The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Education

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ADULT LEARNERS NAVIGATING THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS

A Dissertation in

Life Learning and Adult Education

by

Nakita C. Dolet

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2018

The dissertation of Nakita C. Dolet was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Adnan Qayyum
Assistant Professor of Education
Dissertation Co- Advisor
Co-Chair of Committee

Craig Campbell
Assistant Professor of Education
Dissertation Co-Advisor
Co-Chair of Committee

Davin Carr-Chellman
Special Member
Assistant Professor

David Guthrie
Associate Professor of Education

Kyle Peck
Research Fellow, Professor Emeritus of Education

Susan Land
Associate Professor of Education
Director of Graduate Studies

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

Abstract

Despite increasing numbers of adult participation in postsecondary educational programs “much of the research examining the question of ‘access’ to higher education is concentrated on the relatively narrow time horizon immediately after high school graduation (Seftor & Turner, 2002). This includes the body of research specifically related to the shift from paper to online college and financial aid applications. Past studies have explored college and financial aid application experiences for traditionally aged low-income, minority and or first-generation students (Tierney & Venegas, 2009; Venegas, 2006; Perna, 2007). Additional studies investigating the transition to online applications have examined graduate student enrollment with a goal of understanding how access to technology is impacted by race and ethnicity (Poock & Berryhill, 2000).

Adult learner experiences are often omitted from or placed in the periphery of discussions about the admissions process. In order to serve adult learners returning to school, it is important to identify what factors impact their access to information and support during the admissions process. Students engaged in the admissions process must often manage applying to a number of schools along with completing the FAFSA. While post-secondary institutions and governmental agencies view Internet-based applications as tools used to streamline the process of applying to school, “institutions [still] need to consider issues of access to technology, as well as differences in student characteristics that may affect how prospective students respond to a more technology-based admission process” (Gifford, Briceño-Perriott & Mianzo, 2005). When we view adult learners holistically, considering their age, occupation, complex social roles, and racial or cultural background we can begin to evaluate how to support adult learners through the application process. As educators, we are tasked with understanding how to support diverse student groups. This responsibility is underscored by the need to develop more inclusive resources that support the unique needs of adult learners as well as their traditionally aged counterparts.

Sociological theories about cultural reproduction, often associated with Pierre Bourdieu, and information-seeking models most often used in health-related fields provide a foundation for this study. This study is interested in exploring the adult learners' experience of seeking and using information while applying to post-secondary programs of study. In addition to the theoretical framework, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to guide data analysis. The method of analysis resulted in four superordinate themes focusing on demographic factors, comprehensive models of information-seeking, types of capital and additional points of inquiry like social role to examine the phenomenon of applying to post-secondary programs from the adult learner perspective. Data also served as a foundation for identifying fourteen additional subthemes.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgments

What I came here with*.* In 2013, I came to Penn State with a foundation built from years of support from a dedicated and nurturing mother, Rose Marie Dolet. Built from a lifetime of dinner table debates with my father and a house that he filled with books about history, Haitian culture, and stories from the Diaspora, Pierre Dolet. Built from hugs, kisses, and meals from my grandmother who dedicated her entire life to her family, Marianna Laguerre. Built from learning how to take risks from my brother, Menes Dolet. Penn State was by far one of my biggest risks. Built from watching my aunts, women who exhibit pride in everything that they do, Helene Smith, Adele Merilan, Rosemene Estime, and Maud Eliacin. Built from the love from my second family, the Hinds clan, who always welcome me into their home with open arms.

How I survived. I survived with the support of my best friend, for fourteen years you have been my constant companion, my co-transcriptionist, and proofreader, Jermaine Hinds. Thank you for the music, laughter, and love, both in moments of happiness and hardship. I survived with a community of friends that felt like family, Heather Bennett, Leslie Cano, Jinhee Choi, Michelle Covert, Annette Hestres, Kayla Johnson, Joe Levitan, Alicia Kehn, Anya Wallace and Megan Wilkerson. Ally Krupar and the little red house. Edith Gnanadass in her role as my mentor. I survived with phone calls from my Maryland crew, Summer Cort, Jessie Manuel, Melissa Del Rios, Jamila Hill, Julia Deck, Lynette Wray and Emely Amaya. Olivia Reed your phone calls from Indiana also make the list. My survival is also due in great part to the administrative staff in 301 Keller, thank you for always making sure I had the tools to progress in the program. Carol Fantaskey, thank you for always knowing when I needed someone to talk to.

How I Grew. I grew from engaging with others in the classroom. A special thanks to Fred Schied and Davin Carr-Chellman, the architects of my Adult Education experience. I knew I was in the right place after a semester under your guidance. I grew from learning and listening to the faculty that have given me the added honor of serving on my committee Dr. David Guthrie, Dr. Kyle Peck, Dr. Craig Campbell, Dr. Davin Chair Chellman and my committee chair Dr. Adnan Qayyum. Finally, thank you to Dr. Sonia DeLuca Fernández who served as a mentor during one of the most formative years I have had as a young professional.

How I did it. I would have never completed this journey without the adult learners that were willing to share their stories. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to the University of Maryland-Educational Opportunity, Maryland Opportunity Center, Penn State Educational Opportunity Center, Leslie Laing, Assistant Director of Adult Learner Services, and Monique Eguavoen, Director of Enrollment Management for working with me to identify potential areas of recruitment. Added thanks to Penn State's World Campus. Judy Wills, Julie Fitzgerald and Dr. Ashley Adams for supporting me both professionally and academically. The entire Student Affairs team was instrumental to my continued success in the field of higher education.

What I leave with. A Ph.D. in Lifelong Learning in Adult Education. I did it Dr. Nakita Dolet!

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one serves to contextualize the study by describing how my own experiences working with low-income and or first generation adult learners helped generate a long-standing interest in adult learner experiences of applying to post-secondary educational programs. Working to support this population generated a number of questions about how educational institutions guide adults through a multi-layered admissions process. The process includes tasks like completing web-based applications, securing financial aid and seeking the necessary information to guide the overall decision-making process of whether or not to enroll in a program of study. Following the discussion about my personal connections to this study, I will present the problem statement and close this chapter by sharing my approach for organizing the study.

Coming to the Topic: Serving Students Changes You

In 2009, I was a recent graduate from the University of Maryland-College Park (UMCP) attempting to balance working full-time while studying for the LSAT. After six months of working as a government contractor, I was struggling to balance both obligations. I started applying to part-time positions at UMCP, hoping to devote more time to my studies. I accepted a job at the University of Maryland Educational-Opportunity Center, a decision that would in time change the entire trajectory of my life. The University of Maryland- Educational Opportunity Center (UM-EOC) was a TRIO program. TRIO programs are federally funded grant programs with an overarching goal of “identify[ing] and provid[ing] services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Educational Opportunity Centers are one of eight types of TRIO programs. Educational Opportunity Centers focus on aiding low-income and or first generation adult learners (19 or older) by “counseling and [providing] information on college admissions”, guiding students through the enrollment process and helping students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid **(FAFSA)** (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The UM-EOC was located within walking distance of my neighborhood, next door to a dentist’s office and below a barber shop. It was a small unassuming office that I had driven by, walked past, or seen from a window on the public bus hundreds of times. The UM-EOC was in the middle of the community it served. With a primary goal of access; our door was open to anyone who needed help.

While our mission centered on helping adult learners enroll in postsecondary programs, we often stretched far beyond our primary goal by connecting members of the community to other services like the Head Start program, GED programs and county-wide events or services sponsored by partners like the public library system, community colleges in the state of Maryland, churches and social services. We rarely turned someone away without providing some level of assistance. Our team of five (sometimes six) employees had to serve at least 1,000 students a year. Quickly recognizing that the need in this community required UM-EOC staff to operate outside of our assigned duties, I often worked outside of my assigned role as the part-time Outreach Assistant. I worked side-by-side with counselors, completing FAFSAs on our outdated computers, traveling across the county to recruit students, editing college admissions essays, and slowly forgetting about law school and falling in love with the idea of a career in higher education.

I spent two years at UM-EOC. Many of the students I encountered at the UM-EOC would be labeled as “moderately or highly non-traditional learners”. According to a 2002 study conducted through the National Center for Education Statistics, the non-traditional designation is applied to students that can claim one or more of seven characteristics. These characteristics include: delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, full-time employment, status as financially independent based on financial aid standards, caring for dependents, considered a single parent or lacking a high school diploma (Choy, 2002). Students with one characteristic received the label “minimally nontraditional”, students with two or three characteristics were labeled “moderately nontraditional” and those with four or more were considered “highly nontraditional” (Choy, 2002). These factors, combined with the fact that many students that I encountered at the UM-EOC were also members of classically underrepresented groups in higher education, highlighted the importance of developing educational support systems for special populations. Our students’ status as non-traditional was often underscored by issues tied to their age, race, and ethnicity.

These students struggled to balance professional and personal demands on their time and money as they returned to school. Many of these students were forced to apply and register for school using online tools for the first time. They faced the difficult decision of choosing an educational path that had to suit a variety of needs (increase marketable skills, benefit their household, allow for flexible scheduling, and respect competing responsibilities); they were also being asked to operate in an environment that was generally designed for traditionally aged students, that in turn worked to further alienate adult learner from the institution.

Over time, I left my position at the UM-EOC but continued to work with both traditional and non-traditional students in a pre-transfer advising program under the leadership of an

Assistant Dean in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. Unlike the UM-EOC, working on campus in support of the Dean's office provided me with more exposure to the debates and issues around issues like retention, prior learning credits, and plus/minus grading. Many of the adult learner and minority groups that comprised a large portion of the UM-EOC student population were underserved on campus. Adult learners, as well as Black and Latino males, were groups that required additional support, facts that became apparent in discussions about prior learning and minority-based support programs. Under pressure from adult students with a military background, the university "implemented a new policy to award active duty and former service members in the United States Armed Forces six credits of lower-level general elective credit" (University of Maryland, 2013). Additionally, the university increased its support of programs in the Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education (OMSE) targeted to helping increase retention and graduation rates for Black and Latino male. Programs like *Soaring Achievers* and *College Success Scholars* both have missions tied to providing "comprehensive, structured ongoing personal, academic and professional support to Black and Latino male students with a primary emphasis on retention and graduation" (OMSE, 2009).

While the university has seen positive growth in numbers of Black males graduating, national research shows that Black and Latino males continue to be underrepresented in higher education. Studies highlight how social and cultural capital may impact minority students' ability to attend college. "African American and Latino youth are more likely to hail from low-income families […] more likely to be at-risk for dropout from school […] and less likely to have college-educated parents" (as cited in Strayhorn, 2010). Adult learners also face additional challenges because they "have been a secondary audience for most campuses, despite their current contribution to enrollment numbers and the potential for brand loyalty through their children" (Kimmel & McNeese, 2006).

In my experiences, the dual identities of being an adult learner and a minority impacted the prospective students' ability to overcome both internal and larger structural barriers. Barriers tied to their status as adult learners may include a lack of adult-centered support from post-secondary institutions or less access to financial aid. Scholarly literature also describes dispositional/motivational barriers; these barriers seem to provide an accurate description of obstacles that delayed or prevented enrollment in post-secondary programs for students that identify as part of a minority group. The literature describes barriers that emerge under "the influence of past experiences; community perceptions; and personal, academic, and job-related motives […] namely, the influence of family and education experience as children and youth [like] a troubled education history" (Flynn, Brown, Johnson & Roger, 2011).

At the UM-EOC these issues manifested in the way students experienced applying for college and completing financial aid documents using a computer and web-based technologies. Adult learners that visited the UM-EOC might be impacted by previous attempts to enroll in a degree program, a myriad of personal needs/goals, academic concerns like a gap in educational experience, and job-related motives like career advancement or a change in career. Studies reveal similarities between adult learners and traditionally aged students in discussions of motivation or academic performance (Deggs, 2011). Other studies examining barriers for adult learners echo the issues that emerged in my own work with UM-EOC students. For example, in a 1990 study of adult learners, Terrell identifies seven developmental needs unique to the adult learner. They include: (a) "low self-concept threatened by the classroom but goal-oriented, (b) time, energy, and emotional demands, (c) establishing financial stability, (d) work and civic demands, (e) developing family relationships and caring for family, (f) questioning career choices, and (g) reappraise habits and interests" (as cited in Deggs, 2011).

In programs or admissions' processes that use internet-based resources and applications as the primary mode for communicating with their students, the barriers described above are exacerbated by a student's ability to access to internet-enabled computers. Many UM-EOC students' sociocultural backgrounds and age may have precluded them from having meaningful access to computers. A basic level of access may be essential in an increasingly technology-mediated world. Activities like applying to college, completing the FAFSA, accessing the information needed to guide the admissions process, requires meaningful access to the internet and a computer. Meaningful access also exists on a spectrum, where learners with effective access to a computer at home, at work or within the community and learners with meaningful access "can [exercise] a degree of control and choice over technology and content. Use [at this stage can be considered…] fruitful, significant [because it has] relevance to the individual" (Selwyn, 2004). Many students visiting the UM-EOC were already marginalized. Their inability to have meaningful access to technology threatened to push them further outside of the mainstream culture.

The students that I encountered struggled to make the decision to return to school, only to be discouraged from the very beginning of the process. The transition from paper to online applications was often the first technological barrier for the students. There are many stories that serve as strong reminders of this issue. For example, a Golden ID student (a program for senior citizens at the University of Maryland) needed an email address to complete a re-enrollment application, but met a roadblock when he realized he had not used his email account in over a year, forgot the password, and had no idea how to reset it. During my first encounter with this gentleman, I spent over an hour resetting his password and establishing an account with the university. He returned to my office two days later because he needed help uploading documents to his application and confirming he had completed all the necessary steps prior to submitting the final application.

While it is possible to learn how to use administrative tools independently, the adults I encountered needed additional help in learning how to use these tools. I often found myself helping adult students learn to navigate online tools and locate information. Every time we updated the website to “make it easier to navigate” or “decrease student dependence on face-to-face meetings,” I wondered if these changes were really making the process easier. I witnessed the issues that adult students face in the early stages of returning to school. I also met a number of minority students that simply lacked meaningful access to computers. Meaningful access is “[characterized] by a complex mixture of social, psychological, economic and, above all, pragmatic reasons” (Selwyn, 2004). Most institutions of higher education continue to promote increased use of online and computer-based technologies. I am interested in understanding how adult learners use these tools in the admissions process. I am specifically interested in how these tools drive the information-seeking during the admissions process. This includes everything from learning about a program of study, to using acquired information, to drive actions like applying to a post-secondary program, completing the FAFSA or even deciding not to enroll.

In medicine, information-seeking theories discuss how information is influenced by a combination of individual and social factors. An information-driven process of decision-making can produce a number of alternative paths; “information can remove uncertainty by helping define probabilities, but it also can increase uncertainty […the] more uncertain the information, the more subject it is to favorable distortions” (as cited in Johnson, 1997). Information-seeking can lead to a number of varied outcomes. I am interested in exploring how access to, and use of, information impacts the adult-learner experience of applying to school.

Problem Statement

Enrollment projections indicate that the number of students aged 25 and older will continue to increase over time “the increase is expected to be higher for students age 25 and over than for younger students in the coming years. […]” projecting a 12 percent increase in for students younger than 25 compared to 20 percent for students age 25 and over” (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2015). As the population of adult learners enrolling in post-secondary programs continues to increase, there is a need for studies examining the experiences of these students during each step of their journey back to school. Past studies of adult learners have argued that campuses see adults as a “secondary audience for most campuses, despite their current contribution to enrollment numbers” (Kimmel & McNeese, 2006). The admissions process serves as the first point of contact between adult learners and the institution. The role of admissions in the college application process positions the admissions process as a potentially important lens into understanding and supporting adult learner needs in post-secondary programs. There is a need to understand how an adult learners’ added social roles directly impact their student experiences during the admissions process. Past studies of adult learners “ reported problematic situations with admissions and advisement staff; experiences of youth-oriented university catalogs and Web sites; and policies, procedures, and curricular scheduling directed to youth who were full-time had no competing life roles or prior collegiate experiences, or lived on campus" (Kasworm, 2010).

When considering adult learner profiles and experiences, we may also need to consider other demographic markers that influence access to education. For UM-EOC students, their status as low-income and/or first generation was often accompanied by membership in other classically underrepresented minority groups within higher education. Studies exploring enrollment to post-secondary institutions within minority groups often report lower rates of educational attainment, increased likelihood of attending less selective educational institutions, and barriers related to the ability access to timely information (Denice, 2017; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby & Bastedo, 2012; Hill, Bregman & Andrade, 2015). Recent debates concerning the role of affirmative action in the admissions process have forced institutions to discuss how a student's race impacts access to education. While "trends and gaps in education attainment by race […] have received much attention in recent years […] reports of these trends have generally focused on traditional-age college students. Little is known about whether and how enrollment […] among older adults has changed over time" (Denice, 2013). Increases in the adult learner population, underscore the need to include them in studies exploring a range of student experience. In addition, it is important to see adult learners beyond one-dimensional lenses focused on age, but rather through kaleidoscopes that highlight complex social roles and identity. Researchers must work to address adult learner populations with the same interests they approach traditionally-aged students in order to begin understanding where these populations intersect and diverge. Exploring adult learner experiences should also occur against a backdrop that recognizes changes in higher education at large. Adult learners are enrolling in post-secondary programs at a time when many scholars argue that there is a “need to adapt schooling to prepare students for [a] changing world” characterized by “sweeping technological changes” (Collins & Halverson, 2009). This focus on technology emphasizes an increasing need for adult learners to develop skills in the areas of information and computer literacy. A variety of fields have been impacted by advances in information communication technologies like the internet, and “education has not been exempt from the influence of the WWW […] one of the […] areas most affected by this technology is college and university admissions” (Poock & Berryhill, 2000). Using online systems to manage the submission and processing of college applications simplifies administrative processes, but does it benefit students? Though a number of studies continue to examine questions around access to higher education, “much of the research examining the question of ‘accesses to higher education is concentrated on the relatively narrow time horizon immediately after high school graduation” (Seftor & Turner, 2002). This includes the body of research specifically related to the shift from paper to online college and financial aid applications.

Purpose of the Study

In order to serve adult learners returning to school, it is important to identify what factors impact their access to information and support during the admissions process. Students engaged in the admissions process must often manage applying to a number of schools along with completing the FAFSA. While post-secondary institutions and governmental agencies view Internet-based applications as tools used to streamline the process of applying to school, “institutions [still] need to consider issues of access to technology, as well as differences in student characteristics that may affect how prospective students respond to a more technology-based admission process” (Gifford, Briceño-Perriott & Mianzo, 2005). When we view adult learners holistically, considering their age, occupation, complex social roles, and racial or cultural background, we can begin to evaluate how to support adult learners through the application process. We can also ask what resources can work to support both adult learners and their traditionally aged counterparts, and what resources must be developed in response to unique adult learner needs.

Sociological theories about cultural reproduction, most often associated with Pierre Bourdieu, and information-seeking models, most often used in health-related fields can provide a foundation for this study. In addition to these theoretical frameworks, phenomenological approaches to qualitative research will work as a methodological framework for examining the information- seeking experiences of adult learners.

Research Questions

My primary research question asks:

- How do adult learners’ information-seeking behaviors impact the phenomenon of applying to post-secondary institutions from the adult learner perspective?

My secondary questions ask:

- How do adult learners access and utilize information during the application and financial aid process?
- How do adult learners utilize different forms of capital (social, cultural, etc.) to navigate the application and financial aid process?

- How do adult learners respond to barriers if and when they encounter them during the application and financial process?

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The first chapter served as an introduction to the overall study, providing background about how I developed an interest in exploring adult learner experiences of navigating the college admissions process. The first chapter also shares information about the adult learner population in order to create a foundation for understanding the problem statement and research questions introduced later in the chapter. My second chapter is a literature review, a discussion of my theoretical framework and research design. It will begin with a discussion geared to helping readers understand what characteristics I use to describe adult learners in this study. This section will also discuss scholarly work concerned with issues like college choice and information-seeking and the relationship between individuals and the structures that they are embedded in. Chapter 3 will present my theoretical framework which centers on a discussion of sociocultural theories of reproduction. These theories are introduced to help interrogate how individual subjectivity and objective structures work simultaneously to influence the adult learners' level of agency during the application and financial aid process. Finally, chapter 4 will describe my research design. My use of phenomenology drives elements of the study like what questions I ask and how data is collected and analyzed. My use of phenomenology is largely influenced by Martin Heidegger's existential approach towards phenomenology. Unlike other discussions of phenomenology where the researcher can somehow overcome their bias, Heidegger encourages the researcher to acknowledge their bias and how it influences their views of the studied phenomenon. We acknowledge our bias while remaining open to moving in new directions based on our experiences in the research setting and our discovery while analyzing the data. Chapter 4 will discuss my methodology, research design, and how my position as a researcher may impact this particular study. In Chapter 5, we review findings from a full-length study of adult learners engaged in the phenomena of applying to a post-secondary program. We use participant interviews to explore information seeking for participants completing college and financial aid applications. This section is followed by Chapter 6 which works to link key findings to an existing scholarship to enable discussion centered on the phenomenon of applying to post-secondary programs. Chapter 6 also concludes this inquiry by providing a brief review of key themes introduced throughout the study, and a structural description of information seeking among adult learners.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Viewing the Adult Learner as a Target Population

Any discussion involving adult learners must first acknowledge that the adult learner population is comprised of a number of subpopulations. “One needs to understand the diversity of adult learner characteristics, life environments, and emotional orientations” (as cited in Connell, 2011). Before beginning my own conversation surrounding adult learners, it is important we define the term “adult learner” and then discuss subpopulations of adult learners that might also be represented in this study. Students that identify as low-income, first-generation and/or as members of minority groups may appear as participants in this study based on my choices for recruitment sites.

Adult learners are often labeled as non-traditional. A number of researchers have attempted to attach specific characteristics to this label in order to develop a foundation for conducting research on adult learners. Many educators define adult learners as those “who have assumed the social and culturally-defined roles characteristic of adulthood and who perceive themselves to be adult” but acknowledge that age often serves as a default marker (Connell, 2011). When other factors are difficult to discern, adult “learners who have achieved an age, such as 25, […are] regarded as [an] adult irrelevant of social circumstances” (Connell, 2011). While age serves a clear maker, it can often obscure more nuanced understanding of the adult learner population. Other studies that focus on adult learners use the term non-traditional in place of adult learner in order to draw attention to characteristics connected to the adult learners’ social roles and experiences.

For example, a 2002 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics included a special analysis of nontraditional learners in their publication “The Condition of Education”. In the initial discussion of nontraditional learners, the authors debate the use of age as a marker for identifying non-traditional students. Despite acknowledging that age is commonly used amongst researchers as a means of defining nontraditional learners, the 2002 study chose to omit this descriptor (Choy, 2002). The analyses’ expanded the description of nontraditional learners to instead include students that can claim one or more of seven characteristics. These characteristics include: delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, full-time employment, status as financially independent based on financial aid standards, caring for dependents, considered a single parent or lacking a high school diploma (Choy, 2002). Based on the number of characteristics that served to describe individual students, those labeled as nontraditional were also sorted into three additional groups. Students with one characteristic received the label “minimally nontraditional”, students with two or three characteristics were labeled “moderately nontraditional” and those with four or more were considered “highly nontraditional” (Choy, 2002). The decision to exclude age as a criterion and instead rely on a list of descriptors allowed students aged under 25 to be considered nontraditional based on societal roles. This resulted in the claim that “73 percent of all undergraduates were in some way nontraditional” (Choy, 2002). Focusing on characteristics instead of age helps researchers develop a window into the lives of students, giving them the ability to understand the individual beyond their role as a student. Nonetheless, this method of defining adult learners “casts the nontraditional net too broadly, [creating] redundancy across categories, and [resulting in] a less meaningful research construct” (Hoyt, Howell, Touchet, Young & Wygant, 2010).

Researchers must recognize that the definitions and criterion used to define the population of adult learners within a study also work to shape key elements of the study. In this study, I use age as a primary maker (25 and older), but also rely on the characteristics used to describe “moderately” and “highly traditional” adult learners. Identifying adult learners with this approach uses age as an initial marker, but then stresses the need to move beyond age and consider how adult learners’ experiences are impacted by complex social roles, personal experience, and other identity markers. Choy’s labels are also valuable for understanding the differences we might see between young adults (18-24) and adults over the age of 25. A number of the characteristics assigned to moderately and highly traditional learners are more likely ascribed to older students. For example, the likelihood of holding a full-time job or being considered financial independent according to financial aid standards increases with age. Students aged 25 years or older will likely be categorized as moderately non-traditional based on these two criterions alone. In addition, my choice to recruit a portion of my students through two Educational Opportunity Centers resulted in several adult learners in my study having added markers of being categorized as low-income and or first generation adult learners. Finally, based on demographic factors within recruitment zones, there is a strong possibility that many participants might also identify as belonging to a racially or ethnically underrepresented group. Census data from 2010, from one of my recruitment sites, reports that the majority of residents are black or African American with 64.5 residents identifying as black, 13.8 identifying as Hispanic or Latinx. In comparison, the other recruitment site is associated with a public university located in the northeastern part of the country. Student data from this university has smaller numbers of minority students, with 65.1 % of students identifying as white and 18 % belonging to an underrepresented population (Forbes, 2017). The diversity represented among study participants will serve to highlight what experiences are attributed to their status as adult learners, and what experiences emerge from differences within groups. For example, will themes related to information usage or access be the same among adult learners regardless of the participant's sociocultural background?

Non-traditional and Underrepresented

In addition to being characterized as non-traditional, in large part because of their status as adult learners, students in this study might also identify as low-income, first-generation and or a member of underrepresented group (non-white). For these students, a second chance at post-secondary education may "have been hindered by both their past and present educational, social or cultural circumstances" (Hyland-Russell & Groen, 2011).

