sara expressed anger at being abandoned again by her step-father:

It started when they broke up, I guess I just quit, I don't remember being depressed. I remember we were moving around a lot, and I couldn't believe he just up and left. We would only see him every other week, like when he wanted to pick us up. Then, he would be gone for a couple months, and he would decide to pop in again. Then, he was gone for two whole years. He just showed up one day.

Sara described her step-father's abandonment as a turning point academically. Her mother became less financially secure and relied on her family to help out. Similar to Ashley's situation with abandonment, Sara became a caregiver to her mother and sister, and her academics were put on the back burner. The instability in her relationship with her step-father has continued up until the time of this writing.

During Sara's senior year, her 19 year old step-brother moved in with her family because he was having problems with his mother. Sara mentioned, "I was just kind of pushed to the side because he had his two blood kids there, and he didn't really need me anymore." She felt that her step-father had always treated her differently than her half-sister.

Unstable relationships with peers and teachers. In a group, Sara often lost her voice and blended into the background. Sara was shy and distrustful of peers and teachers because of her transience and the favoritism rural teachers showed towards the more popular students. After moving to so many different schools, Sara desired the stability of family, school, and friends. It is clear that Sara was distrustful and resentful of teachers in rural schools, as she moved from one place to another.

As with Ashley, Sara experienced the positive effects of the consolidation that took place their tenth-grade year, by providing more “diversity” in the school. She felt more like she was finally on an even plane, as all the students were feeling the discomfort of meeting new students and teachers. While many students and parents opposed the consolidation of four rural high schools in one county, Sara, as with Ashley and Jennifer, looked forward to the consolidation because they could no longer be singled out and labeled as the “new kid.” At the consolidated high school, all students experienced feelings of having to meet new students in a new, unfamiliar school.

Peers. Sara attended seventh grade at Carroll Middle School, wondering where she and her family would end up next. Sara improved academically as her mother and step-father were back together. Sara excitedly explained:

Then towards the end of eighth grade I met Cassi. We have been friends ever since. Cassi has been my biggest educational influence. I take what she takes, so we can be in classes together. She is my college buddy. That is what I told my sister. I said she needs to find someone like how I found Cassi. You need to find someone to copy off of in math. I got Cassi and copied off of her and quit trying a little more.

While Sara enjoyed taking classes with Cassi, she appears to have become complacent in those classes. Sara’s academic success occurred in classes without her friends. While Sara’s relationship with Cassi brought a sense of security and friendship, Sara became over-reliant on Cassi for academic success. Due to the rural environment, the girls interacted socially in school only with little interaction outside of school. By taking classes with each other, they had time to bond socially.

Teachers. Due to her difficulty creating friendships in her ever-changing world, she relied on teachers for caring and equitable treatment. Sara complained about two of her sixth-grade teachers showing favoritism:

I could not stand her. She was one of those teachers that took after the popular kids. I was always trying to do stuff and concentrate on work, and she would be talking really loud to the girls. They would giggle. I hated her. She would talk to the popular girls and the smart boys, and then the average ones just got left out. She was constantly talking to them. I just did not like her at all. And I did not like my math and science teacher. He was an ass. He was [a] really tall, skinny guy with red hair and glasses. I hated him because he was like that too. Except his was the sports teams, all the people for sports, he liked them.

Sara enjoyed a teacher with high expectations because she got more out of the class, but she still liked the classes where the teacher was “lazy.” After transferring to the new consolidated high school, she remarked, “The teachers were a little bit different, some of them were lazy and some of them were strict. I liked the strict ones, because I learned more, but I liked the lazy ones because I didn't have to work.”

Sara’s teachers described her as very quiet in their classrooms. They often didn’t know how to advise and assist her because she did not communicate with them.

While Sara felt more comfortable taking classes with Cassi, her favorite class in ninth grade was chorus, her only class without Cassi:

In ninth grade, my favorite class would be chorus. I didn't have that with Cassi. I had Mrs. Matthews, and she was really nice. I didn't have it with anyone. I made

straight As in that class, Mrs. Matthews was really nice and fun. She wasn't mean, all the other ones were mean.

Sara enrolled in AP English during her junior year because “Cassi was taking” the course. Despite the fact that Sara failed the class, she continued to praise her teacher for treating her respectfully. She explained:

We had Ms. Taylor, my favorite teacher. She is awesome. She is more with us; she comes down to our level and speaks to us like adults and not like kids. She wasn't like most teachers. She talked to you like you were a normal person. She is really nice.

In turn her AP English teacher tried to motivate Sara: “I never let up on her either until May, and I was pounding her, ‘You need to work, need to work, need to work.’” While her favorite teachers tried to push her to do well and complete assignments, she frequently did not follow through with their high expectations.

Lack of motivation. Sara’s teachers recognized that she needed motivation and drive to be successful at high school, and especially college. Even one of Sara’s favorite teachers explained, “Sara is a classic under-achiever. I could not pull her through.”

Sara explained one of the incidences when she was overwhelmed and did not follow through with her assignments:

In fifth grade, for English, we were writing short stories, but I never finished mine because I turned it into a novel. I just never finished, but I don't think they ever gave me a bad grade on it. We were doing them during the end of the year, and I never got finished. It was really good too. I think I had 14 pages by the end of the year.

Sara remembered getting carried away with assignments and never felt the urge to complete what she started.

Teachers struggled to understand Sara's failure to complete assignments up to her level of ability and to their expectations. One teacher commented, "There must be something at home that takes her attention away from her school work."

Sara experienced difficulty in school when her step-father left them in fourth grade. She described that time as her educational turning point when she stopped trying to do well in school: "I meant to pass all of my classes, and I was a straight A student up until then. Then I was straight C student, [and] that was like getting an F for me. Now I'm lucky to get a C."

Despite her intelligence, Sara and her teachers admitted that she lacked the motivation needed to be a successful student. One of her teachers said that Sara "would say, 'Oh, I just didn't do it.'" Likewise, Sara admitted to me: "I just didn't do any of the work." She explained further, "I slacked off a lot. I am lazy."

One teacher said, "Sara was imaginative and curious but did not possess the skills to follow through with her goals. Something would come up and interfere with her plans." While her teachers did not understand any specific reason for this occurrence, they speculated that either work or something in her home life was keeping her from spending time on assignments. Ultimately, Sara made choices about what she spent time on outside of the classroom. During high school, Sara's parents worked long hours and did not monitor her schoolwork.

One of her English teachers suggested that she made personal choices based on her interests in the subject matter, stating that "She would peak, and then she would drop.

It appeared to me that she would pick and choose things to do.” Because Sara was left to her own devices after school, she would put homework off to surf the Internet. Due to her procrastination, she frequently did not complete assignments.

I would go home and start reading fan fiction or something. I would think I would do it later. It would get to be ten o'clock, and I would still be reading and would have to go to bed. Then I would have to fake a lot of essays. I made a D the first six weeks, and the other six weeks were Fs.

When Sara had courses that required homework, even having a good teacher, her grades suffered because she had a tendency to let her homework go. Homework was not a high priority. When Sara arrived home after school, she and her younger sister were on their own until her parents came home from work, usually late and into the early morning hours.

One of Sara's English teachers during her senior year recognized that Sara's lack of voice prohibited her from communicating with her teachers about problems that she encountered in completing assignments.

Sara is very quiet. If she would encounter a problem, unless I would ask her about the problem, I am not sure that I would always know if there were other problems with something. She doesn't talk to you a lot.

Several teachers at the high school expressed concern for Sara's academic future in regard to communicating with professors and asking for help or clarity. Her English teacher explained that Sara's teachers had to take the initiative to find out if Sara was experiencing problems because she was so quiet: “She is very quiet. Unless you could

sit down one-on-one, to get her to really talk to you about. . . ‘Are you okay with this? Is there a problem with this?’”

Occasionally during our lunch meetings, Sara worked on an AP English essay at Cassi’s insistence. Sara mentioned that she could do better work under pressure and expected to turn in assignments without planning. Her procrastination led to incomplete and missed assignments. A teacher mentioned, “She is okay with not finishing; this is just my opinion. She is okay with not finishing some things. I feel like she was picking and choosing what was relevant to her.” While one of Sara’s teachers worried about Sara’s ability to commit to college, she did not doubt her ability.

Sara later explained:

After school, I didn’t have my mom to tell me, “Do this homework.” They both worked 10 hour days because they were managers, and they would have to stay over, and it would turn into 12 hours. They would get home way after I was in bed. I had a computer.

Lack of advising. Sara did not speak with a counselor about her graduation requirements until she was a junior and was worried about graduating. She can remember her initial advising during her ninth-grade year:

At the beginning of ninth grade, they give us this little yellow book you can look through. I kept it until this summer, and my dog chewed it up. I was in the science department to be an archaeologist, but I wasn’t taking any of the right classes for that. I was taking all the right classes for hospitality, so I had to get my paper switched to the hospitality thing, Pro-start. If you had classes picked out, where you couldn’t graduate they would just change it for you.

While Sara was interested in archeology, she did not plan her schedule or have someone help advise her, so she had to change her major.

While Sara decided to pursue an archeology/science track during her ninth-grade year, she deviated from that track when she continued to enroll in classes based on Cassi's schedule. Sara enjoyed classes with Cassi for the social aspects instead of inspiring each other to do better.

Sara explained how she adjusted her schedule her junior year to take most of her classes with Cassi:

We sat down with Mr. Jackson during our first week of class, and he worked with us to get our schedules together. If we would have sat down with someone like Ms. Taylor, she would have been like, "No." She doesn't like how someone tries to manipulate their schedules that way, but they let us change it so we would have classes together, so that was cool.

Sara has constantly struggled with defining her future and career path. Sara explained that the school had a program for archeology,

but I never took them, I was just picking classes to take. During the middle of my junior year, I decided to go into Pro-start, then I finally figured out how to get it switched around to take the classes I needed to graduate. I was on the professional pathway, and I had to change that. I'm on the skilled pathway now, and I don't have to take a second foreign language class, or four sciences, and I don't need a lot of electives only a few. The speech class didn't go for anything, then pottery class and chorus, both went towards the arts class, those would have

been filled with Spanish 2 and science if I was going towards the professional track.

Sara did not discuss academic advising with her parents, and she had to figure out her academic curriculum for herself. She was quiet and didn't ask questions about her advising until she became worried about graduations requirements.

Parents' expectations. Sara's parents seemed to value a strong work ethic over formal education. Sara began working for her step-father at a fast-food restaurant in a neighboring county when she turned sixteen. Throughout high school, Sara worked long hours on the weekends. Because her ride to work was her step-father, she would frequently be at work for ten to twelve-hour shifts. She enjoyed the monetary benefits, but the hours meant she frequently put off schoolwork.

Initially, she was interested in going to culinary school, but later explained, "I don't want to end up like my parents, or how I am now at [the fast food restaurant]." Because her parents both worked in the fast-food field, she desired something different for herself. She was unsure of a future occupation.

Similar to Cassi and Ashley, Sara grew up with fewer resources to ensure her academic success. While her mother spent time teaching Sara as a young child and later her step-father assisted her with homework, she did not discuss her high school assignments with her parents. During high school, Sara was on her own academically. Her parents did not assist her with schoolwork and were frequently at work when she came home from school. Because Sara was unsupervised, she chose activities besides schoolwork after school and in the evenings.

Sara's mother and step-father worked in fast-food management, so their schedules were irregular, working long hours. They trusted her to take care of her schoolwork, while expecting her to work on weekends. Her parents encouraged Sara to take responsibility at work and also assumed she was being a responsible student.

While Sara's parents wanted her to attend college, they did not provide concrete advice about the college-going process. When I met Sara's mother, as Cassi and I waited outside a classroom where Sara was taking her SAT, her mother said that she had always told her daughters to do well in school so they could earn scholarships for college.

Sara felt dependent on her parents for her choice in majors as she had expected them to help her financially pay for college. She explained, "I'm not positive what I really want to do if I had to pick something for my parents." At first, Sara was interested in archeology but explained that "mom told me it was an unrealistic idea." When she expressed an interest in nursing, "my dad told me he didn't think nursing was a good choice for me." Sara was frustrated by the thoughts of working long hours in a restaurant, where she would finish work tired and "work all day and feel like crap." Her AP English teacher commented on her parents' hectic work schedules, "That's one thing perhaps Sara has seen, that without an education, that's the kind of job I'm going to have."

Jennifer felt that Sara's parents squelched her dreams by telling her that she wasn't capable, but I am not sure whether they are referring to her ability or her habit of not completing what she started. Jennifer explained, "I hate seeing people like Sara. She always tells her parents she wants to do something, and her parents tell her she can't do it. Not like she can't, but she won't be able to." Jennifer can remember a time when she

and Sara were thinking about participating in tennis, but Sara's parents told her that she "wouldn't be able to." Jennifer believed that those messages from Sara's parents affected her ability to believe in herself and prohibited the desire to engage in activities and follow through. Jennifer explained,

If you're always being told you can't do anything, and you're never going to succeed with anything, then it would be hard to want to do anything. If somebody tells you enough times that you're stupid or you can't do something, you eventually think it and can't do it because you've got to be able to think you can before you can do anything."

Sara explained that her parents expected her to be successful academically on her own without giving her guidance:

They expect me to do stuff, like go to college, get a car, but there is not really any help. They will tell me that I need to do this, but they wouldn't push me. It just like, "You need to go to college," and "You need to get a good job with a good paycheck." But then they wouldn't push me toward it, or they don't keep up with me on doing anything. I have to do it all myself. When I am expected to do it all myself, I get lazy.

In tenth grade when Sara began struggling with her grades, she began creating fake report cards to give her parents. At one point she explained that she didn't want to upset them when she knew she could bring up her grades before the end of the year. She explained how she began to balance work and schoolwork:

If I wasn't doing good at one, I would get yelled at. Dad would yell at me. I couldn't really fake anything [at work], but I could fake my grades. So, I

wouldn't get yelled at [for grades]. I wasn't getting yelled at. I put all my energy into work and faked my grades, so that they would think that I was doing good in school.

Sara thought she knew her own ability to bring up her grades.

Sara would explain that typing out a report card was easy when she found the font the school used to print out their grades.

I would type up a fake report card and print it off. Haha! [The school] makes it so much easier because they print it off a computer. It makes it so much easier for kids to change their grades. Now, they have Ed Line. I wouldn't tell my mom about that.

Sara got by with faking her report cards until she had oral surgery during the summer after her junior year. The day after her surgery her parents picked up the mail and discovered her real report card with her actual grades. During her junior year, Sara failed her AP English course. She explained to her angry parents that she was already registered for two English classes during her senior year to make up for her failure.

Sara explained that her parents' academic expectations changed when they received her real report card for her junior year. At that point, "they just wanted me to pass" with a high school diploma.

Dental problems. Sara was always self-conscious about her teeth. When I would take a photograph of her smiling, she would always be disappointed that her teeth were showing.

During the summer after her junior year, Sara planned to have all of her teeth removed, a bone graft to reinforce her gums, so that she could have permanent dentures

implanted in her gums. She was excited about having a pretty smile. Unfortunately, Sara began the procedure by having her back teeth removed and the bone graft completed on her back gums, but her parents realized that their insurance would not cover the entire procedure. Her father promised to use his restaurant stock options to complete her dental procedures.

Sara entered her senior year with no back teeth, occasionally complaining at the difficulty she experienced eating. Sara explained:

I want my teeth fixed because they are just so bad. I don't like to smile because of my teeth. I hate my teeth! They are just so nasty. When I was at [Cassi's] house, I bit into a celery stick and broke a tooth. They are so brittle. I am afraid I am going to lose this front tooth because it is bad off. I will die if I lose a front tooth. I hate my teeth. They are icky looking. They are scary. I want skinny teeth. I have one that abscesses a lot.

Her teeth have affected her ability to socialize. In addition, she explained that her first priority is to have her teeth fixed. After her teeth were fixed, she felt confident that "I think I could save up for a car by myself. I could fight my way through college." While Sara felt confident in her ability to go to college, she felt that she needed to fix her dental problems first.

Post-secondary Experiences

One of the problems with attending college for Sara was choosing a major that her parents agreed would lead to a future job. Since Sara was unsure of a major, she could not justify the cost of attendance, especially when she would be responsible for the

financing of her education. While her step-father promised to cash in his restaurant investments, Sara hated the feeling of being financially obligated to her step-father.

Despite attending orientation at a local community college and registering for classes, Sara decided to wait a year before attending college, so that she could decide on a major and acquire funds for attendance. Her step-father mentioned that he could pay for college the following year because he could withdraw funds from his stock options. While Sara considered having her step-father pay for college, she worried that she would be too dependent on him. In addition, he had previously promised to pay for dental work, only to stop payments in the middle of her restoration procedures.

When I asked Sara what her mother told her about college, she told me that her mother told her that “[she] better go eventually and find out what [she] wants to do.” She said that she had a year to think about college. Sara is planning to attend college after taking a year break after high school. She is planning to take out student loans to pay for college. Sara explained, “I could pay it all back myself and not have to worry about him.” Sara wants to choose a major and a potential career, but at the present time she is influenced by her parents’ work expectations. Her father thinks that she should get in a managerial track at the fast-food restaurant where she is currently working.

At the point when the other girls were studying for final exams at the end of their spring semester, Sara lost her job because it was discovered that her step-father was the manager. Sara was living with her parents in a different county without a job, car, or license. She was completely dependent on her parents. Sara continued to struggle to approach her parents with college-going plans and does not plan on attending college this

upcoming year. Sara did not enroll in college a year after high school. Currently, she found another part-time job in fast food.

Reflection

It was frustrating to watch Sara negotiate her senior year of high school. She said that she had nightmares of not graduating from high school because of some minor infraction, like not wearing the right socks. From numerous hours spent with Sara, I recognized her quick wit and intellect that was rarely directed at academics, but was more about pop culture and the Internet.

Sara has been presented with several opportunities to move out of her parents' house, but she is reluctant to leave her mother. She still remains hopeful of attending college: "Money is a real issue with me. I want to be 100% positive in my college choices, so I don't waste any money because I don't have it to waste." I know that Sara is intellectually capable of college work and hope that she finds a career to pursue.

CHAPTER TEN: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Chapters five through nine presented the single cases and revealed factors that enabled and constrained college-going for five girls from Livingston County. In this chapter, I explore themes across the five participants' transitions from high school to college. In identifying common themes across the cases, I found Giddens' (1984) structuration theory helpful in considering relationships between social systems of which the girls are a part and their own human agency.

Before discussing structuration theory and themes, I will begin by aggregating the findings in my five single-case analyses of enabling and constraining factors in participants' transitions from high school to college. Following the aggregate section, I will explain how Giddens' (1984) structuration theory was helpful in categorizing my aggregate data. Next, I will take a closer look at how social systems were both enabling and constraining to participants' human agency. Finally, I will discuss individual acts of human agency that enabled or constrained participants' transitions to college.

Aggregate

First, I will summarize the enabling and constraining factors that were found in the single-case analyses. Then, as a way of looking at their common enabling and constraining factors, I will return to Giddens' (1984) structuration theory to assist in the interpretation of themes across the cases.

A year and a half after high school graduation, participants found themselves in a variety of places. Four out of five participants, Marycait, Jennifer, Cassi, and Ashley, are continuing to pursue their goals of higher education. Marycait dropped out during her

second semester, but continued part-time during the summer and the following fall semester, fulfilling her developmental math requirements. Currently, Marycait is enrolled full-time at another local state university. After having a baby following high school graduation, Jennifer continues to attend college full-time, struggling to balance school and motherhood. She began as a pre-veterinarian major and has begun to look at her options in a veterinary tech program. Cassi started out in the university honors program and withdrew because of a low GPA; she continues in the nursing program full-time. Ashley attended a more distant (from her home county) state university during her freshman year, failing the majority of her courses. After sitting out a required semester, Ashley is enrolled full-time at a nearby state university and is commuting from Livingston County, like Jennifer. Sara, despite being accepted, attending orientation, and completing a schedule for the fall after high school graduation, did not attend college. She remains adamant about not becoming her parents, but she, like her parents, continues to work in fast food.

Enabling Factors

Looking across the five girls' single-case analyses, a total of 17 enabling factors supported their transition to college (see Table 1).

Table 1

Enabling Factors in Their Transition from High School to College

Enabling Factors	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Independence	X			X	
Motivation			X		
Love of Reading			X		
Intelligence					X
Teacher's Pet	X				
Private School		X			
Extra-curricular Activities		X			
Arts and Theater	X				
Nursing			X		
Relationships				X	
Parents' resources	X				
Mother's expectations and support		X			
Early parental expectations				X	
Early learning with mom					X
Mother's expectations			X		
Financial Aid		X	(X)		
No cost attendance				X	

Note. (X) designates categorization after the single-case analysis.

The 17 enabling factors can be grouped into three key categories: family expectations and support, the consolidated high school's expanded curriculum, as well as a few individual issues.

Grouped in this way, the enabling factors fit with Giddens' (1984) structuration theory of social systems and human agency. In Giddens' theory, individuals make decisions and follow through with actions based on their life experiences, which shape and are shaped by the environment. In this case, the social systems were family and schooling, influencing my participants' human agency, which in turn, influenced their families and school.

To some degree, all of the girls were expected to attend college and had heard positive messages from their families about college goals (See Table 2). Also, one girl's family income served as an enabling factor for her transition to college.

Table 2

Enabling Family Factors

Family	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Parents' resources and expectations	X				
Mother's expectations and support		X			
Early parental expectations				X	
Early learning with mom					X
Mother's expectations			X		

The primary family enabling factor that crossed all cases was the girls' relationships with their mothers, which included high expectations and support. While Marycait, Jennifer, and Cassi's mothers' high academic expectations were consistent throughout their educational experiences, Ashley and Sara experienced positive but inconsistent messages from their mothers. In other words, they heard positive messages about the importance of college attendance, but those messages were not articulated and supported consistently through their educational experiences.

As the girls were enrolled at the same school during high school, I will take a closer look at the recently consolidated high school's influence on these students (See Table 3). In particular, three of the students benefited from the expanded curriculum offered at the new high school. The new facility offered several new courses and programs with new equipment. The courses that benefitted the girls were taught by

teachers who held high expectations and provided support. Jennifer and Cassi benefited from rigorous Career and Technical Education programs, in addition to a college preparatory curriculum; Cassi earned college credit for two English courses. Marycait struggled through her college preparatory curriculum, but felt competent in theater and speech. In contrast, Ashley and Sara experienced fewer obvious enabling factors in high school.

Table 3

Enabling School Factors

Schooling	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Private School		X			
Extra-curricular Activities		X			
Arts and Theater	X				
Nursing			X		
Agriculture		X			
AP English and literature			X		

The new programs and activities at the high school proved to be helpful to my participants' goals of college when they were taught by qualified teachers (as perceived by participants) and taught in appropriate sequence.

For the four participants with factors in this category, the enabling individual factors appear to be intrinsic qualities, but they can also be understood in terms of their relationships with social systems, in this case, family and schooling (See Table 4).