Adult Learners in Higher Education

Other researchers narrow their focus to adult learners as a group, placing demographic factors like race and ethnicity in the background. Studies examining adult learner populations have argued that the "university has attempted to maintain its historic ethos to serve the young, residential undergraduate" refusing to "acknowledge [its] xenophobic culture and customs" and in turn impacting the adult learners' ability to engage with the campus community (Kasworm, 2010). As discussed in previous sections, being asked to navigate an environment that designed to serve other student populations often results in poor ecological fit (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009). In a 2009 study of adult learners conducted by Kasworm, there is a focus in understanding how adult learners "negotiate their undergraduate student identity" Kasworm asks about the "socially and culturally mediated experiences of adult learners (Kasworm, 2010). The study found that "adult students believed they were often viewed as not part of the dominant culture, as being other within their research university culture. Therefore, they presumed that they needed to prove themselves as worthy, as meeting the entry standards of this selective academic environment" (Kasworm, 2010). These studies suggest that adult learner identity may predispose adult students to experience the collegiate environment in a different manner from traditionally aged counterparts. Furthermore, the juxtaposition between adult learner identity and campus environment is likely manifested throughout the admission process through recruitment materials, during campus visits etc. During the Kasworm study, "students reported problematic situations with admissions and advisement staff; experiences of youth-oriented university catalogs and Web sites; and policies, procedures, and curricular scheduling "(Kasworm, 2010). The study includes a number of counter-narratives about adult learner experiences of applying to school.

Adult Learners, Technology, and the Admissions Process

As the number of adult learners is projected to increase, post-secondary institutions will need to respond to this shifting student demographic. One of the first points of contact between adult learners and the institution happens during the admissions process. If students encounter any difficulties during this initial contact, they may be dissuaded from applying altogether. Today, the admissions process is generally managed using fully online systems (Gifford, Mianzo & Briceño-Perriot, 2005; Korbin & Edwards, 2013). A recent study reports that "in 2011, 97 percent of colleges reported integrating social media into their online recruitment offerings"; in addition, the "percentage of applications received online increased steadily, from 57 percent in 2002 to 85 percent in 2011" (as cited in Korbin & Edwards, 2013). This data supports the idea that information communications technologies (ICT) like the personal computer and internet access have become integral tools for applying to school and finding information about the admissions process. Using online systems to manage the submission and processing of college applications simplifies administrative processes, but to “achieve the efficiencies […] of online application, they must be created in a manner students can understand and use effectively” (Gifford, Mianzo & Briceño-Perriot, 2005).

Accepting an offer of admission is generally a long-term contract between the student and institution. The institution, in turn, should attempt to impart an impression that they support and care about students during the admissions process. In order to better understand how an admissions system can impact a student’s ability to successfully navigate the online application, the institution should access the body of “research related to […] student characteristics that may affect the comfort level students have with the use of technology” (Gifford, Mianzo & Briceño-Perriot, 2005). For example, research about the ‘technology gender gap” conducted on high school-aged students “found that females tend to defer to males when dealing with computer issues (Gifford, Mianzo & Briceño-Perriot, 2005). Though institutions should refrain from characterizing female students’ use of technology as deficient in comparison to their male counterparts, the data still suggest a need to assess how uses of technology might vary among groups based on demographic categorizations. An institution that can successfully make student learners feel supported during the admissions process is more likely to recruit the student.

There is an ongoing debate about whether or not patterns of information and communications technology (ICT) use differ between traditionally aged students and adult learners (Prensky, 2001; Guo, Dobson & Petrina, 2008). In research focused on the age-based use of ICTs, the term “digital native” is applied to younger generations who grew up in a world dominated by technology use, while the term “digital immigrant” is used to identify “those not born in the digital world” (Prensky, 2001). Though many researchers argue that it is dangerous to label adult learners as unskilled users of technology, it may prove valuable to investigate if use varies between each group (VanSlyke, 2003; Guo, Dobson & Petrina, 2008). For example, in Marc Prensky's discussions about digital immigrants and natives, he states that observations of adult learners might “reveal their non-native status through a ‘Digital Immigrant accent’” (as cited in VanSlyke, 2003). The accent “manifests itself in a number of ways— [like] printing out a digital document to edit it rather than editing it online” (as cited in VanSlyke, 2003).

While a number of studies have examined questions around access to higher education and the impact of technology in educational settings “much of the research examining the question of ‘access’ to higher education is concentrated on the relatively narrow time horizon immediately after high school graduation” (Seftor & Turner, 2002). This includes the body of research specifically related to the shift from paper to online college and financial aid applications. Past studies have explored college and financial aid application experiences for traditionally aged low-income, minority and or first-generation students (Tierney & Venegas, 2009; Venegas, 2006; Perna, 2007). Studies continue to focus on traditionally aged students despite the well-documented increase in the number of adult learners returning to school (NCES, 2012). Additional studies investigating how the transition to online applications has impacted graduate student enrollment have focused on the level of access to technology based on race and ethnicity (Poock & Berryhill, 2000). In order to serve adult learners, it is important to identify what factors impact their access to information and support during the admissions process. It is also important to examine if their experiences of applying to school vary in comparison to their traditionally aged counterparts. In general, students applying to school must often manage applying to a number of schools while completing the equally complex task of navigating the financial aid system. While post-secondary institutions and governmental agencies view Internet-based applications as tools used to streamline the process of applying to school, "institutions [still] need to consider issues of access to technology, as well as differences in student characteristics that may affect how prospective students respond to a more technology-based admission process" (Gifford, Briceño-Perriott & Mianzo, 2005). Due to their age, occupations or complex social roles, adult learners likely experience applying to college in ways that differ from their traditionally aged counterparts. Though current literature focuses on younger students, it allows educational researchers to make an educated guess that adult learners also experience challenges when applying to school.

My own experiences in supporting adult learners showcase relationships between individual adult learners, the admissions staff, and the adult learner population as a group. After spending several years in advising position within higher education, I have observed adult learners in various stages of applying to and returning school. These observations also suggest that the adult learner experiences of applying to school are a complex system of resources characterized by the adult learners' identity and their ability to utilize information resources. By distilling the adult learner experience of finding and utilizing admissions related resources to its most basic components, we can begin to identify what kind of behaviors dominant information-seeking within this population (adult learners). Once we can document the key components of this experience, future work can focus on understanding and improving the overall process of applying to school for adult learners.

There is a clear gap in research about the information-seeking behaviors of adult learners applying to college. Researchers in the field of higher education are beginning to realize the need for targeted research focused on supporting the adult learner. Much of the research concerning financial aid calls for a need to "improve information on financial aid and college cost [by] develop[ing] age appropriate, tailored information [including] addressing the specific needs of parents and independent students [adult learners]" (Stone, 2005). The financial aid process is characterized as exceedingly complex, and increasing access to information as well as tailoring information to match distinct prospective student populations are viewed as a primary method for simplifying the process (Stone, 2005; Dougherty & Woodland, 2009). The discussion of financial aid serves as one of the few areas in higher education that has attempted to explore key differences in the adult learner information-seeking experience versus information-seeking for traditionally aged students.

For example, in a study describing sources of financial support for adult learners, we can identify several resources that adult students utilize to finance education that are unique to this particular population. Adult learners finance school through "employee tuition reimbursement programs […] benefits for Service Members, Veterans, and their families; state support of adult learners; IRS tuition tax credits; and institutional and foundation support of adult learners" (Dougherty & Woodland, 2009). These sources of financial support also represent possible sources of information, established through social networks embedded in each program and within the actual information carriers (websites or promotional materials discussing various financial options). In addition to showcasing possible information sources financial aid studies centered on the adult learner population highlight trends in adult learner uses of financial aid. Researchers “found that independent students were less likely to apply for financial aid, to receive state aid, and to receive federal loans. However, independent students who did receive Federal loans borrowed more on average than other students” (Dougherty & Woodland, 2009). Though researchers do not explicitly describe the relationship between access to information and decision-making actions based on available information, this data suggests that adult learners are making the decision not to apply for financial aid or use costly loans because they are in some way misinformed about the federal financial aid process. In addition to revealing possible barriers to receiving to optimal financial aid packages, these studies also discuss how adult learners’ status as independent, as defined by financial aid criteria, can unfairly limit their access to financial aid. Independent students include students aged “24 years of age or older [that are] married, responsible for half or more of the support of at least one dependent, an orphan or ward of the court, or a veteran of or actively serving in the United States Armed Forces in a non-training capacity (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In many cases, adult learners are labeled as independent and this categorization leads to “unjust allocations of resources” by increasing the adult learners out of pocket contribution (Smith, Baum & McPherson, 2008). In one example, from a study about the influence of independence and age on financial aid, we can see how independent status can negatively impact a student that in reality should qualify for financial aid. In the discussed example, Mark, a student labeled as independent according to federal standards, is denied grant-based financial aid because the financial aid system fails to account for his annual financial expenses. Rather than basing Mark’s financial aid decision on the amount of disposable income he has left after expenses, the financial aid system considers his entire earned income before expenses. As result of this flawed approach to calculating Mark's real financial need the "resulting aid allocation thus rides the conservative reading […leaving] his financial aid […] too low, Mark is forced to make the very choices that the financial aid system is designed to prevent" (Smith, Baum & McPherson, 2008). Mark must decide between quitting his job to maximize his financial aid allotment or keeping his job which results in a higher out of pocket contribution (Smith, Baum & McPherson, 2008).

Research about the information-seeking experiences of adult learners applying to school is limited. Nonetheless, studies concerning the adult learners' ability to access information about financial aid and use the corresponding information to maximize aid amount can help create a foundation for understanding the overall adult learner admissions experience. These studies show that discussions about the role of social networks or the role demographic background are key factors in facilitating access to financial aid. They also reflect the influence of capital on the admissions process and how background characteristics influence information-seeking. The concept of "capital" and detailed discussions about information-seeking will be discussed throughout this larger discussion of the adult learners' information-seeking experience of applying to post-secondary institutions.

Extrapolating from the Traditional Student Population

Existing studies, aimed at investigating the college application process conduct research from the perspective of traditionally aged students, can help create a foundation for studying this phenomenon from the adult learner perspective. ICTs are used throughout the application process to facilitate communication between students and staff, the retrieval of up-to-date information about the institution and financial aid, as well as tracking admissions status and confirming or denying acceptance offers (Poock & Berryhill, 2000; Tierney, 2009; Korbin & Edwards, 2013; Venegas, 2006). Researchers also highlight the complexity of the application process, reminding readers that students are not only required to interact with one party or organization but several. Applying to college involves communicating with family members and interacting with admissions and financial aid representatives from several schools, all while recording and reacting to information during a condensed period of time.

In one study, the researcher, William G. Tierney documents the experience of three high school aged Latino students he mentors through the application process (Tierney, 2009). Tierney uses a narrative approach to tell the story of three Latino students he mentors throughout the application and financial aid process. He attempts to show readers that the completing the college application "is a longitudinal process that takes place over the course of senior year", and that the challenges that low-income students face during each step of the application process are increasingly "commingled and nonlinear" (Tierney, 2009). The students in Tierney's study encounter challenges despite "12 months [… and] approximately 30 hours [he spends helping] each student […] navigate the college-going process" (Tierney, 2009).

In another study conducted in 2006, researchers discuss the use of internet in high schools as tools for supporting the college application process. Researchers profile the state of California focusing on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application process. Researchers interview students during a series of focus groups where each member of the group is engaged in the admissions process. Students describe the financial aid process as a laborious and confusing process, but also explain the role that parents and other students play in encouraging them to complete their FAFSA applications. In one case, "parental concerns influenced a student to complete his online financial aid transactions from the safety of home" conveys a real sense of fear in relation to the financial aid process (Venegas, 2006). We also see examples of students influencing each other during the application process. One student explains how he/she is prompted to ask a fellow student for advice about finding accurate financial aid information about their prospective school (Venegas, 2006). The student states that "[another student] and I are both going to the same school next year […] she always knew about her financial aid and me didn't […] I asked her about it" (Venegas, 2006).

In a similar study, researchers help parents and their children, as well as older students by providing personal assistance during the college admissions process. This study includes data from students aged 15 to 30, and reports a 2% rise in enrollment for financially independent students that received help [here independent is equivalent to the term nontraditional] as well as an increased likelihood that nontraditional students would receive financial aid (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, Sanbonmatsu, 2012). Despite including a group of adult learners in this study, the focus of the study is examining how students make decisions about college attendance and paying for college, not the resources or methods used in obtaining the necessary information to make these decisions. Nonetheless, questions about how FAFSA completion is influenced by "information treatments" does highlight a need to investigate the relationship between navigating information and applying to post-secondary institutions for adult learners. It also highlights how describing the student experience of applying to a post-secondary can serve as a foundation for helping educators make the admissions process manageable for students (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, Sanbonmatsu, 2012).

Foundations of Information-Seeking

Each of the studies in the previous section describe student experiences of applying to school and seeking financial aid. These studies highlight how a student's ability to access information by drawing on available networks and information carriers can facilitate or inhibit the decision to enroll in a post-secondary program. The relationship between the student and these sources of information are an example of the relationship between humans and their environment. This relationship has been examined by many scholars from several disciplines. Information scientists examine the role that information plays in dictating human activity on both subconscious and conscious levels of experience (Cole, 2012). On one side we see scholars like George A. Miller, a forefather of information science, arguing that information seeking happens on a cognitive level (Johnson, 1997) For Miller, exposure to information is "equated with any stimuli we register or recognize in the environment around us [where] information involves the recognition of patterns in the basic matter/ energy flows around us" (as cited Johnson, 1997). Our sensory relationship to our environment is characterized by the constant flow of information between the individual and their and environment, where this information dictates all action. Other information scientists elevate information, stating that not every message received from the environment rises to the level of information. This alternative view of information is most strongly associated with Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver (Johnson, 1997; Johnson, 1996). Shannon and Weaver state that information is based on the concept of entropy (disorder). An environment with "total entropy would represent complete randomness and lack of organization in messages […] greater entropy […results in] higher levels of uncertainty, so that the more familiar a situation […] the less information it generates" (Johnson, 1996). From this perspective, information must represent something new to the individual "a measure of information is the 'surprise value' (as cited in Johnson, 1996). This view also creates the foundation for the 'information paradox'; the information paradox states that the more expertise an individual has of a particular topic, the less likely they are to encounter information that has any "real value" for guiding action (Johnson, 1996). Finally, others define information as the "number (and perhaps kind) of messages needed to overcome uncertainty" (Johnson, 1996).

Regardless of the perspective we choose, information calls on the individual to act in some capacity. Whether we are recognizing, registering or overcoming uncertainty, individuals valorize information through its use. Individuals acquire information through active and passive channels. Even when our interactions with information are passive, and acquired unintentionally, its importance is established by our ability to use it (Josefsson, 2006). Alternatively, the active search for information is characterized as an "information need", which "is the motivation people think and feel to seek information" (Cole, 2012). Models of information need, break need into four categories: "(1) the actual, visceral need, perhaps unconscious to the user, (2) the conscious, within brain description of the need, (3) the formalized need; a rational statement of the need, (4) the comprised need in language/ syntax the user believes is required by the information system" (Cole, 2012). Establishing an information need is viewed as a primary component of the information-seeking process.

Information-seeking describes the purposive search for information" (Johnson, 1999; Cole, 2012: Johnson, Case, Andrews, Allard & Johnson, 2006)

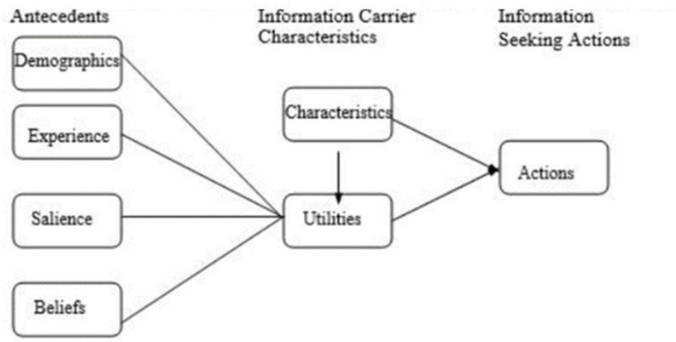
Overview of Information-seeking

Information-seeking is broadly defined as the "purposive acquisition of information", but the concept is better understood through a part-to-whole analysis. At its most basic level, information is comprised of one or more messages; messages are information carriers that serve as the building blocks for all other carriers (Johnson, 1996). Scholars identify three types of information carriers: individual messages, information channels and information sources (Johnson, 1999; Cole 2012; Johnson et al, 2006). In a real-world example, a person researching law schools might use U.S. News as their source, the channel could be either the print or web version of the rankings list, and the message might be that Yale University was ranked the number one law school for 2017.

Information-seeking is triggered by a motivation to fill an information gap focusing on a particular interest or topic (Johnson, 1999; Dutta-Bergman, 2006). David Johnson, a scholar well-known for his research about information-seeking in healthcare, encourages scholarship that refocuses study in this area to patients and away from healthcare providers. Johnson writes that past studies about communication have "focused on the senders of communication messages and how they persuade receivers who are cast as target audiences" (Johnson, 1999). Information-seeking theories work to shift communication research to the audience by first acknowledging the role of motivation, then discussing how internal and external factors work together to shape the information-seeking experience of the learner. Information-seeking also utilizes the term field to describe the sociocultural context the individual is embedded in. The field can enable or restrict an individual's ability to access information. A person's field "represents the typical arrangement of information stimuli to which an individual is regularly exposed […] resources they routinely use […and] contains resources, constraints, and carriers of information" (Johnson et al, 2006). The term field is used throughout this document and is used in research discussing both sociocultural reproduction and information-seeking. In both disciplines, field seeks to convey a "notion of structure […] social spaces … [that are] understood as differentiated and thus structural in essence" (Grenfell, 2011). In discussions about sociocultural reproduction "field" is introduced as a concept, that concept is then operationalized in a number of discussions like the literature about information-seeking. Bourdieu's use of field gives rise to a practice of using the term to describe unique social spaces. Social spaces that we naturally recognize as different. For example, the differences between the rules, practices, and structures that allow us to identify workspaces, familial spaces, and social spaces as unique when viewed in comparison to each other. When used in conjunction with other descriptors, Bourdieu's field serves as a modifier that brings "understanding and methodology to a series of field studies: for example, the academic field […] the artistic field […] the religious field [… each field is unique but] shown to be defined in terms of overarching power structures in society: class, the state, economic interests (Grenfell, 2011).

Healthcare research has provided several studies examining how people search for and use health-related information to prevent or cope with illness. In 1993, John D. Johnson and Hendricka Meischke tested a model for predicting patterns of information use among cancer

Figure 2: Johnson and Meischke's Comprehensive Model of Information-seeking (1996)



patients (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). Johnson and Meischke borrowed from several theoretical research streams to develop a comprehensive model of information-seeking (CMIS). The model was revised in 1999 and is pictured in Figure 2(Johnson, 1996).

This model illustrates an information pathway showing us how an individual moves from information need to information-seeking action. Three primary categories are used to organize variables in the model. The antecedent category includes "the imperatives that motivate someone to seek answers to questions. These factors determine an individual's natural predispositions to search for information from particular carriers" (Johnson, 1999). In other words, antecedents force us to interrogate the personal and cultural/background factors that cause an individual to privilege a particular source, channel or message in their search for information.

The CMIS views demographic and experience based features as background factors. In this model, demographic features like race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and age are examined independently and in conjunction with each other (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). Researchers also inquire about the individual's past experiences with the topic of inquiry;

researchers ask about both personal experiences and experiences of other people in the individual's social network. In addition to background factors, the CMIS also examines two personal factors: (1) salience and (2) beliefs. Salience is used to establish “the personal significance of health information to an individual” and is related to “the perceived applicability of information to a problem he or she faces” (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). Belief speaks to the individual’s ability to “perceive that there are efficacious methods of prevention and control” as expressed by the information they encounter. Belief also addresses the question “Can I do something?” (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). The belief that acquired information is effective. The overall model also has a category devoted to describing information carriers (sources, channels and/messages). The information carriers’ category examines two variables: (1) characteristics and (2) utility. Characteristics are used to focus on attributes of the information carrier like “editorial tone [… which relates to] an audience member’s perception of the credibility and perceptions of [the medium…] and utility focuses on communication potential […which refers] to issue of style and comprehension” from the individual patient’s perspective (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). Finally, the last category describes what actions the individual takes while seeking information. Does the individual search the internet? Do they read a book? Do they discontinue their search altogether? Even though the CMIS was used to predict information-seeking behavior related to preventative and prospective health information, the overall categories and secondary variables investigated are broad enough that they can serve to examine information-seeking in other fields.

Information-seeking is Purpose Driven

The CMIS synthesized theory from three areas of research in order to produce a new theoretical model that could be used to predict information-seeking behaviors among individuals looking for health-related information (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). People engaged in the “purposive acquisition of information from selected information carriers” are engaged in an active search for information (Johnson et al, 2006). Researchers acknowledge the importance of passive attention or passive search avenues of information exposure but recognize key differences between passive and active sources of information. Passive attention describes a situation when someone is accidentally exposed to useful information. While passive search, different from passive attention, is when an individual finds useful information during the course of another search (Josefsson, 2006). Active searches differ from passive attention and are triggered by information need and viewed as intentional goal-oriented activities (Johnson, 1996). People engage in information-seeking activities “to accomplish a particular goal [that they have] in mind. Individuals determine the value of the information acquired in relation to the particular goal [making] information-seeking a […] receiver oriented construct” (Johnson, 1996). Information is acquired from our environment and shaped or reshaped to fulfill individual information-seeking goals. The CMIS focuses on variables that highlight both the internal and external elements of information need in a manner that challenges classic divisions. In any case, information need begins with a view of information-seeking as stemming from a problem situation; information-seeking is triggered by a problem or problematic situation (Cole, 2012). One perspective asserts that the problem situation “starts when the human cognitive system is surprised or receives unexpected information from the environment” (Cole, 2012). In this ‘it’s all in the mind” view, the need for information does not begin until the individual makes the decision to pursue it. The alternative view asserts that mental recognition of the problem means that “feeling and emotions [operate as] the first sensory alarm bell” that information need is stimulated by “something that occurs on the outside, in either the physical or social environment” of the individual (Cole, 2012). The CMIS models use of background variables (demographics and experience) as well as personal variables (salience and beliefs) reflect information-seeking as a mixture of both subjective and objective influences.

Internet and the Consumer Movement

While information-seeking can take place without technology, information communication technologies (ICTs) like the internet, computers, and Internet-enabled mobile devices have had a significant impact on how we as individuals find and use information. In healthcare, the internet “represents a huge potential for [allowing] citizens to participate and collaborate with medical professionals” in maintaining their own health (Sirigatti, 2006). This information channel empowers citizens but also exposes them to risk. The research exploring the threats posed by the internet view the “most evident threats […] to be lack of control over online content, low reliability, and poor validity of medical information” (Sirigatti, 2006).

In addition, to being heavily influenced by a technological revolution, changes in the client-consumer relationship have also influenced information-seeking behaviors among non-professionals. Client-consumer movements state that “consumers [have the] freedom to choose, to be informed, and to be heard” but they also shift much of the “responsibility for health-related matters […] to the individual” (Johnson, 1997). The rise of the consumer movement coupled with an increasing reliance on ICTs makes several assumptions about the consumer. We assume that today's consumer is knowledgeable enough to understand a wide range of complex issues and assess the credibility of various information channels (Dutta-Bergman, 2006; Johnson, 1999; Seidman, 2006). Rather than make assumptions about individuals and their information-seeking behaviors, we need to "challenge techno-deterministic conceptualizations of a monolithic experience of a medium" instead of working to "accentuate the diversity of media experiences" (Dutta-Bergman, 2006).

Lessons from the field of Medicine

Several studies in healthcare research have used the CMIS model to investigate how people seek information the real world. In 2006, Johnson and Meischke conducted a study with several other researchers to examine how an individual's information fields and pathways work together to drive information-seeking behavior. The information field is in general described as the "typical or stable" set of information sources that an individual is regularly exposed to (Johnson et al., 2006). Pathways are described as the "dynamic and active" pursuit of information and "overtime in response sequences [that occur as the] direct result of individual choice […pathways are] a response to what an individual has uncovered" during each step of the search" (Johnson et al., 2006). This study asked participants to answer questions about information-seeking around the topic of cancer. It identified data about participant's preferences when choosing sources and how these sources combine to form information pathways then clusters. This study revealed a relationship between clusters and level of information among individuals. For example, respondents grouped into "Cluster 1" relied on the library as their primary source of information in combination with the Internet or a doctor. These respondents tended to be young and wealthy (Johnson et al., 2006). The study includes three other clusters, and each one highlights how examining the types of information sources present in an individual's field or actively sought out during an information-seeking experience, can help researchers identify how demographic factors impact information-seeking. Who we are, says a lot about how we search.

In another study, researchers sought to explore health-related information-seeking behaviors in adults aged 55-70 years old (Manafo & Wong, 2012). Participants were interviewed and the interviews were recorded to facilitate data analysis. Researchers then analyzed transcripts in order to identify themes present in the adults' information-seeking experiences. Three themes were identified, they included: (1) Information-seeking behaviors as enabling, as disabling, and as a method for enhancing adult perceptions of control (Manafo & Wang, 2012). The study also examined the role of the internet on information-seeking in a real word context without making an assumption that adults would have difficulty accessing health-related information but instead working to simply provide a window to their experiences. Adults had to deal with "sifting through large quantities of information as well as deciphering the quality of the information sought" (Manafo & Wang, 2012). Some adults were successful while others described online health and nutrition information as "mind-boggling" or as causing "information overload" (Manafo & Wang, 2012). Showing a range of responses to information within one relatively "homogenous" population reinforces the idea that information-seeking can be a highly individualized process. It, in turn, must be examined in a manner that acknowledges participant similarities while recognizing diversity. Borrowing from phenomenology, information-seeking must acknowledge both textural difference and structural similarity.

Finally, researchers Michael Laurent and Tim Vickers conducted a study to examine the "significance of Wikipedia as a source of online health information" (Laurent & Vickers. 2009). Wikipedia is an online collaborative encyclopedia that is included as a top result for most internet searches. The researchers identified the most searched health topics according to the time of year and used these topics as a frame to analyze what people were searching for and how often Wikipedia was used in comparison to other sources of information. The study found that Wikipedia "ranked among the first ten results in 71-85% of search engines and keywords tested. Wikipedia surpassed MedlinePlus and NHS Direct Online" in a number of searches (Laurent & Vickers. 2009).

Information-seeking in Education: College Choice

The CMIS not only devotes an entire category to information carriers but also asks us to consider the relationship between the individual's sociocultural field and decisions about what source, channel or message they chose to facilitate their information-seeking actions/ behavior. This study can provide some insight for developing question frames or approaches for examining information carriers within a larger study about information-seeking behaviors within a population.

The CMIS was developed in an effort to describe and understand the information-seeking behaviors of patients or individuals searching for health-related information. Despite being created as a tool to investigate health based information-seeking, the CMIS model could be used more broadly to examine information-seeking in other areas. The antecedents (demographic, direct experience, salience, and belief) and other categories focused on information carriers (characteristics and utility) and information-seeking actions are not unique to the health field. Like patients navigating health care, the information-seeking behaviors of students navigating the educational field are influenced by a variety of internal and external factors.

The literature around college choice provides some insight into the student experience of searching for information as part of the college choice process. Making a decision about enrolling in a postsecondary program and deciding what school/program to apply is a complex process. This process is often characterized by “constantly changing personal and environmental factors lead to continuously revised personal choices, circular patterns of attendance, and attending multiple institutions either simultaneously or serially” (Southerland, 2006). The decision to attend school is in many ways just as important as making decisions related to an individual’s health, and in turn requires individuals to be informed about a range of issues ranging from financial aid to information about one or more post-secondary institutions (Stone, 2005).

Researchers in the area of college choice describe how students move from the decision to attend a post-secondary institution to choosing a school, applying and ultimately picking a school to attend. Researchers Don Hossler and Karen Gallagher are often cited for their work in developing a three-step model of student college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The first stage called the “predisposition phase” is when high school students decide if they would like to continue their education by applying to a college or university. During the second phase, students gather information about institutions and other college/university-related data. In the third phase is when students decide on what school to attend (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). During the predisposition phase, background characteristics are viewed as an important factor in predicting or explaining a student's decision to attend or not attend college. Factors like socioeconomic statistics or parental involvement are evaluated (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Though a strong importance is placed on background factors at the predisposition phase, these influences are summarized as "student preliminary college values during the search phase" (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Unlike the CMIS, information-seeking is no longer the primary research focus; in turn, background factors have minimized importance during the search phase. If we look below, we can see that phase one ends with "college search" as an outcome and phase two's antecedent is an attempt to summarize the information from phase one. Phase two also tries to capture the institution's role in searching for qualified candidates with the label "college and university search activities" stating that "at the same time students are searching for institutions, institutions are searching for students" (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

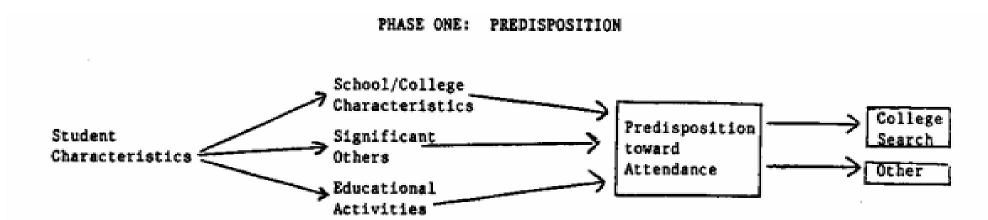


Figure 2.1: Stage 1 of Hossler & Gallagher's college choice model- predisposition phase

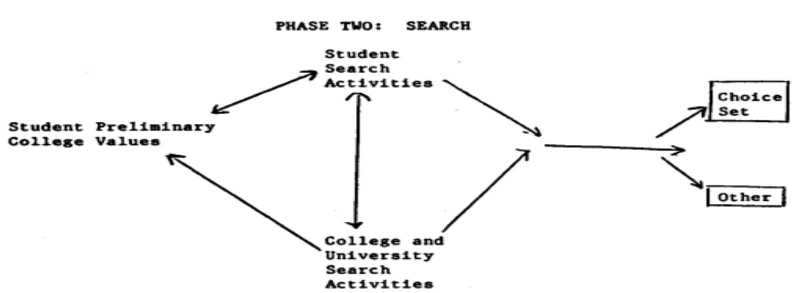


Figure 2.3: Stage 2 of Hossler & Gallagher's college choice model- search

In the third phase, students must make a decision about what school to attend. This phase is characterized by its interactive nature because this is the time students must actually retrieve and complete applications and consider financial aid options (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Other studies about college choice have taken Hossler & Gallagher's model and applied it to research about college choice for African American communities, immigrants, and women (Davis, Nagle, Richards & Awokoya, 2013; Nienhüser, Vega & Carquin 2015; Bergerson, Heiselt & Aiken-Wisniewski). These studies ask scholars to evaluate the relationship between background influences and the information-seeking that takes place during the college choice model. Each study argues that the college choice model's failure to acknowledge a wider range of demographic factors makes it difficult to use to model in understanding and evaluating the college choice process in diverse groups. For example, the Davis, Nagle, Richards and Awokoya study places financing higher education at the center of the predisposition phase for high achieving, low-income African American students. This study argues that the college choice model has to move beyond socioeconomic status as a factor in the predisposition phase and include a targeted conversation about access to financial aid for this population of African American student. (Davis, Nagle, Richards & Awokoya, 2013). In the Bergerson, Heiselt, and Aiken-Wisniewski the researchers retain parent involvement as a key factor in the predisposition phase but deviate from the Hossler and Gallagher model by introducing family culture and community culture as additional points of consideration. The study examines college choice from the perspective of female students and finds that aspects like "family culture, or habitus […] is emphasized both in talk and action" along with "the type of community […] women were raised in interacted with family cultures and parental involvement to shape women's ideas about higher education" (Bergerson, Heiselt & Aiken-Wisniewski, 2013). Finally, in their study of college choice among undocumented students, Nienhüser, Vega & Carquin seek out to determine how factors like "discriminatory public policies, limited availability of information and insensitive college choice processes, and fear of immigration status disclosure" impact decisions about the college (Nienhüser, Vega & Carquin, 2015). The researchers identify nine themes, that they describe as microaggressions that undocumented students experience during the college choice process. The findings lead to a conclusion that institutions of higher education "need to eliminate discriminatory postsecondary education policies that shape the educational journeys of undocumented students […and] challenge education institutional agents to create environments and processes […their] college access needs" (Nienhüser, Vega & Carquin, 2015). Each study pushes scholars to expand existing college choice models to accommodate students from different backgrounds.

In another study about college choice, researchers attempt to address the lack of research focused on the search phase of the college choice model. The study states its primary purpose of "describing […] students engaged in the search phase in order to gain increased awareness and comprehension of this understudied phase" (Shaw, Korbin, Packman & Schmidt, 2009). Furthermore, this study focuses on college by examining the relationship between background factors like parent's educational attainment, income level, gender, minority status and a number of other interpersonal/ personal characteristics. This study attempts to address a gap in college choice literature and has more points of comparison to the CMIS.

Furthermore, researchers recognize that an increasingly diverse student body requires changes in how institutions support prospective student populations. Researchers assert that institutions will have to “identify and describe […] unique clusters of college applicants in order to guide their academic preparation for college success as well as to rethink college recruitment and admissions policies” (Shaw, Korbin, Packman & Schmidt, 2009). The study also makes brief mention of nontraditional and adult learners as members of the changing student population. Despite mentioning adult learners, the study still focuses on high school aged students as the focus of their research. This omission creates a need to study the search phase from the adult learner perspective.

The areas of scholarship discussed in this brief literature review attempt to reinforce the need to investigate adult learner experiences at each stage of the admissions process. The first few sections help readers understand what characteristics help identify the adult learner as a unique population within the higher education landscape. Characteristics like delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, and full-time employment are often used to differentiate adult learners from their traditionally aged counterparts. This chapter use enrollment data for both adult learners and traditionally aged to better understand how changing student demographic may impact higher education. Additional articles about the admissions process for other student populations were also discussed to highlight the importance of engaging in similar studies for non-traditional or adult learners. Past studies have explored college and financial aid application experiences for traditionally aged low-income, minority and or first-generation students (Tierney & Venegas, 2009; Venegas, 2006; Perna, 2007).

The literature review also introduces the Comprehensive Model of Information Seeking and the College Choice Model to create a foundation for larger discussions about how individuals seek and utilize information during the college admissions process (Johnson & Meischke, 1993; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

While each study examines the admission process from a slightly different angle, they each demonstrate the influence of familial or community networks as a resource for applying to school. Researchers, parents and other students encourage or provide assistance to students applying to school. We see parents reminding students to complete financial aid forms, fellow students teaching each other how to review their financial aid status or researchers serving an advisor-like role to help navigate the application and admissions process. Students are part of a larger community where "environmental impacts matter […] the impact of family or home environments, peer environments […] make it possible to see how these environments might come together to influence access to resources and information" during the admissions process" (Venegas, 2006). Students make the decision to act, to apply and ultimately enroll, but their ability to do so is mediated by their relationships. How do these relationships work to give them access to pertinent information? How are finances shaped by personal histories? These real-world examples also highlight the relationship between the student's individualized or "subjective hopes and aspirations" and "their objective chances of fulfillment" (Jenkins, 1982).

Tierney's' study of three Latino males' experiences applying to school, two of the males' status as immigrants limit their access to federal sources of financial aid (Tierney, 2009). Though both boys have a desire to attend school, we see how the complex relationships between subjective and objective forces work to inhibit or facilitate their dreams of going to school. Each student expresses a "subjective hope" of going to college, but this hope is largely impacted by their personal histories; personal histories are characterized by both subjective and objective forces, and social structures governing citizenship either enable or prevent "objective chances" of [fulfilling] their dream of attending college.

Critical Race Theory: Adult Learners from Minoritized Groups

Critical Race theories may provide another lens to explore how social or cultural factors intervene and impact academic achievement. In general, critical race theory "was developed to examine the persistence of racism" by focusing on the relationship between "race, racism, and power" (Closson 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). A critical race perspective in education provides "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses. [It] is conceived as a social justice project that works toward the liberatory potential of schooling" (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015).

In my experiences as an employee at UM-EOC, many of our students view education as an avenue for overcoming personal or professional roadblocks. Many of the students have the potential to succeed, but lack access to information or funding for school; these barriers are exacerbated by a mixture of social and cultural issues. Students utilizing TRIO services like those offered at the UM-EOC view these programs as a second chance to attend school. Nonetheless, their need to utilize these services should also serve a warning sign that something in the secondary school experience was broken, something that prevented these students from following a more traditional course into post-secondary education.

In addition, the number of underrepresented students that utilize these programs suggests that critical race theories can help understand how demographic markers like race, ethnicity, and income might also work to impede educational attainment for these students. Within the larger body of critical race theory, a number of studies examine the relationship between race, gender, class and the educational system. These studies highlight the differences between educational attainments for minority students when compared to their White or Caucasian counterparts; these studies also attempt to understand or explain how race impacts education. For example, in a study using critical race theory to examine the racial climate for Latina and Latino undergraduate students, researchers discuss a "campus climate wherein Whites enjoy a sense of entitlement, while Students of Color face charges of being unqualified and 'out of place'" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009). Researchers explain that "historically underrepresented groups such as Latinas/os [must] learn to critically navigate this bittersweet reality, drawing on cultural and knowledge and skills gained in overcoming earlier structural barriers to education" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009). The study describes a series of structural barriers that begin as early as kindergarten and compound over time; limiting the number of students that ultimately continue on to post-secondary programs. Minority students that are able to apply and enroll in post-secondary programs are often entering a predominantly white institution; researchers in this study investigated how Latinx students react to racial microaggressions. They identify three types of microaggressions that student's face and explore the effects these microaggressions have on Latinx students. Researchers in this study note that the transition for White students to an academic institution ends with them being incorporated into their new environment, an environment where "their cultural resources remain intact and their ecological fit is almost guaranteed" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009). Latinx students, on the other hand, must "constantly navigate between multiple worlds […and] rarely enjoy the same ecological fit" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009). The interviewed Latinx students face a number of barriers that begin as early as their primary schooling; when these issues persist we can draw assumptions about how they might lead to delayed enrollment in post-secondary programs or lower rates of retention. TRIO programs like the UM-EOC become a resource for students that are unable to succeed through expected channels.

In addition to serving as a lens in specific studies of minority groups, using critical race theory as a lens for examining the educational system has also produced new theories and ideas for understanding the relationship between education and race. Two of these ideas provide new perspectives for examining barriers to enrollment for minority students. The first explains how socially constructed perceptions of “whiteness” and “blackness” work to alienate minority students throughout their schooling. Critical race theorists describe how” contemporary examples of Whiteness include ‘school achievement, middle-classness, and intelligence,’ whereas examples of Blackness include ‘gangs, welfare recipients, and basketball players’ […this positions] Whiteness […] as the normative, everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition” (as cited in McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, pg. 19). These stereotypes limit visible educational horizons for minority students and creating “dispositional or psychological barriers […these] barriers to learning, psychological barriers such as fear, low self-esteem, and negative attitudes toward education [which] are the most resistant to change” (Hyland-Russell & Groen, 2011). Once again, the social structures normalize conceptions of race that empower one group while discouraging minority groups from pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities.

Another concept that critical race theory introduces is the view of “whiteness as property” whiteness becomes something that can be “bartered and exchanged for other forms of property and capital [including] access to high-paying careers, better neighborhoods […and] higher quality schools" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). This discussion also extends to curriculum development "curriculum [in] higher education is [also] considered a form of 'Whiteness as property' because it focuses on "White, western perspectives and its acquisition may offer real tangible benefits in the form of capital to the individual" (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015). This concept raises questions about what type of capital or networks minority students can access and rely on. In my study, critical race theory not only helps me interrogate whether or not race influences the participant's self-concept as they pursue admission but also if these forces impact college choice by limiting cultural or social capital. Discussions of capital are naturally underscored by the interplay between individual agency (subjective) and structural force (objective) (Sterne, 2003). Critical race theory adds another layer to the relationship between individual agency and structure by asking scholars to consider this relationship through the lens of identity. Critical Race Theory stresses the reality that "considerations of identity or agency cannot be understood without analysis of the effects of structural factors of class, race, gender, economic, and occupational conditions […] agency cannot be divorced from structural factors" and identity cannot be divorced from agency (Ecclestone, 2007). Again, critical race theory provides "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race (identity marker) and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015).

Finally, critical race scholars have worked to create spaces that privilege minority perspectives and experiences through counter-storytelling. These stories are used to "recognize People of Color's lived experiences […] as valued, legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in education" (as cited in McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). By investigating the admissions process from the perspective of an adult learner that might also identify as belonging to a minority group, we focus on a population that is in large part absent from the literature involving college-choice and admissions in higher education. This study attempts to provide a counter-narrative about the admissions process for adult learners.

Sociocultural Reproduction: How Capital Function in Educational Contexts

The studies by Venegas and Tierney, respectively, begin to illustrate how theories about social reproduction and discussions about the use of various types of capital can serve as lenses for analyzing real examples of students engaged in the admissions process (Taylor, Trumpower & Pavic, 2012; Portes, 1998). In his discussion, Tierney writes that "a great deal of preparation takes place that enables middle- and upper-class students to apply to college […] by the time the adolescent applies to college he or she is equipped with the cultural and social capital to attend a post-secondary institution" (Tierney, 2009). He draws these conclusions after conducting a year-long quantitative study of three 17- year old Latino males applying to school, in his study he explores how differences in the cultural, social and economic background create different circumstances for his target population. For Venegas' students, we see that "most low-income students lack the support structures and networks that enable them to plan about college in a manner akin to their well-off counterparts" (Tierney, 2009). Tierney interrogates how differences in social and cultural capital lead students to navigate the application/admissions process with varying levels of ease or difficulty.

These experiences also demonstrate theories about social capital as a resource for individuals. Approaches to understanding and describing capital as a resource that “exists in the relations among persons”; social capital is often discussed within the scholarly work of James Coleman (Coleman, 1988; Taylor, Trumpower & Pavic, 2012; Portes, 1998). Max Weber’s writing about lifestyles also has a place in the discussion of theories surrounding issues of cultural reproduction. Finally, Pierre Bourdieu’s theories about cultural reproduction describe education as a primary tool for maintaining existing social classes while ensuring intergenerational social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986).

For Bourdieu, educational achievement would be described as an institutionalized form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is one of three primary forms of capital discussed by Bourdieu, and it is defined as “familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated language” (Sullivan, 2001). Bourdieu views cultural capital as an inherited resource passed down from parent to child. Parents that have high levels of cultural capital are likely to expose their own children to activities that support the development of high levels of cultural capital (activities like reading classic literature or attending theatrical productions). These activities lead children to be socialized in a manner that helps them to succeed in the academic field (N. D. De Graaf, P. M. De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000). Tierney’s study of three Latino males applying to college also provides key examples illustrating the relationship between cultural capital and educational achievement. When one of the boys from the study is encouraged to work instead of attending school, readers can begin to see how the parent’s lack of education prevents them from adequately supporting their son’s own goal of attending school (Tierney, 2009). Their parents entered the workforce instead of attending college and encouraged their son to do the same. The student’s desire to attend school is challenged by social and cultural expectations common within his community. In his community, the dominant message for all three Latino students is the need to contribute to the household financially. In addition, there are institutional/structural roadblocks like the ability to access financial aid we read that one student, “Luis is ineligible for financial aid because he is undocumented and even though [he] scholarships [he applied for would cover the costs of Cal State, he ends up not getting any of them” (Tierney, 2009). Again, there is a conflict between “subjective hopes and aspirations” and “their objective chances of fulfillment” (Jenkins, 1982). Bourdieu would also highlight how the parent’s own relationship to school shapes the child’s relationship to school. This pattern works to restrict social mobility and is a clear example of the type of cultural and social reproduction discussed by Bourdieu.

Cultural capital works in concert with other forms of capital (a resource operating within a specific field or social context). In addition to cultural capital, Bourdieu describes economic and social capital as resources that can serve to enable or restrict individual action based on a person’s ability to leverage each form of capital. Social capital is described as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network […] or […] membership [to] a group” (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, economic capital is any resource that can easily be converted to or evaluated in terms of currency. Bourdieu argues that all forms of capital can be evaluated economically on some level (Bourdieu, 1986). If we take an institutionalized form of cultural capital like a degree, we can describe it in terms of its potential for helping someone get a job; a job has economic value. On the other hand, if we think about the common practice of dividing citizens into groups based on income (working, middle, and upper class), and evaluate how these groups or classes dictate relationships within communities we can see a clear example of the relationship between social and economic capital.

Bourdieu explains how capital operates within a field (the larger collection of social actors and structures). The term "field [is defined as] groups of interrelated social actors, and 'capital' used to describe the specific forms of agency and prestige within a given field" (Sterne, 2003). Within each field, we also see how habitus operates. Habitus is an individual disposition that operates between the objective (social) and subjective (individual) spheres. Habitus works as more than "a mental state [because] it is embodied in social knowledge [that…] comes through in everything [a person does]" (Sterne, 2003).n this study, I ask how different adult learners' habitus influences their information-seeking behaviors during the college application process. Though habitus is not entirely fixed it is a stable "system of learned attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors that [dictates] one's probabilities and possibilities in life (Barrett & Martina, 2012). In addition to exploring habitus, questions about how adult learners navigate resources also work to reveal information about the communities and networks (fields) they rely on to acquire information about the college application process. Within this field, capital can be described as the resources used to operate within a given field. This study questions, what resources or capital adult learners have access to in relation to the field and their habitus when seeking and utilizing information during the college application process. Using a gaming metaphor, habitus describes the player and his/or her qualities, the field describes the game along with its accompanying structures and rules, while the capital describes the resources you utilize to advance during the game. Extending this metaphor we can also see how the habitus, field, and use of capital are intimately linked. A gamer enters the game (field) with their habitus already established, but the gameplay is not pre-determined. Instead, gameplay is controlled by the network of actors in the game (field) and the degree that the player is able to use their resources or capital based on the field/game's structural elements. Furthermore, while the player enters with a set of "attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors" they may be challenged to change or about based on the field or available capital.

Coleman's discussion of capital focuses on social capital. Like Bourdieu, Coleman sees social capital as a force operating between two poles; social capital is tied to social structures and individual actions (Coleman, 1988). For Coleman, social capital assumes three types of relationships between actors within a field. These relationships demonstrate: "(a) the "level of trust [between actors], as evidenced by obligation and expectations, (b) information channels, and (c) norms and sanctions that [work] to promote the common good over self-interest" (Dika & Singh, 2002). Coleman believes social networks, especially intergenerational networks within a family are important to protect traditional values and promote social norms within communities (Dika & Singh, 2002). Coleman views social capital as a positive tool used to maintain social control and ensure that each generation has the opportunity to advance in a community "where trust, information channels and [social] norms" function appropriately (Dika & Singh, 2002). Though both Bourdieu and Coleman investigate social capital as a resource operating within the familial structure, they each view social capital as having two divergent functions within society. For Coleman social capital describes a relationship between the family and the community. Coleman argues that "non-mobile, traditional nuclear family, with a working father, stay at home mom and one or at the most two children represent the ideal structure for maximizing social capital" (Gillies & Edwards,2006).This "ideal" structure supports the development of a "collective bond" that "monitors, guides, and sanctions individual behavior" (Gillies & Edwards, 2006). Individual behaviors conform to social norms and people thrive through a symbiotic relationship between themselves and the community. Social capital is the foundation of "harmonious networks of shared values and social bonds that benefit individuals and society" (Gillies & Edwards, 2006). While Coleman's discussion suggests that capital varies according to family structure, he does not explicitly discuss how social capital influences disparities in class. Coleman's focus on social capital as a resource that can be "created and built up in communities where it is lacking" and as a commodity of sorts "that can ultimately be transformed into other forms of capital" plays down questions about power (Leonard, 2005).

In contrast, Bourdieu rejects the idea that social capital increases harmony, but rather argues that it works to "maintain and reproduce inequality" (Leonard, 2005). Furthermore, Bourdieu views social capital as valuable only to the extent that "individuals [can] convert social capital to other forms of capital, particularity economic capital" and this process of "transferring social capital […] is far from straightforward because the wider environment may inhibit individual actors to achieve such transformations" (Leonard, 2005). The relationship between the individual and society is contentious. Bourdieu does not embrace this mutually beneficial model of social capital that Coleman advances, in fact, for Bourdieu the community or larger social structure often places limitations on the individual's ability to advance within existing structures. Once an individual is born they are cast "into a designated social space that is defined by access to capitals" and operating like a highly regulated system "[capital] is also necessarily exclusory in that powerful social networks depend on mechanisms of distinction in order to preserve and reproduce privilege" (as cited in Gillies & Edwards, 2006). Bourdieu's theory focuses on how the difference in capital produces a difference in social standing, while Coleman omits any discussion about power differentials between individuals within a community.

Coleman acknowledges both the individual and the structure, but his focus on the system as one that supports mutual benefit "edits outworkings of power constitutive of social relationships […] sidestepping power dynamics [forcing the question about] how to account for differentials without talking about […]unequal distribution […] and power resources along the lines of class, race, or gender" (Tlili & Obsiye, 2014). In contrast, Bourdieu pairs discussions of social capital with discussions of power. Bourdieu explains the inequity present in society by describing how individuals use social capital to preserve existing social structures. Bourdieu explores how individuals position themselves "in social space according to access to economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital" (Gillies & Edwards, 2006). In well-positioned families, individuals can " draw on these capitals in order to cement advantage, and transmits the benefits to their children […] social capital [becomes] a resource that can be accumulated, invested in and deployed for instrumental personal advantage " (Gillies & Edwards, 2006).

My study of adult learners benefits from interrogating multiple approaches to understanding and describing how capital functions. From Bourdieu, ideas that social capital can be exchanged, individuals "use the capital they possess in order to maximize the capital which counts in a particular filed […] explicitly develop[ing] this theme of convertibility" can help identify how adult learners navigate a particular field (Peillon, 1998). In addition, to examine how adult learners respond to forces in a particular field, we can also ask what forms of capital inhibit or enable their ability to respond. My study of adult learners information-seeking behaviors, to a large extent, asks how adult learners can utilize social capital to increase access to cultural capital "which covers educational credentials" (Peillon, 1998). In addition, both Coleman and Bourdieu describe how familial relations predispose and position individuals within larger social structures. Though they differ on the degree of rigidity present within the structure both scholars agree that relationships, especially familial relationship impact access to capital and social standing. This focus on family, identity and personal experience connects strongly to my use of information-seeking models commonly used within the healthcare research. These models also question how demographic features and past experience influence how we access and utilize information to drive decision-making or action. Bourdieu and Coleman's discussion about capital, about the individual and their position within society, create a foundation for examining how an adult learner's decision to return to school, the ability to access information about post-secondary programs and financial aid, the decision to apply or enroll in a program are impacted by the relationship between the individual and his or her environment.

Furthermore, in our larger discussion about information-seeking, there is some added value in mentioning Coleman's use of "information channels" as unique forms of social capital. Coleman writes that "an important form of social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations" (Coleman, 1988). For Coleman, whether or not the individual maintains a social relationship for the purpose of obtaining information, all social relations create an information channel of some sort (Coleman, 1988). Coleman's examples of information channels also highlight how channels can prove valuable even when the actors pursue the relationship with other goals or interests motivating the connection. Coleman asks readers to think of "a person who is not greatly interested in current events but who is interested in being informed about important events […can depend] on a spouse […] who pays attention to such matters" (Coleman, 1988). Both Coleman and Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks create a foundation for examining how adult learners find and apply information during the college application and financial aid process. Cultural reproduction theories argue that life is divided into various fields. In his descriptions of "field," Pierre Bourdieu, argues that the "world is differentiated into different fields within which different forms of capital—economic, cultural and social […] being the generic forms—are differentially active and distributed among positions within that field" (Friedland, 2009).

The type of field or social context determines what type of capital is effective for achieving a particular aim or goal, but an individual's ability to leverage capital varies from field to field based on various demographic factors. An individual's ability to act within a certain field is also dependent on their habitus which Bourdieu describes as "the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world" (Peillon, 1998). Habitus as a concept straddles the subject/object divide, as a "learned set of preferences" an individual's habitus is formed through the interactions with the environment. Despite influences from the outside, the habitus is also highly subjective "it is through habitus that agents in the field respond meaningfully to how a situation develops" allowing for a "display [of] autonomy and flexibility [… allowing individuals to] steer a course between alternatives" (Peillon, 1998).