Table 4

Enabling Individual Factors

Individual	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Independence	X			X	
Motivation			X		
Love of Reading			X		
Intelligence					X
Teacher's Pet	X				

All of the girls made decisions, based on their experiences with family and in school, which sometimes played out in unintended consequences. For example, Marycait and Ashley's desires to be independent enabled them to realize greater personal freedom, but unintended consequences occurred when they struggled with the responsibilities of college. Jennifer and Cassi were less independent and kept clear career goals in mind, as they relied on support from family and friends.

Constraining Factors

I identified 18 constraining factors across the five girls' single-case analyses (See Table 5).

Table 5

Constraining Factors in their Transition from High School to College

Constraining Factors	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Lack of confidence	X				
Lack of motivation					X
Low academic achievement	X				
Homeschooling		X			
Lack of scholarship advice			X		
No advising					X
Overly concerned with GPA			X		
Math	(X)	X	X	(X)	(X)
Boyfriend and pregnancy		X			
Parental abandonment				X	
Sheltered			X		
Unstable foster care				X	
Parents' expectations					X
Abandonment					X
Unstable relationships					X
Cost of attendance		X	X		(X)
Transience					X
Dental problems					X

Note. (X) designates categorization after the single-case analysis.

Like the enabling factors, these can be grouped into categories of influences, family and school, as well as human agency.

While families were enabling in certain ways, as shown above, for three of the five participants, family instability constrained their schooling experiences as well as their capacity to act in self-enhancing ways (See Table 6). The degree to which the barriers influenced their lives varied. For example, Cassi's being sheltered proved less detrimental in comparison with Ashley's parental abandonment and subsequent instability in foster care.

Table 6

Constraining Family Factors

Family	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Parental abandonment				X	
Sheltered			X		
Unstable foster care				X	
Parents' expectations					X
Abandonment					X
Unstable relationships					X
Transience					X

While three of the girls experienced school-related enabling factors, all five experienced school-related factors that constrained their transitions to college (See Table 7). The expanded curriculum allowed more options, but lack of advising and inconsistent instructional quality constrained their transitions to college. Further, math, while not initially an obvious constraint for all, ultimately was an obstacle for all five participants who scored low on their ACT/SATs, requiring them to enroll in developmental math courses in college.

Table 7

Constraining School Factors

Schooling	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Homeschooling		X			
Lack of college-going advice			X		
No advising					X
Math	(X)	(X)	X	X	(X)

Note. (X) designates categorization after the single-case analysis.

Finally, for four participants, individual factors were barriers to their transitions to college (See Table 8). The only participant with no obvious individual barrier was

Ashley, who experienced stronger family constraints that, in turn seemed to create an inner strength and perseverance.

Table 8

Constraining Individual Factors

Individual	Marycait	Jennifer	Cassi	Ashley	Sara
Lack of confidence	X				
Lack of motivation					X
Low academic achievement	X				
Overly concerned with GPA			X		
Boyfriend and pregnancy		X			

The four girls who attended college in the fall after high school graduation experienced more enabling factors than constraining factors; on the other hand, Sara, whose constraining factors far out-numbered enabling factors, did not enter college during the fall after her high school graduation. Ashley and Sara, who experienced the most instability at home, also had the most difficult transitions to college.

I began to see patterns of family, school, and individual factors that seemed to be related to the nature of their transitions from high school to college. Giddens' structuration theory was particularly meaningful in thinking about the relationships between social systems and human agency. The most beneficial results (i.e., successful transition to college) occurred when family and schooling provided similar messages and support about values and opportunities in education. Families and the high school sent messages encouraging college attendance, but the level and consistency of support varied.

Structuration Theory

As discussed in Chapter Two, social class positioning is frequently reproduced in schooling, leaving working-class students with working class opportunities that do not include college attendance. In 2005, Livingston County, a primarily working-class community, had a low college-going rate (42.2%) (West Virginia College Going, n.d.), and the number of citizens with bachelor's degrees was also low (5.9%) (U.S. Census, 2009). For Giddens' (1984), "structuration theory is based on the proposition that structure is always both enabling and constraining, in virtue of the inherent relationship between structure and agency (and agency and power)" (p. 169). The prevelant "structures" found to influence my participants were family and school. In addition, I served as a social actor by influencing participants' college-going decisions and choices. Social systems influenced participants' plans for their futures after high school. As Giddens' notes, "the actors have reasons for what they do, and what they do has certain specifiable consequences which they do not intend" (p. 294).

Social Systems

The social systems that influenced my participants' agency were their families and their schools, as well as myself. Family and school proved to be both constraining and enabling according to the girls' individual experiences.

Family. Giddens (1984) discussed the influence of family as a social system as a "predictable and caring routine established by parental figures" (p. 50). According to Giddens, family is the initial social system that influences a child's ability to trust and establish a sense of security. As a social system, families provide the initial support for learning and for valuing education. My participants' families clearly enabled and

constrained the educational lives of their daughters through early high academic expectations and support for college attendance.

All the girls received messages from their mothers of high expectations of college attendance, but the support for college attendance varied, shaping the decisions that the girls made about college attendance. Marycait, Jennifer, and Cassi received consistent messages and positive support, successfully transitioning to college. On the other hand, Ashley and Sara received positive messages from their mothers early in life, but experienced declines in their mothers' support, which may have constrained their progress after high school. For Sara, the revelation of poor high school grades led her mother to doubt her academic ability to pursue a college degree. Even in college, Ashley's mother may have hindered her academic progress by moving into her apartment, relying on Ashley's support in her road to sobriety.

Of the five girls, the three from working-class backgrounds—Cassi, Ashley, and Sara—emphasized the importance of early life educational assistance and encouragement from their mothers. All three were first-born daughters, who experienced early-education from their young mothers growing up in rural and isolated areas with considerable time for working one-on-one. They remembered that their verbal and language skills were well above their peers in kindergarten. These experiences may have enabled the girls to succeed in elementary school.

In addition to high expectations and supportive reinforcement, family financial resources played a part in the girls' transitions from high school to college. Financial resources varied according to participants' parents' income. Marycait's family could provide far more financial support for tutoring for ACT, in addition to providing for her

cost of college attendance. In contrast, Jennifer, Cassi, and Ashley had to find financial resources outside the family in federal aid, regional scholarships, and small student loans. While the financial aid process was cumbersome, as I will discuss under the section on school, the end result was college attendance for three low-income girls. Sara, who did not attend college, named money as the main reason she did not attend, despite being accepted and attending orientation. Sara could not justify the cost of college attendance because she witnessed a culinary graduate employed at a fast food restaurant where she worked, with no obvious benefits over the work-to-management route.

School. In addition to families that serve as social systems, schools are another social system that influenced and was influenced by the girls. Due to poor test scores and old buildings, the state took control of the school system. One of their decisions was to consolidate the four run-down high schools into one consolidated high school. As their families were sending messages about the value of higher education, the state provided a new school facility with new equipment, new Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, and more Advanced Placement courses. The new school also communicated high expectations for college attendance but varied in the support provided through advising and teacher quality.

School proved to be both enabling and constraining related to the programs and courses in which the girls enrolled. The courses that proved to enable their transition to college were nursing and agriculture, AP English and literature, and dual credit speech. The teachers involved in these courses were perceived as qualified by the girls who were enthusiastic about their classes. The courses that proved constraining were Computer Aided Drafting (CAD), Pro-start, and math. While the new facilities provided additional

resources for active, hands-on learning in both CTE and academic classes, the constraining factors of schooling revolved around teacher quality and workload.

While Jennifer, Cassi, and Sara started taking advanced math courses in eighth grade, they all experienced math as a constraining factor to college attendance. Cassi explained the loss of two good math teachers in the middle of the year during eighth and ninth grade, only to be replaced by permanent substitutes who were teaching out of field.

All of the participants struggled with math in high school and were required to take developmental math courses in college. I knew the girls were struggling in math courses when they began receiving their ACT scores. They all scored lowest in math, costing all of them a shot at the West Virginia Promise scholarship. For Cassi, who held high expectations for receiving the Promise because of her 4.0 GPA, math problems cost her thousands of dollars in scholarships.

Because two of the participants in college, Jennifer and Ashley, were majoring in science fields, they were required to successfully complete a college math course before enrolling in science courses for their majors. The delay of completing their developmental math courses cost them extended time in college and the expense of additional credit hours.

While families and schools provided initial positive college-going messages and support, my presence at the high school reinforced the positive message of college attendance. Because the participants received varying degrees of support at home and school, my continued presence allowed the girls to engage in conversations about college where many of their questions were discussed and answered.

My role. Throughout the five years I have been working with the girls, my role in their lives has varied, from de facto Girls Resiliency Program (GRP) facilitator to informal academic advising. In addition, I acted as a parental figure for various college-going events. As the de facto GRP facilitator, I continued meeting with the girls for school lunch discussions after the GRP lost funding. Because of the positive reputation of the program, I was able to establish rapport more smoothly with the participants, their parents, and the school.

During their junior years, as I understood their college-going plans and began defining my dissertation research topic, I began asking pointed questions about their high school experiences and their goals, periodically inserting my advice as part of our conversations. As discussed in Chapter Three, I began my work with the girls primarily as an observer-participant. Throughout our collaborative work, I strived to achieve—as I took on the role of “empathic neutrality” participant-observer who negotiated the “middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding” (Patton, 2002, p. 50).

During their senior years, I asked the girls about their high school classes and college-going plans during regular visits to the school. As the girls ran into roadblocks, I frequently answered their questions. As a former academic counselor at a nearby state university, I understood the process of applying to college, from immunization requirements to terminology that was unfamiliar to my participants. For example, Cassi was not going to apply for a scholarship because she did not see herself as a first-generation college-going student because a cousin had attended one year of college.

After our lunch discussion about scholarships, Cassi went home, wrote an essay about her financial need, and applied for a scholarship, which she received.

Similar to prior research, in this study, a gap in college-going advice existed for first-generation college-going students, and I supplemented this lack of college-going advice for them. As I expected, Marycait, from an upper-income family, asked fewer questions, and I, in turn, knew less about her experiences as her parents actively assisted her in the transition from high school to college. In Jennifer's case, her mother, as well as her older, college-going brother, provided knowledge and support during the college application process. One area in which she did ask for assistance was in regard to financial aid, which I was less knowledgeable about. In that case, Jennifer's brother took her to campus in order to directly speak to someone in the financial aid office. Cassi, from a lower-income family, asked me the most college-going questions. Through our conversations, I continually explained the processes that occurred throughout her transition to college. Ashley, also working-class, worked with her social worker throughout the college-going process. Although Sara, who was a middle-income, working-class student, never attended college, I played an active role in her college-going procedures by hand-delivering her application form, actively seeking an application fee waiver, and taking her to her college orientation.

In addition to providing college-going advice, I acted as a parental figure for low-income girls during college-going events and college orientations because of their parents' absence due to their inflexible work schedules. I attended Jennifer's college orientation the day before she gave birth to her son. Because of her mother's inflexible work schedule, I frequently took Cassi to college-going events, such as the governor's

symposium for West Virginia Gear Up! as well as her college orientation. In Ashley's case, I attended her college orientation at a distant state university and joined their university-sponsored program for parents. If Sara had attended college, I would have played a key role in her college-going process, as discussed above. In the case of Marycait, her parents attended all college-going events with her.

Human Agency

While the social systems of family and school influenced their transition to college, the girls had goals and made choices that enabled and/or constrained their progress to college attendance. Giddens (1991) discussed the creation of an individual identity through life plans and human agency. Through their ability to create plans and act on them, my participants made choices related to their participation or non-participation in post-secondary education. Their ability to plan and take action (human agency) was influenced by the interplay of social systems of which they were a part (Giddens, 1984). The social systems that seemed to most strongly influence their transition to college were their families and their high school experiences, but we cannot understand how these systems contributed to the girls' college outcomes without taking a closer look at the girls' human agency, their ability to make choices and follow through with action.

According to Giddens (1984), human agency requires "reflective monitoring of conduct in the day-to-day continuity of social life" (p. 44). Individuals do not act alone but are influenced by the social systems in their daily lived experiences. Four factors of human agency that related to my participants' transitions to college were: goals, high school curricular choices, college-going procedures, and college choices.

Goals. According to Giddens (1984), “the self forms a trajectory of development from the past to anticipated future” (p. 75). When I met with the girls for the first time during their junior years, they excitedly told me of their plans for the future which featured attending college and working in a large, pink professional building where they would each have a floor for their practices/businesses. During their senior years, I asked the girls how they saw their goals playing out in five years (See Table 9). Again, all of them mentioned college plans and family plans, with the exception of Marycait, whose family’s expectations were clearly college attendance.

Table 9

Participants’ Goals

	Five-year Goals
Marycait	Hopefully, I’ll find someone and get married and have children in my mid-20s.
Jennifer	My baby starts kindergarten! I’ll be in veterinary medical school, living in Virginia. Maybe have another baby.
Cassi	I will hopefully be out of college by this point. I’ll be living full time with Harry! Hopefully, I’ll be engaged. I’ll have a great job.
Ashley	Hopefully, I will be in [distant state city] with Jeremy and have two years left in college before I get my doc degree.
Sara	College and marriage

As discussed in Chapter Two, social reproduction through schooling often contributes to children following their family social-class positioning. According to Giddens (1991), “where traditional modes of practice are dominant, the past inserts a wide band of ‘authenticated practice’ into the future” (p. 48). When I spoke to high school teachers about obstacles for Livingston County girls who wished to attend college,

most of the teachers referred to the potential constraints of traditional gender roles that are emphasized at home, as well as in the school.

Given their young age, I was surprised at the importance the girls placed on starting their own families. Perhaps traditional social systems, both family and school, influenced their understandings of traditional gender roles and relationships, creating a sense of emotional and financial dependence. As the girls made high school curricular choices and college major choices, they assumed they would be wives and mothers. Their choices in careers reflected their goals of fulfilling the traditional motherhood role, as they were hoping to create a better life for themselves and their future families.

High school choices. While their goals were influenced by their family and school circumstances, they made intentional choices but could not predict the unintended consequences of those choices. Participants demonstrated agency in high school when they registered for particular courses. In some cases, such as Marycait and Cassi, this enabled them to earn college credit through their selection of AP or dual-credit courses. In other cases, however, girls' curricular choices were constraining; for example, Sara chose to schedule courses with Cassi during her junior year, thereby changing to a skilled pathway rather than college preparatory during her senior year.

During their senior years, Marycait, Jennifer, and Cassi's majors continued to influence their college-going plans and goals (See Table 10). As mentioned previously, Jennifer and Cassi enrolled in CTE programs that related to their desired field of study in college, while Marycait's participation in high school speech and theater contributed to college credit earned in high school. On the other hand, Marycait's emphasis on theater courses during her freshman year of college had the unintended consequence of her

decision to withdraw from college during her second semester. For Ashley and Sara, their curriculum choices, at least partly a failure on the part of the school, influenced their career goals and potential college majors.

Table 10

High School Choices

Participant	Action/Choice	Intended Outcomes	Unintended Constraints
Marycait	Dual credit speech Theater	Earned college credit	Withdrawal from college
Jennifer	Agriculture Pregnancy	Animal knowledge Family	
Cassi	Nursing AP Calculus drop	Career Kept 4.0 GPA	Low ACT math score, loss of scholarship, and developmental math
Ashley	CAD	Graphic design	Little learning
Sara	11 th grade classes with Cassi Faked and cheated Work Pro-start	Friendship/security Getting the grades/parents' approval Parents' approval Culinary learning	Lack of progress toward high school major Little learning and parents' distrust Less time for schoolwork Little learning

Marycait exhibited the least agency during her college-going process, relying on her parents for major decisions. Marycait's family valued the arts, and she took advantage of theater and speech classes, as well as extra-curricular theater participation. In addition, Marycait took college-preparatory courses, and her parents assisted her with homework.

Jennifer made successful curricular choice and academic goals. Through her enrollment in the high school agriculture program, Jennifer was able to build on her interest in plants and animals. She continued her pursuit in agriculture by enrolling in Future Farmers of America (FFA), which allowed her to raise two pigs and compete (with her peers in formal annual FFA competitions) while visiting a distant college campus.

Cassi made the decision to pursue a degree in nursing after enrolling in a CTE nursing class during her junior year of high school. She enrolled in the course initially because she was interested in pursuing a medical degree. Cassi found nursing more practical than being a doctor because she, like Jennifer, was interested in starting a family. In addition, Cassi took advantage of the expanded AP courses that were offered at the new consolidated high school. During her junior year, she enrolled in, and successfully completed, AP English, fulfilling the college requirement of English composition. During her senior year, she enrolled and successfully completed AP literature, which counted as an elective in her college nursing program. Initially, Cassi enrolled in an AP calculus class her senior year but dropped the course, worried about the effect on her high school GPA.

Ashley enrolled in two Computer Aided Drafting courses (CAD) for two blocks, four class periods, during her junior year. The courses were meant to be completed in two years, with the second year building on knowledge from the first year. As a junior, she was interested in becoming a graphic design artist, but she became disillusioned through her high school experiences in CAD.

Sara made the most choices that constrained her progress to college. While Sara wanted her parents' approval, she began working more and studying less, faking report cards to avoid their disapproval or punishment. In addition, as Sara chose to take courses to be with Cassi instead of courses for her original academic major, archeology—she increasingly relied on Cassi for assignments, doing little of her own school work.

College-going procedures. The support the girls received from social systems, family and school, varied according to their parents' knowledge of procedures and their ability to inquire at school, and I filled in some of the gaps. The girls perceived Livingston County High School counselors as busy and intimidating.

Local colleges recruited at the high school, and the girls participated to varying degrees. Marycait and Jennifer chose to collect the material and rely on their parents' advice. Ashley worked with a social worker. Cassi visited the counselor's office and asked me questions to clarify terminology. In the case of Sara, I encouraged her to the point of hand-delivering her application, making sure that a waiver was given for the application fee, and taking her to her orientation.

In stark contrast to Marycait's reliance on her parents' active involvement in the process of applying and attending college, Jennifer and Cassi more single handedly gained entrance into an institution of higher education. Throughout their senior year in high school, they explained the steps they were taking towards applying to college: filling out university applications, financial aid applications, sending out their transcripts, and taking entrance exams. Many of the activities took place at the school, allowing them to ask questions of teachers, counselors, and me.

Three of the girls—Marycait, Jennifer, and Cassi—chose a nearby state university to attend because of the support and relationships they could maintain at home. Ashley chose a more distant state university, craving the independence that distance would allow.

College choices. The participants made college-going decisions related to their desired majors and college location (See Table 11). Marycait, Jennifer, and Cassi chose to attend a nearby state university and majors that corresponded to the courses and experiences they enjoyed in high school, while Ashley initially chose a more distant state university and a major, pre-pharmacy, based on her perception of future income. While their intended outcomes were successful college experiences, in some instances unintended consequences constrained their progress in college.

Table 11

Participants' College Choices

Participant	Action/Choice	Intended Outcomes	Unintended Consequences/Constraints
Marycait	Theater courses	Theater major	Withdrawal from college
Jennifer	Pre-veterinary	Veterinarian	Vet-tech (math)
Cassi	Nursing	Nursing	
Ashley	Distant state university	Independence	Loneliness
Sara	Work	Delay of college	No college going

As a provisionally admitted student at a nearby state university, Marycait was admitted as an undecided major until she completed developmental math courses. Instead of accepting her initial college schedule, Marycait worked with an advisor during orientation to make changes to her schedule to include a university orientation course specifically for theater majors and added a special topics course in Youth Theater.

During her fall semester, she enjoyed experiences in these courses with the same professor. During her spring semester, Marycait enrolled in a technical theater course, in addition to general studies courses. She felt that she was in over her head, which led to her neglect of other courses. Based on advice from her parents, Marycait withdrew from college during her second semester because of the stress created from concentrating on theater as a major rather than focusing on completing her general studies courses. Marycait's decision to take theater courses was influenced by her family and her high school experiences. Her family members were patrons of the arts, and Marycait often attended musicals when she travelled. In addition, she enthusiastically acted and participated in all theater productions at school.

Ironically, after enrolling in developmental math for three semesters, Jennifer began taking biology and chemistry courses that were meant for non-majors because the science courses for her major required college math as a pre-requisite. As a result, she is currently considering changing her major and transferring to a different college in order to become a veterinary technician rather than a veterinarian. As Jennifer balanced motherhood and schoolwork, she also recognized that a shorter program would be more manageable and would still provide a stable income. In addition, Jennifer made decisions based on her mother's ability to provide care for her son.

Cassi chose a nearby state university because of her relationships with her mother and boyfriend, and, as she explained later, my proximity on campus. She was unable to earn the West Virginia Promise Scholarship because of her low ACT math scores. Cassi was immediately accepted into the university's nursing program; in addition, Cassi's aunt was a nurse, providing knowledge of the field. Cassi became closer to her boyfriend

during college, relying on him as her primary social outlet. To avoid early pregnancy, she used multiple forms of birth control. After her freshman year, she and her boyfriend moved into an apartment together. While she first considered her living arrangement to be “domestic bliss,” the novelty soon wore off, and she became overwhelmed during her sophomore year, as she began to work a part-time job in order to contribute to their living expenses. Cassi frequently discussed marriage, wedding rings, and babies in the distant future after she had completed her degree.

At least partly due to her family and foster-family instability, Ashley became very attached to her high school and college boyfriends. Initially, Ashley selected a larger, more distant state university and decided to live off campus in an apartment with her high school boyfriend despite advice from her social worker and me. She was happy to start a new life with her high school boyfriend but became irritated when he became overly possessive. In the process of their relationship dissolving, Ashley began dating a new man from Livingston County. As her high school boyfriend moved out, her new boyfriend moved in with her. After her unsuccessful first year of college, Ashley moved back to Livingston County and into her boyfriend’s family house.

Sara’s decisions to work and not attend college were strongly influenced by her family. She believes that her parents stopped “pushing” her toward college after they realized she failed a course during her junior year of high school. While she was adamant about not turning into her parents, at the time of this writing, she is still continuing down the path of fast food service and still living at home.

Conclusion

Social systems proved influential in my participants' human agency, providing both openings and barriers for girls as they made decisions and took actions related to going to college. As the students in Livingston County were being consolidated into one high school where they received messages about the importance of attending college, the participants also were receiving messages from their parents that a college education was in their futures. In addition, my constant presence and inquiries provided expectations of college attendance. Through my developing relationships with the girls, I began to answer their college-going questions and encouraged them to attend college and pursue their goals, but ultimately their decisions and actions were, in many ways, their own.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: INTERPRETATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A degree in higher education is increasingly important in our competitive economic environment. Currently, we know that the United States is ranked 12th out of 36 developed nations in the “number of 25- to 34-year-olds with college degrees” (Lewin, 2010). Furthermore, the United States college graduation rates are at 63%, which was found to be comparable to France, the Netherlands, and Finland (Gordon, 2009). We know less about the reasons for these college-going deficits. Because Livingston County has struggled in meeting high school academic yearly progress, administrators and teachers are concerned with producing more high school graduates and encouraging students to pursue college attendance after high school. This study looked at the question of how participants’ experiences have enabled or constrained their transitions from high school to college.

In light of Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory, key participants made college-going choices (human agency) based on the influence of family and school (social systems). In this chapter, I will explore four key themes. Looking at the five cases, I have identified four factors—mothers, money, math, and me—that proved enabling and constraining based on their experiences. I explore each theme in relation to prior research, and then, I look at implications for practice and future research.