The concepts of habitus and field are inextricably linked. Individuals are conditioned to "act and think in accordance with the social context without those ideas, beliefs, and practices being fully determined by social structure [… through] habitus, people's experiences become embodied, and through these experiences they develop a 'feel for the game', learning the rules that become second nature " (Collyer, Willis, Franklin, Harley & Short 2015). Individuals are bound to a number of fields and their access to capital, their ability to exchange or utilize capital often varies in relation to the field or social space that they occupy. Bourdieu establishes four categories of capital: "(1) economic capital, which corresponds to material wealth; (2) cultural capital, which covers educational credentials and cultural goods; (3) social capital, which refers to the mobilization of people through connections, social networks, and group membership and (4) "symbolic capital […] the form taken by all types of capital when their possession is perceived as a legitimate (Peillon, 1998). In order to describe how capital operates in a real-world setting, we might compare a surgeon in a trauma center to a senior nurse. A surgeon's cultural and social capital may allow him or her to use capital within the healthcare field quite liberally, allowing them to exercise power over others and the freedom to direct their personal courses of action. In comparison, a senior nurse working in the same hospital may have less cultural capital; the nurse is less likely to hold an MD degree; the nurse may also own less cultural goods. Based on social norms and differences in socioeconomic class we might safely infer that the doctor has more cultural capital at his or her disposal than the nurse. However, the nurse in this scenario might be described as having a great deal of social capital, maybe the nurse is required to work with a larger number of healthcare professionals within the hospital extending her social network and group membership beyond the doctor's own reserve of social capital. We might also produce a number of situations or fields where access to social or cultural capital varies between the two actors. The described field has specific characteristics but is also defined by a dynamic “configuration or network of relations” actors ability to use capital enter or leave the field can impact the field. An actor learns how to operate within a field, which likely results in them behaving in specific ways; regardless the field allows for a range of choices based on individual access and use of capital.

In the school and educational fields, the four types of capital directly impact the student’s ability to access the information needed to apply to school, secure financial aid, and enroll in a post-secondary program. For example, the student’s ability to access funds through the FAFSA is based on their financial condition or economic capital; material wealth determines whether the federal government will provide the student with funding for school. In the case of cultural capital, college applications ask students targeted questions about their familial and personal educational backgrounds (G.P.A, SAT scores, the applicability of transfer credits, and degree status).

In addition to Coleman and Bourdieu, Max Weber also develops a theory to describe the relationship between individuals and the societal structures that surround and shape them. Including Weber in our conversation about subjective and objective forces allows scholars to push the boundaries that threaten to relegate Bourdieu to being overly deterministic. If we view Bourdieu’s theories on class and culture as a logical extension of Weber, we can begin to draw comparisons between Weber’s discussions of lifestyles to Bourdieu’s discussion of habitus. In Weber’s discussion of lifestyles, he focuses on two elements, life chances and life conduct (Abel & Frohlich, 2011). Life chances are defined as “the structurally anchored probabilities of achieving one’s goals” and life conducts are “people’s re-active or pro-active behaviors [their…] choice-based life conduct” (Abel & Frohlich, 2011). Weber’s decision to describe life conduct as “choice-based” suggests that his approach allows for some level of agency. This agency is however mediated by the individual’s life chances. Each term, life chance, and life conduct, must be examined with full awareness and understanding of the other “Weber does not consider life chances to be a matter of pure chance, rather, they are the chances people have in life because of their social situation […] chance is socially determined” (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997).

There is a clear interplay between what the structure allows and the choices individual can make within a particular structure. Choices that are supported or facilitated by the larger system “realistic choices are based on what is (structurally) possible and are more likely to be operationalized, made routine, and can be changed when circumstances permit” (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997). Bourdieu’s decision to focus on social reproduction as the end-product of his theory, make it difficult to see how Bourdieu assigns agency to individuals. However, examining Bourdieu against a Weberian backdrop helps draw clear parallels between both scholars. Within Bourdieu’s discussion of social reproduction, he introduces the term habitus. Habitus describes a set of behaviors or dispositions that orient individual behavior, these “routine practices are influenced by the external structure of their social world and […] these practices, in turn, contribute to the maintenance of the structure” (as cited in Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997). Though Bourdieu’s focus on social reproduction is a departure from Weber, both scholars examine how social structures work to influence individual behavior while still allowing for an individual to exercise agency. For Bourdieu, subjective and objective forces are not static, but rather dynamic entities that operate “relationally” (Robinson & Robertson, 2014). If we consider Bourdieu’s key concepts like capital, habitus, and field, we see a system that breeds interdependence. The field or "site of struggle" that describes larger social structures or systems are imagined or physical spaces where individual action is enabled or disabled by access to capital. Capital is the symbolic or material currency that individuals use to navigate a particular field, and finally, habitus operates as a "socially regulated (structured), largely unconscious set of attitudes and habits that [… guides] the [individual] in their actions within specific fields" (Robinson & Robertson, 2014). The habitus is both subjective and objective, connected to the individual but developed through prolonged contact with the field or environment. Capital also straddles the subject-object divide as a currency that is controlled through habitus, as well as the allowances or limitations set forth by field. Finally, Bourdieu's field creates a space for individuals to exercise habitus and use capital.

The field structures individualized behavior while simultaneously being impacted by those behaviors. The bi-directional nature of the relationship between the individual and the field is clear when we examination different historical periods or eras, changes in the larger system can only be explained by analyzing and understanding changes between individual actors. Habitus is shaped by sociocultural forces while interactions between individuals within the system can overtime work to influence the larger system. Individual agency and power to impact the field may be situational and infrequent, but possible. As "situations vary-so, habitus can [also] vary to fit the situation. Habitus is not a mechanical response to all situations; rather it is an open system of dispositions […] the same habitus can generate different, even opposite outcomes" (as cited in Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997). Habitus allows the individual to make decisions based on what is possible within the system, but the system often allows the individual several options. There is an agency in the ability to choose between options "habitus channels behavior down paths that appear reasonable to the individual" and the individual is free to decide between paths (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997). Furthermore, changes over time (political, social, and historical) indicate that collective action by individual actors within the system can ultimately yield a structural change in the field.

Though Bourdieu acknowledges that individuals can use capital in support of their interests, the capital is predetermined for the individual based on familial and social structures. The individual is the sum of his or her parts, and while we can see the potential for some upward mobility, the individual remains generally confined to the same social class. For example, a view of education embracing "Bourdieu's formulations [would be a] complex [network] of institutions and practices which [serve] to reproduce symbolically and culturally the relations of power in a given society" (Jenkins, 1982). In comparison, Weber also recognizes that people are often bound by their environment, but Weber's decision to focus on how individuals actively reinforce or resist these structures through their choices in dress or marriage shows agency at work. Weber proposes a "duality of structure and agency" (Abel & Frohlich, 2011) Examining Weber's concepts of life chance and life conduct in concert with Bourdieu's concept of habitus can help readers better understand how agency is exercised within a seemingly deterministic system. We might use an analogy where we describe the structurally bound capital as money deposited in a Roth IRA versus cash hidden under a person's mattress. Our ability to use the money deposited in the Roth IRA is limited by the financial institution; removing the money from the Roth IRA account may result in a penalty, your access to the funds is limited by bank hours, your ability to use and access your money is controlled by the institution to some degree. If the money is stored in your home under your mattress you have a great deal of control over when and how it is used without a larger institution like a bank controlling your actions. Both examples can likely occur within the same field. A field governed by capitalist ideals like wealth accumulation, the need to accumulate capital is present in both example, but the individual has some room to decide how this behavior is carried out within the system (Fuchs, 2012).

Education is often viewed as an avenue for increasing access to capital in all forms: economic, cultural, social and symbolic. The interrelated nature of capital, habitus, and field suggests that an increase or decrease in capital can also create a ripple effect, impacting an individual's habitus and radiating outwards within the field. People enter educational programs to improve and possibly transcend their current positions in life; the "position of each particular social actor in the field is the result interaction between the specific rules of the field, an agent's habitus and an agent's capital " (as cited in Robinson & Robertson, 2014). Most prospective students do not view education as a tool used to reinforce existing oppressive structures or maintain social inequality. Students returning to school for reasons like retooling for a new career or working to advance in a current position, probably see education as fundamental to their mobility in any context. When moving from theory to real-world examples, we can see how capital can operate to ensure upward mobility. In a study examining "five specific forms of mobility" listed as "educational, occupational, wage, family income and wealth mobility" researchers report that 46% of their female participants experienced occupational mobility in comparison to their parents (Beller & Hout, 2006). Many children grow up in a household, where parents invest in them in hopes of having these children grow up to surpass them economically, socially or in any other area. This kind of narrative is built into the familial structure. In countries like the United States, this narrative is also built into larger narratives like stories about the “American dream”. A two-parent household, with parents employed as teachers or government employees, can produce a child that becomes an attorney or doctor. In fact, many researchers argue that “institutions need to compensate for the ways that family differences lead to differences in achievement” they believe that factors like “educational opportunity [can] promote social mobility […] in many ways that are independent of social origin” (Beller & Hout, 2006). Programs like Head Start or Federal TRiO programs provide strong examples of institutional responses to the differences between families, the cited programs worked to provide low-income and/or first generation with additional support services to ensure that these families have equitable access to educational services. There is a recognition that low-income and/or first-generation family may lack the capital needed to ensure social mobility. Educational scholars agree that differences in social and cultural capital can work to impact access to higher education and “given differences in social and cultural background and important question whether [and more importantly how] schools can mitigate some of the inequalities” (Robinson & Roksa, 2016).

Bourdieu began his project of developing a theory that focused on cultural reproduction when his studies exposed him to the limitations of structuralism. Bourdieu felt that structuralism as a paradigm that created false dichotomies; he was especially troubled by the dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism. Bourdieu described the relationship between objective and subjective poles of understanding as the “objectivity of the subjective” (Johnson, 1993). Bourdieu attempted to produce a theory that accounted for both the “social ground that shapes consciousness” and the “social reality that is [in part] shaped by the conceptions and representations individuals make of the social world" (Johnson, 1993). He introduced four forms of capital that could be used as resources that can help individuals navigate various fields of cultural production, and habitus is used to describe the mediating force connecting subjective and objective elements of cultural reproduction.

Observing prospective adult learners engaged in the process of applying to post-secondary institutions illustrates the theoretical discussion of cultural reproduction in a real-world context. Adult learners view education as an avenue to facilitate their mobility in various fields. Bourdieu describes the role of education as the institutionalized state of cultural capital expressed through "educational degrees or vocational certificates […] are acquired mostly through social learning" (Abel & Frohlich, 2011).

Habitus complicates the subject-object divide, making it difficult to assign habitus as a product of purely subjective or objective forces. As a "concept [habitus] thus units phenomenological and 'objective' structures in an integrated generative scheme" habitus is developed through a process of socialization, but the individual's "practical knowledge of the social world [is then] internalized [and] embodied" (Nash, 2003). The subjective and objective structures are locked in a circular process where the "influence of exterior social structures and conditions are incorporated into the habitus, as well as the individual's own inclinations, preferences, and interpretations'" (Jenkins, 1982).

The college application process forces adult learners to confront social realities and evaluate the ability to leverage capital. Where adult learners go to receive help, how they find information and how that information ultimately shapes the admissions process all present situations that showcase elements of theories of cultural reproduction. A researcher observing this phenomenon could gain insights into how “exterior social structures” have shaped the adult learners “aspirations and expectations [their subjective perspectives] into what Bourdieu calls “categories of the probable” that impose perceptual boundaries on dispositions and the potential for action” (Cockerham & Hinote, 2009). Adult learners’ decisions and actions during the application process are largely based on who they are and where they come from; there is a constant interplay between the subjective and objective forces. Forces that are so inextricably linked that it becomes impossible to understand one element without the other.

The Role of Agency

Bourdieu’s work on social and cultural reproduction continues to serve as foundational texts in discussions concerning the relationship between the individual and society. While a number of scholars critique his treatment of the human condition as being “overly deterministic [… leaving] no room for notions such as resistance” others identify concepts like habitus, cultural capital, and field for their potential in allowing individuals to exercise some level of agency (Mills, 2008). Habitus describes the dispositions or inclinations that guide behavior, habitus is developed over time and dependent on our social position. Despite being largely regulated by objective structures, habitus allows for a “creative yet limited capacity for improvisation” (Mills, 2008,). While Bourdieu’s work is primarily focused on how societies reproduce social and cultural inequality, we can see traces of human agency embedded in metaphors used to discuss habitus and field. For example, Bourdieu’s recurring use of games as a metaphor for the relationship between habitus and field states that the:

> action is not the mere carrying out of rule or obedience to rule […that] social agents are not automata regulated like clocks, in accordance with law which they do not

> understand […instead] in most complex games they put into action incorporated principles of generative habits" (as cited in Mills, 2008).

Like players in a game, individuals must adhere to a set of overarching rules, but these rules *still* leave room for varied approaches to gameplay. Scholars have argued that this metaphor suggests that "habitus sets the boundaries within which agents are 'free' to adopt strategic practices […] choice is at the heart of habitus [but that choice…] can never be unconstrained action […] or [operate] as individual acts of liberal freedom" (Mills, 2008). This view of habitus not only creates space to discuss choice but also furthers Bourdieu project of challenging "structuralism without relapsing into subjectivism" (Mills, 2008). Habitus from this perspective draws equally from the individual and society, placing some power in both spheres. In the subjective sphere, habitus explains why some people seem to have a natural resistance against oppressive structures, while others are complicit in reproducing the oppressive structure that limits their own mobility. Once again habitus, primes individuals to react to situations in a specific manner, habitus is simultaneously transformative and reproductive. Where some individuals recognize the potential for agency, others struggle to see beyond rigid social structures. Bourdieu calls this blinding against possibility a symbolic violence, that causes "people [to] play a role in reproducing their own subordination through the gradual internalization and acceptance of those [...] structures [we comply…] because there does not seem to be an alternative" (as cited in Mills, 2008). If we return to the gaming metaphor, we can easily conjure a memory of a family game night. Even with a set of agreed-upon rules guiding the gameplay, each family member will likely exercise their own strategies to win. In Bourdieu's words, one player might "increase or [… work] to conserve their capital, their number of tokens, in conformity with the tacit rules […another might go as far as working to…] transform partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game" (as cited in Mills, 2008). This description also forces me to recall, how often playing a well-known game with new players begins with each player discussing how "they play the game" and working within the group to decide on agreed-upon rules to dictate the play through. The game maintains its structural integrity, it is still recognizable, but we can make small changes within the structure.

In addition to recasting habitus, scholars have also worked to interrogate Bourdieu's concepts of capital and field. This discussion also benefits from using a gaming metaphor. Capital within this context, describes a collection of practices, assets relations (symbolic or material) that are valued by dominant groups and facilitate success in certain fields. Capital positions players on a particular field. In 1992, Bourdieu added to his theory of reproduction stating that agents were not:

> pushed and pulled by external forces [but…] rather […] bearers of capital [that were able to orient themselves] depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy on the field by virtue of their endowment (volume and structure) in capital" (as cited in Mills, 2008).

Here capital both restricts and enables movement within a particular field; increased capital also leads to increased access to opportunities, protects social status or enables some level of situated improvement. Capital is also an important element to consider in relation to the field. The field represents the social context, setting or structure "within which individuals act" (Mills, 2008). For Bourdieu, habitus and field are locked in a relationship where one force relies on the other, where practices are seen as "the product of the relation between habitus, and the specific social context or 'fields'" (as cited in Mills, 2008). This reading of Bourdieu describes "a 'field of forces' that is dynamic in which various potentialities exist" (as cited in Mill, 2008). An individual's ability to exercise agency is mediated by a number of factors including the particular field, capital and the dispositions that form their habitus, but this reading of Bourdieu makes these factors less restrictive. The individual's cultural capital can increase or decrease as he or she moves between different fields and habitus is not static, but rather an "amalgam of past and present" that can evolve through new experiences.

A constant process of socialization occurs. The choice to act is primarily based on the choices we make within the confines of the game or structure. Bourdieu's theory of reproduction is an attempt "to account for agency in a constrained world" (as cited in Mills, 2008). In many ways, Bourdieu's theory remains a theory of reproduction. The ability to move from one field to another, manipulate capital and even changes in habitus do not often equate to social mobility or sweeping change within oppressive structures. Nonetheless, recasting his theory does allow for some agency and movement within the structure or field and forces scholars to interrogate whether or not we can develop theories that go beyond reproduction and enter the realm of change.

Theories of Resistance

A number of scholars have attempted to move beyond reproduction theory, developing theories that have a project of challenging and replacing oppressive structures. These theories, often labeled as resistance theories argue that our ability to identify points of resistance are often obscured by our focus on theories of reproduction. Reproduction theories "overemphasize the idea of domination in their analysis [… causing] human subjects […to] disappear amidst a theory that leaves *no* room for moments of self-creation, meditation, and resistance" (Giroux, 1983). Giroux also argues that both theories of reproduction and resistance are caught in a negative feedback loop, where the "dualism between structure and agency" stall progress (Giroux, 1983). Giroux sees the potential for resistance and focuses his discussion within the educational field. Schools complex role in building societies drives its use as the focal point of many discussions about both theories of resistance and reproduction. Schools clearly serve as sites of reproduction, where students often have little influence in deciding what constitutes as valid knowledge and where societies' rules are normalized, ensuring that students are able to reproduce existing structures; if the process works students enter the "real world" without challenging the status quo. Giroux argues that even though schools operate as:

> social sites characterized by overt hidden curricula, tracking and […] competing class ideologies […] which always favor the dominant" that schools "are complex and creative fields of resistance through which class-race- and gender mediate practices often refuse, reject, and dismiss the central messages of the school" (Giroux, 1983).

For Giroux, schools often operate in a manner that is either out of sync with or in direct opposition with dominant views. Debates about the value of a liberal arts education versus S.T.E.M or questions debating the aims of education (education for work, society or self) reinforce the idea that schools "operate within limits set by society" while "they function in part to influence and shape those limits" (Giroux, 1983). Schools are not factories, the raw materials vary and even identical systems of production result in vastly different products. Giroux begins his project of giving agency back to the individual by acknowledging what “aspects of schooling […] are accurately presented in […] reproduction models […then reconstructing] the major theories of reproduction into abstract from them their most […] emancipatory insights” (Giroux, 1983).

Giroux directly addresses Bourdieu. He credits Bourdieu for drawing attention to the role schools play in maintaining social control, especially his discussions about the “hidden curriculum”; using Bourdieu helps readers position themselves as Giroux begins to move away from reproduction and into a theory of resistance. Giroux highlights several flaws in Bourdieu’s theory that curtail any opportunity for real resistance. I will focus on two; Giroux argues that Bourdieu’s theory:

> “represents a somewhat one-way process of domination […] resulting in the loss of such notions as struggle, diversity, and human agency” this asymmetrical discussion of power also “prevents scholars from being able to unravel how cultural domination and resistance are mediated through the complex interface of race, gender, and class” (Giroux, 1983).

Any attempt to resist from the working class is diminished or ignored because the outcome is reproduction, not change. Bourdieu’s theory is not about subverting existing power structures, but rather understanding how these structures operate and develop. In order to shift the conversation from reproduction to resistance, we must begin by shifting the focus from dominant classes to the working class. Like Bourdieu, Giroux examines the relationship between the individual and the environment. Both theorists explore this relationship in school settings, but resistance theories point to actions performed by teachers and students that challenge “capitalist rationality and sustained dominant social practices” (Giroux, 1983). The students and teachers "opposition to the labels, meanings, and values of the official and hidden curriculum is informed by an ideology of resistance" (Giroux, 1983). Resistance theory recognizes a complex society that places subordinate classes in multiple spheres, each sphere has an impact that is made visible through action; these actions are examples of agency at work. Students oppose dominant ideology because:

> "the counter-logic embodied in the families, workplaces, and street life make up their culture points to a more convincing reality" where the "alleged superiority of mental labor [… is rejected along with its] it underlying ideology that respect and obedience [of dominant ideas will equal] knowledge and success" (Giroux, 1983).

Oppositional behavior that might have otherwise been dismissed is now seen as a potential point of resistance. Scholars must resist defaulting to a reading of the working class that devalues their culture and experiences. Resistance theory should "depict a mode of discourse that rejects traditional explanations of school failure and oppositional behavior […] by arguing that it has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation" (Giroux, 1983). Rather than present a view of the agency that is bound by structure, Giroux gives subordinate classes an opportunity to reject dominant ideology. The subordinate class can exercise agency and "domination [is no longer] a process that is […] neither static nor complete" (Giroux, 1983). In my own study of adult learners, many of my participants are applying to school as a second-chance to obtain post-secondary credentials. They may perceive their need to rely on alternative programs to guide their admission to school as a personal failure, but using resistance theories as a lens to analyze their experience may reveal examples of human agency. Finally, Giroux warns that oppositional behavior occurs on a spectrum “some acts of resistance reveal quite visibly their radical potential, while others are rather ambiguous” (Giroux, 1983). Giroux places the responsibility on the researcher to analyze potential acts of resistance critically. The researcher must understand that “behaviors displayed do not speak for themselves” in order to reach the level of resistance:

> “one must link the behavior under analysis with an interpretation provided by the subjects themselves, or dig deeply into the historical and relational conditions from which the behavior develops. Only then will the interest embedded in such behavior be revealed” (Giroux, 1983).

Giroux provides examples of notable research that examines oppositional behavior in schools. His review of Paul Willis’ study of working-class boys showcases several key points about reproduction, the development of resistance theory, and the complexities of analyzing oppositional behaviors. Willis’ study is important for illustrating how culture and more specifically countercultures work to challenge dominant ideologies. Giroux also views this study as foundational in the development of what he calls a “dialectical model of domination” that works to collapse the subject/object divide. Giroux writes that Willis’ study does not paint:

> “domination as […a simple a] by-product of external forces [… but instead shows how] resistance theorists [can develop] a notion of reproduction in which working-class subordination is viewed not only as a result of the structural and ideological constraints embedded in capitalist social relationships but also as part of the process of self-formation within the working class itself (Giroux, 1983).

Willis helps advance the shift from reproduction to resistance, by highlighting that development is influenced by external and internal forces. This becomes a precursor to understanding how oppositional behavior can develop even a system that favors reproduction. Giroux also uses Willis to illustrate the complexities that emerge when individuals experience this kind of dual process of formation. The study of resistance is complex because analyzing oppositional behaviors requires researchers to trace the behavior beginning with the interest that guides and ending with the outcome; both are essential in understanding whether the behavior reproduces dominant structures or resists them. For example, in Willis' study "[the] lads rejected the primacy of mental labor and […] in doing so they closed off the possibility of pursuing an emancipatory relationship between knowledge and dissent [… they] discounted […] critical thinking as a tool of social transformation" (Giroux, 1983). Even though the boys' behavior is oppositional, the outcome leads to the type of reproduction that a theorist like Bourdieu would describe as a symbolic violence. The boys challenge the logic embedded in the dominant ideology in favor of a counter-logic that is representative of their working-class culture, but this behavior does not free them from the working class; it increases the likelihood that the boys will remain members of the working class. Giroux also discusses Angela McRobbie's study of female students which observes oppositional behavior displayed in expressions of sexuality. This oppositional behavior reaffirms the complexities of identifying points of resistance because:

> "it could be argued that this type of oppositional behavior [sexual expression] rather than suggesting resistance, primarily displays mode of sexism" where the outcome is

> "linked to social practices informed by the objective of developing a sexual and ultimately successful, marriage" (Giroux, 1983).

This oppositional behavior rejects the rules that govern school, but ultimately ensures that female students adhere to societal expectations that place them in the home. McRobbie's study once again reinforces the importance of tracing oppositional behaviors from interest to the outcome.

Giroux's discussion of reproduction and resistance gives equal weight to presenting the key tenets of both theoretical frames. The final section of his article, entitled *Toward a Theory of Resistance"* makes a final argument for developing a theory that can combat overly deterministic views of agency that are often associated with reproduction theories.

Another study that engages in a similar discussion of resistance theory is Allan Quigley's study of adult learners dropping out from literacy programs. Quigley's focus on adult learners and use of phenomenology contribute to my study of adult learning applying to post-secondary programs. Quigley shares Giroux view of resistance theory. He cites Giroux, agreeing that "the concept of resistance must have a revealing function that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and struggle in the interest of social and self-emancipation" (as cited in Quigley, 1990). In this study, Quigley describes how non-participants or dropouts are generally ignored in studies of adult basic education or examined from participant data instead of working to engage these learners directly. He uses a phenomenological approach to analyze famous literary characters that embody ideas of resistance supported by a reading using these theories. Quigley is able to produce examples that come close to the type of emancipatory resistance that both he and Giroux call for.

For example, in his discussion of Huck Finn, he argues that Huck's oppositional behavior does not reject powerful tools or learning, but rather "infringement of rights" (Quigley, 1990). Huck is able to resist the dominant ideologies that state that going to school or following rules are necessary to ensure entrance into the "good place" (Quigley, 1990). In another example, from the book *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, the protagonist Duddy "believes his family and Jewish faith are being maligned by his homeroom" and instead chooses to adhere to "values that reside with the Irish street gangs" (Quigley, 1990). Duddy leaves schools but is still able to achieve success in the ghetto (Quigley, 1990). Duddy recognizes the tensions that exist between his personal fields and the formal education field, addresses these tensions critically, and achieves success outside of normative systems. These examples illustrate the type of oppositional behavior that can rise to the level of resistance and help researchers draw different conclusions about non-traditional learners. Instead of diminishing adult learners:

> "capacity for human agency […] reinforce[ing] stereotypes of illiterate adults" and using the language of "personal deficit, affliction […is all about] "rehabilitat[ing] the malfunctioning adult [forcing their return to normal society" (Quigley, 1990).

Unfortunately, this type of narrow reading invalidates behaviors that in actuality operate as intentional forms of resistance (Quigley, 1990).

Non-participants openly reject their "second chance" at entering a society controlled by dominant ideology, and the examples that Quigley uses show alternative paths that reject capitalist ideals. Pure reproduction is no longer the outcome and characters are given more opportunities to exercise agency.

Another theorist that challenges the language of reproduction theory, by replacing reproduction with concepts of reconstruction and growth, is John Dewey. Like Bourdieu, Dewey uses metaphor as a tool for understanding his larger discussion of the individual and his or her environment. Dewey borrows from naturalist, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Dewey argues that like organisms embedded in an ecosystem; humans are embedded in a circular and constant relationship with their environment that trends towards growth. He argues the very nature of being a "living thing" means that we respond to external force. Even when living things face the threat of being "crushed by superior forces, [they] nonetheless [try] to turn the energies which act upon it into means of its own further existence" (Dewey, 1990). Dewey begins by establishing a metaphor that negates the helplessness that we find in reproduction theories; humans have the ability to act against external forces in order to improve their individual condition. Dewey's concept of growth "provides an anti-foundational, yet normative, criterion to examine the ways in which power opens up or, at times forecloses future possibilities for everyday actors" (Nelsen, 2016). Dewey does not limit power for subordinate classes. By placing growth at the center of his theory and defining growth as a goal-directed force that enables positive change he opens up a space to challenge oppressive structures. Dewey tells us that "individual growth cannot be built upon and sustained by oppressive power structures because those conditions inhibit the growth of both individuals in oppressed groups and dominant positions" (Nelsen, 2016). Oppressive power becomes an obstacle that an individual can work to subvert on an individual level and more importantly as a collective of individuals.

If we begin with his discussion of the individual, growth begins in childhood. Examining the concept of growth at this stage is simple; growth in children is a visible process, where a child's evolution can only be explained by the (child's) ability to give and take from the environment. Similar to Bourdieu, Dewey establishes a system where the individual learns from experience and these experiences give the individual the ability to respond to the environment. Another point of commonality between the two theorists is Dewey's concept of habit in comparison to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Dewey defines habits as "mechanism of action physiologically engrained, which operate 'spontaneously' […] "to cover our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living" (Hildreth, 2009). Our habit(s) allows us to move through our environment without constantly being derailed by daily occurrences, we are able to move through this environment until we are confronted with a problematic situation. Solving these problems, in turn, allow for growth on an individual and collective level (Nelsen, 2016; Hildreth, 2009). In Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, habitus is described in a similar manner, habitus is a set of "structurally situated" dispositions that "favor stability […but habitus can also] evolve by the degree to changing experiences and circumstance" (Edgerton & Roberts 2014). Both habit and habitus are impacted by disruptions to the system. Bourdieu explains that individuals will experience a high degree of "habitus-field congruence, if the dispositions of habitus align well with the conditions of a particular field [making] change […] unlikely or minimal" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). In comparison, Dewey frames "learning [or positive growth] as only emerging from the process of inquiry into a problematic situation [the new situation] might be powerful enough to disrupt patterns of thought "(Nelsen, 2016). Both theorists acknowledge the interplay between the individual and the environment; both theorists also acknowledge the power of disruptions in the system.

We can draw several connections between Dewey and Bourdieu, but there are also clear differences. Several differences emerge from Dewey's view of individual growth as a precursor to collective growth. Dewey gives marginalized groups power to challenge oppressive structures; in fact, real growth from Dewey's perspective is only achieved when individuals can unite across differences to solve societies' problems. Dewey states that a "great community […] cannot be fulfilled except when different groups interact flexibility and [are] fully connected with other groups" in order to "resolve social problems" (Nelsen, 2016). Furthermore, Dewey gives the individual the power to not only challenge but change oppressive structure; the end goal is far from reproduction, but rather reconstruction. As the individual goes "through the ongoing course of experience […] fields [become more] fluid, as actions bring forces to bear on the field […] these actions and the field itself are changed in the course of taking action" (Hildreth, 2009). There is always a structure, but it does not always look the same. Dewey creates a relationship of mutual dependence between individual and society. Dewey presents a theory focused on the reconstruction of oppressive structures, giving individuals "power to" instead of relegating them to a position where dominant groups express "power over" (Hildreth, 2009). This move from Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, where agency is contained by the structure, to Dewey's where agency allows individuals to break through the structure, may share similarities but vary in their outcomes.

Applying Theory to Study of Adult Learners

Both reproduction and resistance theories describe the relationship between the individual and the environment. Limited views of Bourdieu's theories of social reproduction as overly-deterministic are challenged by examining Bourdieu alongside Weber and Coleman. Weber's discussion of life chances and conduct acknowledges larger social structures and the control that society has over the individual while simultaneously recognizing that individuals retain the ability to choose between alternative paths. Paths that are identified as "realistic choices are based on what is (structurally) possible and are more likely to be operationalized, made routine, and can be changed when circumstances permit" (Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997). In comparison, Coleman's discussion of capital re-casts reproduction as "harmonious networks of shared values and social bonds that benefit individuals and society" (Gillies & Edwards, 2006). The social structure is maintained in order to ensure intergenerational prosperity; Coleman describes reproduction as social good used to maintain order. The ability to draw parallels between concepts like habitus and life conduct or Coleman's treatment of capital alongside Bourdieu can help illuminate the similarities that exist between Bourdieu and his counterparts. Bourdieu's discussion of social reproduction acknowledges the field as a "structured system of social positions within which struggles take place over resources, stakes and access" where social actors "are socially constituted as active and acting in the field [… possessing] the necessary properties to be effective, [and] to produce effects" (Battilana, 2006).

Actors must strategize within a given field. Whether they have limited capital or capital in excess, they must decide how to leverage existing capital to maintain or advance their social status. This ability to strategize also lays the groundwork for understanding resistance within a Bourdieusian framework. The potential to resist structural limitations is embedded in each of

Bourdieu's key concepts. Beginning with Habitus, Bourdieu embeds a latent power of resistance in this concept. Although habitus is largely controlled by environment as "a product of early childhood experience and in particular socialization within the family, it is [also] continually re-structured by encounters with the outside world" (as cited in Reay, 2004). Habitus draws from past experience while allowing the actor to change in response to the environment. The past orients behavior, but habitus retains a latent or embedded transformative power. This power allows social actors to generate "new creative responses [to the field] that are capable of transcending the social conditions in which it was produced" (Reay, 2004).

By expanding our view of habitus, we are also in a position to explore the symbiotic relationship between habitus and capital. Habitus orients how we utilize and manipulate capital to maintain or improve social status, but Bourdieu also argues "that our habitus is generative and transportable depending on our access to capital" (Holt, 2012). Lastly, we consider Bourdieu's concept of field. Fields are used to describe objective structures that define a specific aspect of society or social life. There is an overarching field a "paramount field" as well as "a range of fields […] an autonomous field is characterized by a high level of specificity: it possesses its own history: a particular configuration of agents operate within it and struggle for a distinctive stake" (Peillon, 1998). Despite existing as a distinct and recognized social space, the field can also be impacted by collective action or group agency. The individual "practices and strategies which are generated on the basis of habitus" also signal participation through struggle, this "struggle through which the structure of the field (the distribution of relevant capital) maintained or transformed. Bourdieu himself rejected criticisms that his theories were too deterministic. Many studies, including several case studies presented by Bourdieu, examine resistance by using the educational field as the backdrop to interrogating the relationship between capital and educational choice. Individual narratives become a vehicle for connecting theory to practice. For example, in one study, the researcher seeks to understand how decision-making about school is influenced by access to social-cultural capital amongst middle-class families. Families view education as a path “towards securing advantage for their children” and believe that “it is more than ever to get the right university degree” (Davey, 2012).

The researcher groups students into three groups and each group represents differences in action based on access to capital. A student with high levels of capital view educational choice as straightforward and simple. For this student “university decisions are part and parcel of the normal family discussions he remembers from childhood” the student in develops a “habitus which is congruent with the elite universities to which he aspires” (Davey, 2012). The student is more likely to attend an elite university because he can draw on capital from his family; capital that comes in the form of knowledge about the institution that affirms his pathway to an elite university is “natural, effortless, and destined” (Davey, 2012). There is little need to resist against the system because “accumulated capital […] social and cultural capital [combine] with economic capital to maximize advantage” (Davey, 2012). The experiences of students with high levels of cultural, social and economic capital are juxtaposed with students that have a lower level of capital. Differences in capital are argued by drawing evidence from narratives. Students described as “ aspiring and vocational-specific” are considered as part of the middle class based on “parental occupation [that] confers a middle-class label” but their parents “nevertheless have little or no experience of higher education” (Davey, 2012). These students   Bourdieu’s book *Weight of the World* written in 1999, we read several narratives that discuss how access to education is influenced by larger environmental factors and how individuals challenge circumstance. The book highlights " a great deal of striving, resistance and action aimed at changing current circumstance as many of the poor and dispossessed, interviewed by Bourdieu and his colleagues, search around for ways of changing and transforming their lives" (as cited in Mills, 2008).

The reproduction and resistance theories discussed in this chapter help readers interrogate how experiences are shaped or regulated through the "influence of exterior social structures and conditions […] as well as the individual's own [habitus…] inclinations, preferences, and interpretations" (Jenkins, 1982). Conversations about social reproduction and resistance also create a foundation for examining what role that agency plays in providing individual actors with the freedom to exercise a "creative yet limited capacity for improvisation" even when embedded in highly oppressive environments or structures (Mills, 2008,) In addition, Critical Race Theory argues that larger social and cultural structures related to "race, racism, and power" also work to enable or disable an individual's ability to exercise agency (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The three theories work together to provide a larger framework for understanding how individuals are able to exercise agency, or respond to larger structural influences as they make decisions during the college admissions process.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

Bourdieu's reproduction theory is central to understanding resistance theory, and concepts like habitus emerge in discussions about theory and methodology. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus can trace its intellectual roots to philosophy. The first use of the word is accredited to Aristotle, and later with Edmund Husserl. Husserl is most often associated with the development of phenomenology as a philosophy tasked with "the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience" (as cited in Dowling, 2007). Similar to Bourdieu's project of challenging the subject-object dichotomy highlighted in a structuralist paradigm, phenomenologists also resist the subject-object divide (Langdridge, 2007). Though Bourdieu and Husserl describe the relationship between the individual and their environment in different ways there are clear similarities. Both Husserl and Bourdieu acknowledge the role of the unconscious or pre-reflexive as stored potential. Phenomenology privileges the subjective, but does so while recognizing how an individual's subjective view of the world dictates how they perceive the world. Phenomenologist resist this division arguing "that it does not make sense to think of objects in the world separately from subjectivity and our perception of them [because] an object [only] enters our reality only when we perceive it when it is presented to consciousness" (Langdridge, 2007). The way we perceive the world changes from individual to individual and context to context, but phenomenology seeks to study human experience first at the individual level often expanding to the group level, always with a project of returning to the essence of lived experience (Van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Moran, 2000; Langdridge, 2007). Though phenomenology focuses on the unconscious "good phenomenological description is something that we can nod to, recognizing it as an experience that we had or could have had"; Van Manen refers to this recognition as a phenomenological nod (Dowling, 2007). Here we can see how phenomenological work begins to collapse this subjective-objective divide, what begins as a study focused on the individual can also serve to gain a better understanding of the lived world of many others.

Phenomenological descriptions seem to echo descriptions of habitus within Bourdieu's own conversations of cultural reproduction. Despite serving as a bridge between the subjective and objective, habitus often operates within the realm of the unconscious. For the most part, individuals embedded in everyday life perform hundreds of daily tasks that they fail to register; actions, like opening a door or brushing our teeth, require little or no cognitive strain. Bourdieu sees the importance of analyzing the pre-reflexive elements of human experience because it is this "magma, of which the components are unconscious, [the] pre-subjective world" [that serves as a foundation for "developing new modes of expression and action" (Frere, 2011). Being jolted out of the unconscious realm by a change in environment or a challenge to common modes of existence forces the individual to reflect or interpret their current condition and resolving the problem or moving forward challenges facilitates learning and growth within the individual (Frere, 2011; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). In his book entitled *Sociology in Question*, Bourdieu encourages "individuals/intellectuals [to] take a reflexive position to work out, in the psychoanalytic sense [stating] that this […] collective reflexivity […] enhances the integrity […of a] discipline [and] extends to an engagement in the world (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Phenomenology as a philosophical perspective and more importantly as a methodology provides several tools for describing lived experiences that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

Approaches to Phenomenology

Though Edmund Husserl is considered by many as the father of phenomenology, his approach for describing human experience only represents one branch of this philosophical perspective. He described phenomenology as “the science of every kind of object” where “the aim of phenomenology is the rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (Moran, 2000; Dowling, 2007). For Husserl, phenomenology sought to describe objects as individuals encountered them in nature, pre-reflectively and free of all interpretation (Dowling, 2007; Langdridge, 2007). In order to produce descriptions that remained unencumbered by interpretation, Husserl developed the concept of phenomenological reduction.

Phenomenological reduction pushes the researcher to “refrain from judgment [… or] everyday, commonplace [ways] of perceiving things [ultimately allowing them to…] reduces the world as it is considered in the natural attitude to a world of pure phenomena or, more poetically, to a purely phenomenal realm” (as cited in Dowling, 2007). Husserl insisted that researchers should be able to bracket or suspend their belief, allowing the researcher to view objects without the influence of prior knowledge (Van Manen, 1990; Moran, 2000; Langdridge, 2007). Bracketing allowed for a type of transcendental or God's view type of subjectivity allowing researchers to describe objects without reverting to interpretation (Van Manen, 1990; Moran, 2000; Langdridge, 2007). Husserl calls the actual process of relinquishing preconceived formulations of the object the epoché. Rather than acknowledge what we know, epoché asks us to doubt what we know, “no doubt about everything we say we know, but doubt about the natural attitude or the biases of everyday knowledge” (Langdridge, 2007). For Husserl, doubt gives us room to engage with first-person accounts of lived experience as raw material, drawing a blueprint that can be altered prior to creating the final structure. In order to access truly natural lived experience, we bracket first, then work to “arrive at an understanding of the meanings and essences (or fundamental structure) of experience” (Langdridge, 2007). Husserl’s concept of phenomenological reduction became one of the primary points of departure for many that followed him.

Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, was one of the first phenomenologists to challenge and ultimately revise the concept of phenomenological reduction, rejecting the idea that researchers could, in fact, achieve a god’s view of the object of study. Heidegger’s brand of phenomenology instead begins with interpretation and rejects the notion that the research can ever truly bracket preconceived notions of the object being studied (Wheeler, 2015; Langdridge, 2007). Heidegger produces a more realistic view of phenomenology. He acknowledges that while the researcher should attempt to bracket, is not possible to reach a point free of bias or prior knowledge. The phenomenologist’s that follow Heidegger are defined by their decision to take an existential approach towards phenomenology. For Heidegger, we enter the research setting with a blueprint but work to acknowledge the structure, explaining our bias from the beginning and being open to a remodel based on acquired information. Heidegger then introduces the difficult concept of “Dasein” to describe the researcher as a “being-in-the-world” a being that approaches the object of study with the care of the objects in the world. Researchers must be able to break away from the type of autopilot existence that dictates everyday action and instead actively engage in a "mode of concern […] with the things that matter in the world" (Langdridge, 2007).

Heidegger is also known for his focus on time, specifically on how our experience of time frames our existence. Heidegger places "our experience of time – […] at the heart of what it means to exist […] because our understanding in the present always involves our past and a projection of our future" (Langdridge, 2007). This need to acknowledge time also highlights a need to acknowledge the social and historical forces that shape experience. Similar to discussions of cultural reproduction, as discussed earlier, Heidegger sees an individual that is "thrown into a world that predates us and that limits our possible ways of being […a combination of] physical, psychological and social factors, our historical situatedness, will all serve to limit our possibilities" (Langdridge, 2007). However, unlike cultural reproduction theories, Heidegger seems to give the individual more room to shape their identity because we also have the freedom to interpret ourselves regardless of outside influences (Crowell, 2016). It is clear that Husserl provides a foundation for phenomenology, and his desire to examine pure experience, while idealistic, does work to highlight that phenomenology's ability to uncover experiences that otherwise hidden or veiled in everyday life or individual subjectivities. Heidegger is able to revise Husserl's phenomenological approach in that works to not only acknowledge the researcher's sense of but also works harder to challenge the subject-object divide by discussing the role that factors like time and socio-historical frames play in shaping the individuals' relationships to the world.

Philosophical Assumptions

Phenomenology serves as a tool for uncovering the essence of the information-seeking experiences of adult learners applying to postsecondary institutions. Like most qualitative methods, this approach requires the investigator to read written transcripts several times in order to identify “significant phrases or sentences” but differs from other approaches in its ability to focus on the participants lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Other established approaches focus on the “social groupings, social customs, beliefs [and] behaviors […] that define a ‘culture’ (ethnography) […] in-depth investigations of a ‘single case’ (case study) [… and collecting] data from people to develop an explanation (theory) for the process in question” (Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015).

The phenomenological approach works to produce a narrative that explains a phenomenon or experience by synthesizing narratives from a target population. Phenomenology “focuses on consciousness and the content of conscious experiences, such as judgments, perceptions, and emotions” to learn “what [an] experience was like to live” (Connelly, 2010). Phenomenology becomes a tool for examining an experience by working to access thoughts that are largely invisible, to illuminate experiences or understand the phenomenon from a specific perspective. Using a phenomenological approach is not only essential to exploring the phenomenon of applying to school, but also in understanding this phenomenon from the unique perspective of the adult learner. Once phrases are identified, I will group them into meaningful themes and then uses each theme to present "results [these results are] integrated into an in-depth description of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2014). Though scholars like Husserl and Heidegger provide a philosophical rationale for understanding phenomenology as a method, their contribution to the field does not operationalize the methodological approach in a manner that lends itself to engaging in data analysis. Other scholars have used the philosophical foundation of phenomenology to create a set of strategies for utilizing phenomenology in a research setting. Step-by-Step approaches like those popularized by Moustakas in his book *Phenomenological Research Methods* or Smith, Flowers and Larkin in their book *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*: Theory, Method & Research establish guidelines for data analysis. Each method of analysis coincides with a different view of phenomenology. The phenomenological analysis is generally grounded in one of two schools of thought. The first, defined as a descriptive approach, is most strongly associated with Edmund Husserl. Descriptive phenomenology is distinguished from interpretative based on the argument that an “investigator must bracket out the perceived reality of the world” in order to identify the essence of experience (Dowling, 2012). Moustakas’ method of analysis has clear ties to Husserl, evidenced by the decision to incorporate bracketing. Moustakas begins the process of data collection with the “epoche” the “epoche is equivalent to the null hypothesis […] a bracketing of objectified knowledge (Woodard, 2004).

Husserl and Heidegger: The Interpretative Approach to Phenomenology

In contrast, interpretative approaches to data collection and analysis reject bracketing as a concept. As a student of Husserl, Heidegger is most strongly associated with the interpretative approach. Heidegger argued that the “researcher cannot separate description from his or her own interpretations” (Dowling, 2012). Heidegger acknowledges that like participants, researchers are socially embedded in the world; researchers cannot fully eliminate their preconceptions. Heidegger introduces the term “pre-understanding” to “describe the organization of culture, for example, its language and practices, that is ‘already in the world before we understand' […] pre-understanding cannot be simply bracketed because it is already there" (as cited in Dowling, 2012).

In addition to Heidegger, we also see scholars like Max Van Manen reject bracketing and acknowledging that in "an attempt to forget or ignore what we already 'know' [that] we [the researcher] might find that the presupposition persistently creeps back into our reflections" (Dowling, 2007). Van Manen embraces a hermeneutic or interpretive approach to phenomenology that recognizes the role of the researcher in assigning meaning to or developing a greater understanding of a phenomenon.

Interpretive approaches, like Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) weave interpretation into analysis at several stages throughout the process. IPA acknowledges the researcher's role in interpreting the data in several ways. The most salient include the concepts of the double hermeneutic and the snowball approach to data analysis built into IPA. Beginning with the concept of double hermeneutics, IPA includes a "two-stage interpretation process" where we acknowledge that "the participants are trying to make sense of their world [while] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher attempts to understand and experience a phenomenon from the participant's view while engaging in a second order evaluation where the research is encouraged to be critical of the participant data. The researcher can ask "Is there something leaking out here that wasn't intended? Do I have a sense of something going here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of (Smith & Osborn, 2008)? Interpretation is also a practical component of IPA, embedded in the first steps of data analysis we see how early participant data is used to interpret data for future participants. IPA allows a researcher to "use themes from the first case to help orient the subsequent analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

In addition to interrogating the differences between phenomenologists that choose descriptive approaches to phenomenology like Husserl or interpretive approaches like Heidegger or Van Manen. We must also understand key differences between phenomenologists that share similar views in the debate about bracketing when choosing a methodological approach to data analysis. For example, Phenomenologists like Van Manen and Heidegger are both classified as ascribing to an interpretive approach, but the decision to use IPA in a study that draws it philosophical approach from Van Manen would suggest a failure to understand key views introduced by Van Manen in his discussions about data analysis. When discussing data analysis Van Manen writes "present-day qualitative method uses the language of data collection, data coding, data analysis, data capture, and so forth. However, strictly speaking, phenomenology is ill served with such usage of the term 'data' (Van Manen, 2017). For Van Manen, phenomenological analysis "does not involve coding, sorting, calculating, or searching for patterns, synchronicities, frequencies, resemblances and/or repetitions in data" (Van Manen, 2017). Van Manen's views about data analysis oppose an approach to data analysis like IPA that openly views the transcript as data, moving from transcript to theme formation with an ultimate goal of "translating the themes into a narrative account" (Smith & Osborne, 2008). Though scholars view both Van Manen and Heidegger as an interpretive phenomenologist, it is important that researchers understand key differences within the interpretivists camp when deciding on their method of analysis. Van Manen's views about data analysis reinforce the decision to refer to Heidegger when establishing a philosophical foundation for a phenomenological study that uses IPA for data analysis.

Understanding the philosophical foundations of phenomenology, are critical to identifying what method of analysis aligns with the researchers own beliefs about the role of the researcher in the field of social science. As a researcher, I agree with ideas explaining why "it is impossible to ignore the subjectivizing, influences of language, culture, ideology, expectations, or assumptions" (Larkin, Simon, Clifton, 2006). The decision to reject bracketing in favor of an approach that recognizes the role of interpretation in the research context at several levels supports the use of IPA as my method of analysis.

Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in 2015. I used the pilot as an opportunity to engage with academic counselors that had direct experience supporting adult learners through the application process and a student that had recently completed a FAFSA and applied to a post-secondary program. The pilot study reinforced the need to further explore adult learner experiences of navigating the college admissions process, which included completing the FAFSA and college applications. Interviews with academic counselors were used to develop relevant questions about the process by asking what challenges adult learners faced during the process, and what resources they used to resolve issues. The feedback from counselors was then used to develop questions for a semi-structured interview with the adult learner that participated in the pilot. The interview experience during the pilot, allowed the researcher to explore which questions worked to elicit the type of meaningful responses needed to engage in a strong phenomenological analysis of the admissions process from the adult learner perspective. Furthermore, the data obtained during the pilot served as a powerful lens for analyzing other participant interviews during the full-length dissertation study discussed throughout this document. The methodological approach used in this study, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, allows researchers to “use themes from the first case [or interview] to help orient the subsequent analysis” (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In turn, the student interview from the pilot study served as the first case and was analyzed in order to identify themes that would drive the analysis for subsequent interviews during the full-length dissertation study (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

My initial attempt to study the information-seeking experience of adult learners derived useful data from participant interviews. My pilot study also relied heavily on the Comprehensive Model for Information-Seeking (CMIS). I use the CMIS to derive coding themes using the list of antecedents from the existing model (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). During the pilot, I utilized interviews from one adult learner and two application advisors from a government-funded college preparation program. Interviews with the applications advisors were used to identify adult learner needs during the application process, this information served as a foundation for developing relevant questions for adult learners. Both application advisors worked to support adult learners during the college application and financial aid process. The adult learner interview was used to evaluate the interview protocol; with a goal of ensuring that established questions helped the researcher collect the data necessary for examining adult learner during the college admissions process. The interview was also analyzed during the full-length study discussed throughout this dissertation.

The adult learner was not currently engaged in the application process, and in turn, reflected on her recent experience of applying to college (1 year prior). While an ideal pilot would have relied on a student population, comprised of students currently engaged in the admissions process, this study still provides some insight into adult learners' information-seeking experiences during an active application period. Nonetheless, observations from this study do seem to support the idea that the adult learners' ability to access information during admissions and financial processes are influenced by their status as adults. As adults, demographic factors like occupation, income, education, and age influenced where adults searched for information and what information was accessible. Data also supported a relationship between demographic factors past experiences. For example, the student's ability to draw on skills acquired on the job or during previous educational experiences were discussed as a source of information. Both advisor interviews discussed the role of the educational professional. In the interview with the student participant, she provided several examples of advisors working to help her navigate the financial aid and college admissions process. She also emphasized the value of advisors over websites.

Interviews with the application advisors revealed several differences between adult learners' experience of applying to school and younger students. The ability to speak to the information-seeking experience of both traditional and non-traditional students likely stemmed from their experience of working with both recent high school graduates and adult learning returning to or applying to school for the first time. In one interview, the advisor explained how past experiences may impact the adult learner experience of applying to school. In lines 55-57 she explains that "the adult population has already been through high school" and that as a result "that population sometimes knows a little bit more about where to look for information" (Advisor Interview, 2015). Lastly, an emergent theme related to direct experience highlighted a source of information that is likely unique to adult learners. In the adult learner interview, the relationship between the student and her step-child serves as a source of information during the process of applying to college and for financial aid (Anna Participant Interview, 2015). In Anna’s interview, her experience completing financial aid forms for her stepdaughter helped prepare her for her own college admissions experience. She explains that when she applied for financial aid that she already “had everything out, like our tax return, [that] we [her and her husband] already knew from when [they] did it for [their] stepdaughter in 2002” (Anna Participant Interview, 2015). This source of data reveals an area that may lead to future research about how the parent/child relationship influences adult learners returning to school during several points of their information-seeking experience.

The pilot study relied on semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection; In turn, participant interviews served as the primary mode of the data collection as I continued studying the admissions process from the adult learner perspective. The pilot also highlighted the importance of creating an environment that was comfortable or convenient for participants in order to encourage discussion about topics that the participants may have difficulty talking about. Discussing sensitive topics like familial background, financial, educational, and occupational information are important for uncovering the essential structure of information-seeking experiences of applying to post-secondary education programs.