Mothers

As Livingston County’s Board of Education was taken over by the state, many parents objected to the proposed consolidated school. According to Truscott and Truscott

(2005) state control over rural community education reduces parental influence over a system that is controlled outside of the community. Prior research has shown that families influence students' transitions from high school to college through expectations (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008; Brown, 2005), support (Battle & Grant, 1995; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, Thomas, & Li, 2008), and financial resources (Bloom, 2007; Fine & Burns, 2003; Howard & Levine, 2004; Kettley, Whitehead, & Raffan, 2008; Perna et al, 2008). Growing up in rural West Virginia, where traditional gender roles were valued, my participants experienced strong relationships with their mothers and valued their opinions. Participants' relationships with their mothers influenced their decisions to attend college, as participants received explicit and implicit messages about college attendance to varying degrees.

Explicit Messages

Similar to Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine's (2003) middle class girls, all of my participants, despite varying social class positioning, "[received] strong messages from their early childhood that it is their destiny to go to university and become professionals" (p. 296). Unlike Howard and Levine (2004), who found that an expensive education was the last thing on the minds of low-income parents, the low-income mothers in this study held high expectations of their daughters' college education. At an early age, all of the participants can remember their mothers' explicit messages that they would go to college.

Similar to this study, Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine (2003) found that successful working-class girls "share a fantasy of escape in their drive towards higher education, one which can be closely connected to their parents' explicitly articulated wish for their children to have better lives than they did" (p. 294). Particularly for low-

income mothers, college offered possibilities for their daughters that their mothers missed out on. The girls understood that their mothers wished more for their daughters and saw college as a way out of poverty, and in some cases out of Livingston County.

Implicit Messages

Beyond explicit messages from their mothers, implicit messages reinforced and supported their daughters' value of higher education from early learning at home to varying degrees of encouragement. Participants remembered the implicit messages from their mothers from early learning at home to providing varying levels of support while attending college.

Three of the five girls had significant learning opportunities at home with their mothers before they entered school. Similar to my participants' early learning experiences with their mothers, Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine (2003) found that working class mothers in England "only felt able to help their children in the early primary school years" (p. 290). Perhaps because Cassi, Ashley, and Sara's mothers' formal education ended at or during high school, they used their knowledge to educate their daughters more in their early years than in later school years. By receiving personal early instruction from mom, the participants began formal schooling ready to learn and confident in their abilities.

Alloway and Gilbert (2004) and Egan (1993) found that success in college for rural females began with personal empowerment that came from small academic successes that led to their search for larger accomplishments. In a study looking at the increased patterns of female college attendance, Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) found "the roots of the female advantage in academic performance, of course, lie much earlier

in the educational career” (p. 534). Strong female role models contribute to feelings of empowerment that allow rural girls to accomplish academic goals in a patriarchal culture (Alloway & Gilbert, 2004). In this study, participants agreed that college not only offers rural females the opportunity for an advanced education, but it also offers possibilities that break the cultural stereotypes that rural females encounter on a daily basis.

The mothers of the girls in the current study continued their support in elementary school, monitoring their homework after school. As the five girls entered middle school, four of them increasingly took more responsibility for their coursework. Crosnoe (2001) suggested that “parental involvement may improve performance, but improved performance may obviate the need for parental involvement” (p. 227). In other words, early parental involvement can empower the children to take responsibility for their own learning.

While only two of the participants’ mothers attended college, participants’ strong mothers demonstrated perseverance in difficult circumstances. Egan (1993) found that family support for higher educational opportunities for rural females sometimes took the form of “internalized messages . . . from those who demonstrated tenacity in difficult situations and who embodied strength and integrity” (p. 271). Likewise, in this study, participants identified strongly with their mothers, who struggled when they were young adults.

Financial Independence

Growing up in rural West Virginia, four of the five participants witnessed their mothers struggle in relationships because of financial dependence. As a result, their mothers encouraged them to go to college for their financial security. Chenoweth and

Gallagher (2004) found that “for females, college may be viewed as the only option for obtaining financial security and independence” (p. 12). During their senior years of high school, my participants were eager to become independent, and college represented a means to become self-sufficient and meet their career goals. Their goals of becoming financially independent women were supported by their mothers, who in some cases were in financially dependent relationships.

According to Buchmann and DiPrete (2006), who compared women’s college completion rates in the 1970s and 1990s, the “declining gender discrimination and women’s growing interest in possessing autonomous resources by which they can pursue opportunities in both the labor and marriage markets while protecting themselves against adversity in both realms” (p. 535) influenced female college-going. As the working-class girls in this study saw their mothers tied to bad situations because of their lack of financial resources, their goals of financial independence were strengthened. Both Jennifer and Cassi’s mothers had regrets about their experiences as young adults and wanted better for their daughters. Similar to Jennifer and Cassi’s experiences, Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine (2003) found that daughters’ desires for independence are “closely linked to their parents’ struggle and the desire for ‘escape’” (p. 289). College represented a way for the girls to gain financial independence.

As prior research demonstrates, “parental support may be a strong component in the development of personal agency” (Ali & Saunders, 2006, p. 47). As the girls went through their senior years, they were responsible for their college-going actions, some acting without concrete advice from family.

Mothers' Education

Students from higher income families are significantly more likely to attend college than students from lower income families (Ali & Saunders, 2006; Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Glenn, 2004; Smyth & Hannan, 2007). Parrott, Spatig, Kusimo, Carter, and Keyes (2000) found that rural Appalachian “parents had uneven resources on which to draw to help their daughters achieve school success” (p. 54). In this study, parents’ education provided varying degrees of financial resources and college-going advice, but parents’ lack of education did not necessarily hinder attendance for low-income students. Financial resources will be discussed further under “Money.”

Despite low involvement with their children’s educations, low-income parents do value education and frequently regret their educational decisions as students (Lareau, 2000). In rural populations, fewer parents have attained college degrees, leaving their children with an absence of college-going advice, such as college admission and financial aid procedures (Hebel, 2006). The girls with college-educated parents relied less on me for advice because they received college-going advice at home. Marycait received the most assistance with college admissions as well as with college-level courses from both of her parents. Jennifer asked me occasional questions about college, but discussed her college questions with her mother. Ashley worked closely with her social worker who met with her at the school and at home. On the other hand, Cassi and Sara relied more heavily on me for college-going advice. With consistent parental support, three of the five girls, Marycait, Jennifer, and Cassi transitioned to college more smoothly than Ashley, or not at all, like Sara.

Closely linked to mothers' education, a mother's occupation can influence available time to spend with daughters on homework as well as the flexibility to attend school events. Lareau (2000) found that parents' occupations "influenced the parents' flexibility and ability to attend school events during the day" (p. 115). Likewise, Marycait and Jennifer's mothers were more involved in their daughters' education because of their flexible work schedules which enabled the girls to participate in extra-curricular activities as well as have their homework monitored. In contrast, Cassi, Ashley, and Sara's mothers were less involved in tracking their daughters' homework and less able to attend school events. When I spoke with teachers about the girls, the teachers knew Marycait and Jennifer's mothers, whereas Cassi, Ashley, and Sara's teachers wondered about constraining factors in their home lives.

Money

Initially, when I asked participants about what might prevent them from going to college, they overwhelmingly mentioned the cost. As found in prior research, the primary barrier to college attendance is the cost of attendance (Clark, 2006; Glenn, 2004; Gorard & See, 2008; Plimpton & Quint, 2007; Porter, 2006). The cost of college attendance is compounded by the preliminary expenses of college entrance exams and application fees, among other costs that are required prior to attendance. Despite the lack of family financial resources for three participants, all of their mothers encouraged their daughters to attend college, leaving the bulk of the financial arrangements to their daughters. Similarly, Bloom (2007) found that low-income students "must shoulder the weight on their own. . . they must make this journey alone and unaided" (p. 356).

In addition to academic advising in high school, my participants looked to the counseling office for college-going financial aid advice. In this study, participants found it difficult to receive one-on-one attention from the school counselors. Many resources were available on the school's website, but one-on-one attention from school counselors was limited. Cassi was very aware of curriculum requirements in high school, but surprisingly was not aware of the West Virginia Promise scholarship requirements until I brought in paperwork during their senior years. In addition, three participants struggled through the financial aid process on their own. Similarly, Bloom (2005) found that in order to receive financial assistance, lower-income students "must make their way through *more* paperwork than middle-class students, with *less* knowledge and support" (p. 72). Ironically, the increase in paperwork for first-generation, low-income students must be negotiated by students and their families who have the least experience with the financial aid process.

Howard and Levine (2004) found low-income students took out more student loans, paying more for their education because of interest on those loans. During their second year of college, Cassi and Ashley took out more loan money, primarily for computers and car repairs. Perhaps as they proceed through college, they understand the loans to be a sound investment in their futures.

Because of the variety of social class positionings in this study, parents' financial resources varied from the ability to provide extensive private tutoring to the ability to qualify for low-income waivers for testing. Participants who experienced a successful transition to college found ways to pay for college with minimal use of student loans. Marycait was the only participant whose parents paid for her college attendance, while

Jennifer, Cassi, and Ashley were able to acquire financial aid because of their low-income status, receiving Pell grants and taking out minimal student loans. Sara, who did not attend college, did not qualify for financial aid because her parents made too much money, but did not have the disposable income to financially support Sara's college attendance.

Jennifer described the family economic breakdown:

It's almost better to not have money cause then you have all that help. Whereas if you're really rich then you don't have to worry about it and if you're right there in the middle where you have a good bit of money but it is all going to something else like the bills you have, so you're stuck there in the middle where you need help but you can't get it cause you make too much. . . it's almost better to be at the extreme ends.

In this study, the low-income students were able to obtain grants to assist with the cost of attendance, and the higher-income student could rely on her parents for the cost of college, but the middle-income student was left shouldering the total cost of attendance.

Math

Currently, the United States is ranked 25th out of 34 developed nations in math literacy for 15 year olds (Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelczar, & Shelley, 2010). While math achievement has been found to be a predictor for college completion (Cho, 2007; Trusty and Niles, 2003), we know very little about reasons for the United States' deficits in math comprehension. In this study, math proved constraining according to the advice, or lack of, from school counselors and the quality of math teachers.

Curriculum Guidance

Participants made curricular choices in high school that shaped their transitions to college. When choices were made with a long-term goal in mind, they enabled the girls' educational progress; but when short-term goals, like avoiding higher-level math, were pursued, negative consequences sometimes occurred. As Glenn (2004) suggests, low-income females have been found to benefit from a college degree more than males, who are more likely to find a decent income through vocational jobs. In addition, Blackhurst and Auger (2008) found girls' career choices indicate the higher need for a post-secondary degree.

School counselors play an important role in matching students with classes that would lead to their desired goals after high school. Trusty and Niles (2003) found "the consequences of individual planning, or lack thereof, are extreme and long-term," (p. 103). Lapan, Tucker, Kim, and Kosciulek (2003) found that "students who understood their coursework to be organized around a career goal that they would like to pursue after high school were more satisfied with their education and had higher educational aspirations than were students who did not see their course work as relating specifically to their career goal" (p. 340). In this study, curriculum guidance, or lack of, was particularly important, especially for two of the girls. College preparatory curriculum requirements can allow students to transition to college more smoothly. An increase in math and science courses in a girls' curriculum will increase the likelihood of college attendance (Cho, 2007). Depending on career goals, math knowledge can play an important role in college. For the girls in this study who are science majors, a math background is particularly important. Typically, advanced math students can begin their

high school math requirements in eighth grade, as three of the participants in this study did. Trusty and Niles (2003) found that “eighth grade math ability affected math course-taking in high school, which in turn affected bachelor’s degree completion” (p. 102). Guidance at this age is particularly important as during early adolescent years, girls’ “IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet” (Pipher, 1994).

In this study, despite their interests in pursuing a college degree, participants made curricular choices in math that proved detrimental to their transitions to college. While all the girls had hopeful plans for college attendance during their junior years, they made poor curricular choices to reach their goals, receiving little guidance from school counselors and avoiding higher-level math courses.

Highly Qualified Teachers

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) stressed the need for all students to be taught by highly qualified teachers, which means teachers who possess a bachelor’s degree, state teacher certification, and subject matter proficiency. According to Linda Darling-Hammond (2010), the most important investment in education for students’ success is highly qualified teachers. In 2008-2009, Livingston County employed 87.5% teachers who were labeled as highly qualified teachers (2008-09, NCLB Report Card). In this study, four out of five participants were taught by out-of-field math teachers during both their eighth and ninth-grade years.

In rural areas, teachers are known to teach out of subject more frequently (Truscott & Truscott, 2005). In addition, Ansell and McCabe (2003) found that in high-poverty high schools, “32 percent of students are taught by at least one core-subject teacher without at least a minor in the subject” (p. 57). Truscott and Truscott (2005)

found the “only schools that have few problems finding and keeping teachers are those located in suburbs with ample resources and stable populations” (p. 127). Perna, et al (2008) found a potential barrier to college attendance for low-income students was the “inequalities in K-12 schools including unequal distribution of well-qualified teachers” (p. 245). In this study, teacher quality in math was a particular problem.

While college-educated teachers might be employed by the school, teaching out-of-field could change their highly qualified standing. Even so, “the data clearly show that the typical out-of-field teacher has both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree, is fully certified, and has substantial coursework in an academic specialty” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 44). According to Ingersoll, “highly qualified teachers may actually become highly unqualified if they are assigned to teach subjects for which they have little training or education” (p. 42). While teachers might be certified as high quality, teaching in the primary field reflects that status.

Lack of teacher quality in math instruction can be particularly problematic as students are expected to build on a prior knowledge base. Having a poor teacher in one year can hinder the progress in knowledge. Trusty and Niles (2003) found that in the United States “31% of high school students were taught by teachers who did not have both a major and a teacher-certificate in math teaching” (p. 103). In addition, Ingersoll (2001) found “one-third of all secondary school math teachers have neither a major nor a minor in math or in such related disciplines as physics, engineering or math education” (p. 43). Lu, Shen, and Poppink (2007) found that only 59.5% of high school math teachers were considered highly qualified teachers. The girls’ difficulties with math

seemed to be, at least partially, a failure on the part of the school, with teachers teaching out-of-field.

Quality of math teaching proved problematic in eighth and ninth grade for three of my participants when their highly qualified math teacher was replaced by a permanent substitute without a math background. The substitution is not surprising in light of prior research on permanent substitutes replacing qualified teachers. Ingersoll (2001) found that “if a teacher suddenly leaves in the middle of a semester, a principal may find it faster and cheaper to hire a readily available but not fully qualified substitute teacher, rather than conduct a formal search for a new teacher” (p. 45). In addition, Parrott, Spatig, Kusimo, Carter, and Keyes (2000) found that in math classes in rural and urban West Virginia schools “substitute teachers sometimes filled long absences, but content coverage and instructional quality often suffered” (p. 53). In this study, the girls found permanent substitute math teachers unqualified to deal with classroom management issues, increasing the difficulty of math instruction.

Gender and Math

The American College Testing Program (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are used as gauges to judge the likelihood of college students’ academic success, and females typically lag behind males in standardized academic assessment scores, with the exception of language skills (Halpern, Benbow, Beary, Gur, Hyde, & Gernsbacher, 2007; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Despite the low test scores on standardized tests, girls traditionally earn higher grade point averages (GPA) (Halpern, et al., 2007; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). At the same time, boys are expected to excel in math and science, while girls are expected to excel in English and the arts (Myhill & Jones, 2006). All of the girls

earned high grades in math, but they occasionally shared homework and received assistance from other students in the classroom.

Developmental Math

Developmental course taking in colleges is a national problem as 60% of all incoming freshmen are required to take at least one developmental course (Bailey & Cho, 2010). For students taking developmental math, only 31% will complete their sequence of developmental math courses (Bailey & Cho). The consequences of low math performance on college entrance exams are detrimental in numerous ways. Loss of scholarships and developmental math requirements lead to extended time in college and delay of course sequence for science majors in college, costing more to obtain their degrees.

In this study, all participants were required to enroll in developmental math courses in college based on low ACT/SAT math scores. Despite low ACT math scores, Cassi was able to enroll in a 100-level math course her first semester. The class met daily and was designed for remediation. Jennifer enrolled in a developmental math course three semesters before passing. As a pre-veterinary major, she was required to complete a college-level math course before enrolling in science courses for her major. She is currently debating whether to transfer institutions and change her major to veterinary tech in order to graduate sooner. Ashley did not enroll in a developmental math course her freshman year, but is currently enrolled in one. Similar to Jennifer, as a pre-medicine major, she is required to complete a college-level math class before moving on to required science courses. Marycait, who was required to take two developmental math

courses, took one and a half years to complete them. Sara, who did not attend college, was enrolled in a developmental math course during her college orientation.

Me and Other Role Models

Prior research has shown that for first-generation college-going students, role models who have earned a college degree and can provide guidance are lacking in areas of poverty (Bloom, 2007). Positive female role models have the ability to empower young girls in positive directions (Alloway & Gilbert, 2004). While the Girls' Resiliency Program offered girls empowerment through social justice, especially pertaining to gender issues, academics were not emphasized. The program facilitators were purposefully local, understanding the day-to-day problems the girls might experience. When I came into the picture, I became the de facto program facilitator with an emphasis on academics. For the girls, the safe space was similar, but the emphasis changed to include academics as well as family and social issues.

The value of a higher education for low-income students may not be realized because of the lack of role models and mentors who have prospered because of their education (Howard & Levine, 2004). Because Livingston County's population of bachelor's degree holders is below 6%, college role models are few. A lack of role models and realistic visions of a college education may hinder college attendance because students have not seen success stories within their communities. Such messages from role models may be important for first-generation, college-attending, rural females who draw upon the strength of their female elders in their journeys towards post-secondary degrees.

During my research internship, the girls and I co-presented about the youth development program on a nearby state university campus. The following year (2008), the girls and I attended and read a poem for the Appalachian Studies Association conference at a nearby campus. The next year (2009), the girls and I were again co-presenters at the Appalachian Studies Association conference, this time explaining their self-representations (images found in Appendix B). In this study, teachers and participants mentioned that opportunities to visit college campuses were rare for rural students. In addition, I took three of the girls to a college football game their senior years of high school.

Social Support

For participants attending a nearby state university, my job on campus allowed the girls to stop by for social support, as well as academic assistance. Cassi relied on me the most as she was experiencing her first time away from home. We frequently went to lunch close to campus, or she would stop by work to tell me about her day. When Jennifer needed someone to watch her son, Cassi and I were both available to provide support.

Academic Support

During their senior years in high school, I met with participants twice a month. I always asked about recent test scores and application procedures. As we had discussions, I frequently answered questions along the way. Because three were first-generation college-going students, I was able to provide information that was lacking from their parents' experiences.

Throughout their college experiences, I taught developmental math for a community college housed on the campus of a state university several of the girls were attending. Thus, I was within easy reach for the girls attending this university. I provided assistance to three of the girls on their math courses. Of the three girls who asked for math assistance, Marycait was the most consistent about showing up, working on homework for extended periods of time, and completing more homework than assigned by the professor.

Implications for Practice

Based on the key findings of this study, I will address potential implications for practice for parents, high school personnel, and college administrators in assisting students' transitions from high school to college. Findings from this study provide useful suggestions for families, high school administrators, teachers, school counselors, as well as researchers. In addition, my participants made recommendations for parents, teachers, and school counselors, as well as for girls from rural West Virginia who are interested in attending college.

Moms

For rural parents in West Virginia, high academic expectations early can provide a foundation for pursuing higher education. Regardless of parents' level of education, assistance with learning and homework supported the girls' educational experiences. In this study, mothers proved particularly important in their daughters' transitions from high school to college. School counselors could provide a connection between schools and students' families by conducting workshops about curriculum planning, college advising, and financial aid procedures.

Teachers

In a high school with the administration and teachers concerned with high drop out rates and low graduation rates, teachers often granted extensions on homework and did not follow their own due dates. Two girls, Jennifer and Ashley, recommended that teachers stick to their deadlines and encourage responsibility and independence, attributes needed for college success.

Participants found math problematic because of their middle school math experiences with teachers out-of-field. For students who complete their final high school math courses during their junior year, their senior year gap in math might be detrimental to retaining math knowledge and demonstrating math concepts on college entrance exams. Because math builds on prior concepts, a good math foundation can lay the groundwork for future math courses.

Because of her experiences in math classes being taught by non-math majors, as well as Jennifer and Sara, Cassi's recommendation was: "If you went to college for English, do NOT try to teach me math." In addition, Sara asked that teachers "know [their] subject."

In rural areas, the bus schedule can dictate when students are available for additional instruction. In this study, teachers frequently found time during class to work one-on-one with each student. As mentioned by Cassi, teachers need to "know how to control [their] class," in order to provide additional instruction and guidance to students who are interested. In addition, Jennifer recommended "one-on-one" time with teachers.

Financial Aid

School counselors. Perhaps because of the new college-going programs in the high school, all of my participants explained the absence of college-going advice from school counselors. One working class participant who used the counseling office regularly wrote, “Know what you preach. When I come to you for help, don’t point me to a drawer and dismiss me. Be able to answer my questions, don’t hand me the documentation and say, ‘Good luck.’ Actually HELP me when I need it.”

While some students begin their high school math courses in eighth grade, students interested in college also should enroll in math courses during their senior years. The West Virginia Department of Education recognized the need for senior-level math and has now implemented a Transitional Math course for seniors who are interested in attending college and working on improving their entrance exam scores.

Federal aid policy makers. Three participants received Pell grants because of their or their parents’ low-income status. In this study, federal aid enabled three low-income students the opportunity to attend college by covering tuition costs, but frequently low-income students must cover the costs of room, board, and additional expenses.

Merit-based scholarships, like the West Virginia Promise scholarship, have been found to work against low-income students because fewer educational resources could account for lower test scores (Brown, 2007). Brown recommended using a sliding scale, similar to one used by the NCAA Division 1 school academic eligibility, in which a higher grade point average would require a lower ACT/SAT test score. Based on the findings of the current study, I would recommend the use of a sliding scale for aid qualifications.

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission published a study, *Final Report of the Promise Scholarship Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee* (2008), showing that the “college-going rates of low-income students has actually declined since the inception of PROMISE” (p. 14). In addition, “as criteria have increased over time, PROMISE recipients are increasingly from higher-income families” (p. 15). The irony of receiving a scholarship for exemplary academic achievement is that often the merit has been achieved because of resources available to wealthier students who would have attended college anyway (Howard & Levine, 2004). The findings of this study support the need to re-evaluate the qualifications of merit-based scholarships, in light of unequal distribution of resources based on social class.

Advice for Girls in Rural West Virginia

As four participants were well into their second year of college, I asked what recommendations they could offer girls in rural West Virginia who were interested in college. The lessons they learned through their transitions to college revolve around the good and bad decisions made in high school and college.

Get involved. While Jennifer was involved in her high school classes and participated in numerous extra-curricular activities, she believed it was important that she “stayed on top of my school work.” In fact, Jennifer noted that her busy schedule “somehow helped me to stay focused.”