Sampling Strategies

This larger study utilized a snowball sampling as its primary recruitment strategy. Snowball sampling “is […] a type of purposive sampling [where the researcher reaches out to] participants or informants with whom contact has already been made [in order to] use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study" (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey 2012). In this study, educational professionals working in offices that support both non-traditional and traditional students during the admissions process served as informants providing a primary source for recruiting study participants. A total of four offices were identified during a pilot study as potential recruitment sites; two out of four offices specialized in addressing financial aid concerns, one office specialized in addressing questions related to college admissions for an online program, and one program worked specifically to promote adult learning initiatives in a post-secondary institution. These offices were originally contacted via email. These initial emails informed staff of the parameters of the study, requested their help in recruiting adult learners that are currently or have recently applied to a post-secondary program, and finally asked staff to recommend other places that may serve as sources of recruitment. I also provided criteria for identifying students for the study. I suggested targeting students that were aged 24 years or older, and or adult learners returning to school after an extended absence (5-10 years). This criterion was provided, in an effort to recruit adult learners that were considered adults based on their "age, social roles, or self-perception" (as cited in Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010). I relied on these sites as well as two offices tasked with supporting undergraduate adult learners at large public university, and an online university as recruitment sites for my extended study of adult learners engaged in the admissions process. In addition to recruiting adult learners, I made the decision to interview several educational professionals during the pilot study. The educational professionals were able to provide data about the adult learner experience of applying to college and completing financial aid forms online. The educational professionals I interviewed had over ten years of experience helping both traditional and non-traditional students engaged in the process of applying to post-secondary programs. These interviews provided a foundation for revising interview questions from my pilot study and focusing areas of inquiry related to this study of adult learner information-seeking behaviors.

Data collection

During the pilot study, I collected using a semi-structured interview frame. The semi-structured frame allowed me to add and omit questions during both interviews, based on participant responses. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher a "guide [during] the performance of the interviews […] to ensure that all topics [are] covered [while controlling] the scope of the interviews, as contrasted with completely open-ended interviews" (as cited in, Josefsson, 2006). Questions were divided into two sections, one section specifically addressed questions related to the FAFSA, the other section focused on information related to online college applications. Both participants were asked questions about which resources (paper-based, online, in-person, or over-the-phone) are helpful in completing financial aid and college applications forms and their direct experiences related to the application process. Two of the initial contacts to arrange interviews resulted in a preliminary discussion of the phenomena of applying to school. In addition to initial phone calls, I also engaged in interviews lasting a total of 3 hours and resulting in thirty-two pages of field notes. One interview was recorded and transcribed while; the other interviews and phone calls were documented using extensive notes. The decision to record or refrain from recording was guided by the interviewee's comfort level with being recorded, the interviewee's comfort level was paramount to obtaining rich data about topics like financial aid and past educational experiences. I also asked participants to choose pseudonyms, which were used here and in all other shared documents discussing this study. I will duplicate the described strategies in my formal study of the information-seeking experiences of adult learners.

The same approach was utilized during my full-length study of adult learners. The data collected during my dissertation study resulted in seven additional interviews with adult learners in the early stages of applying to post-secondary programs. I analyzed a total of eight interviews including Anna's participant interview, which was collected during my pilot study. The seven remaining participant interviews were transcribed. All eights interviews were analyzed; and then coded in order to produce the themes discussed in the findings, discussion and conclusion sections of this dissertation. The eight interviews resulted in a total of 7 hours' worth of interviews, which translated into roughly eighty pages of transcribed interviews.

Data Analysis

In my pilot, the recorded interview with the educational professional was transcribed and arranged using line numbers approximately two days after my initial interview. The adult learner interview was also arranged using line numbers. I then reviewed and organized the notes from this interview approximately one hour after the initial interview in order to ensure the data was preserved and recorded as accurately as possible. The included phone call was also reviewed and organized following the initial conversation. After organizing the data, I engaged in open coding, using terms common of the information-seeking models like "demographic", direct "experience", "salience" and "belief" while also including additional codes like "automated response", "assistance from professional" "personal network". Open coding was followed by a focused coding process. For the more focused coding, the researcher attempted to search for themes that were common in both interviews. During the second focused coding process, I removed passages coded “salience” and “belief” because they almost exclusively appeared in the interview with the adult learner. I retained the codes “demographic” and “direct experience” because they supported a larger theme of demographic factors and past experiences impacting the adult learners’ ability to access information. I also identified a theme of help from educational professionals tied to the concept of social capital. Finally, direct experiences tied to relationships between parents and children also surfaced as influential in guiding adult learner experiences completing the FAFSA and college applications. The pilot not also provided a foundation for developing the question protocol used in the full-length study of adult learner admissions experiences, but also as a lens for analyzing data. The study used an interpretative phenomenological method of analysis where “the table of themes from the first transcript [can be used] to orient the analysis of the subsequent ones” (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this case, Anna’s interview was analyzed prior to other participant interviews and used as a source for themes to assess future interviews.

In the extended study, transcribed interviews were organized using timestamps in place of line numbers. In addition, the analysis was conducted using an Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) a detailed review of IPA as a method of analysis will be introduced later in this chapter (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Positionality & Potential Issues with Research Approach

My interests in adult learner experiences of applying to college and completing financial aid using fully online forms developed during her employment as an educational professional. While I see value in fostering new relationships for this study, I will also rely on past professional relationships in order to recruit interviewees. Past personal experiences as an educational professional will likely be beneficial, in providing the researcher with an insider perspective into adult learner experiences. This insider's view may also limit the researcher's ability to examine adult learner experiences without undue bias or assumptions. For example, during an initial pilot study, insider knowledge was helpful for developing interview questions and evaluating participant responses. On the other hand, personal connections to the research environment made it difficult to cast away assumptions. Often times, prior knowledge served as deterrence for asking more probing questions. There were times when I did not ask a question, because of an assumption that I already knew the answer. In the reviewing field notes, I identified several points where follow-up questions may have been helpful in soliciting more data. In interviews with adult learners, my past experiences with this population also made it difficult to refrain from providing the learner with advice regarding future schooling. While this likely had no adverse effect on the quality of data, operating as both an advisor and a researcher requires mastery of the interview process; mixing these roles may prove difficult for a novice. Like many researchers, engaging with participants often become a balancing act of maintaining integrity as a researcher despite the common experience of developing a more personal relationship with the participant (Van Manen, 1990). Providing advice to an adult learner engaged in the process of applying to school may push the researcher into a role that is not supportive of the overall goal of understanding the adult learner experience of applying to school. I will attempt to manage these issues by using my interview frame as a guide to direct questioning. In addition, it will be especially important to disclose and address my connection to this study throughout the experience; this process of disclosure also supports the importance of engaging in the practice of phenomenological reduction (Dowling, 2007).

Concluding Comments about Areas of Discussion

While we can draw some assumptions about adult learners we lack data that describes their information-seeking experience of applying to college. Research has shown how relationships with a friend, parents and high school guidance counselors work to impact high school students applying to college (Tierney 2009; Venegas, 2006; Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos & Sanbonmatsu, 2012). While these observations help us better understand information-seeking experience for younger students, it is unlikely that adult learners are embedded in an information field comprised of similar actors.

In addition to conversations about information field, we might also wonder what other forms of capital adult learners can access during the application process (Bourdieu, 1986). How do adult learners leverage economic, social and cultural capital to facilitate information-seeking actions? The adult learners' degree of ease or difficulty while in accessing necessary information might also provide powerful insights into patterns of cultural reproduction both within the higher education "culture" and larger socioeconomic structures. Finally, both, CMIS and theories of cultural reproduction showcase the relationship between subjective and objective perspectives during the college application process. Phenomenology using a Heideggerian approach is helpful for managing the role that researchers play within a study, by rejecting the possibility of "God's view" analysis of data while working to challenge subjective and objective division common in other research paradigms (Van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994; Moran, 2000; Langdridge, 2007). Examining the information-seeking experience of adult learners not only works to improve the application process for adult learners but also to improve information carrier characteristics for institutions of higher education (Johnson & Meischke, 1993).

Chapter 5: Findings

The following chapter will focus on synthesizing findings from the study. In total eight semi-structured interviews were conducted. Initial recruitment emails were shared with potential participants via listserv, and recruitment sites primarily consisted of student support units with a secondary or primary target population of adult learners. Interested students were asked to complete a short survey, to confirm that they were viable candidates for the full-length study. The survey included questions about the participant's age, length of enrollment in their program of study, and status as a moderately or highly non-traditional adult learner (Choy, 2002). A number of participants were also recommended for the study through staff at identified recruitment sites, these participants were screened for the study via telephone, and phone calls lasted approximately 10 minutes.

Interview Summaries

Demographic data for each participant will be summarized below in Table 1. Each participant was asked to provide a pseudonym prior to answering any targeted interview questions, the participants are represented throughout this study using their chosen alias. All participants were interviewed during the discussed pilot study and full-length dissertation study. In addition, the listed length of enrollment represents the amount of time each participant was enrolled in their current program of study. The column summarizing status refers to the participant's status as a "moderately or highly non-traditional learner". Participants interviewed for this study were labeled using one of these categories. Their status as a non-traditional learner was assessed using a list of characteristics, which includes: delayed enrollment, part-time attendance, full-time employment, status as financially independent based on financial aid standards, caring for dependents, considered a single parent or lacking a high school diploma (Choy, 2002). Students with one characteristic are considered “minimally nontraditional”, students with two or three characteristics are described as “moderately nontraditional” and those with four or more were considered “highly nontraditional” (Choy, 2002). The table lists participants at random and used to provide readers with a quick overview of the participants’ backgrounds.

Table 1: Student Profiles

Name (Alias)	**Age**	**Length of Enrollment**	**Status**	**Race/Ethnicity**	**Gender**
Anna	49	3 semesters	Moderately	Caucasian	Female
Jay	31	1 semester	Highly	Asian	Female
Xena	56	1 semester	Highly	Caucasian	Female
R.L.	44	2 semesters	Highly	African American	Male
Joanna	41	1 semester	Highly	Caucasian	Female
Marie	47	1 semester	Highly	Caucasian	Female
Joseline	31	1 semester	Moderately	African American & Latino	Female
Don	65	1 semester	Moderately	African American	Male

In addition to Table 1, the following section will also provide readers details information about each learner’s status as a non-traditional learner, motivations for enrolling in a post-secondary program, and primary topics of inquiry throughout the admission’s process.

Anna

Anna's experiences as an adult learner classify her as a moderately non-traditional student. Her decision to return to school is in large part influenced by her need to relocate in order to care for her aging parents. The transition to a new state provided Anna with an opportunity to reevaluate her long-term career goals. After several decades of working in finance, Anna relocated and was unable to transfer to another branch of the bank where she was previously employed. As a result, Anna reflects on leaving the banking industry and finds that she is no longer fulfilled in her current occupation. Anna stated "[I] did everything in finance, I did it all; I had success in it, but it did not feed my soul. Banking has changed, I used to be able to sit down and work with clients, but now it is about sales" (Anna Participant Interview, 2015). Though Anna previously enrolled in a bachelor's program, she has re-enrolled as an adult with a goal of completing her bachelor's degree in speech pathology and ultimately continuing on to graduate school. She also cites her mother's death as a factor in her decision to return to school. Anna describes the thought of returning to school. She states that "[I] was nervous; I took some time to think. I was 40 something I have not been in school for 30 something years. Then my mom passed away and she wanted me to go back to school so despite my hesitation I jumped back into it" (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

In addition, to being classified as moderately non-traditional because of her role as a caregiver, Anna's status as "financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid" also contribute to her (Choy, 2002). Anna's questions during the application process included wanting to know more about available programs of study, tuition, acceptance rates, program faculty, and exploring the physical campus space (Anna Participant Interview, 2015)

Jay

At the time of her interview, Jay had recently enrolled in a four-year bachelor's program in business administration. She also opted to pursue a minor in healthcare administration. She identifies a need to advance professionally as well as serving as a role model for her daughter as her primary motivations for returning to school. Jay is considered a highly non-traditional student; her experiences as an adult learner include five out of seven characteristics generally associated with non-traditional students. As a full-time employee, Jay attends school part-time. Jay is also a single parent and the primary caregiver for her daughter. Jay's social roles, age, and occupation contribute to her status as independent according to financial aid standards. Her questions during the application process focus on concerns about transfer credits, programs of study, available scholarships and placement tests.

Joanna

Joanna has spent much of her adult life working in the healthcare field. She attributes much of her desire to return to school to the joy she finds in learning about new topics. After earning a certificate in dental assisting, Joanna spent ten years working in the field until deciding that she wanted to " do something more" (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017). Joanna returned to school in 2012 with an interest in a physical therapy assisting program through her local community college. Despite possessing experience in the health field at large, Joanna did not have the required pre-requisites to enter a physical therapy assisting program. Joanna instead earned a certificate in massage therapy, and also went on to "[pursue] further accreditation under a massage heading and became a certified manual emphatic drainage therapist" (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017). Joanna entered the program for massage therapy because she knew that it could serve as a pathway to completing the required coursework to enter the physical therapy program. Joanna later entered a physical therapy program but "found it tedious. [she] passed everything […] got A's in it, but […] only completed one semester of it" (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017). Joanna's determination to find a profession that brings personal and professional fulfillment continued, she attempted a program in radiological science but was unable to continue due to the physical rigor. Joanna ultimately decided to enter a program that would allow her the flexibility to earn a more general degree. Joanna describes that "a freedom to take more classes that I'm interested in and will work more towards the degree that I'm ultimately you know the career that I'm ultimately searching for and it's still in healthcare but it's more of an ancillary thing as opposed to being on the front lines" (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017). Joanna is a highly non-traditional student. She is responsible for the care of her mother-in-law, considered independent according to financial aid standards, completed secondary school by earning a GED, and enrolled in college for the first time as an adult. Joanna's questions during the admissions process focused on her ability to apply her financial aid to a new program of study, finding a program that allowed her to maximize her transfer credits and learning about potential majors.

Marie

Marie has decided to pursue a bachelor's degree in Psychology. She has successfully supported her children through the admissions process and shares that when "her two kids went off to school [that she] was left with a little bit of extra time and [was left] thinking about what [she] wanted” (Marie Participant Interview, 2017). Marie has always wanted to learn more about human behavior and describes herself as a problem-solver within her social circle.

In addition to her role as a parent, Marie is also employed full-time. Her personal and professional responsibilities reinforce her desire to attend school part-time. The listed characteristics in conjunction with her status as financially independent according to financial aid standards support Marie’s classification as a highly non-traditional student. Marie applied and was accepted into two programs of study. She has enrolled in one program and deferred admission into the second program as she continues to explore which program provides her with the level of flexibility needed to balance her personal, professional and educational responsibilities. She has attempted to learn more about each program, asking questions about transfer credits, required coursework, flexible scheduling options, including the ability to take online classes, and the potential to earn credits by exam.

Xena

Xena has achieved a great deal of professional success without earning a post-secondary degree. Despite feeling capable of performing her duties without a formal education, Xena has enrolled in a degree program to satisfy a request from her employer. She describes never earning her degree as her “dirty little secret”; Xena shares that her new company “actually recruited [her] because they liked [her] work as executive director […and that] when [she] handed them [her] resume [and] they saw that [she] didn’t have a degree that they were dumbfounded” (Xena Participant Interview, 2018). Xena’s background in human resources made the decision to enroll in a related program a natural choice. Xena explains that “at this late stage […that her…] hope [is to have] only about fifteen more years of […] life working

[…and] that [she wants] to do something that [she will] be physically capable of doing too but still [remaining] mentally challenged" Xena Participant Interview, 2018). Xena is considered a highly non-traditional due to her status as a full-time employee, her need to attend school part-time and being defined as independent according to federal financial aid. This degree also marks Xena's first attempt at enrolling in a degree-seeking program. Xena had a number of questions during the admissions process; including identifying the institution with the highest rated human resources program and understanding the differences between a Bachelor of Science versus a Bachelor of Arts. Xena also wanted to know if she would receive academic credit for her work experience, the timeline and cost of completing a degree, and the required courses for her desired program of study.

Joseline

Joseline describes her previous attempts to enroll in a post-secondary program as difficult. When asked about her first time applying Joseline explains that "it was not easy because I came from another country when I was fifteen years old or so, I did not understand the system I lived with my cousin and she got me through the whole process […] it was kind of like I did not have no idea what I was doing, to be honest" (Joseline Participant Interview, 2017). Joseline struggles to navigate the application and completes the FAFSA on two separate occasions before receiving financial aid. Joseline attributes the success during her last attempt to her participation in a program geared to helping adult learners enroll in college and complete the FAFSA. Following the success of her final attempt, Joseline has decided to enroll in a cybersecurity program. Her decision to return to school is centered on her desire to establish a career, a career "that allows [her] to move up" because "she is committed to having a better life with a career" (Joseline Participant Interview, 2017). Joseline is also motivated to return to school to serve as a role model for her daughter. During the application process, Joseline describes having several questions about her major; she is specifically interested in finding an institution that houses her major and fits her lifestyle. Joseline is a stay-at-home, serving as the primary caregiver for her daughter. She is given the freedom to attend school full-time. Her ability to attend school is also greatly impacted by a successful FAFSA, which provides her with enough aid to enroll in the cybersecurity program. The FAFSA defines Joseline as financially independent, but she is still able to receive aid based on several other factors like income and the fact that she is attempting to earn an associate's degree versus an advanced degree like a Master's or Ph.D. Joseline's role as a primary caregiver and status as independent according to financial aid standards classifies her as a moderately non-traditional student.

Don

At the time of the interview, Don is still in the process of finalizing his enrollment at his school of choice. He is interested in pursuing a degree in Software Engineering. His desire to return to school is motivated by an interest in all topic related to science, an interest that began when Don was a child. As a child Don remembers living during "Cold War […when] there were a lot of television shows that came out then like Star Trek, Lost in Space" for Don watching these shows made him want to be a scientist (Don Participant Interview, 2017). Don also views his age as a primary motivation in returning to school, earning a degree is a lifelong goal for Don. In addition, to a personal drive to return to school, Don's previous certification in computer and communication electronics has given some hands-on experience in the broader field of computer science. He explains that the certificate focuses on the "hardware part of it, but that the big money and what he [wants to] do in life to help [him] live [his] dream is […] writing the code" (Don Participant Interview, 2017). Don's pathway to higher education has been largely delayed by an addiction to drugs and the legal issues that followed him as a result. Time has helped him address the addiction and at the time of the interview, he has been clean for sixteen months. Despite facing a number of barriers as a result of his experiences, Don is categorized as a moderately nontraditional. His status as moderately nontraditional is based on his status as financially independent according to federal financial aid guidelines and the fact that he completed secondary school by earning a GED. Don path to college includes asking questions about the best program of study, financial aid, earning clearance to return to school related to his criminal history and working to get his loans discharged.

RL

After years of military service, RL sets a new long-term goal of completing his undergraduate degree. He describes a feeling that something "was missing" something that was telling him that "he needed to take the next step" (RL Participant Interview, 2017). RL also views education as a pathway to financial security and supporting his children. RL develops an interest in mechanical engineering after temping for a company as a project manager, he is introduced to the field by observing how computers can be used to "generate or design" objects (RL Participant Interview, 2017). RL has always enjoyed working with his hands and believes that mechanical engineering will allow him to exercise his passion while satisfying his curiosity for learning new things. He wants to "know about things, understand what the mechanics [are] how […] you create that that, how did that change or effect [things…] he [wants] to learn the background" (RL Participant Interview, 2017). In order to identify what program was ideal for him, RL asked several questions about where the school was located, tuition costs, and when classes are held. He explains how his role as an employee and father impact his education “as far as the school itself all that background is important when you have a full-time job or have a family” (RL Participant Interview, 2017). RL’s social roles are at the forefront of his decisions regarding school. RL experiences classify him as a highly nontraditional student. In addition to his responsibilities as a caregiver and employee, he is also defined as independent according to the FAFSA and attending school for the first time as an adult. Like many other adult learners, RL must continue to work full-time and attend school part-time in order to accomplish his educational goals while maintaining a household.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Qualitative research often relies on participant interviews as a means of exploring various aspects of society. Once a topic of interest is identified, decisions about methodological approach should emerge as a logical extension of the questions the research is attempting to answer. In this study, asking about how adult learners’ information-seeking behaviors impacted the phenomenon of applying to post-secondary programs and completing financial aid forms resulted in using a phenomenological approach. As discussed at various points throughout this dissertation, phenomenology is largely defined by the differing philosophies that govern this specific area of qualitative study. Descriptive phenomenology, most notably associated with Edmund Husserl represents one approach and interpretative, associated with Martin Heidegger another. I view my own research as strongly aligned with the interpretive branch of phenomenology. As a researcher, my interests in examining adult learner information-seeking behaviors emerge from my own experiences in supporting adult learners engaged in the admissions process. My connection to the topic predisposes me to interpret the data through my own .experiential lens. In addition, IPA's ability to acknowledge that the researcher enters data analysis

I began by reviewing a transcript of my first participant interview. As the first interview in the set, Anna's interview has been read several times and was included in my pilot study and extended study of adult learners. My familiarity with Anna's interview supports a phenomenological approach which calls for an intimate knowledge of the first interview. The researcher should "read and reread the transcript closely in order to become as familiar as possible with the account" (Smith & Osborn, 2008).The first few readings allow the researcher to engage in a process of open coding, assigning phrases or words to logical meaning units. IPA guidelines recommend placing first-order themes on the left side or left margin of the written transcription. The next step involves returning to the first transcribed interview and using the right margin or right side of the transcribed interview "to transform initial notes and ideas into more specific themes or ideas" (Eatough, Smith, & Shaw, 2008). Themes are continuously reviewed, revising the list of themes to eliminate themes that fail to emerge as significant and clustering themes into subordinate and higher order themes. Up to this point, the themes are arranged chronologically according to their position in the transcript, but as we continue this process of analysis we move forward with an "analytical or theoretical ordering, as the researcher tries to make sense of the connections between themes" (Smith & Osborne, 2008). The last step in analyzing the first interview is producing a list that highlights higher order themes and subordinate themes. This list is then used as a tool for analyzing subsequent participant interviews. The process should be conducted in a manner that allows for "some else to track the analytic journey from the raw data to the end […in] an 'independent audit' (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). Studies can also utilize this "master list" to organize and privilege participant voice.

In their 2008 study, examining how women experience anger and aggression, Eatough, Smith, and Shaw also develop a table connecting themes to transcripts creating a for a full-circle analysis that allows us to see a clear relationship between the data and the final themes. IPA allows us to analyze data at the descriptive level while understanding that interpretation is also essential to investigating an experience or phenomenon. Some scholars introduce the idea of a "questioning hermeneutic […] that seeks to interpret *within* the terms of the text which the participant has produced. In doing so, it can draw on outside sources of knowledge […it] opens up the possibility of exploring theories" Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011). In this study, literature about information-seeking and theories social reproduction served as a tool for interpreting raw data (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011). The theoretical framework serves as a foundation for analyzing data while the participant's words are used as direct evidence for understanding the larger phenomenon of applying to school for adult learners. A transparent approach to data analysis showcases each element, both the data and the theory; each element becomes essential for understanding the larger phenomena. The two tables included in this chapter, Table 1.2, Table 1.3, and Figure 2.4, help readers trace data analysis from the first stage which calls for a close reading of the first participant's transcript in order to identify first-order themes to the final stage where "superordinate themes" allow for "theoretical convergence" (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008; Smith & Osborne, 2008).

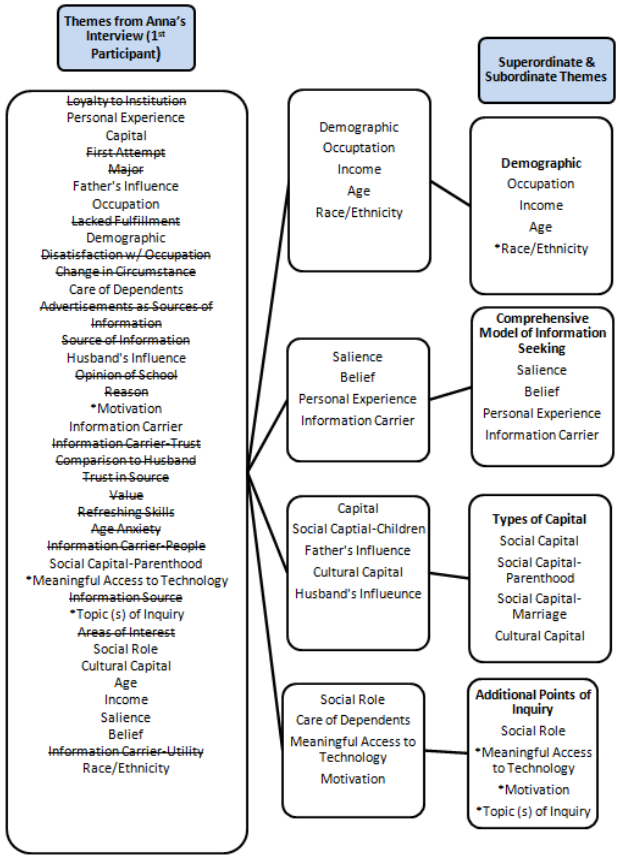


Figure 2.4: Interpretive Theme Development

In figure 2.4, the first column lists the forty labels that were assigned during the first stage of analysis. The first reading is "close to being a free textual analysis [this stage has] no rules about what is commented upon, and there is no requirement, for example, to divide the text into meaning units and assign a comment for each unit" (Smith & Osborne, 2008). The first stage of data analysis draws themes directly from the first participant's interview. Researchers using IPA can "can either use the themes from the first case to help orient the subsequent analysis or put the table of themes for participant 1 aside and work on transcript 2 from scratch" (Smith & Osborn, 2008). As the analysis continues across cases, phrase or labels that fail to describe a phenomenon or experience across participants are eliminated. In my own study of adult learners, phrases or labels that have been crossed out were eliminated for several reasons. Labels that could be subsumed by another phrase or label were removed. For example, the label "areas of interest" was eliminated in favor of the label "topic(s) of inquiry" as a more encompassing theme. In addition, labels that had limited value beyond the first interview did not emerge as higher order themes for analyzing other participant interviews. Labels like "refreshing skills" were interesting enough to note but did not speak to the larger study which focuses on themes related to information-seeking and factors that drive participants pathway or access to information. Finally, starred themes were traced across interviews to write student profiles, included earlier in this chapter or emerged in later interviews as meaningful themes for analysis for other participants. Table 1.2 works to provide abbreviated definitions drawn from "outside sources of knowledge" that were used as higher-order themes in this study, the ability to draw from the outside is afforded by IPA's focus on interpretation (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011).

Table 1.2: Superordinate & Subordinate Themes
Superordinate Theme 1: Comprehensive Model of Information Seeking (CMIS) **Typically used to examine information seeking of health-related information, the CMIS "proposes that the health-related factors of demographics, direct experience or [personal experience], *salience* […] beliefs and […] information carrier factors […] influence information source use" (Ruppel, 2016).**
Subtheme 1: Salience- An antecedent of the CMIS salience examines the individuals "perceived applicability of information to a problem that he or she faces" (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). **Subtheme 2: Belief-** the definition in this study is modified from the CMIS to describe a belief in the efficacy of the information (Johnson, 1997). **Subtheme 3: Personal Experience-** definition in this study is modified from the CMIS and describes "an individual's degree of direct experience […] either through [past experience…] or through […someone] in one's personal network" (Johnson & Meischke, 1993).

Subtheme 4: Information Carrier- the CMIS also explores information sources, examining factors like "editorial tone, perceived credibility […] utility [which] refers the perception that the source information is important, relevant and topical [and…] trust in [the] information source" (Johnson & Meischke, 1993; Ruppel, 2016).

Superordinate Theme 2: Demographic- "background factors that often affect the choice of communication channels for information-seeking […] these factors also help someone's information field, determining their exposure (Johnson, 1997).

Subtheme 1: Occupation

Subtheme 2: Income

Subtheme 3: Age

Subtheme 4: Race/Ethnicity*

Superordinate Theme 3: Types of Capital

Subtheme 1: Social Capital- In general social capital is defined as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network […] or […] membership [to] a group" (Bourdieu, 1986).

Subtheme 2: Social Capital-Marriage- this theme emerged from the study and is used to describe resources/ access to information acquired through a spousal relationship.

Subtheme 3: Social Capital-Parenthood- this theme emerged from the study is used to describe resources/ access to information acquired through the participant's role as a parent.

Subtheme 4: Cultural Capital- Cultural capital has long been defined as "familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated language"; in this study, cultural capital is also closely associated with the participant's ability to discuss their intended field or major of choice as an insider, or previous evidence of credentials (Sullivan, 2001).

Superordinate Theme 4: Additional Points of Inquiry- this theme was used to identify additional areas of interest that provided a valuable lens for evaluating the data, but were not used across participants or as part of the extended data analysis.

The subthemes motivation and topic of inquiry were used to help develop participant profiles for each participant but did not serve as a theme during data analysis. The subthemes social role and meaningful access to technology were only applied to specific participants. The

theme social role and meaningful access to technology provided valuable data about information-seeking among adult learners but did not appear as themes for a majority of the interviewed participants.
Subtheme 1: Social Role **Subtheme 2: Meaningful Access to Technology***- participants ability to engage with "rather than merely use where the 'user' exerts a degree of control and choice over the technology and its content, thus leading to a meaning, significance, and utility for the individual concerned" (as cited in Selwyn, 2004). **Subtheme 3: Motivation*** **Subtheme 4: Topic(s) of Inquiry***

Table 1.3, links higher order themes to excerpts from Jay's participant interview; the table serves as a foundation for in-depth data analysis that works to translate "the table of themes [becomes a precursor…to] the [extended] account of the participants' responses, which takes the form of the narrative argument interspersed with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support the case" (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The table is included to define themes using one participant interview, understanding the themes through Jay's case serves as a foundation for understanding how the themes were used to analyze information-seeking experiences across participants.

Table 1.3: Superordinate & Subordinate Themes

Superordinate Theme 1: Comprehensive Model of Information-Seeking

Subtheme 1 Salience:

[00:54:53] Jay: In terms of [the community college] I felt more, I felt like there was a very big lack of communication. I always had questions and I never was 100% confident. There wasn't a step by step or someone to follow me and say hey you're doing this wrong you are doing this right and it was kind of like trial and error in those terms (Jay Participant Interview, 2018)

Subtheme 2 Belief:

[00:53:07] Jay: The first time I wasn't too confident, like at [the community college] it did not always seem like they always had all the information I needed, with the [four-year online] I was able to, I felt more confident (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Subtheme 3 Personal Experience:

[00:57:03] Jay: […] She pretty much told me where to go um you know she could tell me where to go but she could not tell me anything else, like in terms of applying or anything she would say I take all my whatever you will get more money from going there whatever the case may be, but in another week or so [blank] will be someone that I lean on because she has dealt with the online classes and this is my first time (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Subtheme 4 Information Carrier:

[00:22:59] Jay: […] The first lady I met with when I talked to her she actually discouraged me. She said 'I seriously doubt you will be able to maintain this class load and do well' she said there is no way you can do it, because you are older you work and you have a child and I think in a way it turned me off in a sense […](Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Superordinate Theme 2 Demographic:

Subtheme 1 Occupation:

[00:34:32] Jay: I chose business administration because I had been in management, my back up is I mean my minor is actually healthcare administration because I have been in healthcare for a while so it was one of those things where it kind of worked out that way (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Subtheme 2 Income:

[00:18:40] Jay: […] My Master's was my goal cause it's what's going to provide me with what I need in terms of money because I have almost ten years of management experience under my belt between retail and office and in order to be able to do what I needed to do I was going to have to transfer (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Subtheme 3 Age:

[01:05:24] Jay: I think that umm for an adult learner that the applications are very generic and the initial the first time you fill it out, you don't feel like, if you have not just recently graduated high school and you are filling it out years later, you are like well how do you know how good I used to be [laughs] you know that is one of the things it doesn't seem like, it seems like when you lose time you lose that educational advantage (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Subtheme 4 Race/Ethnicity:

[00:12:58] Jay: um very important I grew up in a first generation from my father, my mom was not first generation she was white, to him education was very important because he came to this country with education but still has to obtain it from here (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Superordinate Theme 3 Types of Capital:

Subtheme 1 Social Capital:

[00:16:32] Jay: Well I asked, I had the benefit of having a friend that [laughs] who did all of this and she actually told me about this website (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Subtheme 2 Cultural Capital:

[00:40:02] Jay: To say you have these credits and you need 29 credits and well you need, that's what I needed 29 credits to obtain my bachelor's (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Superordinate Theme 4 Additional Points of Inquiry:

Subtheme 1 Social Role:

[00:38:01] Researcher: Where did you work on your application why did you choose that space to work on your application?

[00:38:07] Jay: on my computer at home in the middle of the night cuz my daughter was asleep and I wasn't going to [laughs] worry about it (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Figures 2.4 and Tables and 1.2 and 1.3 illustrate how themes are developed, defined and utilized for data analysis. Table 1.3 introduces data from a study participant to highlight how IPA prioritizes interpretation at theoretical and methodological levels. Table 1.3 also highlights how IPA works to give voice to participants, direct quotations are essential to the data analysis.

The figures and table also trace how superordinate themes were identified. The use of IPA in this study yielded four superordinate themes: demographic, comprehensive model of information seeking, types of capital and additional points of inquiry. The figures and tables are a foundation for in-depth discussion of each superordinate theme using “a narrative account of the interplay between the interpretative activity of the researcher and the participant’s account of the experience in his or her own words is produced (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). The following sections move from tables to narratives exploring superordinate and subordinate themes

Comprehensive Model of Information-Seeking (CMIS) as a Superordinate Theme

The CMIS used in this study is most commonly associated healthcare fields. The CMIS is used to examine how “clients make their own decisions concerning preventative [health] behaviors and treatment options after consulting an array of information carriers” (as cited in Johnson & Meischke, 1993). The CMIS model was used in place of models more commonly used to evaluate college decision-making in higher education contexts, like the college choice model created by Hossler and Gallagher in 1987 for two main reasons. The first is the focus that college choice models place on more traditionally aged students versus non-traditional or adult learners. The majority of studies using the college choice model “depict the development of choice set and behavioral intentions for traditional 16-to24- year old(s)” (Lansing, 2017). In comparison, the CMIS focus on information-seeking in the health field relegates the majority of study in this are to adult learner experiences, making much of the literature surrounding the CMIS a good fit for examining adult learner experiences during the admissions process. In addition, many of the studies using the CMIS recognize that “health information seeking has generally focused on the Internet, with several studies finding that trust in the Internet is positively associated with using the Internet as a health information source” (Ruppel, 2016). The focus on information-seeking that privileges online resources also provides a useful lens for this study of information-seeking during the college application process. Like the medical field, higher education has seen a steady increase in web-based resources and applications when related to the admissions process. Trends in higher education reflect that "In 2011, 97 percent of colleges reported integrating social media into their online recruitment offerings. The proportion of applications received online increased steadily, from 57 percent in 2002 to 85 percent in 2011" (Korbin & Edwards, 2013). The studies that utilize the CMIS incorporate discussions about how patients navigate learning about their health in a manner that also provides valuable insights into the higher education context. This study of adult learners' information-seeking behaviors asked if the factors that influence information-seeking in the health field, can also be extended to understanding information-seeking during the adult learner process of applying to a post-secondary educational program. Antecedent factors, viewed as the first stage of analysis in the CMIS, became themes for analysis in this study. The methodological approach to data analysis used in this study, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis often calls for the researcher to engage in a type of questioning that "seeks to interpret within the terms of the text […] in doing so, it can draw on outside sources of knowledge […opening] up the possibility of exploring theories" (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011). The Comprehensive Model for Information-Seeking served as an outside source of knowledge where themes used to describe how the adult learners search for medically related information were evaluated as potential themes for examining how adult learners search for information during the admissions process. Themes like direct/personal experience that described the adult learner's "degree of direct experience […] either through [past experience…] or through […someone] in one's personal network" were applicable to this study of adult learner's information-seeking during the admissions process, and therefore were used as themes (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). In other cases, themes like salience when used in a medical context, is defined as "as perceived severity, which refers to a person's beliefs about the medical or social seriousness of a health threat or leaving it untreated" had to be defined in a broader sense for use in the higher education context (as cited in Lee & Kim, 2015). Broader definitions of salience used in CMIS define the term as "the perceived applicability of information to a problem that [someone] faces" (as cited in Johnson, Donohue, Atkin & Johnson, 1995). Finally, other themes used in the CMIS were omitted from this study because they failed to emerge as themes that could provide an analytical lens for describing the adult learner experience in navigating the admissions process. For example, the theme "utility" which is used as a stand-alone theme in the CMIS asks if the information "contained in [a] medium [is] relevant, topical, and important for the individual's purpose" became redundant when analyzed in conjunction with "salience" as a theme which also interrogates the personal value that information has for the individual when addressing a specific need.

Antecedent factors, displayed in the first stage of the Comprehensive Model for Information-Seeking, were used as a primary source of themes to guide data analysis in this study of adult learner's information-seeking behaviors during the college admissions process. The antecedents for information-seeking "focus on the imperatives that motivate someone to seek answers to questions. These factors determine an individual's natural predispositions to search for information from particular carriers (Johnson, 1997). Antecedents include demographic factors, salience, belief, personal experiences and information carrier characteristics. Antecedents are also organized into two categories, personal relevance factors (belief and salience) and background factors (demographics and direct/personal experience). The personal relevance factors focus on how an individual perceives information "largely [determining] the imperative to seek information", and background features interrogate individual characteristic that determine exposure to information (Johnson, 1997; Johnson, Andrews & Allard, 2001). The following section will focus on salience, belief, personal experience and information carriers. Demographic factors, which include a number of subthemes, will be addressed in another section.

Salience as a Subtheme

Salience was adopted as a subtheme and used to analyze information-seeking behaviors for adult learners during the college application process. This theme was important to understanding how adult learners perceive information, questioning whether or not adult learners view acquired information as applicable to solving a problem they are confronted with (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). We can generally assess salience by evaluating the participant's level of motivation; highly motivated adult learners will pursue information until their query is answered (Johnson, Donohue, Atkin & Johnson, 1995). We measure salience on a spectrum where, salience is often "related to the rate of acquisition" (Johnson, 1997). If the information contributes to solving a problem then, information seeker will show an active interest, a desire to learn more. In contrast, clear skepticism about whether the information is salient, or resistance to applying the information to solve a problem reflects a low-level of salience.

For many of the participants, salience is strongly related to the information carrier or source. Participants often value speaking to educational professionals or staff members representing the educational institution over using web-based resources. In her interview, Xena describes concerns about using web-based resources during the early stages of the admission process. She has anxiety about sharing personal information without having a clear explanation about how the information will be used. The adult learners' preferences about information sources emerge in the language used to describe different sources. In speaking about an institution's website Xena explains:

> **[00:25:37] Xena:** I actually tried to apply to [blank university] about fifteen years ago and found the whole thing unfriendly. I wasn't going to put my name in there [on the website] because I didn't want to go there until I understood more. I went so, for but then said, I don't want to do this with understanding more, and I just freaked myself out and said no, no I'm not doing it (Xena Participant Interview, 2018).

Online resources are described as secondary or less reliable sources in comparison to human resources. Websites are used to gather information, but human resources confirm that the information is accurate. When another study participant is asked about her decision to call the institution after exploring the website, Marie states:

> **[00:09:08]Marie:** I just needed to make sure I understood it correctly, and it was a lot of financial aid questions as well and there were a couple difference in the schools. The programs itself and I wanted to make sure I understood the differences (Marie Participant Interview, 2017).

Even participants that exhibited a great deal of comfort with web-based resources felt a need to consult human resources when confronted with a problem.

> **Researcher:** Did you use websites, phone calls?

Anna: Phone calls, resources through [transitions course]. I did have to call [staff member] before I submitted the application. There is a policy if you have less than 60 transfer credits you have to go to a branch campus, but they have to have a blanket rule. I had to call […] (Anna Participant Interview, 2015)

The value placed on human resources is evident across participants but is often magnified within individual interviews. If we return to Xena, the anxieties and fear of the unknown that were apparent in her descriptions of the institution's website are alleviated when she speaks to a representative.

[00:34:11] Xena: After my one and only actual phone, when I talked to my advisor. Yeah, when I finally got that call cause I was, my god I was panicked […] I was like why can't see classes without signing up for, and where is this, and when will I see that. She was like 'calm down' and we probably spent an hour on the phone. She walked me through what to expect and timelines. And it was a lot of the background information that isn't printed on the website, but she's like it'll be okay. I am going to help you make a right decision and you are going to be alright (Xena Participant Interview, 2018).

When asked about anxiety levels after the phone call, Xena states "I didn't have any more" (Xena Participant Interview, 2018).

Whether participants explicitly state a preference for online versus human resources, human resources are often privileged in the positive language and direct praise used to describe person-to-person interactions or express gratitude towards a specific individual. Six out of eight of the participants in this study share a narrative describing how they benefited from direct advising, in Joseline's interview, for example, she attributes her success in enrolling to a postsecondary program to a staff member. Joseline explains: I did not know the system, and to be honest if it was not for Ms. [blank], I do not think I would have ever tried to go to college (Joseline Participant Interview, 2017). Despite discussions about using and navigating websites, human resources are often privileged throughout participant interviews.

Belief as a Subtheme

Belief, another antecedent factor in the CMIS is closely related to salience. Belief asks whether or not participants view information as effective, if participants have a strong level of belief in the efficacy of the information, we can often hear the sentiment reflected in language about control over a particular situation. In general, the participants "individual beliefs about the […problem…] its impact on him or her, and his or her control over it, plays an important role in information-seeking" (Johnson, 1997). Information that is salient, should also be viewed as effective and garner a sense of belief in participants. The majority of person-to-person experiences described in the previous section include a hidden or embedded commentary about belief. For example, when Xena speaks to an adviser, and in turn no longer feels anxiety, we can also make an assumption about her belief that the information provided will be effective in facilitating her ability to enroll in the post-secondary program. Other participants' willingness to apply provided information to resolve or address problems during their journey, become windows for understanding how belief operates as a subtheme in analyzing the phenomena of applying to college for adult learner populations. The ideas that belief and control are intertwined elements of information-seeking often emerge when participants discuss degree completion or major selection. When Joanna, for example, discusses her experience with changing majors, the excerpt begins by describing a lack of control over what direction to take with her education. When Joanna initially speaks to the advisor she says

> **[00:14:49] Joanna:** I was completely clueless as to what I was going to do, but I knew I had to get out of [blank] major […] I have a lot of credits done but they were kind of potpourri (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017)

Joanna is unsure of what major will work for her, given her background in the health field and previous coursework. Later in the excerpt, Joanna shares that following her conversation with her advisor she learns that she has

> **[00:14:49] Joanna:** 37 credits that applied towards [one] degree in particular and [that the adviser] told me about that one and said that leaves you a lot of options and it's so far so good and I actually dropped all the [other] classes] (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017).

Joanna's belief in the information allows her to make a decision about her desired major of study and regain control over her educational journey. Her decision to drop all her courses and change majors shows a great deal of belief in the efficacy of the shared information.

Belief is also considered when the participant feels that the information presented fails to provide them with the information needed to support their decision-making. In many of the adult learner interviews, complaints about websites being geared to traditionally aged students challenge their belief in the information source. In an excerpt from Jay's interview, her comparison of scholarship resources highlights the type of disconnect that occurred when she lost faith in information sources provided by her institution. Jay shares that the

[00:42:43] Jay: "[community college's] financial aid office never told me about scholarship or how to even look for them […] when I called the [community college's] financial aid office you know all the scholarships were never communicated clearly" (Jay Participant Interview, 2018).

Over time, Jay loses belief in the information sources related to scholarship resources. Even when she transfers to a new institution and gains access to better resources she still questions whether or not the information is effective for her as an adult learner. When her new adviser shares the scholarship information Jay questions him. She says

You know I said I am a single parent, I work full time are these scholarships really going to apply for me because at the [community college] some of those scholarships you know, I was too old for" (Jay Participant Interview, 2017).

Her willingness to use the information or spend time using the information source is a directly related to her assumptions or beliefs about the sources effectiveness in responding to her specific needs.

In comparison, once an information source is deemed effective, it is common for adult learners to prioritize and use that same source during multiple occasions. We hear many of the adult learners describe multiple interactions with the same person. For example, one participant, Joseline shares that after meeting her college counselor that

[00:08:26] Joseline: I get most information through Ms. [blank] because when you go to school they don't tell you" (Joseline, 2017).

The decision to return to the source, allows us to infer that the adult learner has a strong belief that information is effective.

Personal experience as a Subtheme

In the health field, personal or direct experience factors explore how proximity to a person with a particular disease or direct experience with a disease increases “the social significance of the […] information” thus impacting individual information seeking behaviors (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). For adult learners engaged in the process of applying to school, previous educational or work experiences impact future information-seeking or decision making when returning to school. Issues that may have prevented them from enrolling or completing educational programs in the past are at the forefront of information-seeking or decision-making. During interviews, adult learners often made direct reference to previous educational experiences, drawing their own connections between the past and present. In her interview, Anna shares that

> **Anna:** I was at [Blank university] my first time around, I was a business major, my dad was a businessman, and he guided my sister and me into business. I also went to [Blank university], and then ended up getting into banking, did everything in finance, I did it all, I had success in it, but it did not feed my soul (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

Anna’s previous educational experience is heavily influenced by her father, and we can see a desire to break away from finance and enter a field that is personally fulfilling. In Anna’s more recent college-going experience we see her engaged in a search that is open to possibilities; she visits a major fair and searches government websites to learn more about career opportunities outside of banking. We can see her past experiences as a tool for helping her decide what major is the best fit *for her* at this stage in her life.

We also see many adult learners, drawing on previous experiences from spouses, friends or coworkers by helping them make decisions about programs or applying for financial aid. For Xena, there are several points where she draws on her husband's experiences of applying to school or completing financial aid forms to drive her own experience. When asked about her decision to complete the FAFSA the interviewer asks

> **[00:46:12] Researcher:** Okay, Well the first question is have you ever applied for financial aid?
>
> **[00:46:21] Xena:** I, We did it with my husband. For his schooling
>
> **[00:46:21] Researcher:** Okay. Okay. And you don't have to answer this but why did you decide not to apply for FAFSA for you?.
>
> **[00:46:40] Xena:** actually, wait he didn't qualify, not everybody qualifies right?
>
> **[00:46:43] Researcher:** Yes
>
> **[00:46:44] Xena:** I think that that is the right answer. Not everyone. I figured I wouldn't qualify.

Adult learners can draw on personal experience from peers or themselves, pushing adult learners to engage in a more expansive information-seeking experience or leading them to limit searches in favor of saving time or energy. The ability to draw on personal experiences in this manner is in many ways is unique to the adult learner. While adult learner experiences of returning to school are often seen through a lens deficit or disadvantage; in this regard, we see adult learners benefiting from previous experience as a tool for narrowing or focusing their interest.

Information Carrier as a Subtheme

Like many other areas, we can see how factors in the CMIS overlap to help us understand information-seeking behaviors. The information carrier subtheme asks scholars to consider how “editorial tone, perceived credibility […] utility [which] refers the perception that the sources of information are important, relevant and topical [yielding…] trust in [the] information source” enable or discourage information-seeking (Johnson & Meischke, 1993; Ruppel, 2016). In previous sections, decisions about salience and belief highlight the value placed human resources during the college admissions experience, but in this, we can focus on the content-neutral elements that lead adult learners to value the source, versus focusing on the effectiveness or applicability.

In one participant interview, he describes a need for a FAFSA that is more tailored to the adult learners’ circumstances in relation applying for financial aid. He imagines a process with two FAFSAs

> **[00:30:18] RL:** yes, like maybe a student like a high school FAFSA and the adult-oriented FAFSA because they're a lot of question that just doesn't apply for an adult learner. I get frustrated. Like why am I filling this out? It’s more like high school, that’s when the frustration and anxiety take place. And that's why it takes so long to get it done (RL Participant Interview, 2017).

In this excerpt, RL focuses on the FAFSA as an information carrier; he does not call into questions about editorial tone or credibility, but rather focuses on elements of the information carrier that challenges his ability to perceive questions on the FAFSA as “important, relevant, or topical” for adult learners (Johnson & Meischke, 1993; Ruppel, 2016).

Other adult learners focus on issues of tone or credibility. In an interview with Joanna, she focuses on tone when asked about her experiences completing the FAFSA.

> **[00:48:00] Researcher:** Where do you go to when you need help or have questions about the FAFSA?
>
> **[00:48:07] Joanna:** well if you want to be harassed you can call them, I mean I've had a couple people that I have spoken to that are that were absolutely belligerent I had one lady in particular that was very nice and accommodating but like when I had the issues with my daughter's birth date not matching her social security number and initially we didn't know why we couldn't get in I think it was vague I think it would just give you the problem and then give you a code, yeah they'll say blah blah blah blah code and then when you finally get in and when you do get through to a live human being most of them a vast majority of them were not nice they were quite rude" (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017).

In Joanna's case, her negative interaction with FAFSA customer service and the online technical support leaves her dissatisfied, with little or no desire to engage with FAFSA in the future.

Demographics as a Superordinate Theme

The CMIS also considers how an individual's background can limit or expand exposure to an information field. In turn, demographic features are also included as an antecedent factor and are used to explore how characteristics common to understanding human populations impact information seeking. Demographic features often represent a wide array of characteristics, as a researcher, it essential to let the raw data help in narrowing your scope to the most relevant demographic features. The characteristics that emerged as impactful for interpreting the adult learner experience of applying to a post-secondary program include occupation, income, age, and race/ethnicity. Characteristics like occupation, income, and age, shaped experiences for the majority of study participants. The remaining characteristic, race/ethnicity was specific to a subsection of the group but served as a powerful lens for interpreting individual cases, creating a foundation for future areas of study.

Occupation as a Subtheme

For many undergraduate students, it is imperative to couple in-class academic experiences with co-curricular experiences like internships or part-time jobs in their field of interest. Working as a paraprofessional often serves as the first opportunity for the student to engage with other professionals in the field, gain a practical understanding of the required skills, and determine if their desired occupation is personally fulfilling. In comparison, adult learners returning to school in order to change careers or advance in their current field can rely on previous experiences to help guide them academically. Challenging or unfulfilling work experiences may create a desire to explore a new field, while satisfaction in their current occupation reaffirms the decision to pursue a degree that supports continued professional development in the same or similar areas of interest. The adult learners' roles as employees are described in concert with their educational aspirations in several participant interviews. For example, when RL is asked about his interest in pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering her attributes his decision to his experience working for a temporary agency

> **[00:10:04] Researcher:** Okay, do you remember a little bit about the process? Learning about the program and kind of your first entry into learning about Mechanical Engineering?

[00:10:14] RL: Uhh, I was working for a [temping company]. Like a project manager, kinda like introduced me to the computer in a certain aspect of putting stuff on paper or in a computer to actually generate or design something. So I was intrigued by that (RL Participant Interview, 2018).

In earlier parts of the interview, RL acknowledges that he has always enjoyed mechanics and working with his hands, but views his direct work experience as having a direct impact on his decision to pursue a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

In other interviews, we not only draw a connection between work experience and decision making in the academic sphere but also the relationship between occupation and information –seeking. For Xena, she explains how she learns about academic programs through her interactions at work.

[00:18:51] Researcher: […] how did you learn about the particular program that [you] ended up enrolling him? So you picked a program but how did you learn about the program?

[00:19:12] Xena: I think that my answer is two-fold I because of the work I do. I'm exposed to HR specialists already that are already degreed. So I understood that I could poke around and that there were some options different kinds of types of programs than there was an option. Then, I actually Googled. I wanted the top school hat had human resource programs and [blank university] was one of the top […] (Xena Participant Interview, 2018).

Direct exposure to other human resources specialists not only provide Xena with a valuable source of information but also drives future information-seeking about academic programs and post-secondary institutions.

Income as a Subtheme:

A logical extension of our conversation concerning the role that occupation plays in information-seeking for adult learners is considering how income impacts college choice. Income emerges as a powerful method of analysis for two primary reasons during the college admissions process. First, is the reality the financial aid is in large part tied to income, like most students, the adult learner views applying for aid by completing the FAFSA as a major component of their admissions experience. Second, income or earning potential is frequently considered in conjunction with decisions about majors, degree and future career goals. Adult learners enter the academic sphere fully aware of their financial responsibilities, and their discussions about their educational pursuits must, in turn, acknowledge economic needs.