Use birth control. Jennifer felt that she “focused too much on her boyfriend, which made it harder to do everything I needed to do.” As she became more serious with her boyfriend, she began to consider having a child. On the issue of teenage pregnancy, Jennifer wanted to say, to every high school student: “USE PROTECTION!! Kids aren’t

as easy as you may think.” As she explained further, her son “was screaming most of the time I have been typing because he hasn’t had his nap and has a red bottom.” Jennifer’s final suggestion for girls in rural West Virginia was: “Don’t give in to the stereotypes and work hard and stay away from drugs.”

Live in a dorm. While Ashley was adamant about going to a distant state university and living in an apartment, her advice was for freshmen to live “in a dorm because I think I would have done a bit better had I had friends.” In addition, Ashley recommends “staying close to home, unless you are totally prepared to leave everything you know behind!”

Cassi reflected: “I think living in the dorm helped. Not that I made any relationships because of it, but because it helped me be close to my classes. No hour and a half drive back and forth for me!!! Plus, it’s easier to concentrate when you don’t have siblings going at one another all the time. Get a fish or plant. It makes your dorm homier!” In addition, she stated, “Get help if you need it. There’s plenty of it if you look!”

Make friends. While Jennifer lived at home and commuted to a nearby state university, she explained that “for some reason being able to hang out with friends every now and then” was helpful. Cassi said, “It helped a lot to have friends to meet up with so I wasn’t so alone.” She suggested further, “Keep in touch with friends and always make a little time for yourself, otherwise you’ll go insane!”

Strengths and Limitations of Study

My long-term immersion in the field throughout the three and a half years of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation gave me the opportunity to gain close

relationships with the five girls and deeper understandings of their experiences with and perceptions of transitioning to college. The length of the study and the relationships formed through collaborative engagement contributed to this study's strong validity. Continued reflexivity and strong relationships allowed for honest interpretations. With a longer time in the field, I analyzed their experiences until I understood their reasoning behind choices.

A limitation was the fact that I only interviewed my participants' favorite teachers, who proved to be qualified teachers who held high expectations for all students. While I met all of my participants' mothers, I regret not interviewing them, which could have added more depth of understanding.

Qualitative research is not meant to be generalizable to a target population, but to look closely at particular cases, in order to contribute to the literature about specific issues. To provide an authentic representation of experiences, triangulation of multiple sources of data is used for "comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means" (Patton, 2000, p. 559). For this study, I collected data from multiple sources—observations, interviews, writing prompts, art projects, participants' academic essays, and their shared grades and assessments.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides topics for future research based on the lack of literature on college-going:

- Research on the college-going experiences of boys in Livingston County.
- Research following students through college, looking at enabling and constraining factors of college retention.

- Research on the high school curriculum guidance of students in key academic subjects.
- Research on teacher quality and teaching out-of-field, especially in math instruction.
- Research on students' college-going from the perspective of the parents, especially mothers in rural areas.

Final Reflection

From the beginning of my research internship, Livingston County High School allowed access and provided private rooms for our lunch discussions. I appreciate the time and friendliness of the administrators and staff. All of the teachers that I approached for interviewing were more than willing to talk freely with me about their perspectives of their county, school, and students.

The Next Steps

I intend to follow the girls through their college experiences and graduations. Within the next month, we will be co-presenting research findings to a Youth Prevention program at the high school from which they graduated. What are their recommendations for the school? What issues do they want to emphasize? In addition, two art professors and I will facilitate an arts project this summer with the hopes of presenting their work at the next Appalachian Studies Association conference. How have their identities changed? What are their priorities now?

Relationships

Beyond the four themes, I plan to focus future research on several issues that affected the girls' pursuit of higher education through the intersections of place, gender,

and relationships. Their rural environment constrained their interactions with peers and emphasized family relationships. The girls most identified with their strong mothers. What do the girls see as their mothers' strengths? How do these relationships change? I am interested in interviewing their mothers to find out their perspectives on their daughters' educational goals and transitions. What roles did fathers play? What did parental abandonment mean to Ashley and Sara?

As the girls began college, their boyfriends played a key role in their identities and at times constrained their participation in activities. I am interested in conducting research similar to Morris and Fuller (1999) who found time with boyfriends meant "having access to a car which signified freedom in a rural area" (p. 541). While the girls found it difficult to acknowledge their gendered identity, they made choices that reflected traditional gender roles that were prevalent in their rural environment. For example, Cassi seemed more independent and confident in high school when she was single. How do they see gender within their own relationships? How do they understand traditional gender roles? What roles do their boyfriends play in their relationships? I am interested in conducting research similar to Archer, Halsall, and Hollingworth (2007) who studied the influence of boyfriends on girls' college aspirations and found that boyfriends negatively impacted girls' academic aspirations and lower ambitions of college attendance. What do boyfriends mean to these young women? How do they balance their female relationships and boyfriend relationships?

Independence

As much as the girls talked about freedom and independence after high school, they continued to return home and depend on parents for emotional support. They also

continued dependent relationships with boyfriends. I am interested in conducting research similar to Mann (1998) who explored how working class mothers assisted their daughters' "development of independence" (p. 217) by giving their daughters the "opportunity to voice other 'realities' beyond a domestic femininity" (p. 217). What does independence mean to them? How do their meanings differ from mine? Do they see themselves as independent? How do they see their "domestic" roles?

Youth Research

I am interested in exploring how the girls experienced the research process. How did they see themselves as participants and co-researchers? How is our relationship affecting their experience in college? What are their reflections on the process? In addition, I would like to explore my struggles within our research relationship. Who had and has control? Whose voices were heard? As the dissertation was my responsibility, how can we work more collaboratively on future projects? What issues are now important to them? How can we continue to record their stories?

New Directions

I would like to explore additional issues that were not fully addressed in my present research. What does home mean to them? Why are they pulled back to the county that they wanted to leave during high school? What do stereotypes of the county and region mean to them? How do those stereotypes affect their college experiences? Being from a predominantly homogenous, rural county, how do they feel about diversity in college? What do they think about the current federal program cuts that have been proposed? Head Start? Planned Parenthood? Pell grants? What is important for policy makers to understand? Perhaps I could research the topic that I threatened the girls

about—Sex and the Teenage Girl. I have already collected a great deal of data for that topic.

Conclusion

As I met with participants one final time as a group, two weeks before my dissertation went to my committee, I was impressed by how far we had come in our educational journeys. I passed out a final writing prompt about my findings and their recommendations. As I distracted Jennifer's son with drawings, I noticed the rare silence as the girls completed their writing. When I returned home and gave the writing prompts my full attention, I was impressed with the girls' honesty and surprised by some of their responses. Would this study ever end? No, I will continue to be involved with my participants and continue to accompany them on their educational journeys.

As I end this chapter, I want to acknowledge the strong bonds I have formed with my participants. They are all intelligent, strong females who are capable of earning a college degree. I will forever keep in touch with these young women in my study. Through our four-year relationship, I have gained a deeper understanding of their lives and experiences. I cannot thank them enough. I treasure the relationships and expect to gain more knowledge about their experiences in college in order to conduct additional research on their retention in higher education and how their lives play out.

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APPENDIX A

Educational Life Histories

The educational life histories were collected from a series of four individual interviews that were conducted during their senior years of high school. I asked them to take me through their past education, beginning at their first memories of learning. The educational life histories begin with their home experiences and continue to their early high school histories. The first-person narratives are not polished pieces and do not have formal conclusions, but are meant to be a starting point for analyzing their enabling and constraining factors of their educational histories. Similar to my experiences with the girls, Lawless's (1993) work with female ministers in co-creating their religious life histories, "women are likely to relate their life stories in terms of 'relationships' with others—primarily fathers, mothers, siblings, husbands, companions, and children" (p. 68). Initially, as a beginning researcher, I would re-direct questions if participants seemed to get emotional. As I developed better interviewing skills, I opened up to some of their troubling experiences, realizing it was cathartic for them to discuss their experiences.

Through their educational life histories, participants have taken more responsibility for their self-representation within this study. According to Ellis (2004), a life history story "often discloses hidden details of private life and highlights emotional experience" (p. 30). Interestingly, Ashley and Sara, who experienced the most family instability, focused on family and relationships when asked about their school

experiences. Through educational life history accounts, we can better understand the relevant lived experiences of participants.

Marycait: The Performer

Introduction

Marycait comes across as put-together. She has a pretty smile, due to two time-periods in braces, and has bright blue eyes. She wears trendy glasses. Her makeup is perfectly applied with careful attention to beauty marks and lashes. Her hair is shoulder length, usually straight and shiny. The color of her hair varies from auburn to blonde.

Marycait's parents met in law school, both earning their degrees. Her father is the only judge in two rural counties. Her mother, who occasionally works out of the home--with the state legislature and teaching at a local college—periodically suffers from depression. Marycait grew up with a nanny who took care of Marycait and her two younger sisters for ten years of her life. Marycait enjoys her position as the oldest and most responsible and trusted daughter.

As a judge's daughter, Marycait is very aware of how she presents herself, as a reflection of her father. Her favorite subjects and extra-curricular activities revolve around performance: choir, speech, musicals, and variety shows.

Early Education: "I Hardly Ever Saw My Parents"

From the way my mom tells stories of my past, I was the weirdest, younger kid around. I once took my shirt off on the bus because I was too hot. I didn't know any better. I didn't really have any social skills. Some of the kids thought I was autistic. My mom had my hair cut short since I was little. By the time I was three, I looked like a boy. She wouldn't let me grow out my hair. She called our hair cuts little Dutch girl hair.

I didn't start talking until I was four. I mean forming complete sentences. I don't know what was up with that, but I would say little words like "up" or "please," "Mommy," "Daddy." I remember being at the doctor's office in a white room, to be tested about why I wasn't talking. They treated me like I was a lab rat or something. I only remember images. I think they might have put like those little things to detect brain activity, those little sticky things. I remember eating a cup full of Fruit Loops. It might have been an over-night car trip. We took our old station wagon. It had a really big back seat, and we would fill the back seat with blankets and pillows and put a little TV back there. I remember waking up in that station wagon. They just came to the conclusion that I would talk in my own time. When Rachel was born, she started copying me. She didn't talk either.

I went to Head Start first. The Head Start building was way up in Mud River. I couldn't really give you directions because I'm really crappy with giving directions. We just did arts and crafts. There was a little gym area where we raced tricycles around the gym floor.

My younger sister, Daisy, was the only one that went to pre-school. When Daisy was born, my mom was in the hospital a lot, and we had a nanny, Ms. Edna, who practically raised Daisy. I think she spent like ten years with us. She would come during the day, after we got home from school. We always considered her family. A little bit after Daisy was born, mom had a nervous breakdown and had to go to [a local hospital]. I didn't really understand what was going on. Dad told us, "Mommy's just sick." All I know is I hardly ever saw my parents. Well, just my mom. They were working and didn't get home until late.

I always went to Carroll. I didn't go to school out of this county. I think I remember the first day of kindergarten, everybody was crying. I just couldn't wait for my mom to go away. I wanted a little independence. I just wanted to be on my own.

I pretty much liked all my teachers. There were occasions I didn't like them, but I'm pretty much a teacher's pet. I never cause trouble and never give them an attitude. I pretty much respect them, or give them respect. There are always a couple people who get a little bit snotty.

In third grade, Cassi and I became best friends. Our teacher, Ms. Stark, introduced us to the *American Girl* book series. I really loved that book series. I still have them. Sometimes she would read it to us and sometimes we'd get copies of it and read along with her, take turns reading. I liked the way you could learn about different time periods and how they used everyday experiences. The first book we read was *Felicity*, and it took place in the 1700's, like when America was in process to be a country. I liked the *Samantha* book that took place in like the 1900's, like 1904. She lives with her grandma, a very wealthy grandmother. Then she gets adopted by her uncle and her aunt, and they live in New York. This was before child labor laws. She saw the horrors of orphans working in workhouses. She saw it because her friend was a servant-girl type who lived next door to her grandmother's house. Her father died, so she and her sisters had to go to an orphanage, and they were put in to workhouses. Then, there was *Abby*, a black girl living during the Civil War.

I was a majorette, like fifth grade or maybe sixth. I still keep my trophies in my room. During the fifth grade, we had to do *A Christmas Carol*, whether we were one of

the characters or one of the stage hands. I was one of the Crotchet kids, and Cassi was Belle, Scrooge's old girlfriend. We had to do it; we were forced to. It was tradition.

Middle School Years

In middle school, those were kind of the good years, including high school years, because we were starting to be teenagers and getting that feeling of being grown up and independent. I felt a little bit scared because I had never changed classes. I had always stayed in one classroom. At that time, the junior high and high school were combined. We used both of the buildings for some classes.

The first day of seventh grade, I only had two classes on my schedule, homeroom and fifth period. And I spent most of the day waiting outside the office, just waiting for my schedule to be changed. Me and some others only had like two or three classes on our schedules. My favorite teacher in seventh grade was Ms. Beth Smith, who I had for English and homeroom. She would always call us not heads, not like a knot in your head as in not using your head, as she would put it. I still have this book called *A Day Where No Pigs Would Die*. There were cuss words in it, and she would even read the cuss words.

In eighth grade, I had my first boyfriend, but that didn't turn out very well. Well, we were discovering boys. I think that my mom said, "Don't let any of them pressure you." I didn't feel pressured. We thought we were grown up and independent, but we were just hoodlums, where I thought I knew everything.

The first time I sang live was, I think you might have heard Girls' Resiliency Program made two cds, well we were doing a concert with this lady who was the main

vocalist. We sang to get our cd sales up. It was the summer of '05. We sang at the ball field.

High School

In high school, I chose the professional pathway to go to a four year college. They gave us a piece of paper to show us what we should take. I just picked what I was interested in, the arts. I was afraid to ask questions because I was shy.

My favorite class in ninth grade was gym, and it was first period every morning. Ashley was with me. That was the year that she first came to Carroll. The exercise was good. We would run around the gym a few times. We learned about sports that we don't really play: volleyball, golf, and tennis. We also played a little softball, basketball, and touch football in the gym.

Ms. Huff is my favorite high school teacher. She teaches drama, speech, English, and forensics. She's also head of the speech and debate teams. I have worked with her on plays. She is so great to work with and tries to make everything fun. I also liked having Mr. Matthews, the choir teacher. He is the one who helped me improve my singing. He's so funny and doesn't really get some of the words in songs right. He always plays a little bit on his piano before we sing.

During tenth grade, I was in the first Livingston County variety show. All I did was sort of act out in a song because I was asked to do it, and I said, "Okay I'll do it." During eleventh grade, we couldn't do a talent show because it wasn't educational, so Ms. Huff had an idea that maybe we could do something a little bit educational. She chose a 1940s radio show. There was singing, little radio show commercials, and a murder mystery. We didn't have to act it out; we just sort of read it out. I thought maybe

we could act it out for the audience, but on the other side of the stage, a family acted out as they listened to a radio.

My favorite class in eleventh grade was choir. Mr. Matthews picked out a group for a choir that he wanted to for concerts. He picked out me, Beth Snyder and some seniors from that year and one of my friends, Brandy Walters, who played Rizo in *Grease*. We got to sing for Governor Manchin and Chuck Yeager when they came here. They came to the school to look at the new consolidated high school. I got to meet Chuck Yeager.

I've always loved singing, just the feel of the music. I listen to songs, especially Broadway songs, for the style and try to do my own interpretation. I just played around. I sometimes just go up to my room and put my earphones on and listen to *Rent*, *Mama Mia*, or *Grease*. I bought the Broadway version of *Rent* with my own money. As soon as *Rent* came out my mom bought three copies of the soundtrack for us, plus the movie.

In eleventh grade, we performed *Grease*, and I was one of the Pink Ladies. When it came to the diner scenes, gosh, it was hard. You know we have this little platform that had the stools attached to it, and it was really heavy and really hard to move.

I didn't take choir in the eleventh grade; I took theater. I'm taking choir this year, and I took it tenth grade year. Mrs. Matthews and Mr. Matthews teach together. It's actually show choir, and she teaches it. At the same time, he's having his regular choir class, so they're both kind of teaching it.

This year, I had to take an elective to graduate, so I took a speech class with Ms. Huff. It's hard. I don't really like making speeches. I am taking speech as a dual credit class, so I don't have to have it in college. I just made a huge speech last week on

volunteerism. In my speech, I talked about my experiences in the Girls' Resiliency Program. When I was thirteen, I helped paint the inside of the old coffee house building. And that same year, we went on a camping trip. It was for fun. It was a sleep over, and we also cleaned up the lake. We went in canoes and picked up trash; we had those poker sticks and put trash in bags. We cleaned out like 50 garbage bags full of trash. It wasn't just the girls; it was also the Boys' Resiliency Program helping. I remember the girls were sleeping in this old trailer that didn't have electricity, but it was still fun. I slept near a door because it was so hot; I had to get some air. The boys slept in tents. We swam, played horseshoe games, canoed, and kayaked. It was fun.

The play this year is *Cinderella*. I'm going to try out for the Fairy Godmother and Cinderella. I received the role of the Fairy Godmother. I am the star! Except for Isabella, she's the big star, but I am the star. I bought my wand today, but I still haven't decorated it. I'm not sure how Ms. Huff is going to get music for it because I've seen *Cinderella* when I was little, and it's a whole orchestra. I guess she's going to have a karaoke cd or something. We can't just use a piano like we did last year. We might get a few band members to like do a little playing, especially with the trumpets. Mr. Matthews is playing the piano.

[In April], we finally got the carriage. It's really pretty, it's kind of small, but it's big enough so Cinderella can get in and out. We're going to have little kids dressed up as white mice to look like they are dragging the carriage. Ms. Huff talked to some parents and teachers and other people she knew. We got like four kids, three little girls and a boy named John, and he's a little bit of trouble. John is in second grade, and the little girls are in third, fourth, and fifth. They're not too young.

We're not going to close the curtain at all during set changes. Ms. Huff expects us to change the scene or sets in the dark, while the curtain is open. I don't know how we're going to pull that off because we make so much noise, "Put that there, no there...Where's this? Where's that?" I just can't do it, and everybody's such a diva. Hardly anybody helps out. I don't know how I am going to help out because of my costume. It will probably get in the way. It will get caught on something. Some actors, I won't name any names, but, Sam, who's playing Prince Charming, won't help.

Hardly anyone is showing up for practice. We have a king that's not showing up, and not everybody knows their lines. Ms. Huff's really stressed about it. Most everybody's cooperating with her. She just wants to put on a good show. She doesn't want it to be a really bad one, and I'm hoping it will come together. I really want it to.

For the *Cinderella*, the program includes biographies of all the seniors. There are only three seniors this year: me, Isabella, and Will. I just got my picture taken for the program today. I am also printing up biographies of each senior, of what they've done in the past and everything. Well, I was supposed to write the bios, but there was a bunch of times I forgot about it. Ms. Huff sort of wrote it up and asked us what we have done in the past and what we planned to do.

What I love about performing is being able to hang out back stage. Like yesterday, I was watching the funny skits my friends were doing, especially the Stewart skit, and whenever my friends are performing I just watch them. From either the left or the right side of the stage, back stage is a better view than the audience.

Mom's a big theater geek. She's done theater in high school and college. She wanted to pursue a career in acting, but things change. My mom really doesn't like the

way Ms. Huff does things with her plays. Sometimes Ms. Huff doesn't plan things ahead, especially with this idea of not closing the curtain. My mom pretty much just bashes Ms. Huff, verbally with my other sisters. I don't do that. They're the two step-sisters. Daisy can really sing. Daisy can sing well. Rachel is tone deaf. She sings too deep and doesn't really listen to the music. I try not to tell them what I think because they'll probably get the wrong idea. I pretty much stay out of their way if they're in a bitchy mood.

I am most like my dad. I have my dad's sensing of reasoning. There are times when I can just blow [up] like my mom, but I try to control it. She doesn't like to use the benefit of the doubt that I do. I know it's kind of silly, but I pretty much think ahead on everything, like what perfume I'm going to wear, what body lotion I'm going to use, what deodorant I'm going to use, what kind of makeup I'm going to put on, should I use the volumizing mousse or conditioning serum in my hair, and how I'm going to get the limo company to call me back, how am I going to pay for this? Money is pretty tight sometimes. We're sharing a limo for prom, well at least our parents are. I should have done this weeks ago, but I'm just so incredibly busy. Dad's probably going to take care of it, maybe. Sometime before 5:00, I hope.

I got my report cards recently. I brought up the failing grades in civics and chemistry, but I am failing College Summit and Algebra II. In College Summit, I didn't turn in some of the stuff. In Algebra II, now that was partly my fault. What am I saying partly? It is my fault. I didn't do so well on the tests. [In April], I have an A in civics this six weeks. It turns out everybody's having trouble in that class too. Well, I think everything is cool with all my classes so far.

My mom got me signed up for [a local tutoring service] so I can get my ACT scores higher. I scored a 14 on my first attempt. I've been to [there] once to take a practice test, and we're supposed to go over there soon to talk about the score and what tricks and what things to do before the test. My parents are older, so they can't help me with my schoolwork. They try to, but on some things they just don't know. They haven't been to school since the late 60's and 70's.

[In April], I got my ACT scores back. I got a 17. I'm so happy. So I can pretty much go to any college I want. Mom was like a leech on Saturday. After the Gear Up! West Virginia ceremony, we practically got almost every application. West Virginia University and Alderson-Broadus College were really recruiting for me. But I don't know; I don't want to go so far away from home. Mom is just trying to get me to choose. We also found out about the ACT scores that day. I just hope she remembered to mail in my applications. Besides Marshall University and West Virginia University, Alderson-Broadus College, I filled in for Concord, West Liberty, Glenville and Bluefield State.

This year I was nominated to be a student counselor, a peer mediator. We had to do some training on Monday. We were at the Carroll Community Center in the basement. It was fun. We did a few exercises and talked about stuff. There was another training session yesterday, but I had the talent show so I couldn't go to it. It was just stupid teamwork activities, fun games like trying to keep the ball in the air because we were all in a circle sitting. Sarah Carpenter and I were the only two seniors in there. We did this survey, like a while back, and there was a question for students to write down one of your friends that you would feel comfortable with and can talk about your problems. I was put down the most. We are supposed to help kids with problems. I mean not to say

anything bad, but adults are really hard to trust. I mean I hardly trust my parents. With my dad it's different, well except for personal stuff, I hardly talk about boys with him. My dad trusts me completely. I do nothing wrong.

I'm thinking and planning my one time ever in my whole school career that I'm going to come in with no make-up on. It's something I've never done before. I always come to school with make-up on. So, for a change, I will wear no make-up, hair up in a bun and sweats. That'll be my one-time-only thing that will probably shock everybody. They'll be like, "You're not wearing any make-up! Your hairs up!" I'll probably look a little bit scarier. People will go, "So, that's what you really look like."

My teachers probably see me as nice, quiet, probably doesn't get much turned in sometimes. I'm a procrastinator. Just today, I totally forgot my chemistry homework. It was just like a self check problem, but we were supposed to turn it in today. I'm just getting a zero. I mean, it's probably just like 10 points at least. I've been doing good besides that one tiny assignment. I think I might get a C. Mr. Phillips always keeps it interesting.

I really don't feel like an adult, though. That's because I'm being treated like a baby inside my own home. Maybe it's just because I'm dying for independence and freedom. I'm just tired of asking my mom for every itty bitty thing that I want, well that I need.

I think college is really good, I mean, of course I'm not really sure what I want, but I figure once I get into college I might be able to find myself and figure out what I want. My dad always says to me, "I don't care what you do just go to college, or at least some college education." Mostly I just talk to my dad about these things because he's

more calm and won't push. I'll just find him in his bedroom watching TV or whenever we go on a trip to go to the grocery store.

Jennifer: Earth Mother

Introduction

Jennifer is originally from Tennessee. She is a natural beauty with dark brown, shiny hair that is down to the middle of her back. She usually wears her hair up in a ponytail. She has bright blue eyes that always seem to sparkle. During the winter, her skin is porcelain, but during the summer, her skin has a health tan from the time that she spends in the sun, working outdoors at a greenhouse.

Jennifer's mother is originally from Livingston County in West Virginia. Her father is originally from Tennessee. Her mother joined the Air National Guard and moved to Tennessee, where she went to school for a nursing degree. Her mom had a tendency to bring children into her home to live, if she felt that their present circumstances were dangerous for the children. Jennifer explains, "it's a whole lot of people and everything, but she'd feel bad if she didn't [take them into her home]." Jennifer had an older brother, Brian, who was three years older, and a half-sister, Melissa, who was twenty years older.

Jennifer

I grew up in Old Hickory, Tennessee, but it was ten minutes away from Nashville. Mom wanted to get away from here, and Tennessee was the place she wanted to go. She went to nursing school when she went there. She went to a two-year nursing program. I know she didn't get to go four years because they asked you that on college things.

I went to a private Christian school from pre-school to the middle of the fourth grade. Our whole school, high school and church, the elementary and cafeteria, was as big, probably, as the old Carroll High School. There were separate buildings, but it was probably that big. There were two or three different grades in one classroom because it was that small and had so few teachers.

We learned a little bit of reading and writing in pre-school. I remember for pre-school graduation I memorized a poem and recited it. Everybody was supposed to do a little skit though. We were writing in kindergarten. There were ten kids in my grade at most. I know graduating classes were like 12 and under a lot of the time. At kindergarten graduation, I read *Me, Myself, and I*. I don't think that I memorized it; I think that I read it.

We learned all that stuff kind of early, at my old school. It was a whole lot higher standards because it was a different state. They didn't have as many classes because it was small. We had music, but we didn't have art or gym. We just had regular courses: English, math and science. And our high school wasn't changing buildings or classes either; it was just one classroom. It was a whole lot smaller. We had Bible study. That was one of the classes we had to take every day. We had math, English, science, reading, history, Bible, and music. We had penmanship too. My favorite class was probably reading. We'd read as a class, and then we'd take home work and read it. We had to read to our parents, and our parents had to sign whether we read or not. It was mostly just little stories. I liked reading when I was little. Well, I like it now.

Usually, there would be two or three different grades in one classroom. We would have the same teacher. Some lessons were together, but some were separate. Our

teacher would tell us how to do something, and then she would go to the opposite side of the classroom. We were usually facing different directions. So, she would go over to the other side and have them working on something else. It worked out pretty well. They ended up shutting the school down shortly after we left. They ran out of funding.

My mother was the PTA president when we were there. She was pretty good at fundraising. We had a festival or carnival one year. There were a whole bunch of blow up stuff. There was this one that was like a bungee race. You had something elastic around you, and you were hooked up to a bungee cord. You had to run as fast as you could to get to the end and lay down, and then it swings you back. It was pretty fun. I remember when I got to do it because I was usually too little. I got on it before it was all started because my mom was there setting up. I got on it, and it wouldn't let me go any further than the bungee cord because I was so little. It was fun, though. They had a time out box, but it was a jail thing. You could get a "get out of jail free" card or something. I think it took place during school.

I only had three different teachers while I was there. I had Ms. Luton, Ms. Linda, and Ms. Woods. They were all really nice. Ms. Woods was my first and second-grade teacher. She was really grouchy though, but nice at the same time. She taught us cursive. When we were doing our work, it had to be in the neatest cursive, or Ms. Woods would rip it up and throw it away, no matter what subject it was. We would have to do it all over. That always sucked, but she was a good teacher. She was cool.

Ms. Luton was my third-grade teacher before we moved. I don't remember why Ms. Linda was my teacher. She might have been filling in, or I might have gone part of my fourth-grade year. She was my mom's good friend, so I knew her for a long time.

She was always the one doing field trips and Bible school. She was probably my favorite. She might have taken fourth grade or third grade. I was in her class for a while. She would read to us out of *Chronicles of Narnia*. She would read to us, and we got to color pictures and stuff.

We went to the children's theater a lot. We would go, and the kids would have to sit on the floor and watch. The adults got to have chairs in the back. We went and watched *A Wrinkle in Time*. The background was talking; "It" was the background. This little kid was playing ball. You couldn't actually see the kid, but there was one person on stage. You would hear him over here, and a ball was bouncing on the stage. Then, the mom got freaked out because he gave the ball back to him. That was weird.

We would go to Kentucky Down Under a lot. It is like an Australian themed zoo. It is in Kentucky. We would get on the van and ride a couple of hours away. Where we lived in Tennessee, it wasn't very far from the Kentucky border. We stayed up there and went to Horse Caves. We got to go there on a big field trip. I went to Indianapolis before, but it wasn't a field trip. It was for this thing called Bible Quizzing.

We went on a trip to the airport once, just because our teacher's nephew was coming in. He was going to live with her. She just took her whole class and went. It was my brother's friend. My brother got to go too. It might have been all the kids that wanted to go, plus her class because we had to. My brother tried to scare me because there was a big flight of stairs. I was looking over the balcony. He barely tapped me and acted like he was going to push me off. It scared me.

We got to go to something like Dollywood. It is in Tennessee. It was a colonial type thing. We would go there a lot for history. We went to the Opry House. That was

fun. It was really boring, but looking back it was fun. We sat there in seats watching a video of the Opry House.

The school in Tennessee didn't even have high school. They called it "Ace." That was what they called it. I am not sure what it stood for, but it was an acronym for something. They had packets that they would do. You had so much, but you could finish a grade before you were done with that year. That is what we were going to do for homeschooling, but a lot of places do that in Tennessee now. My brother's friend got to graduate a year early because she did that. She finished all of her work for one year and got to do the next grade's work.

When my grandmother became sick, my mom wanted to move back to West Virginia. We bought the land in Livingston County from my uncle. It's on the family farm. When we were planning to move, they took us out of school. We were going back and forth. We actually moved here half way through my fifth grade year. The move ended up being longer than they anticipated before we actually got here. When we were homeschooled in Tennessee, we had to go to some type of community center and take a test with a whole bunch of other people. Those were called our ACTs. If I actually stayed in school, I'd probably be a little bit above my grade level. Tennessee has so much higher expectations, and then to come here, I kind of dumbled out for a while.

We were half way through fifth grade when we moved up, and so we had to finish that out. At first, Dad didn't want us going to public school up here because he went to public school, and it was bad. He looked at it and realized it wasn't that bad, so we went to Carroll [Middle School and High School] the next year.

If we would have actually stayed in Tennessee instead of being homeschooled, I would have been way ahead of my level on everything. I got slowed down, where my dad was homeschooling us. He had to sleep during the day because he had to work at night. He'd get us started on something and go to sleep. That's probably why we didn't do most of our work. He got us two uniforms to wear, but we never wore them. They were army-type uniforms with black boots and cargo pants. It was so funny. I loved it, the big army thing. I thought it was so cool.

We really didn't learn anything during those years. Dad had us do a lot of stupid projects and stuff, but I don't remember most of them. I think we had a leaf project once. We had to get a whole bunch of leaves and figure out what tree they were from. He'd tell us what to do and the stuff we had to we'd do and the other stuff we'd copy out of the book. We were still doing some school work in the summer when we moved up here. When we moved here, we kind of skipped a whole bunch of stuff. Our parents passed us and everything because they knew we could do it anyways. They passed us and the school went by that.

Middle School

When I enrolled in school here in sixth grade, we had to change classes. I thought that was cool because it was like how you see on TV with the lockers and all that stuff. We had half lockers, but we still had to share them. That sucked, but it was fun.

I thought it was so crazy that they had three different classrooms per grade. I thought it was so huge because I was used to going from two grades in one classroom, and at Carroll they had three classrooms for one grade. I was like, "Wow! This school is going to be huge."

On the first day, going into the cafeteria, I noticed that they had trays. We didn't have our food like that. If we had lunch in school, we would have it on paper plates, and those were like on Burger King trays. They had red trays like that, that is how we ate. I come here, and they had all the food on one tray. I was like, "Ough, that is so gross." I was used to either having it on paper plates, or at home we would eat off our plates. If it wasn't school food, you could either order Pizza Hut or Burger King or Subway. You would send in money. They could have taken the whole elementary school in one of those eighteen passenger vans on a field trip. It was small. Every week, they would send home a form to get pizza or McDonald's or any of that stuff and send in money with it. I went home and told my mom that it was so unsanitary. She laughed at me.

When I started school at Carroll in sixth grade, I didn't know anybody besides my cousin, Alex, and he wasn't even in my class. I had no friends in sixth grade. I talked to Drako and Ross, but that was just because they were there, and they would talk to me. They were the type that would talk to me because I was sitting there, but they wouldn't talk to me that much. I really didn't have that many friends. I was kind of lonely.

The students here were more pervy and knew a lot more stuff. Actually, it is about my current boyfriend, Drako. He was living here when I came here. He was in my math class. Him and Ross Stapleton, those are the people who I sat with at lunch because. . . they were just at the end of the table where I happened to sit. There was a hole in the wall, and they were like (gesturing a finger going into the hole), but I didn't know what they were talking about. They were sticking their finger in the hole and making jokes. I would say, "Ha! Ha! That is so funny." But, I didn't get it at all. I knew it was something pervy, I guess, but I didn't know what it was. I was like, "Wow!"

They knew more, I guess. But, then again, at a private school, you didn't really know anything anyway.

Brittany was my first friend because my brother was friends with her brother. They were both in high school together. He would come over all the time, and she would come over too, just for the ride. He said, "Go talk to her." I was like, "I don't want to." She was in Ms. Stevens's class, and they were supposed to be all snobby. I didn't want to go talk to her forever, but she started talking to me. We became friends. It was me, her, and Grace for a long time. She ended up moving to [another part of the county] because she had bad family problems. They finally got her to tell [the social work service] about her parents being abusive. She went to foster care. So, we haven't seen her in a while. It ended up that the three of us were friends for a while. She left. Then, it was me and Brittany for a while. We have always been friends, but then she was better friends with someone else, and I met Cassi and Sara.

I met Cassi, but she was kind of stuck up when I first met her. She wouldn't even be my friend. There was another new girl there from Florida. Her name was Kathy. I tried to be friends with her. She was really snobby, and she had made friends with Cassi.

I was hoping that we would have field trips, but we hardly had any. The biggest one that I remember when we moved here was to go see *Holes*. Our teacher was in love with the book. So, for a sixth grade project, we all read the book *Holes* in class. We made 3-D boxes. The other sixth grades did something else. We made t-shirts. We went and watched *Holes*, wearing our t-shirts.

In seventh grade, Daddy set us up on his and mom's bank account. It's mainly just mom's, but his names on it too. He set me and Brian both up on their account, and

he was supposed to be putting like a \$100 a month for our allowance. We had to buy all our stuff with it. If we wanted to buy clothes, we'd have to buy our own clothes. He'd go on little kicks like that every now and then. It was the whole trying to teach us money, but he stopped after a couple of months. He never really sticks to a lot of stuff he starts out doing. We've had bank accounts for a while, but we didn't use them a whole lot.

In seventh grade, they told us the classes we had to take, math and English and all that stuff. We had one extra, besides a revolving class that was like gym, health and music. We only really had one class we could pick, and I had band. You had your gym, English, math, stuff like that, but we got to choose one or two extra-curricular. They came to classes before seventh-grade was finished, and we got to pick classes for eighth-grade.

I started band in seventh grade. I was trying to do it in sixth grade, but I couldn't get into it. I talked to Mrs. Matthews, the band director, about joining every time I'd go to a ball game and I'd see her. I was in sixth grade. My cousin was in the band, so we'd come and watch her. I'd talk to Mrs. Matthews. I remember she asked me what I wanted to play, and I really didn't know because I never did anything like that before. I remember my cousin wanted me to try to play the oboe, so I told her that. Mrs. Matthews said it's not really an outside instrument; it's just for concerts. I said I don't really care what I play. My mom was there too, and she was said that I'd play anything she wanted me to play. I was never big into music, so she had me try different instruments. I kind of stuck with baritone and play tuba for marching band. She would pick an instrument she needed, and she'd let students try out on that. If they didn't like it or couldn't really play

it that well and want to try something else, she'd move them to something else and do it like that. I like it pretty well, and it worked out so I just stayed on baritone.

When we started out in band, the rookies would come the first two or three days, or it would be like them and then us and then them and then everybody. Then, they also had days where we did just music types for a little bit. That was clarinets one day and then flutes or woodwinds, and brass the next day.

The school usually had all the instruments they needed. Some people have their own. I heard that at a lot of schools you have to pay so much to be in band. I was like, that's one of those crazy things. That's like a good amount of money, like hundreds of dollars. I said that's crazy.

In eighth grade, I was supposed to have been eighth grade math, but me and Cassi and Sara all got to go in to Algebra I because we were smart. We all ended up in Mr. Stone's math class together.

High School

In ninth grade, I was still going towards paleontology, dinosaur bones. I changed my mind; it might have been when we came here because really there's no where around here to do any of that. At the end of that year, we had scheduling for the next year. I have the curriculum book somewhere because they told us we had to keep it. I think it's in my underwear drawer. We were all supposed to keep it because it has all the classes and the requirements to graduate. Usually, we had the counselors come into the classroom and give us papers and tell us about scheduling. When we first came here, I didn't start off in an agriculture class. I remember thinking that would be really fun, but I didn't start out in it. I went into it two weeks after the school year started.

When I was little, I always wanted to be a paleontologist. In tenth grade, I heard we were going to have the agricultural program. Then, I decided I wanted to be a veterinarian because it was going to be hard to do anything being a paleontologist. I'd have to go far away, and I'd never be able to settle down.

We checked off what classes we wanted. We couldn't do the order or anything like that. We couldn't do anything about the teacher we took. We could make a suggestion of who we wanted, but other than that there wasn't anything we could do. If you wanted to make a change to your schedule, you had to go and get a change of schedule form. Usually, if you have good reasons, they'd go ahead and change it.

I was thinking if Mrs. Matthews wasn't going to be the director at Livingston County High School, I probably wouldn't be in it. It would just be a whole lot harder and different without her because the way she is. A lot of the other band directors are more strict and everything, and it'd just be different; it'd be weird.

Ever since we were really little mom put it in our head to go to four years of college, probably because you get better jobs with a four year degree. You probably can get a better job now with two years of training. My mom didn't go to a four year college. She just went to a nursing program for two years. Dad did the whole nursing thing too. Since we were little, she's always told us that we should go for a four year degree. I think Brian's going for a four year degree too. She's been telling us that ever since we were old enough to remember anything. She told us about saving our money, don't get credit cards, and go to college for four years. That's pretty much what she drove into us big time.

Most colleges won't take you if you don't have two years foreign language. I took Spanish 1 in ninth grade and Spanish 2 in tenth grade. Where it's just easier for me to get it, it gets a little bit boring. We have all these organizers that we have to do, like making little books and cubes to help us remember everything and worksheets. We never really have homework, just class work. I don't think I've ever had to take anything home for Spanish. In tenth grade, Cassi, Sara, and I took an English honors class. It was kind of like if you were in that class you could be in AP next year.

During the summer after tenth grade, I raised a pig for my agricultural class. My parents had to help me pay for stuff, but I was the one who took care of my pig. I gave my pig a shot. When I got him he was about 50 lbs. To be able to show them in the fair, students usually get the pigs that are born in January because if they're over that the meat is different. They're not as good to eat until they are six months old. The fair's in July. They can't be babies when you take them in there. I got him at some point in April because the first weigh-in is in April.

At the Future Farmers of America (FFA) competition at West Virginia University my sophomore year, we had to study flowers and take tests on them. You had to identify different plants and then take tests. We just went on the computer and looked up the different plants, then labeled them. We had to know the plant and a little bit more about them.

Mostly we just hang out at school and stuff. Every now and then we'll go out and do something, but we don't do it a whole lot. Sara and I do stuff more than me and Cassi because I don't really know how to get to Cassi's house. Usually her mom has to have

like so much of a notice or whatever and most of the stuff we do is like spur of the moment.

Cassi: The Academic

Introduction

Cassi was raised in Livingston County. For the first three years of her life, it was just Cassi and her mother. Now she is living with her mother and father, her younger sister, Kelly, 15, and her younger brother, Dawson, 9. During the summer, Cassi is responsible for taking care of her siblings, while her parents are at work. She lives thirty minutes outside of Carroll on a small, one-lane paved road that lies between two of the main roads. Cassi has not gotten her driver's license, so she is stranded in the hollow the majority of the time.

Cassi is petite with long, dirty blonde hair past her waist. She usually wears her hair in a braid that drapes over her shoulder and onto her chest. She is a very conscientious student, who has only made one B, in a gym class in ninth grade. During her tenth-grade year, she wanted to be an obstetrician-gynecologist. The next year, she rationalized that becoming a nurse will allow her to begin having a family sooner. Cassi feels most comfortable in Livingston County, but knows that she needs to leave in order to get an education and work.

Cassi

I had Ms. Burns for kindergarten, Ms. Rose for first, Ms. Smith for second, Ms. Stark for third, Ms. Greer for fourth, Ms. Berry for fifth, Mr. Bledsoe for sixth, and seventh. . . If you give me long enough I can write down my schedule for every grade, period I've ever had.

I don't know if my mom was on her own then or in her senior year. She has always kind of been on her own; Abby was never there. It was always mom as the mom. My mom's dad lived in Michigan. She was born in Michigan. They got married when she was sixteen and had mom when they were nineteen. I don't know how long they were married, then they got divorced. Then he married MaMa Mary. Abby moved around a lot, and mom had to move because the law was on her. Grandma Farmer had Grandma Woods at nineteen, Grandma Woods had Abby at nineteen, Abby had mom at nineteen, and mom had me at nineteen. I think Grandma Farmer's mom had her at nineteen. They were all married except for mom. I think. I would hope so.

My parents didn't get married until I was eight years-old. Mom and I did a bunch of stuff before kindergarten. Back then it was just me and her for a long time. She had plenty of time to play with me. She had a job and everything, but it was still just me and her. I could say my ABC's at twelve months. I knew them, but I thought LMNOP was one word.

I didn't go to preschool. I just went straight to kindergarten. I remember telling mom, the first day of kindergarten, telling her she had to leave. Everybody else's mommy was leaving. Mom cried, but I didn't. I never told her until years later that I wouldn't sit in any other seat, but the one she sat in when she brought me to class. Ms. Burns up and moved me one day for testing, some kind of test. Justin Hall, he doesn't go here anymore, and I had to sit at the same table, and I did not like it.

I remember never sleeping during nap time. I had a teddy bear and my blanket, Teda, mom's bear, and Bankie; they have names, don't laugh. My great, great grandma Farmer made Bankie for me before I was born. The back is green, and the front has pink

and blue and black and yellow and green squares. It barely covers me up now. It was just random pieces of stuff, but they were solid colors. I have another one she made me right before she died. Mom needs to fix it; it's coming apart. It's made from pieces of everything, and it's so soft.

I don't remember anything to do with numbers. I know they were there. I don't know when I learned them or anything. It's a long time ago.

In first grade, I had Ms. Rose; she's the Clifford lady. She was a Clifford freak, Clifford the Big Red Dog. She had a dog house and a giant dog of Clifford. Half the year was Clifford, like we had milk jugs for crowns and stuff. When we got back from Christmas, she had Arthur and DW. I remember writing notes to Greg Nicely on my special paper and sticking it in his milk thing. He wouldn't even read it. He would just throw them away because it was pink on one side and blue on the other. There was no mistaking it was my paper. It was funny.

Greg Nicely. I was his stalker. I liked him, but he didn't like me. Girls were icky! I went to my first dance that year. It was the Valentine's Day dance. I backed Greg up to the wall, and I punched him cause he wouldn't dance with me. I mean I was backing him up against the wall, and he stepped up on a crate. That's when I punched him. Good times, good times.

In first grade, I got put in a special class during a certain time of day. I remember doing math. I don't know if it was an experimental group, or if I was in special education math. I'm not really sure. I know Steven Sturm's mom and Ms. Melissa maybe, I don't know, they were over it, and I had forgot completely about it until last year. I started thinking like, God; I was that bad back then.

I can remember the first time I read to somebody else. In first grade, we had these little tiny books, and the whole “On Top of Spaghetti Mountain” thing, about the meatball that runs away. There is a whole book about that, and I remember reading it. Mrs. Rose sent me to our old principal, Mr. Burns. I read it to him, and he gave me a Payday bar. He kept a drawer full of candy bars. It was my first Payday, and I became addicted to them, right then.

In second grade, I had Ms. Smith, and she was evil. She was just mean. I remember getting in trouble once because my friend, Tenika, was crying, and I got up to give her a hug while Ms. Smith was gone. I got up out of my seat, and I got in trouble for that. I didn’t understand why I couldn’t hug my friend who was crying.

In third grade, I had Ms. Stark. She used to read us these *American Girl* books out loud. The *American Girl* that I remember the most was Felicity. After reading the book about Felicity, we had a tea party. The boys in class wore neck ties. Sam’s grandma had made us little bonnets for the girls to wear. We had green tea, cream, sugar, and wafers. It was hot tea. We did the whole green sticks thing, like if you’re good you get green sticks. Ms. Stark bought things, and we got to buy stuff with our green sticks. It was fun. I don’t know where my hat went. I lost it a long time ago; I want it.

I love the *American Girl* books, but *Felicity* is still my favorite. I have a bracelet. I found it the other day, never lost it but I put it up. Aunt Betsy found out I like American Girls, and she would get like the starter sets for the books. So I have like the first three books. She started me out a bracelet, like a charm bracelet. It was like \$10.00 a charm though, but you could get like the little people and their animals. So, I have Kya, and Felicity, and her horse Penny, and Kristen and her cat, and Samantha and her dog.

And Felicity and Kya fell off, no Kristen and Kya fell off so I stopped wearing it. I kept it inside an empty Sucrets box, shoved in a drawer somewhere, and I found it. It's probably too little for me to wear anymore. I was trying to see if dad could sawder it back on.

In fourth grade, my teacher told me I had to read the social studies book aloud. I had Ms. Greer for math. I was good in math. I can remember Tom Pinkerman, besides Ben Stone, and Patrick being the smartest person ever. I would race with Tom to finish our work. Once you were finished with your work, you got to help other people. We would race. Nobody else knew we were racing, but we were racing to see who could get up first and help somebody. It was division. I can't do division by hand, and I haven't been able to division by hand since then. I wanted to help people, and I just wanted to get done before Tom. He was the person to beat in that class. I don't think Michael Weekley was in that class.

In sixth grade, I had Mr. Bledsoe. The whole got-his-teaching-license-taken-away thing. Yeah, but his license didn't get taken away until like seventh grade. It started with a pat on the butt. He always had me sit in his lap, and there were other things. The board actually had to have a big investigation because someone had hid his file because there was stuff from way back that people had reported and nothing had been done about it. They were trying to hide it, so they wouldn't find it during this one. I told the counselor first. Someone had mentioned it, and Mr. Bledsoe ended up finding out. He was just so mean. I went back to the counselor's office, and mom came and got me.

He found out somehow; I don't know how. It was right about that time when all of that started happening. He started going through our purses, trying to find notes and

stuff. We'd ripped up our notes before we'd throw them away, so he wouldn't be able to find them. It was the day after mom took me home, and they brought in somebody else and put him on leave. He was getting paid for doing nothing.

He started making all kinds of comments that one day. They called Jackie down to the office to ask her some questions. He was talking about trash or something and as she walked out the door he goes, "speaking of trash." We are little sixth graders. He had problems going way back from when dad had him in school. Dad didn't think it was a big deal; he was like, "He has always done that." Mom was the only one who listened. She went berserk, of course. She is super mom. Word got out about it, and all the board pulled a meeting. So many people showed up at that meeting, community members and people who had him in the past. They didn't plan on having that many people. They had to get a big old rack of chairs. Mom went and got them.

I remember going to the hearings. We had one in the Embassy Suites, and it was the only day Ms. Forester, the principal, could be there. Somehow, they managed to draw it out to where either she or I got to go in. We didn't go back there. The next hearing was somewhere near Yeager Airport and Coon Skin Park. It's up that road just a little bit. We had one down here at the board's office, and I was on the news for that one. They just showed me and mom walking. It was me and Brittany and Sam Cook that got questioned that day. It was sometime around Valentine's Day because on the front of it I had a picture of a heart candy that Mark had given me. It's a little dancing heart and on the inside it said, "Mr. Bledsoe had a very, very big class." That was their evidence against me that I had tried to get him with that little heart. They were like, "What do you think about this?" I was like, "It just says he has a really big class." I didn't understand.

It was very weird. They had our yearbook picture. I was standing beside him, and he asked the photographer if I could sit on his lap for the picture.

Middle School

In seventh grade, I had half of a Spanish credit. Once a week, we would have a phone call with an actual lady, and she would quiz us. We did all of our work online, so when we got it done we could do whatever we wanted. It doesn't even show up that I took it because it was just half a credit. Our permanent, substitute teacher was Alice Winfrey.

During seventh and eighth grade, I was with the same people it seemed like, except I had no classes with Sara in seventh-grade. I had every class with her in eighth grade, but I didn't notice because I didn't know her until right before Christmas. I up and decided one day that I was going to sit with my boyfriend, and she sat beside my boyfriend.

I had gym in eighth grade, but we rotated to art and music. I had gym with Mr. Thomas, and he wasn't bad at all. There was only one game I didn't understand, and it was something he made up. I just didn't like it because you had to stand still and throw the ball somewhere. One of the reasons I don't like basketball was because I kept losing once they did give me the ball. I'd walk with it. That gym class wasn't hard, then came Ms. Ross, the spawn of Satan that lady is. She gave me my only B in school.

I think I recently found out that Harry saw me in one of my most undignified moments. I had science across the street, and we were coming across the yard. Mark was betting me that he could trip me. I was like, "No, you can't; you wouldn't." He reaches out and trips me. I fell flat in the mud and was covered in mud. I remember

seeing my cousin laughing at me. I had mud everywhere, and I had to go back to my gym locker and get my gym pj pants to wear. Ms. Baxter gave him lunch detention for it.

We had different teachers in middle school, and they baby'd us more. Ninth grade was when we got to go back and forth from the buildings.

High School

I can remember I wanted to be valedictorian before I realized [the high school consolidation] was real. I don't know but I really, really wanted to be it and I knew there was minimal chance once Kathy came. I sort of accepted that she would be the valedictorian, her or Michael one.

The bus comes at 6:47 a.m., so I have to wake up at 6:00 a.m., 5:30 a.m. if I want to take a shower. It's because I live way out in the boonies. My bus only does Parsoner's, Big Creek, and Sandlick, in the mornings, and they drop one little kid off in the evenings that just lives somewhere randomly on the river.

I'm good when it comes to reading. Math scares me; it's the old stuff that scares me. Anything that has do with trig I can do.

Ms. Bailey thought I would be well rounded, my old science teacher. She was my teacher for the whole West Test 2. We had to be in her room. She was really surprised at my English scores, and then she said, "I can't believe you got a 17 in Math. I figure you would be well-rounded." I said, "I'm not rounded at all."

The only thing I don't like about consolidation is not having that whole connection with Chuck Yeager. You never got to walk around the inside of Carroll, but in the yard you've got the statue of him. Then going down the hall, there are pictures and autographs and things, and you're always hearing about Chuck Yeager. He came the first

year, which was awesome, especially when he was cussing; that was fun. He came half way through the year because I wasn't dating Harry, but developed a bad habit of looking for him everywhere I went.

Ashley: The Survivor

Introduction

Ashley is a heavy set, outgoing girl who was originally born and raised in Clayton County, but due to her father's arrest and her mother's drug problems, ended up in Livingston County in foster care. Due to her mother's drug problem, Ashley sees extra weight as healthy. Throughout the time I have known her, she has put on a little more weight.

Ashley had shoulder-length light brown hair that she frequently dyed pink in the front. As Ashley stated, "I could give a crap less about appearances. It's not my thing. As you can tell I wear sweat pants and flip flops every day of the week."

Ashley took on a lot of responsibility for her younger sister, Lilly. She was very aware of what her obligations were as a daughter, sister, and student.

At the end of her junior year, Ashley started dating Jacob. Jacob is five years older than Ashley. During her senior year of high school, Ashley was moved around to four different foster homes, two in neighboring counties. Jacob remained a consistent part of her life during turbulent times, frequently taking her to and from school.

Early Education

I went to preschool somewhere in Hamilton. I went there for one year, then kindergarten through fifth grade at Holt elementary, then sixth through eighth Stonewell Middle School.

My parents had been together since they were knee high to a grasshopper. They didn't graduate high school. My mom went to Hamilton East, but quit in the ninth-grade. I don't know where my dad went; I didn't talk to him much. He quit in the tenth-grade and got his GED. Ever since I was in elementary school, I knew that I wanted to go to college. My parents told me that I had to go to college.

My dad influenced me educationally because I would get the shit beat out of me if I came home with a bad grade. He would whip me, but he wouldn't beat me. I considered it beating the shit out of me, but with him when he would whip me it would hurt. When Mom did it, it didn't hurt, but you would cry to make her feel better anyway.

My mom read to me and my sister from the time we were in her belly. I knew how to walk before I was one. I never remember it being hard for me to learn to read, or anything like that. I knew all this stuff at such a young age.

I remember mom helping us with our science homework because I really hate science. It was not my thing, until this year for some reason. I remember that we would be sitting at opposite ends of the kitchen table, and mom would be sitting in the middle. She would say, "I have one left-handed daughter and one right-handed daughter." If we needed help, she would be right there. She would not leave us until our homework was done because if she wasn't there, we would just goof off and not do it. She would make Lilly read books when she was four. She would have her write sentences and write her name. You know those pencils that are like triangular shaped to fit little kids' hands? She would buy those, and I would take them and use them. Lilly would get mad at me and throw fits.

I remember thinking of strippers as being very, very pretty. You know. I always wanted to be pretty when I grew up. Yeah. I told my mom that I wanted to be a stripper. She was like, “What?!” I was four. She was like, “What are you talking about?” I said, “I want to be a stripper.” I had seen that on TV. She was just like, “Oh my God!” Then, when I went to school and saw real careers, I wanted to be a teacher, a nurse, an artist, a singer. You name it, I wanted to be it. So, my mom used to tease me and tell me that I could be like, “fix your broken arm while I am stripping for you and paint you a picture.”

I went to Head Start for preschool. I remember eating cereal, like the small individual boxes. I thought those were the coolest things. I remember playing with this little cash register thing that taught you how to do money. I remember all of my teachers and my first kiss. His name was Mark; he was a cutie. I remember it being a really big room with tables, little short tables that we fit at perfectly. I remember going outside and playing in the leaves. The cafeteria was huge, but we never ate in there; we always ate in our classroom.

I remember kindergarten orientation. I remember walking through with my mom and the principal. In between the two kindergarten rooms was a playground. Actually, there were two playgrounds. The little one had no grass, just concrete. We had the little cubbies in the classroom to put your stuff. The cafeteria was huge. They literally pulled the tables out of the walls. The tables would come out, and then they would push them back up into the wall. I remember Ms. Marcum, my music teacher, and Ms. Carter, my art teacher, and Mr. Hurt, my gym teacher. Ms. Marcum was my favorite because I always loved music. I was always the lead in every play in elementary school. I remember being the head angel and having to teach everyone to dance.

I had a really mean kindergarten teacher. She also had my mom in school. I thought she was mean. There were two teachers, Ms. Cook which was her, and Ms. Stevens, her assistant. They were both old women. Ms. Stevens was nice. I really liked her.

In first grade, I had Ms. Polly and Ms. Coleman. Ms. Coleman was there first. My mom and her got into it because she kept losing my work that I did. She kept saying I was failing the first grade. I think the reason she did that was because my mom and her got into it when I was in preschool. She was also one of my preschool teachers. Once Ms. Coleman moved, Ms. Polly came on, and I loved Ms. Polly. I think she was my favorite teacher. She was always so nice, and I always understood everything. I learned pretty fast, but I would watch her with the slower kids, and she actually cared. She always made learning a game; it was fun with her.

In second grade, I had Ms. Smith. I did not like her at all. She was okay in a way, but I really didn't like her.

In third grade, I had Mr. McComas. I thought it was so weird that I had a guy teacher, but he was awesome. He was my favorite teacher out of anyone; even now, he is still my favorite teacher. He was in the army, or something like that, and he also played football for Miami Dolphins. Whenever we came down the hallway, he would make us do this turn thing at the end of the tile. You actually had to turn and walk into class, like spin, turn thing. We all thought that was the greatest thing.

I remember one time Josh, Josh and I were the greatest friends until about ninth grade then we just wandered off, fell asleep in the class. Mr. McComas made us put our chairs on top of our desks and hide in the back of the room. He changed the clock, put

his coat on, and grabbed his briefcase. He said, "Josh, are you planning on staying the night?" He cried because he thought that he had missed the bus, and no one was coming to get him. Then we all came out, he couldn't believe we all did that to him. It was the funniest thing.

In fourth grade, I had Ms. Elkins. I didn't like her. She really did lose my work, and my mom had a conference with her. She finally found them and brought my grade back up.

In fourth grade, I loved reading. We had to read books and take tests on them. I remember reading *Where the Red Fern Grows*. It is about a boy who grew up in the Ozark Mountains. This is set way back when. They lived way back in the woods. The boy had never seen his reflection before. He really wanted dogs to coon hunt. His family was poor, so he saved up forever, and then he went to Kentucky to get a couple of coon dogs. At the place where he lived, there was a race to see who could get the most coons in the shortest time. He and his grandpa took the dogs out on it. There was a really bad storm. The dogs died trying to help the boy win. I cried after I finished reading it. It was sad. I still cry when I read it.

In fifth grade, I had Ms. Teachman. She was great. She retired right after she taught our class. We were the last class she ever taught. I remember watching *Little Women* in her class. We read about five books. One book took forever to finish. They never made us read at home. I didn't really get into books until I was in middle school.

At Christmas time, she had us make our own gingerbread house. She invited her entire class to her house for a party and Christmas caroling. She made spaghetti, a lot of spaghetti. I remember going caroling and playing with all of her cats. We had to do a

research project on a country when we were in her class, and I had Denmark. I remember her asking who had Denmark because she had a bunch of Danish plates. She had a real big fireplace that was pretty. Her house was really pretty. I would say that is probably my favorite experience of elementary school.

Middle School: “Always Living in the Moment”

I had straight A’s up until sixth grade. That was when everything with my parents started going downhill. So that was horrible up to eighth grade. I started raising Lilly really when I was eleven, and she was six. Mom and Dad were always gone. I pretty much raised her until she was eleven. I get all defensive and sometimes cry when she gets in trouble, and “Dad” yells at her. She hates me; to her, we are just sisters. To me, I think I am a mother figure.

My dad had really good jobs, plus burglary. So, we had a lot of money. Mom didn’t ever have to work at all. He was good to her. Whatever she wanted, he would just give her the money to get it. That’s how it was. We would go to Walmart once a month and spend \$1000, anything and everything. We would have like four or five buggies. Then, whenever everything changed, Dad went to jail and mom was never home. It was just me and Lilly, which was like a slap in the face. I had to do it. It was my sister. I couldn’t just leave her there. I was so afraid. It was just me and her, and she never said anything either because she was just little enough to think that everything was alright.

Okay, it started a little bit before my Dad got put in jail. It is all fuzzy now because I haven’t thought about it in so long. He came home drunk all the time. During my sixth grade year on Christmas Eve, my Dad really beat the shit out of my Mom. He beat her really bad. He went to jail that time. He got out about a week later. His dad

would always bail him out. And then, life was okay for about a year. I guess she was doing drugs already because I remember that night, whenever he was beating her, he was saying that she was such a crack whore. Lilly stayed in my room with the door shut and locked with a blanket over her head and the lights off, crying because she was so scared. I was beating the shit out of my Dad trying to get him off my Mom. And, he was yelling about how she was a crack whore and has been doing drugs. My mom seemed fine. She seemed like she wasn't ever on them or anything. She may have, but she was really good about hiding it, or not coming home until she was off.

Everything was good for a year, and then they got in another fight over something; I can't remember what. He beat her but did not go to jail that time. They worked it out, I guess. I don't know what all went on there.

I can never remember back to when it was normal. It has never been normal for me. I have always had this dysfunctional family. I have never seen my parents kiss, unless they were really drunk. They never hugged each other or embraced each other. They never even slept in the same bed. They had different rooms. They weren't even married. I didn't know you were supposed to be married. I didn't know that when you have kids you are supposed to be married. I didn't know the dad wasn't supposed to drink constantly. You even see that on TV. Like, the dad sits there and says, "Bring me a beer, honey." He would even say that to my mom. Her last name was Starling, so he would call her Star. He would be, "Bring me a beer, Star."

Then, on August 11, right before my seventh grade year. . . Okay, I will tell you the whole story. Me and my mom were looking on the internet for school clothes. We were just going to order them on the internet. I didn't know it was with a stolen credit

card, but it was, I found out later. My dad was lying in bed in his room, and we were on the computer. We were all in the same room, me and my Mom and my Dad. He was just kind of laying there watching us. Right before we went to order it, we all got hungry and went to KFC to pick up food. We went past Holt with a big parking lot there in front of it. Between the two bridges back there, there were all kinds of cops. I thought, "Well, they are getting ready to go bust somebody." It was us. We drove to KFC and got everything, came back. . . We came back, pulled in, got all the food out. We didn't even get to open it before there was a bang on the door. Bang, bang, bang! There were all these red and blue lights going crazy in our front yard. I guarantee you ten. They were all in the front yard and in every driveway across the street. It was bad, like he had killed someone. They come in and are pointing guns at us. My sister is asleep on the couch, and my mom is freaking. She said, "Why are you here?" Then, there went dad. That is all I know.

They were at our house for hours. They searched everything. They took everything that had been reported stolen from all these burglaries that he did. He had stolen thousands of dollars in coins. He was arrested for burglaries. He was a felon, and he had like three pistols. He has been in jail ever since.

And then, not long after that, things started getting to mom, and she'd leave. That is around the time that I started raising Lilly myself. She wouldn't come back for days. It was right before school started. When school started, I started taking care of Lilly. My grades went way down. It was so bad. I had like Fs in all my classes. Somehow, I managed to pass seventh grade.

Lilly's grades went down too. I wouldn't even think to ask her. I wasn't that smart to know. I know that she made good grades, and she passed. That is something that I can praise her for. She did that by herself. If it wasn't for me, she would have never have taken a bath and would have stunk. She hated taking a bath. Her clothes never matched, either. I would just let her pick out whatever she wanted to wear. Ha! Ha! She looked like a little welfare child. It was so funny.

That is what I wanted more than anything, to pass. But it was so hard because Lilly was so little herself. I left for school 20 minutes before she did. My bus ran at 7:00 a.m., and hers ran at 7:21 a.m. I would set the alarm, and I would tell her that "whenever the alarm went off, switch it over to this, get dressed, and be out of the house and on the front porch by 7:21. The door is not locked, don't lock it, just shut it because we don't have a key." I was like "just shut the door and make sure all the lights were out, and the TV was off, and catch the bus and go to school. I will be here when you get home." She did. I remember going home some days, and I guess I did not set the alarm right because she was still asleep. She would have been just sitting around the house. I would ask her, "What are you doing here?" She would say, "The alarm didn't go off, and I didn't go to school." She would be all mad at me.

I remember I couldn't cook at all, so I would try. Ha! Ha! She said, I don't remember this, that I tried to make instant mash potatoes with ranch, or something like that. She said it was disgusting. Ha! Ha! She said it was either eat it or die. I told her, you weren't starving to death. Mom would go buy groceries and leave them there. We would see her twice, maybe three times, a week. She would never stay the night.

All my middle school years, I was raising Lilly, but sometimes we would stay with my mother's best friend, Stacy. Stacy realized after she took us that she was just giving mom a chance to go do whatever she wanted because she didn't have us. They took Lilly and I back home, just so she could have a responsibility. Mom said, "You are old enough to raise your sister." I guess things started to get better, but mom moved us to Stacy's again. We stayed with Stacy for a while, maybe a month or two. And then, Lilly went back first because mom said that she thought she could handle this. That is when mom went back to being Mom, the way she used to be, but that only lasted for a couple of weeks. It was like, whenever I came back, it wasn't good any more. Things went back again because she knew that I was there, and she wasn't leaving Lilly there by herself. I guess that is how she saw it. It was a load of crap.

Finally, we got some new people who moved in around us, our neighbors. Lilly would go over to their house every day and play because they had kids around her age, and they would do their thing while I was at home. I was freaking out wondering where she was. I told her to call me every hour. I told her, "don't stay over too long, they might get annoyed with you." She would stay over for a while, and then she would come back home.

By then, we hadn't paid our bills, so our gas was off. Our water was on. We had electricity. We didn't have TV, so we would just watch movies all day. We would have to get some pots and boil the water and pour it in the bathtub to get hot water in the bath. By the time Lilly would get home, I would tell her, "get in the bath before it gets cold." I, at least, used my head for something. I knew how to do that. At least I would feed her and keep her clean. I tried to keep her safe. She slept with me every night. She didn't

want to sleep by herself because you never know. What if someone would have come in? That is the only time that I would lock the doors was at night. I left the backdoor open, and we had a big backyard that was fenced in. There was always a padlock on the gate, so if Mom would ever want to come in, she could go through the backdoor, but she never did. She never came home. I remember staying up until five in the morning, calling her and crying and leaving her messages, "Get home." She could have a cell phone, but she couldn't pay the gas bill. I would stay up all night crying. I mean, it was really stressful for me.

We used to turn the oven on in the kitchen and leave it open all night. It was the only way that we could get heat. That sucked because it was always freezing. If it wasn't for that poor oven, we would have frozen. Really. We would have like 50 blankets piled on top of us and stuff. It was good.

In eighth grade, I didn't have good grades, but I managed to pass. I guess I made myself work hard enough, so that I would pass. My favorite classes were art or science. They both had great teachers. In middle school, I started pottery. I didn't tell anyone at school. I just figured that Mom would fix herself. I didn't know what to expect. I was always living in the moment.

During the summer after my eighth grade year, Mom was arrested for drugs and something else. I don't remember what else it was. I think it might have been for doing drugs and finding them in her car. She had been doing them for a year before she got put in jail. My mom was in jail, and my Dad was in jail. They were both in jail, and there was no one to take care of us. She was in there for a few months before they came and got us. It was during the summer, and no one knew that we were on our own. My

mom's boyfriend kept us. He always sent us to his friend's house, and we literally lived there. I don't know what the plan was, really. All we kept hearing from her was, "I am going to be out on this date." That date would come, and she wasn't out. Not until we got in foster care did we go see her.

It seems like when she went to jail, she really realized what she was because she would write us letters, and she would sound just like she did before she was on drugs. I think jail helped her out a lot. She got out a few days before Christmas. She never even came and saw us for weeks. I know that she went right back to drugs.

I went into foster care during the summer after eighth grade. They just came one day and got me and my sister randomly. And, we were just like, "What?" And, they took us to our grandmother's house. We thought, "Okay, we will just live here." We stayed there for a night. Then, they came the next morning and got us, and took us to [a neighboring county] to a foster home.

High School

Ninth grade was the worst. That is when I got put into the foster care. I was only at Hamilton High until December. The first foster home I stayed in, I was there for a week, was in [a neighboring] County. I got moved into the permanent one that I was at for three or four months. That was permanent to me. My second foster mom was like, "you know if you graduated from foster care, you can get a full paid scholarship, and they'll buy you a computer and all that stuff." And I'm just like, "I'm not planning on graduating out of foster care." I overlooked it, like that's not for me but for somebody else. That's the first time I ever heard about foster care paying for college.

Then, I was in Carroll High School. It was like being pulled from a humongous school like Hamilton High and being put into Carroll. It's like taking a dog that used to have a huge yard and putting him on a patio. I hated Carroll when I first started going there.

I still wanted to go back, but not as bad as I used to. I don't want to go back now. Even if they were like, "you're moving to Hamilton. That's where we're going to put you." I'd be like, "Hell no, you're not. Leave me here." I remember I was like, work on it, find me a home, do something with me. They were like, "okay, okay." Now, I'm thankful that they didn't because I think I have more here than I ever would have in Hamilton because everything there is like drugs and alcohol and my mom.

I felt like the new girl, until I got to LCHS, and everybody was here. Now, I miss Carroll. Everybody knew everybody. Here I try to get to know everybody, but it is easier said than done in a school of nine hundred. I had friends the first day, because I'm just that type of person. I'm not one to shy out of something; I'm one of the first ones to throw myself out there. I admit sometimes I'm a little scared too, but I'll get over it. I'm just used to all the social workers being like, "tell me your life story." I'm so used to it; I just kind of put it out there. I have been at Kirk's for three years, since I was 14. It will be three years with my "dad," but I was a foster kid before.

Sara and I met because we ride on the same bus. I used to just sit by myself. Lilly is like a social idiot. She will go up to anyone and say, "Hey, what's your favorite color?" Well, her and Molly, Sara's little sister, got to be really good friends. One day, Molly was crying, and Lilly wasn't there. I was just like, "Oh crap! Lilly's friend is crying." I went up and sat with her and asked her what was wrong. Sara walked up and

said “hey you! What is wrong with her?” I told her. She said, “I am Sara. I am her sister.” I said, “Hey, I am Ashley. I am Lilly 's sister. She is Molly’s friend.” That is how we met. Since then, we have been friends.

To get used to first living here it was easy, you know, it helped a lot that I had Cassi and Sara and Jennifer, but it was still so weird because I wanted my old friends so bad. I missed them more than anything, and I also missed my mom and having someone else because my mom was just too weird for me. The only thing that made it easier was that I had friends that reminded me of my friends from back home. Cassi reminded me a lot of my friend, Meredith, which was my super best friend ever. She reminded me of Meredith because Meredith was really smart, shorter than me and had blond hair. She had hazel eyes, and Cassi has blue eyes. It’s just like, that helped a lot, but at the same time, it made me miss her that much more. Finally, we all just clung and now we stick, and I don’t want to go back. I wanted to go back so bad for like a year, but I don’t want to anymore.

I’m more of the artsy, creative, lit out of the group. Sara is. . . I don't know. Cassi is the intellectual. Jennifer is the “let's go party.” Marycait, she's like “who wants to do my hair?” She is the girly part, but we all complement each other.

I was pretty good in [math] in middle school and at Hamilton High. I was in advanced math classes when I was in elementary school and middle school, but it seems like as soon as I moved here. . . .I finally just gave up on it. If I pass, I pass. If I don’t, I’ll be pissed. I at least do my work and turn it in and get participation points. I’m always the first one to volunteer because I need those bonus points.

Sara: The Rebel

Introduction

Sara was short in stature and usually hid her body under large t-shirts and sweatshirts. On rare occasions, Sara wears her hair down with light makeup. She usually tried to hide her bright smile because of her insecurity with dental problems. Sara was shy within a group, but spoke openly one-on-one once she felt comfortable with someone. She seemed to have blossomed during the four years that I have been meeting with the girls. Sara was quick-witted and could make cutting comments when she was sure of herself.

Sara was her mother's oldest daughter. The only clear memory of her birth father was the last time that he told her good-bye before he left for good. Sara's mother met her step-father, "Dad," when Sara was five years old. She shared some memories of her and her mother's turbulent years when her mother and "Dad" were separated. Sara's "Dad" has three children that he hasn't seen in many years; in addition, Sara has a half-sister, Molly, who is four years younger. Her step-father worked as a chain-restaurant manager, being transferred up to three times in one academic year.

Early Education: "We moved around a lot."

I was born in North Carolina, but we kept moving everywhere. I lived in Tennessee, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia; I lived everywhere. When I lived in Virginia, it was called Clinch County, then Mount Airy there in the school called West Field that was in North Carolina. Tennessee. . . I can't remember that school that was when I was in first grade. Then Minetown in Kentucky, then Ohio we only lived there a week, then we moved here. I was in Carter; I went to the elementary there.

I think I was two, because [my stepfather] was living beside us with his ex-wife, then we moved to Virginia. Hamilton might have been in there somewhere I think. That might have been after Katie was born. I was four because she was born in May, then I turned five that December. I think Hamilton was before Katie, because I don't think I went to school. I can't really remember because we moved around a lot.

I started Head Start, and I knew most of my ABC's and was reading a few words. I could recognize CAT. Before mom met my [step] dad, it was just me and her, like after my real dad left. She would go to work, come home and talk to me. She didn't have anyone else to talk to, so she would talk to me constantly. I guessed I picked up language easily. When I have kids, I'm going to constantly talk to my kids.

My mom tried to go ahead and get me into kindergarten, but they wouldn't let me since my birthday was in December. The guy felt sorry for me, so they said I could go ahead and start Head Start. I think it was Virginia. I remember there were two different classrooms. We each had our own shapes and colors to sit on. They were assigned to us. I think mine was a diamond or an oval because I remember I didn't like it. I was like, "Why can't I have a cool shape?" I think it was green too. For show and tell, I remember bringing in my stuffed bear, Pokey. I got mad because they called my bear a girl, and it was a guy. I was like, "It is a he." I was really mad about that. Really the only thing I remembered about Head Start was tying my shoes, and they had us do shapes and colors. They sat us around in a circle. When we went on a field trip, we all had to wear orange. We went to some kind of park.

I think that was when we moved to Virginia, when my mom married my [step] dad, and we moved in beside my grandmother. Dad was always a math person, and I was good at math up until fourth grade.

Part of first grade I was in Virginia. Then we moved back, but not to Charlotte. We moved to Mount Airy and were there until the first part of third grade. Then, we moved to Carter, then went to Kentucky. Then in fourth, we were also in Kentucky. Then, I went to Virginia in fourth, then we moved back to Kentucky, but then I was in a different school. Then, I moved back to the school that I was in Kentucky that I was in in the first place, for fifth grade. Then, I was there until the first part of seventh grade. In November, we moved here, I have been here ever since. Then [my mom and stepdad] got back together the first part of seventh grade; that is why we moved out here.

I remember I didn't talk often because I remember my mom was telling this story a while ago. I don't even remember this. They told her they were excited because I actually talked. They said I said that, "My dad doesn't wear underwear because it squishes his nuts" or something. In kindergarten, I remember the teachers and how the school was setup. I went there three times, because we moved away and came back. I think it was because of my dad's job; he kept getting transfers. My kindergarten year, we had these cubby holes. I would take other people's stuff and put them in my cubby hole. It was stupid stuff too, like pencils and stuff. No one ever caught me. I would even take stuff out of the teacher's desk, like stickers and paperclips. I was like a little clepto. I stopped doing it after that year. I like took everything, and my mom asked me where I was getting all this stuff. I would say, "People gave it to me." It is a good thing I grew out of it. In kindergarten in Virginia, I didn't like the kids. They were stuck up. I

remember when I moved back in fourth grade; it was in that school and the same people, and they were still stuck up.

My kindergarten teacher was Ms. White. We all started out as one big kindergarten classroom, and then they got another kindergarten teacher. I can't remember which one was which. It was one big room. The way they had the room separated; there were no doors. You could walk around the wall and be in another classroom. There were only two or three, they had like rooms for each grade. We learned how to write perfect. I remember that most. I like writing.

During first grade, I started out in the same school in Virginia and then moved to North Carolina. I took first-grade, moved away came back, still in first-grade. I remember I didn't like my teacher because she kept showing *Goosebumps*, and I got scared. She always had us watch *Goosebumps* movies. Everyone thought they were awesome, and I didn't like it. I remember going over spelling tests. The only thing I really remember in spelling is because, and I still have to do it that way, and favorite, favor-ite. I really don't remember going over math too much though, until second grade. I remember meeting my first best friend there. Her name was Elizabeth.

In second grade, I remember she made us do cursive, and that is what we practiced all the time. She always had to work extra with me because I was left-handed, and I couldn't get it to slant right. She would always work extra with me on that.

In the third grade, in North Carolina, Elizabeth and I were inseparable, but then we moved away. During the second part of third grade, we moved to Carter. I hated it, where I was the new kid they made fun of me. No one would talk to me, and I always had to walk to school and walk home from school. This one kid always walked the same

way as me, but he branched off at the railroad tracks. He always made fun of me all the way home, him and his friends.

Then my parents split up. I think that was fourth grade; we moved to my grandpa's house. That is when they split up, and we were going over the multiplying and dividing. I didn't like that, so I just quit. I know I started early at slacking. I just got lazy and quit trying. In the fourth grade, in Kentucky, I had a friend, but we were like on and off friends. We would fight. It was like stupid stuff. I can't even remember now. We just get into the dumbest arguments. Then we would forget and be friends again. Nobody had changed. They didn't get any new students. No one had left. It was just that little town in the middle of nowhere.

It started when [my mom and stepdad] broke up. I guess I just quit. I don't remember being depressed. I remember we were moving around a lot, and I couldn't believe he just up and left. We would only see him every other week, like when he wanted to pick us up. Then he would be gone for a couple months, and he would decide to pop in again. Then he was gone for two whole years. He just showed up one day. It was me, Molly, and I was babysitting my mom's boyfriend's baby; he was like nine months at the time. I think I was eleven because when we moved here I was babysitting Molly, six years old, and a nine month old. I think he might have disappeared right when we moved. I thought he was my mom's boyfriend's friend because I didn't recognize him. Then he saw me peek out of the blinds. He saw me, so I had to go answer the door then. I just kind of went with it. He hugged me, and Molly ran up to him; the baby hugged his leg. Then he asked me where mom was working and where Michael was working because my dad's name is Michael, but everyone calls him Mike and my mom's

boyfriend at the time was Michael, and that was really confusing. He asked where they were both working, and I guess he went to see them. They were both working at the [a chain] burger place. Then mom, I think she quit, but David was still working there. Then she was working at [a discount grocery store], and [a restaurant]; she had two jobs. I guess he went to see them, and I acted like nothing happened. I didn't really like Michael, but I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I didn't want him to go off. I was going to wait until I got Mom alone to tell her that he showed up, and then after 10 minutes, they were just sitting there. Michael just started screaming, "Somebody better tell me what the fuck is going on." Like what happened when he showed up, I was like "Oh My God! There is no need to yell," and after that he got really mean. I remember he used to get drunk a lot. Her boyfriend, Michael, and mom would get into a bunch of yelling fights, and sometimes there would be punching. He would never hit her, but she would sometimes hit him. They were always fighting, and then he got really strung out on pills and drank on top of that without eating. Then they got into this really big fight. He went out to the yard, and I guess he was going to leave, but mom said she was going to call the cops on him. It reminded me of a really big redneck family. He got a hold of a beer bottle and had her on the ground and started hitting her in the head. This was outside the trailer. I grabbed a big butcher knife, and I was going to go after him. She was all I had. He grabbed a hold of the blade and yanked it out of my hands and threw it over in the woods. I found it in the woods all rusted a few weeks later, but it cut his hands all up. Then he was going to go after me, and mom jumped on top of him. Then we went back into the house. We had to hold the door shut to keep him from busting it down. Then he

drove away in his truck. He came back the next day, and it was like nothing ever happened.

Dad rented a place 20 minutes away. We went and saw him on the weekend, and they eventually got back together. Then, we moved here to Carter where we lived in his dad's basement.

I meant to pass all of my classes, and I was a straight A student up until then. Then I was straight C student; that was like getting an F for me. Now I'm lucky to get a C. I remember when I got my first D in science class. I was heartbroken, and mom yelled a lot. She got really mad and couldn't believe I got a D in a class. After that we studied a lot of science. I think I brought them up to Bs.

In fourth grade, we had one person, an English/reading teacher, and different science teacher. In fifth grade, the teacher was English had gone to science. I don't know where the science teacher went, and there was this new lady. I didn't know anything about her. I think they dissected a shark too, but I was gone that week. The shark had babies when they cut it open. I'm glad I was gone.

I finished fourth in the one school. I thought that was weird switching classes because I thought that was high school stuff, but they did that in Kentucky. They didn't do that when I moved back to Virginia. When I had to stay in one class I didn't like it. I thought I wouldn't miss it, switching classes, but when we moved back to Virginia I didn't like it because you had to deal with that same teacher all day. Then we moved a county over. I had to go to the other school. I remember my social studies teacher because she was my homeroom teacher. She didn't have a loud voice and didn't yell; she was more understanding than the other teachers. I liked her. She was really short too.

In fifth grade, I remember a friend named Melissa, and we talked for a bit after I moved back. Then we just stop calling each other. Then we moved back in sixth grade. I don't remember fifth grade. I know I didn't like it because I didn't have any friends, until the end. Carrie Brown became my best friend the end of fifth and into sixth grade. Then I had Carrie who I knew in sixth and seventh grade. Then I moved up here, and she came up here for a couple summers. Then we just quit talking. She found me a couple months ago on My Space.

In fifth grade, I don't even remember a math class, but I know there was a math class. It might have been the science teacher, when they put math and science together. For English, we were writing short stories, but I never finished mine because I turned it into a novel. I just never finished, but I don't think they ever gave me a bad grade on it. We were doing them during the end of the year, and I never got finished. It was really good too. I think I had 14 pages by the end of the year.

I think we had music and maybe art. I think we had art in the basement. We had to go out to a different building to get to the music room. In gym, I never participated because I hated gym. The one teacher I had that year, I didn't have to. The other [gym] teachers made me, but this teacher let me sit out. I sat with my friend on the bleachers. I don't remember what excuse she used, but I used my asthma. That is all we had to say, and he just let us sit out. None of the other teachers would let us do that. They would make us participate, just not do as much. I liked him because he let us sit out.

When I was in fifth grade, we did reading on the computer, in English and reading. I scored ninth grade. My teacher was announcing the name of who scored the highest, and everyone pointed at the smartest guy in the class. It was me, and I was like,

“What?!” I would always read the little kid books, then we would go to the library. I started checking out Nancy Drew, the mystery books, then I don't know what I started reading after that. When I got here, I started reading Harry Potter. I think it came out when I was about ten. At first, I didn't like it because everyone else liked it.

Then sixth grade, I found out [my old fourth grade teacher] was going to be my homeroom teacher, my English teacher and all that. I was so mad. I could not stand her. She was one of those teachers that took after the popular kids, so she was constantly talking about her kid. I was always trying to do stuff and concentrate on work, and she would be talking really loud to the girls. They would giggle. I hated her. She would talk to the popular girls, and the smart boys, and then the average ones just got left out. She was constantly talking to them. I just did not like her at all. And I did not like my math and science teacher. He was an ass. He was really tall, skinny guy with red hair and glasses. I hated him. Because he was like that too, except his was the sports team, all the people for sports, he liked them. I didn't like him at all. My science and computers teacher, I liked her; she was nice. The first half, we would do all science stuff, and then the last half we would go to the computer lab and do all of our typing crap. The language art teacher is the one I hated. That made me so mad because it was my favorite subject.

But that November we moved to Carter. I started out with Ms. Brown. I think she was the literature person. I can't remember the other guys name, he was history and really mean. And then the English teacher, I didn't like her. She was really short, blonde hair, and really giggly, but mean. It was like a split personality, one minute she would be all nice and bubbly, and then she would be all angry. I think we watched videos and did writing journals. In my literature class, we went over Shakespeare, and I don't know

anything about math. I hated Carter. It was more like everyone has their own subject and not split subjects. They made you take an extra class, some sort of special class, toward the end of the day, band, chorus, and something else. I think it was some kind of advanced art class. My mom made me pick chorus because I was going to do some kind of art class; I would not have to talk in front of anyone. I could just sit there and doodle, but she made me take chorus. She thought that would help where I had it before, but it didn't. I didn't like it. I just ended up skipping every other day. I hated it. I didn't like the people or the teachers. It sucked!

When we first moved here, in seventh grade, the first two weeks I was not in Livingston County. I had to go to Carter Middle School, and I got put up with those same people, and I hated them too. I started seventh grade in Kentucky, and we were living with my grandpa. I went the first two weeks in Carter, where we lived in my grandpa's basement. Then we moved out here. I remember mom let me skip every other day because she knew we were going to move anyway, and she knew how bad I hated it. So, all together I went like a week. I couldn't really find that one friend that was all alone. Kathy Sinclair is the one I hung around with a lot, but we really didn't have any interests the same. She was just a person to hang out with. I didn't really talk to anybody else. I just kind of kept to myself.

We moved to Livingston County after spending two weeks in Carter. My dad's half brother lived down here. You know where my trailer is? Then the big white house, then there is a trailer behind that. They lived in that trailer. Then my aunt was having an affair with the landlord in the big white house. My uncle ended up finding out about it.

We were like, “Leave us out of it.” We just live over here, but we are friends with our neighbors.

Middle School

I was never actually in middle school until I came here in seventh grade. Minetown, the elementary school, went up to eighth grade, and then ninth through twelfth was high school. This is the longest I have ever lived anywhere. I'm going to actually graduate from one place and have the same friends. After the third move, I just stopped trying for friends. I really like reading and English because I always had my books.

When I started Carroll in seventh grade, I didn't really talk to anybody else. I just kind of kept to myself. My favorite teacher that year was Mr. Williamson. He taught this extra class that would help you go over simple math and English. I think everyone had to take it. He taught it third period, and someone else taught it another period. I had him second then for art later in the day. He was my favorite teacher. He was the nicest one and would talk to me, and everyone else would just say, “Here is your book.” I guess I got math more because I got put in the smart math class the next year.

I knew we were going to move every couple of years because dad always got transferred. It was like being in the military because he was always the manager of restaurants. When we moved here, he said, “I promise we will stay here.” And then they started talking before I went into the ninth grade, “Do you want to go to a different school? Because you are going to be stuck here.” I said, “No I want to stay here. I already made friends.”

Honestly, I didn't really have any honest-to-God friends. I just had people who were nice to me, not anyone that I hung out with. That was in seventh grade. At first, I

didn't like it because I really didn't know Cassi. I found her in eighth grade, when we started talking. Then towards the end of eighth grade, I met Cassi. We have been friends ever since. Cassi has been my biggest educational influence. I take what she takes, so we can be in classes together. She is my college buddy. That is what I told my sister. I said she needs to find someone like how I found Cassi. You need to find someone to copy off of in math. I got Cassi and copied off of her and quit trying a little more. I think we have had math classes every year. Since the fifth grade, I have not been a math person at all. I do not like math. I feel stupid when I do math.

I first hung out with Jennifer in eighth grade, and then she was gone for two whole weeks. None of us can remember why, but she was gone. I just started talking to Cassi and Kathy because they hung out. Then Kathy got mad at Cassie because she told her to do the wrong page, and that messed up her whole grade. She still got an A in class, during the whole fight I was still talking to both. Cassi missed one day, and then I hung out with Kathy. After that, Kathy made sure I didn't go anywhere near Cassi, but Kathy was gone on a field trip. Cassi and I hung out because we were the only two that didn't go on the field trip. We hung out the whole day. Kathy found out and didn't like it. So it was me and Cassi, and Kathy was all by herself.

In eighth grade, I was put in Algebra 1, which was an advanced math class. I don't know how that happened. Everyone else was still taking the normal math, and then they stuck the smart ones in Algebra 1 to have a heads up. I did pretty good. I made Bs and Cs. I think the way I got in there was the WestTest. I think I guessed on the questions. In my eighth grade English class, I had Ms. Turner. I didn't like her. She was really loud and obnoxious and rude. She was just very blunt. I really didn't like her.

I think I made all A's, B's, and C's my seventh grade year. I think I did the same for eighth grade. It was pretty good, and then it started to go downhill in ninth grade. I think I had all of my classes with Cassi that year. Then in ninth grade, we had all but one. Then, tenth grade, we only had one class, then last year four or five. This year, we only have one, but she had to switch out of one of her classes to get into my class. She dropped some kind of instrument class to get into my speech class.

High School

At the beginning of ninth grade, they give us this little yellow book you can look through. I kept it until this summer, and my dog chewed it up. I was in the science department to be an archaeologist, but I wasn't taking any of the right classes for that. I was taking all the right classes for hospitality, so I had to get my paper switched to the hospitality thing, Pro-start. If you had classes picked out, where you couldn't graduate, they would just change it for you.

In ninth grade, my favorite class would be chorus. I didn't have that with Cassi. I had Mrs. Matthews, and she was really nice. I didn't have it with anyone. I made straight A's in that class. Mrs. Matthews was really nice and fun. She wasn't mean; all the other ones were mean. I had Ms. Adkins for English. That was honor's English that I had with Cassi and Jennifer. Then, I went to chorus, and they went to gym. Fourth period was science, and I had that with Cassi, then we went to lunch. Fifth period was algebra; me and Cassi had that with Jennifer. Sixth period was business computers; me and Cassie had that. For seventh period, Jennifer would go to science, and we would go to Spanish. We had a substitute, but she knew Spanish; we had her all year. That was a very big class like 37 students, crammed in that little room.

At Carroll Middle School, there were not that many people and a lot of people knew each other. Since the consolidation, there are so many diverse groups. I have never been around that. Where I have been, and it's like really small, everyone has been the same. Now, you have all your goth people, jocks, and the normal boys. Carroll was more like everyone was the same. Then when everyone came here they realized there were more people like themselves. So more people became goth, and more people came out of the closet. I was like, "Oh my god, left and right you would hear about so and so being a lesbian."

Coming to the new school was different because there were a lot more people. I hated it because I didn't have any classes with Cassi, except for my speech class. The teachers were a little bit different, some of them were lazy and some of them were strict. I liked the strict ones because I learned more, but I liked the lazy ones because I didn't have to work. Most of Kincaid and the Chase teachers, they are the lazy ones, and Carroll and Dunlap teachers try more.

In tenth grade, my favorite class was speech because that was the only class I had with Cassi, and I could actually talk. In speech class, we would have to get up and do presentations in front of the class, and we would work on our skills and make sure we didn't say "um" a lot. We would have to do the "um" game. The object was to not say "um," or you were out. Ms. Huff would give you a topic to talk about for three minutes, if you said "um" you were out. Fourth period, I had geometry with Jennifer. I would copy off of Jennifer, actually we would copy off each other. We were like, "Did you do the worksheet?" "No, I didn't either," then we would scramble to find it.

They had the classes for archeology, but I never took them. I was just picking classes to take. I really wanted to, but mom told me it was an unrealistic idea. During the middle of my junior year, I decided to go into Pro-start. Then I finally figured out how to get it switched around to take the classes I needed to graduate. I was on the professional pathway, and I had to change that. I'm on the skilled pathway now, and I don't have to take a second foreign language class, or four sciences, and I don't need a lot of electives only a few. The speech class didn't go for anything, then pottery class and chorus, both went towards the arts class, those would have been filled with Spanish 2 and science if I was going towards the professional track.

My favorite year in school was eleventh grade because Cassi and I had almost all of our classes together. We sat down with Mr. Jackson during our first week of class, and he worked with us to get our schedules together. If we would have sat down with someone like Ms. Taylor, she would have been like, "No." She doesn't like how someone tries to manipulate their schedules that way, but they let us change it so we would have classes together, so that was cool.

My favorite class in eleventh grade was pottery with Mr. Williamson. I had that class with Ashley and Cassi, and we would constantly goof off.

I took AP English in eleventh grade because that was the English course that Cassi was taking. We had Ms. Taylor, my favorite teacher. I just didn't do any of the work. She is awesome. She is more with us; she comes down to our level and speaks to us like adults and not like kids. When she goes by she will say, "Hey," and your name in an angry tone. I will be wondering, "Why are you yelling?" I thought she was going to yell at me the other day because I heard her say my name. I ducked into a class because I

was skipping first period, when I still had psychology. It was when nobody was here. There were only around 150 students during the week of Thanksgiving. She wasn't like most teachers. She talked to you like you were a normal person. She is really nice. I slacked off a lot. I am lazy. I would go home and start reading fan fiction or something. I would think I would do it later. It would get to be ten o'clock, and I would still be reading and would have to go to bed. Then, I would have to fake a lot of essays. I made a D the first six weeks, and the other six weeks were F's.

I used to type up fake report cards that showed I was making C's in Ms. Taylor's class. Then on the day they took out all my teeth, someone went and got the mail with my report card. I started crying. My parents said that I would have to take it next year. I said, I know. I was going to tell them I was in pottery and type up a fake report card. I started that in tenth grade, typing up fake report cards.

This year, I'm taking English twelve and eleven. They are both going over literature right now. In twelfth grade, I'm learning about Beowulf, and in eleventh grade, they are going over Puritans, like this thing some lady wrote about being captured by Indians. The first six weeks, I made an A in my English twelve and a B in my English eleven. That was reversed the second six weeks. Cassi switched her civics periods this year to get into mine. Cassi is a library aid during third, and I have it second, which is nice because I can go in and do homework. This morning, I finished something for my English eleven, which I was supposed to do last week, but it wasn't due until today. All week she had us in the computer lab, looking at sources for our research paper. She had us looking in the library at the computers. I looked at them, but I didn't print any off, so I

went and printed them off this morning and highlighted some good stuff and did my outline. The actual paper is due the Tuesday after spring break, or that Monday.

My hardest class this year is my business and marketing class, but we do more work in our English class. Business and marketing is probably one of my favorite classes this year because it's so easy, and the work doesn't have a due date, as long as it is in by the six weeks. That is one of the required elective classes I have to take. I'm sure it's required for something. I wouldn't just have to take it just to take it because it's a business class. My English classes are a little easier because the teachers are more helpful and give a lot of time to put in your work. In the business class, the teacher doesn't follow her due dates. I made a C the first six weeks, and I think I managed a B the next six weeks. The fifth week of both six weeks I had an F. She told me that just those two times she would let me do extra credit work. I brought my grades back up. Here a lot of the teachers give you a due date, but don't actually follow them. They are just like, "Turn it in before the six week period, so you can get a grade." I usually have half of the stuff by the due date, and then have a stack like so big about three days before the six weeks is over.

In my Pro-start class, we are not doing anything new this year. Ms. Clark was just Pro-start, but now they have her teaching the parenting class because they had to get rid of that teacher. They have her teaching both classes. There should be two class periods for the first year and two class periods for the second year, but this year the first year and second year Pro-start students are in the same block of classes. We don't have as much time to do everything we did last year because we were like baking stuff for everybody. We made the food for most of the dinners; now we can't do it because we

don't have the time. Last year, Ms. Clark had first and second periods for her first year student, and in third and fourth periods she had her second year, and seventh and eighth for her other first year because they separate the first years. Ms. Clark is getting really mean for some reason. I don't know why. She has just been yelling and getting all angry and stuff. I'm like, "Calm down." The first year students have been organizing, while me and Samantha have to cook. We had to have a potato recipe and a pasta recipe. The first year students are fixing up the back room and putting up all the equipment. They have to do dishes daily, sweep, and mop.

I don't think Mrs. Clark is coming back. She had like a nervous breakdown or something. They keep trying to shove her around with different rooms, and she just got fed up. They used the Pro-start room on the weekend for something. We came back Monday, and the room would be trashed, and we would have to clean it up. The substitute teacher tried to do accounting with us, but she is not certified to run the stoves. I was mad about it too. We finally did get to start cooking again because we were doing book work and as soon as we did she leaves. I was upset. She is supposed to come back after spring break, but I don't think she will.

At first, I was thinking about going into culinary arts. My dad was planning on using his stock investments in [a fast food restaurant] to help with college, and then I was going to try and open my own restaurant, my own bakery. I am not interested in the culinary arts anymore. I was thinking maybe something in nursing. My dad wanted me to go into culinary. So he is mad. I don't want him to bother me about it. I mean I like to cook for like my family, but I don't want to be cooking all day and then have to go home and cook. I was looking at respiratory therapy, but I heard that was very competitive.

There is a lot of certification you have to go through and a lot of tests you have to take. Nursing sounds interesting, but I'm not positive what I really want to do. If I had to pick something for my parents, I think I will do the nursing thing because that would be a good fall back plan. Then maybe once I get a good nursing job, I will find my true calling, then I will have good money. Hopefully, I won't have to take out any student loans. My dad told me he didn't think nursing was a good choice for me. I don't want to go to work all day and feel like crap. You know what, I'm the nurse, and I can call the shots. Dad thinks I would be better for respiratory therapy or physical therapy.

I keep having nightmares that I can't graduate. Stupid stuff like, "You can't graduate this year because you didn't wear the right color of shoes." This is in my nightmares, then it's like, "You forgot to bring your book to class this one day, so you can't graduate." I keep having those nightmares. If you wear the wrong color of socks, you can't graduate.

APPENDIX B

Appalachian Studies Association 2009



Figure B1. Marycait



Figure B2. Jennifer



Figure B3. Cassi



Figure B4. Ashley

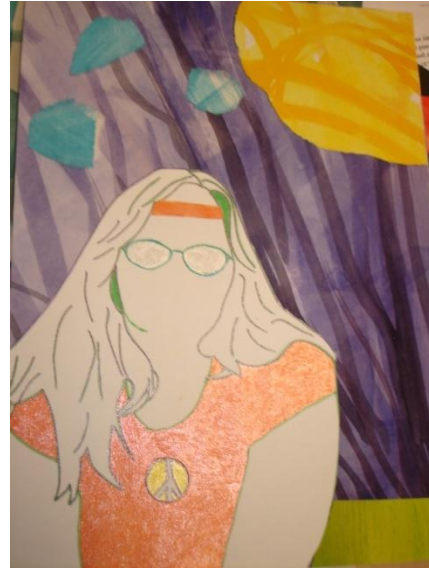


Figure B5. Sara



Figure B6. Collaborative Artwork

The Society for Educating Women 2010



Figure B7. Domestic Bliss



Figure B8. Badass!



Figure B9. Take Me Home



Figure B10. New Day

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Approval and Consent Forms

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, July 11, 2006

Linda Spatig, Ed.D.
Leadership Studies Department
One John Marshall Dr.
Marshall University
Huntington, WV. 25755

RE: IRB Study # 8020 **At: Marshall IRB 2**

Dear Dr. Spatig:

Protocol Title:

Small Town Girls With Big Dreams: The Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program

Expiration Date: 7/10/2007

Our Internal #: 2611

Type of Change: (Other) Expedited

Expedited ?:

Date of Change: 7/11/2006

Date Received: 7/11/2006

On Meeting Date: 7/19/2006

Description: In accordance with 45CFR46.110, the above listed study was granted expedited approval for a period of 12 months. A progress report of this study is due prior to the expiration date of July 10, 2007 or upon completion and or closure of the study if prior to the expiration date.

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of knowledge about strengths-based youth development programs in rural communities.

Respectfully yours,



Stephen D. Cooper, Ph.D.
Marshall University IRB#2 Chairperson

Informed Consent

Protocol #

Small Town Girls with Big Dreams: The Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program

Linda Spatig, Ed.D., Principal Investigator

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a study of the Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program, a program that is sponsored by the Appalachian Women's Leadership Project, in Hamlin, WV. You may or may not receive personal benefits from being in the study.

Participation is voluntary so please take your time in making a decision and feel free to ask me (Linda Spatig) or my research assistant, Heaven Rangel, to explain any information you do not understand. Our contact information is provided on page 3.

Why is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to learn more about youth development programs in rural communities. Specifically, the research is being conducted to tell the story of the Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program which began in 1997 with one staff member and fewer than 20 girls in two junior-senior high schools. Since then, it has experienced periods of success and growth (at one point having four full-time staff working with over 75 girls in three schools) as well as a period of financial struggle during which staff members were laid off and fewer than ten girls in one school participated. By doing a case study of this program we hope to learn about what factors enable such programs to be successful and sustainable as well as about obstacles such programs face. Most importantly, we hope to learn about what the programs mean to the young people for whom they are designed.

How many Will Take Part in the Study?

About 20 young people (under age 18) and 20 adults will take part in the study. In addition to the young people, the study will include Girls' Resiliency staff members, Appalachian Women's Leadership Project board members, and other community members who have worked with the project in some capacity.

What is Involved in this Research Study?

As a participant in the study, you will be interviewed about your experiences with the Girls' Resiliency Program. The goal is to understand the program, how it has evolved over its history, and what it means to the adults and young people who are participating currently or have participated in the past. I will conduct some of the interviews and others will be conducted by my research assistant, Heaven Rangel, a graduate student in the College of Education at Marshall University.

Also, you may be part of a program activity (e.g., pottery class) that is observed as part of the study. The observations will not change the nature of the activity. The observer will simply be there, as part of the group, in order to see and hear what transpires. After the observation, the researcher will write notes describing the activity.



MU IRB *DC*

Initial _____

JUL 11 2006

APPROVED

How Long Will I be in the Study?

You will be in the study for about six to eight months. We plan to complete the observations and interviews between July and December, 2006.

You can decide to stop participation at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, it would be helpful if you would inform me (Linda Spatig) or my assistant Heaven Rangel about your decision.

What are the Risks of the Study?

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

Are There Benefits to Taking Part in the Study?

If you agree to participate in the study, there may or may not be direct benefits to you. We hope the process of being interviewed will give you an opportunity to honestly express your views about the Girls' Resiliency Program. Also, we hope the information learned from the study will strengthen the Girls' Resiliency Program and will be helpful to people who work with youth programs in other communities.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your interview responses are kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep the research records (observations and interviews) private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances we may be required by law to allow others to view the research records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What are the Costs of Taking Part in this Study?

There are no costs to you to take part in this study. All the study costs will be paid for by the study.

Will I be Paid for Participation?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for your participation in the study.

Who is Sponsoring this Study?

This study is being sponsored by the Drinko Academy at Marshall University. The sponsor is providing money to help conduct the study. As researchers, we do not hold a direct financial interest in the sponsor or the study results.



MU IRB *SDC*

Initial _____

JUL 11 2006

APPROVED

What are my Rights as a Research Study Participant?

Taking part in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or you may withdraw from the study at any time. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

Whom Do I Call if I have Questions or Problems?

For questions about the study, or in the event of a research-related problem, please contact study investigator, Linda Spatig, at 304-696-2875 or 304-522-1921. You should also contact Linda Spatig if you have a concern or complaint about the research. For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University IRB#2 chairman, Dr. Stephen Cooper at 304-696-7320. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The researcher cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the researchers.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

SIGNATURES

I agree to take part in this study and I confirm that I am 18 years of age or older. I have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have those questions answered. By signing this consent form I have not given up any legal rights to which I am entitled.

Participant (Printed)

Participant Signature

Date _____

Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date _____



MU IRB

SOX

JUL 11 2006

Initial _____

APPROVED

IRB

008020

Parental Consent/Permission

Protocol #

Small Town Girls with Big Dreams: The Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program

Linda Spatig, Ed.D., Principal Investigator

Introduction

Your child is invited to participate in a study of the Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program, a program that is sponsored by the Appalachian Women's Leadership Project, in Hamlin, WV. Your child may or may not receive personal benefits from being in the study. Participation is voluntary so please take your time in making a decision and feel free to ask me (Linda Spatig) or my research assistant, Heaven Rangel, to explain any information you do not understand. Our contact information is provided on page 3.

Why is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to learn more about youth development programs in rural communities. Specifically, the research is being conducted to tell the story of the Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program which began in 1997 with one staff member and fewer than 20 girls in two junior-senior high schools. Since then, it has experienced periods of success and growth (at one point having four full-time staff working with over 75 girls in three schools) as well as a period of financial struggle during which staff members were laid off and fewer than ten girls in one school participated. By doing a case study of this program we hope to learn about what factors enable such programs to be successful and sustainable as well as about obstacles such programs face. Most importantly, we hope to learn about what the programs mean to the young people for whom they are designed.

How many Will Take Part in the Study?

About twenty young people (under age 18) will take part in the study. In addition to the young people, the study will include Girls' Resiliency staff members, Appalachian Women's Leadership Project board members, and other community members who have worked with the project in some capacity.

What is Involved in this Research Study?

As a participant in the study, your child will be interviewed about her experiences with the Girls' Resiliency Program. The goal is to understand what the program means to young people who are participating currently or have participated in the past. The youth interviews will be conducted by my research assistant, Heaven Rangel, a graduate student in the College of Education at Marshall University.

Also, your child may be part of a program activity (e.g., pottery class) that is observed as part of the study. The observations will not change the nature of the activity. The observer will simply be there, as part of the group, in order to describe the activity.



MU IRB

SDC

JUL 11 2006

Initial _____

APPROVED

How Long Will My Child be in the Study?

Your child will be in the study for about six to eight months. We plan to complete the observations and interviews between July and December, 2006.

You or your child can decide to stop participation at any time. If you decide to stop your child's participation in the study, it would be helpful if you would inform me (Linda Spatig) or my assistant Heaven Rangel about your decision.

What are the Risks of the Study?

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

Are There Benefits to Taking Part in the Study?

If you agree to allow your child to take part in the study, there may or may not be direct benefit to them. We hope the information learned from the study will benefit other people in the future. In addition, we hope that the process of being interviewed will benefit your child in that will give her an opportunity to express her views about the Girls' Resiliency Program.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your child's interview responses are kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep the research records (observations and interviews) private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances we may be required by law to allow others to view the research records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your child's rights and safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, your child will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What are the Costs of Taking Part in this Study?

There are no costs to you for allowing your child to take part in this study. All the study costs will be paid for by the study.

Will I be Paid for Participation?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for your child's participation in the study.

Who is Sponsoring this Study?

This study is being sponsored by the Drinko Academy at Marshall University. The sponsor is providing money to help conduct the study. As researchers, we do not hold a direct financial interest in the sponsor or the study results.



MU IRB

SDC

Initial _____

JUL 11 2006

APPROVED

What are my Rights as a Research Study Participant?

Taking part in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to allow your child to take part or you may withdraw them from the study at any time. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you or your child are entitled.

Whom Do I Call if I have Questions or Problems?

For questions about the study, or in the event of a research-related problem, please contact study investigator, Linda Spatig, at 304-696-2875 or 304-522-1921. You should also contact Linda Spatig if you have a concern or complaint about the research. For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University IRB#2 chairman, Dr. Stephen Cooper at 304-696-7320. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The researcher cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the researchers.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

SIGNATURES

I give permission for my child _____ to take part in this study. I have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have those questions answered. By signing this consent form I have not given up any legal rights to which I am entitled.

Parent Name (Printed)

Parent Signature

Date _____

Second Parent Signature (if not used check reason below)

Date _____

Permission of second parent was not obtained because the:

- _____ Second parent was deceased
- _____ Second parent was unknown
- _____ Second parent was incompetent
- _____ First parent has legal responsibility for the care and custody of the child

Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

Date _____

Person Obtaining Consent Signature



MU IRB
SDC
JUL 11 2006

APPROVED

IRB

008020

Child's Assent /Permission Protocol #
Small Town Girls with Big Dreams: The Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program
Linda Spatig, Principal Investigator

Why am I here?

We are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about the Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program. As a current or past member of the program, we want to find out what you think about it.

Why are They Doing This Study?

This study is being done so we can learn more about youth programs in rural communities. We want to tell the story of The Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program which began in 1997 with one staff member and about 20 girls in two schools. Since then, the program grew larger, at one point having four staff members and 75 girls in three schools. However, there was also a time when the program got smaller, laying off staff and working with only about ten girls in one school. By doing this study we hope to learn about what made the program grow during the good times and what problems it had during the bad times. Hopefully what we find out will make the Lincoln County Girls' Resiliency Program stronger and will also be helpful to people who work with young people in other similar communities.

What Will Happen to Me?

If you choose to participate in the study, we will do a tape-recorded interview with you. The interview will be conducted by my research assistant, Heaven Rangel, who is a student at Marshall. In the interview, she will ask questions to get to know you and to find out what you think about being in the Girls' Resiliency Program.

Also, Heaven will observe Resiliency Program activities you are doing. For example, she plans to go to some of the pottery classes scheduled for this summer. Her observations will not affect the activities. She will simply be there, along with everyone else. After the activity is over, she will write notes describing the activity.

Will the Study Hurt?

There are no risks or pains from being in the study.

Will the Study Help Me?

The study will give you a chance to tell your honest views about the program. Hopefully, this information will make the program better and this would benefit you, as a program participant.

What if I Have any Questions?

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call me, Linda Spatig, at 304-696-2875 or 304-522-1921, or ask Heaven Rangel or me the next time you see us.



MU IRB

SDC

JUL 11 2006

APPROVED

Initials _____



Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board
401 11th St., Suite 1300
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

August 24, 2009

Linda Spatig, Ed.D.
Educational Leadership

RE: IRBNet ID# 125202-2

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)


Dear Dr. Spatig:

Protocol Title:	[125202-2] Transition From High School to College: The Experiences of Girls in Rural West Virginia
Expiration Date:	July 30, 2010
Site Location:	MU
Type of Change:	Revision APPROVED
Review Type:	Expedited Review

In accordance with 45CFR46.110(a)(7), the above study and informed consent were granted Expedited approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Chair for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire July 30, 2010. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student LeAnne Olson.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, CIP at (304) 696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

	Marshall University IRB	
	Approved on:	8/24/09
	Expires on:	7/30/10
	Study number:	125202

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Transition from High School to College: The Experiences of Girls in Rural West Virginia

Linda Spatig, Ed.D., Principal Investigator

Introduction

You are invited to be in a study of the transitional experiences of five girls who attended Lincoln County High School and are interested in attending college. You may or may not receive any benefit from being part of the study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take your time to make your decision, and ask me (Linda Spatig) to explain any words or information that you do not understand. Contact information is on page 3.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to explore how high school girls in a rural Appalachian community understand their educational experiences-past, present, and future. By conducting this study, we hope to learn more about factors that have enabled and/or constrained their journeys into college. (Where do they end up, how, and why?)

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

About five young people and fifteen adults will take part in this study. A total of 25 subjects are the most that would be able to enter the study.

What Is Involved In This Research Study?

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed about your experiences in the educational lives of five students attending Lincoln County High School and college. The goal is to better understand the college going process for girls in a rural West Virginia county. Primarily, LeAnne Olson, a doctoral student in the College of Education at Marshall University, will be conducting the interviews. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed into written documents. The recordings and transcripts will be locked up and stored at LeAnne Olson's house. Participants' records will be stored in Dr. Linda Spatig's office upon completion of the project.

Subject's Initials _____

How Long Will You Be In The Study?

You will be in the study for no more than 12 months. We plan to complete the observations and interviews between July, 2009 and July 2010.

You can decide to stop participating at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study it would be helpful if you would inform me (Linda Spatig) or LeAnne Olson about your decision.

What Are The Risks Of The Study?

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

Are There Benefits To Taking Part In The Study?

If you agree to take part in this study, there may or may not be direct benefit to you. We hope the process of being interviewed will give you an opportunity to honestly express your views about the transition from high school to college for girls in rural West Virginia.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep your study records private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?

There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. All the costs will be paid for by the study.

Will You Be Paid For Participating?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

What Are Your Rights As A Research Study Participant?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop participating in the study we encourage you to talk to the investigators or study staff first.

Subject's Initials _____

Whom Do You Call If You Have Questions Or Problems?

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the study investigator, Linda Spatig at 304.696.2875 or 304.522.1921. You should also call the investigator if you have a concern or complaint about the research.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University IRB#2 Chairman Dr. Stephen Cooper or ORI at (304) 696-4303. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The research staff cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the research staff.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

SIGNATURES

I agree to take part in this study and confirm that I am 18 years of age or older. I have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered. By signing this consent form I am not giving up any legal rights to which I am entitled.

Subject Name (Printed)

Subject Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date

Subject's Initials _____

APPENDIX D: CURRICULUM VITAE

LeAnne A. Olson
olson2@marshall.edu

Education

Doctor of Education – Curriculum & Instruction,

2011 Marshall University Huntington, WV 25755
Emphasis – Multicultural Issues in Student Affairs Counseling
Dissertation: *Transition from High School to College: The Experiences
of Girls in Rural West Virginia*

Master of Arts – English

1997 Marshall University Huntington, WV 25755

Regents Bachelor of Arts

1992 Marshall University Huntington, WV 25755

Graphic Design

1986-1991 Shepherd College Shepherdstown, WV

Work Experience

Humanities Instructor: LITS 600: Women Writers in Appalachia
2009 Marshall University Graduate College
 Charleston, WV

Humanities Instructor: LITS 600: Identity Inscribed: Contemporary
 Novels by Women
2008 Marshall University Graduate College
 Charleston, WV

Math Instructor

2000-Present Marshall Community and Technical College
 Huntington, WV 25755

Academic Skills Center: Math and English Instructor

1999-Present Marshall Community and Technical College
 Huntington, WV 25755

College Study Skills Instructor

2001 Marshall Community and Technical College
 Huntington, WV 25755

2004-Present Developed and implemented COL 138 online

Academic Mentor: Graduate Assistant

2004-2006 Marshall University Women's Basketball
Huntington, WV 25755

Academic Counselor: Buck Harless Student Athlete Program

2000-2004 Marshall University
Huntington, WV 25755

NCAA Division IA academic eligibility rules and procedures
Tutor coordinator, mentoring coordinator, advising, and recruiting

Co-teaching experiences

CI 706: Multicultural Education

HUMN 600: Introduction to Humanities

Professional Organizations

Association for Supervision of Curriculum Development (ASCD)

American Educational Studies Association (AESA)

Appalachian Studies Association (ASA)

Presentations

Self-representations and Conversations: Transformative Identity of College Females from Rural Appalachia.

LeAnne Olson, Dr. Heather Stark, Dr. Linda Spatig

July 2010: Society for Educating Women

Transitioning from High School to College: The Stories of Five Appalachian Girls.

LeAnne Olson, Dr. Linda Spatig

November 2009: American Educational Studies Association

Like a Mountain: Performing Collaborative Research with Youth in Rural U.S.A.

Dr. Linda Spatig, LeAnne Olson

November 2009: American Educational Studies Association

Self-portraits and Conversations: Appalachian Identity Among Girls.

LeAnne Olson, Dr. Heather Stark, Dr. Linda Spatig. Student presenters: Cassandra, Jennifer, Marycait, Ashley, Sara

March 2009: Appalachian Studies Association.

Collaborative Ethnography: Student Voices in School Consolidation & Youth Development

LeAnne Olson, Dr. Betty Sias
March 2008: Appalachian Studies Association

Like a Mountain: A Collaborative Study of Youth Development in Rural America
Dr. Betty Sias, Dr. Linda Spatig, LeAnne Olson.
October 2007: American Educational Studies Association

Like a Mountain: Youth Development in Rural America.
April 2007: Drinko Symposium Presentation, Marshall University.

School Consolidation in a Rural County: A Story Featuring Students' Voices
Dr. Betty Sias, Dr. Linda Spatig, Heaven Rangel, and LeAnne Olson.
March 2007: Appalachian Studies Association.

Multiple perspectives of technology integration: Higher education, teacher preparation, remediation, English as a Second Language (ESL), and high school
Dr. Sherry Nash, LeAnne Olson, Dr. Lee Olson, Dr. Betty Sias.
January 2007: Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, Hawaii

We value your input: Dissertation research design
Dr. Sherry Nash, LeAnne Olson, Dr. Betty Sias
January 2007: Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, Hawaii

Publications

“Like a mountain: Performing collaborative research with youth in rural Appalachia.”
(2009) *Collaborative Anthropologies, 2*
Linda Spatig, Shelley Gaines, Ric MacDowell, Betty Sias, LeAnne Olson, Cassandra Adkins

“Multiple perspectives of technology integration: Higher education, teacher preparation, remediation, English as a Second Language (ESL), and high school”
January 2007: Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, Hawaii
Publication Proceedings: CD ROM (ISSN# 1541-5880)

Like a Mountain: Youth Development in Rural America.
Drinko Research Team Writer, Marshall University, Collaborative Book Project
October 2006 – Present