Joanna's story illustrates how access to financial aid is dependent on income. In her case, Joanna views income as a barrier to earning her degree. When asked about her experience of applying for federal aid by completing the FAFSA, we read

> **Researcher:** Did you receive any documentation from FAFSA following the completion of your financial aid application?
>
> **Anna:** Yes, but when we got it, we did not get any money, so I was confused about that **(**Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

Later Anna also shares that

Anna: The only other thing with FAFSA, was that I applied for scholarships, I did not receive any. So I called [blank] and she explained that these are need-based scholarships. I have a 3.92 and I feel bad I am not qualifying, but I should get some merit. They give you a need percentage because of my husband's income, but I do not want to spend all my savings, I have two homes, I thought it would be all merit-based, but that took a lot of understanding for me (Anna Participant Interview, 2017).

Anna makes the connection between aid and income, and we can see how the lack of aid leads her to seek additional information. In other cases, income or rather income potential drives information-seeking about educational programs. When Joseline is asked what led to her choice in major, she tells the interviewer

> **[00:03:30] Joseline:** we thought about a career, that allows me to move up, can I use or how much are they're gonna pay. So cyber security is a major they gonna use anywhere you go, but it is part of the innovation of the world. Everything is going towards that (Joseline Participant Interview, 2017).

Joseline is interested in finding a major that can develop into a career, a career that can be long-lasting and lead to her upward mobility. She naturally links mobility to income, placing income at the center of her information-seeking process.

Age as a subtheme

Discussions about adult learners generally begin with age. In this study, age is in many ways tangential to information-seeking. Instead, conversations about age are linked to considerations about time and perceptions about school related to participant’s status as adult learners. When asked about age, the oldest participant in the study views age as a motivating factor for returning to school. The interviewer asks

> **[00:02:47] Researcher:** What made you apply to school?
>
> **[00:02:57] Don:** I had been putting it off all my life and I figured I am not getting any younger so I might as well do it now. (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

When age the topic of age resurfaces, we once again hear Don discuss age as an aspect of time.

> **[00:05:51] Don:** Okay when I first came into admissions I was determined that school is going to be where I went. I was going to go back to college, right. You know, I've been putting it off for all these years saying to myself I can do this anytime. I'm going to do this anytime, well I'm 65 now right and when I get out I'll be 69. If I decide to go for a master's or doctorate that's four more years (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

In another excerpt, a conversation about age also serves as a commentary about differences between adult learners and traditionally aged learners during the early stages of the enrollment process. Joanna shares

[00:20:49] Joanna: I've actually given them feedback at you know different things about how it feels to be a non-traditional student on the campus and it's harder because a lot of The welcome functions and an orientation and all that stuff, and all the hoopla is more to so to speak is more so geared towards the younger people […and] for people like me we're not necessarily interested in mixers or parties or whatever it just kind of remind you that you're not 18 (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017).

This excerpt may prove valuable for helping institutions understand the importance of developing information sources that acknowledge the adult learner experience by appealing to their specific interest and need. Institutions might ask if admissions website developed for access during the application process and admissions events recognize adult learners as a target population.

Age is important to the adult learner experience; it is a topic that is discussed throughout the interviews, and key to most studies of adult learner experiences. Though age does not operate as a factor that drives information-seeking across participants, there are some participant experiences that provide some evidence of the role age plays in information seeking. One of the most direct examples is also provided in Joanna interview. Joanna describes her experience in learning about her intended major

> **[00:18:29] Joanna:** I did look up [my major] before I made this change because I was not like familiar with what it was. I tried to explain it to my husband when I came home from school that day. He and I went online. We looked up the degree, we looked to see what I could do with it cause I mean naturally, I'm not 18 years old anymore. I needed to figure out how it was going to affect the future job. […] I'm still kind of trying to feel my way around.

All three excerpts include commentary about age. Age is viewed in relation to time, and as a point of comparison to traditionally aged students. Age appears as a theme in many of the interviews but rarely operates as an independent factor in analyzing information-seeking.

Types of Capital as a Superordinate Theme

Theories about social and cultural capital question how personal background factors influence an individual's ability to navigate larger social fields. Though the Comprehensive

Model of Information Seeking (CMIS) has a different theoretical foundation, there are clear similarities between both areas of study. The CMIS also includes a conversation about the relationship between individuals and fields. The CMIS explains how " an individual's information field provides the context for individual information-seeking" the field either enables or limits access to information "the arrangement of [an] individual's information field [controls] the degree to which the individual can act on his or her predispositions" (Johnson, 1997). The commonalities provide the logic for drawing on both theories in our study of adult learners information-seeking experiences during the phenomena of college admissions process. The differences allow us to view the experiences from another perspective, allowing for added dimension. With social and cultural capital we shift away from "antecedent factors" that "predispose" individuals to seek information and begin to talk about personal background factors as a resource. Theories about capital push us to consider questions about control, as well as the relationship between subjective and objective forces.

Social Capital as a subtheme

Social capital asks us to think about how individuals utilize and benefit from relationships within their personal networks. This type of capital is the "actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network […] or […] membership [to] a group" (Bourdieu, 1986). Throughout this study, adult learners repeatedly describe how personal relationships benefit them during the college application process. Joseline's story begins with a friend connecting her to college counselor; Joseline attributes her success in receiving financial aid and enrolling in her post-secondary program to the counselor.

[00:04:43] Researcher: okay, well how did you find out about Ms. [blank]

[00:04:49] Joseline: Oh through a friend from high school, she went and through her she invited me and I have been with Ms. [blank] since then.

Joseline's friendship allows her to gain access to a new network of educational professionals; what begins as a potential resource becomes part of Joseline's durable network as she returns to her counselor several times during the application process.

Social Capital through Marriage as a subtheme

Different types of relationships allow us to examine social capital through multiple lenses. Bourdieu's own discourse on marriage casts it as a relationship with a unique ability "for monetary and also symbolic exchanges that [work to] assert the family's position in the social hierarchy […viewing] marriage [as] an institution that had direct bearing on the improvement, conservation, or dissipation of a family's material and symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 2002). We categorize marriage as a familial relationship, but it is a familial relationship that is in many cases governed by choice and recognized for its potential to influence social standing. In this study, spouses become partners in the college application process. When Anna works on completing her FAFSA, she credits her husband's technological expertise as an asset

Anna: We had everything out, like our tax return […] it was a longer process we had to sit and look for everything, but my husband had a background in computer science, so we did it just fine (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

She also cites her husband's experience as an asset during the application process

Researcher: What was the application like when you applied? I know this was not your first time, did you use paper the first time?

Anna: I used paper and it was 1991. Applying online was a lot easier. The first time I had to deliver stuff by hand but this time it was easier. I just hit submit. Even though I am

> older I am technology savvy working with it for almost 20 years, my husband is also a computer programmer (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

Anna positions her husband as a source of information or authority she can rely on while applying for financial aid and completing her college application.

Social Capital through parenthood as a subtheme

The family is the basis for much conversation about social reproduction. Capital is passed down and inherited from parent(s) to child. The parent's level of capital is used as a predictive measure of the child's level of capital we believe that the "the probability that someone who starts life in extreme privilege will stay there and [that] (simultaneously) increases the probability that someone whose parents were poor will also be poor" (Beller & Hout, 2006). The idea that capital flows from parent to child is so ingrained in the social reproduction discourse, that we might be surprised to find evidence of capital flowing from child to parent. Adult learner interviews in this study provide several examples where children serve as a source of capital for parents returning to school. Parents learn from supporting their children through the process or rely on young adults in their family as a source of information during the admissions process. Anna learns about the FAFSA through her stepdaughter, when asked

> Researcher: How did you learn about the FAFSA? Did you know about the FAFSA?

Anna responds

> **Anna**: […] my husband had a daughter attending Auburn and we did it with her (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

She also learns about the required financial documentation through her experience with her stepdaughter

Researcher: […] what documentation did you use to complete FAFSA?

Anna: We had everything out, like our tax return, we already knew from when we did it for my stepdaughter in 2002 (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

We also see an intergenerational transfer of capital between another participant and her niece and nephew. In Xena's interview, she shares how niece and nephew serve as a rich source of information

[00:27:26] Researcher: And then outside of the [universities'] website were there any other websites or sources of information you found valuable?

[00:27:37] Xena: […other sources worked in] conjunction with my niece and nephew going to school […] I could talk to my niece and nephew and say what is this ALEKs thing about, but I had more resources this time that understood college. The other time, you know with my background there was nobody else who had ever apply to college or gone through. I didn't have any resources. So I think my family really made a difference (Xena Participant Interview, 2018).

Finally, we see the relationship between parents and children serve as a tool for accessing a new network. Similar to the experience described earlier in this section, when Joseline is introduced to a college counselor through a friend, we see a parent tap into a network of educational professionals through her role as a parent. Marie learns about a student support program

[00:17:13] Marie: from [her] boy's school, it was you know a financial assistance type of thing and I wanted to see if they could you know what the financial guidelines were you

> know if I could qualify that sort of thing and they were able to help (Marie Participant Interview, 2017).

Each example works to support the idea that children can serve as a source of social capital for parents. The interruption in education means that parents are returning to school with a new generation of students, and they, in turn, have the opportunity to learn about the college admissions process from young adults in their social network. Educational institutions may begin to consider how they can leverage the child-parent relationship to recruit more adult learners.

Cultural Capital as a subtheme

Cultural capital is most strongly tied to academic success or educational attainment and is also described as a resource that can be passed down from parent to child. Children raised in an environment that allows for exposure to “cultural activities such as book reading and buying cinema, theatre, concert and museum attendance” are able to “ [acquire] knowledge (education or otherwise), cultural codes, manner of speaking and composition” (Sullivan, 2001; Mills, 2015). In other words, being embedded in a community where its members are highly educated be it in a neighborhood, school or workplace increases the level of cultural capital through further credentials, promotions or continued membership in the community. Despite the fact that the adults taking part in this study, are working to gain entrance into a new academic community, many of them already possess a level of cultural capital that connects to their intended program or field. In Joanna’s narrative, her knowledge of the health field showcases cultural capital at work. She shares

> **[00:09:11] Joanna:** I did the massage therapy and I got my license, I took my boards and actually also pursued further accreditation under a massage heading and became a certified manual emphatic drainage therapist as well. Um and then I did go back and start physical therapy assisting right away got through the first semester and found that I found it tedious. I passed everything; I got A's in it (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017).

Joanna enters a new academic program, but she already has years of experience in the healthcare field. Along with her professional experience, Joanna also shares that her spouse is in the healthcare field. Joanna's entry into the program is not jarring, but rather congruent because she has the "cultural capital or the 'expected behaviors, expected language competencies […] knowledge, attitudes to and relationship with academic culture required for success" (as cited in Mills,2015). She able to achieve that success, even though she dislikes the major

> [00:09:11] Joanna: I only completed one semester of it, just cause I really could not see myself sitting elderly people for wheelchairs for the rest of my life (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017).

In Joanna's case, we might argue that her cultural capital helps her succeed regardless of her dissatisfaction with the program.

Other participants allow us to consider cultural capital as resource passed from generation to generation. Xena describes feeling a sense of disconnect with her community, and how this distance drives her to leave home

[10:00:53] Xena: I don't connect with my younger life like that, like that high school, grade school and most of my family […] The thing that, there was a point probably in my mid-twenties where I didn't fit there anymore. I didn't talk like them like my thoughts were bigger […] but the different experience and like just my vocabulary changes because I went on to school and I learned some of the things […] I didn’t feel like I changed as a person, but there was an intellectual discrepancy (Xena Participant Interview, 2018).

In other parts of the interview, Xena describes school as a way “out of poverty”, she does not view her hometown as a place where she can develop the cultural capital needed to advance. For Xena, school becomes a source of cultural capital, and upon leaving she is able to learn more, adopting the language and cultural codes associated with her new community. Xena is able to accumulate capital, by gaining “exposure to the educative effects of the cultural capital of dominant groups” at school (Mills, 2015).

Social Role as Superordinate Theme

Social roles operate as another point of inquiry for understanding the adult learner experience of applying to school. This theme does not have a direct relationship with the comprehensive model of information seeking or theories about capital, and therefore is addressed as its own superordinate theme. The social roles designation has a logical connection to the CMIS when the CMIS explores demographic factors it asks how background features impact information-seeking behaviors. A demographic feature like marital status may prove valuable in our larger discussion, but participant interviews of moved beyond the simple “married, single, divorced” designations and instead discussed the impact that marriage and family had on their decision to re-enter school. The social role designation, in turn, contributes an added layer by focusing on the role instead of the label or characteristic. For example, Anna's experience of applying for FAFSA is further complicated when she must also consider what information is relevant based on her responsibilities as a parent

> **Anna**: We had to call, we did not think we had any questions, except that our stepson was in Kentucky and we had to pay child support, we were paying child support and the verbiage made it seem like we had to discuss child support, so we did. Then, we got a letter in the mail we had to fix that and clarify some things. I can remember that was a bit confusing (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

Here, Anna's information-seeking is not just a matter of marital status, but more so her financial responsibility to support her step-son. Her roles as a wife and stepmother lead her to ask different questions and consider different elements when completing her FAFSA.

We can also see how social roles impacting decisions about majors and educational programs during the admissions process. The term social role is also used to examine the complexities of the adult learner experience. The idea that the adult learner must consider their responsibilities as parents, children, spouses, and employees when deciding on the educational program is highlighted in Joanna's story

> **[00:23:56] Joanna:** I have three kids all three of which you know two of them are adults themselves. Ones in college of her own and my youngest son you know he's special needs he's autistic, and we live with my oldest son's my oldest son's fiancé lives with us and my mother-in-law lives with us so we have 7 people in my house […so] my shelf life for being on campus is dwindling so […] the [blank] program is insanely difficult and it was very for anybody to get through to keep up the workload […] at the same time when you put that in with having to come home and make dinner […] managing a

> household and making sure that my husband has clean clothes to wear to work (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017).

We can see how Joann's decision to leave a previous academic program is strongly influenced by her responsibilities outside the classroom. She is committed to returning to school but must find a program that provides her with the balance to support her family while completing a post-secondary degree.

We see a similar thread running through RL's interview. When he describes what he is looking for in an institution, he acknowledges some of the added challenges adult learners face

> **[00:12:07] RL:** Well uhh, I look at academics, yeah. Something that's good, relatively close. Also, looking at courses, as far as the school itself all that background is important when you have a full-time job or have a family and it becomes a little more difficult when you have to factor in your tuition which is you know was like 12-15,000 a year. It kind of hampers your ability to actually stay on course.

His roles as an employee and a parent impact the distance he can travel for school, he considers programs through a lens that must acknowledge the added responsibilities that come with life outside of school. Finally, he shares concerns about the financial burdens related to returning to school as an adult. Like Joanna, RL recognizes how social roles and responsibilities impact adult learners returning to school.

Subthemes of Race/Ethnicity & Meaningful Access to Technology

There are a number of remaining subthemes that served as keys to understanding adult learner information-seeking behaviors and experiences for a subsection of the participant pool. These themes did not appear across all participant narratives but may serve to provide a foundation for future studies about adult learner information-seeking experience when returning to school.

Race/Ethnicity as a Subtheme

Two of the participants described their ethnic background as a central part of their decisions or experience of returning to school. Each narrative treats ethnicity differently but makes ethnicity a central part of their stories. In Joseline's story, her ethnicity is tied to her experiences as an immigrant in the United States. Joseline attributes a large part of the challenges she faced, in her previous attempts to return to school, to her difficulty in navigating the system as an immigrant. Of her first attempt, Joseline shares that

> **[00:06:15] Joseline :** It was not that easy because I came from another country when I was 15 years old so, I did not understand the system […] it was kind of like I did not have no idea what I was doing, to be honest (Joseline Participant Interview, 2017).

Later in the same interview, she also states that

> **[00:17:38] Joseline:** The challenges were like I explained learning the system, when I came here I was already in high school and I did not know the language, and I did not know the system, and to be honest, if it was not for Ms. [blank] I do not think I would have ever tried to go to college or the university because I felt like that was not for me, like I could not reach that, that is for people that were born here and know the language.

Joseline attempts to apply to school three separate times, she is committed to returning to school but feels like she faces added barriers as an immigrant. She is ultimately able to navigate the process and contributes much of her success to her ability to work through an advocate.

For, Joseline her status as an immigrant positions her as an outsider, having a direct impact on her information-seeking experience. She relies on the social capital and cultural capital provided by her advocate to get access information during the college admission process.

[00:08:26] Joseline: I get the most information through Ms. [blank] cause when you go to school they don't tell you, they assume you already know what's going on. So they don't really tell you what you need (Joseline Participant Interview, 2017).

Ethnicity also plays a role in another participant interview. In Jay's interview, we see her father's experiences as an immigrant play a role in her views about education. Her father's own educational background creates a source of cultural capital that pushes Jay to return to school.

> **[00:12:58] Jay:** um very important I grew up in a first generation from my father, my mom was not first-generation she was white, to him education was very important because he came to this country with education but still has to obtain it from here (Jay Participant Interview, 2017).

Later when asked about the importance of education, we also see how her father's ideas about occupation, education, and success are passed down to her as motivation for obtaining her degree.

> **[00:14:13] Researcher:** and how do you feel the importance of education was conveyed in your household? Was it that they talked about school? Were there things in your household?
>
> **[00:14:27] Jay:** Oh you weren't going to have a good job if you did not go to school [laughs]
>
> **[00:14:31] Researcher:** Okay

> [00:14:31] Jay: Yeah it was basically the way I was taught, you are nothing, you earned it through your education so if you wanted to make money, if you wanted to be successful you were only able to do it if you had a college degree behind you

Cultural background plays a role in guiding the adult learners as they return to school, and though it operates in different manners, we can see how ethnicity and culture influence adult learners during the admissions process.

Additional Points of Inquiry: Don's information-seeking experience

IPA privileges the first participant by allowing researchers to use the themes from the first interview as a foundation for understanding other participant experiences. This study used Anna's participant interview as a roadmap for analyzing the interviews that follow. As the first person interviewed, Anna's narrative was used as a foundation for extrapolating themes from raw data these themes were then used to analyze other participant transcripts. The majority of the themes in this interview begin with Anna, Anna is used to measure common themes across interviews, but another participant, Don serves as a powerful narrative for measuring difference or range of experience. Don is recruited through a program that focuses on helping low-income and/or first-generation students enroll in a post-secondary program. He is also one of the few African American students in the study. Identity markers like income and race become valuable for analyzing experiences that are unique to Don's story. Don's story mirrors much of the literature about meaningful use or access to technology. Studies that ask how demographic features impact technology use "the term "digital divide" […] to describe patterns of unequal access to information technology based on factors such as income, education, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and geography" (as cited in Mossberger, Tolbert & Gilbert, 2006). When race and income are used as points of inquiry, findings of African Americans use of technology seem to echo across Don's experiences of using technology to seek information about his post-secondary program. Data also shows that African Americans view computers and internet as important tools in the "path to economic opportunity" they place this level of importance on technology despite "lower rates of access and skill" (Mossberger, Kaplan, Gilbert, 2008). African Americans are also more likely than "similarly situated whites to report a willingness to use public access for computers or the Internet" (Mossberger, Kaplan, Gilbert, 2008). Don's primary sources of technology for navigating his college application process include his cell phone and community library in the group home where he resides. When asked about where he works on his application Don shares

> **[00:18:37] Researcher:** That's right you got it, exactly. Uhh, let's see. Where did you work on your application? Did you go to the library?
>
> [00:18:53] **Don:** Well they have a library here at the uhh home, but I kept my phone and I had internet access on my phone. I do a lot of the stuff on my phone a lot. (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

Don's reliance on public resources and his cell phone stand in stark contrast to other participants who answer this question. The majority of other participants describe completing their applications at home in a space that they have complete ownership of. When measuring the distance between participants, Joanna choices about where she completed the application speak to the differences in accessing technology we can observe between Don and other participants. Joanna states

> **[00:43:38] Joanna:** [In] my dining room table where my laptop is […] you know I had a library relatively close by to where I lived then I didn't really use it very much though so as far as for school or whatever I never really did use it. When I was at the community college if I ever […] wanted quiet somewhere I could do research I did it at the library in the college. I did a vast majority of my school work at the time at the dining room in the dining room at the dining room table (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017).

The college application process is far from linear, adult learners in this study explain the need to consult advisors, financial aid representatives, admission representatives and college counselors while applying to college. For Don, circumstances related to his income and a past drug addiction forced him to engage in an exceedingly complex information-seeking process in order to facilitate his return to school. Don shares that he needs help

> **[00:05:51] Don:** with uhh the court stuff […that] admissions and financial aid they helped me quite a bit over there told me exactly what I needed and the thing is they will tell me where to get it from like I need it like I need to turn in this paper I got yesterday, right. It's for a non-violent letter from the federal government which I went to the Federal Building yesterday right and that woman you know you got to make an appointment to go there now and I didn't know (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

In a world, where people increasingly rely on online resources for information about navigating the types of processes, discussed in Don's interviews, we can begin drawing assumptions about how his information-seeking is impacted by his access to technology. In a study examining how factors like race and place support or inhibit access to information researchers argue that "technology resembles education, with its ability to shape "human capital" and to foster civic knowledge and engagement [the impact is strongly related to the…] a number of social and educational services are also readily available online (Mossberger, Gilbert &Tolbert, 2008). As online resources become a primary mode of sharing information about educational services, meaningful access to technology takes on a growing importance. The Mossberger, Gilbert, and Tolbert study (2008) also stresses the importance of control over information technology. The study explains that “Access to a computer is important, but [that] research suggests the use of the Internet at home may be more so, both for economic and political opportunities given the migration of employment and government information online” (Mossberger, Gilbert &Tolbert, 2008). This once again forces us to consider differences between Don and the other study participants, where five out eight participants openly discuss completing application materials from home.

Chapter 6: Discussion & Conclusion

The comprehensive model for information-seeking is used throughout this study to explore how personal background and relevance factors determine patterns of access and use for adult learners applying to post-secondary educational programs and completing financial aid forms. We also use discussions about the college-choice model, theories about sociocultural reproduction, resistance, and race in similar ways. Though each of the named areas of study emerges from different fields, they each share a common thread of exploring the relationship between an individual and their environment as well how structures enable or limit agency.

Literature from the Healthcare Field and the CMIS

The health field has seen a shift in how information is shared; the onus for accessing the information is placed on the information-seeker. This shift means that research should no longer focus on the "sender of communication messages and how they persuade receivers who are cast as target audiences" but rather on what drives an individual to search for information. Individuals are embedded in an information field where they are constantly exposed to information, how they receive or respond to and utilize information is dependent on how individuals are predisposed to receive information based on personal factors and positioning in the field. The field "represents the typical arrangement of information stimuli to which an individual is regularly exposed […] resources they routinely use […and] contains resources, constraints, and carriers of information" (Johnson et al, 2006). Many information scientists define information in a manner that recognizes the relationship between the information field and the individual. It is difficult to separate the individual from the environment because information need is a mixture of subjective and objective forces where "feeling and emotions

[are] the first sensory alarm bell" stimulated by "something that occurs on the outside, in either the physical or social environment" of the individual (Cole, 2012).

In a past study of adult learners, the CMIS is used to examine health-related information-seeking behaviors among adults aged 55-70 years old (Manafo & Wong, 2012). The CMIS allows researchers to take a participant group united by similar experiences and age, and flesh out differences while finding the underlying structure. Understanding individual nuances while identifying the structure is the overall project of the phenomenological method used in my study of adult learners applying to school. In addition, IPA encourages researchers to use "outside sources of knowledge" (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2011). The CMIS is an outside source that aids scholars with the project of understanding individual information-seeking experiences and then sifting through differences to identify commonalities; the commonalities are used to build an overarching description of the phenomena of applying to school. We can see clear differences when asking how demographic features impact information-seeking. For example, when Xena explains that her job is paying for her education, we can see how occupation and income impact her information needs. Xena does not have to apply for financial aid or seek out information about the process because her education is paid for. In comparison, a student like Don describes having to ask the admissions office

> **[00:17:23] Don**: to defer [his] enrollment fee, which is $300 and […] If necessary […] overdraft at the bank and pay the $300, right. You know how it is the extra 40 bucks for it, but it'll be worth it (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

The CMIS pushes us to consider difference, but this practice also works to highlight similarities. After working through the differences, similarities in experience are highlighted and magnified as essential elements of the information-seeking process for adult learners returning to school. Though Don and Xena have very different narratives about returning to school, they both discuss how age impacts their decisions about school, equating discussion of age with the passage of time. Xena shares

> **17:23 Xena:** So at this late stage. I might have fifteen more years of, I hope only about fifteen years of life working. I was thinking to myself. I want to do something that I'll be physically capable of doing but still, it is mentally challenging (Xena Participant Interview, 2018).

Don also discusses his age as a measure of time that drives his educational decisions, telling the interviewer that

> **[00:02:57] Don**: I had been putting it off all my life and I figured I am not getting any younger so I might as well do it now (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

The CMIS helps us measure differences between individuals while finding common experiences of information seeking across participant narratives.

College Choice Model

College Choice Models take on a similar project of understanding what factors drive information-seeking and more specifically decision-making about post-secondary programs and institutions for prospective students. Several scholars have developed college-choice models, but "Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-stage model, which is based on a synthesis of two decades of college choice literature" remains one of the "the most notable and widely cited framework for understanding college choice processes" (Davis, Nagle, Richards & Awokoya, 2013). Hossler & Gallagher's model presents three phases that work to examine college choice.

The first, called the predispositions phase is where “students begin to develop aspirations and expectations to attend college […] aspirations about college [are shaped by…] interactions with colleges and universities, support from high school teachers and administrators, parental encouragement and support, peer influence, socioeconomic status, and the anticipated return on investment” (Davis, Nagle, Richards & Awokoya, 2013). We can see clear parallels between the comprehensive model of the information-seeking model and the college choice model. Socioeconomic factors connect to the review of demographic factors in the CMIS. In the college choice model student’s decisions are informed by interactions with peers and members of the student’s larger community. In the CMIS, we also see a discussion of personal or direct experiences where students draw upon their own past experiences or experiences from others in their network to direct information-seeking.

In the next phase, we see an “active search for a select number of colleges and universities to which students apply […where] students consult their support network, including those who shape their college aspirations in the predisposition stage, to narrow down the number and types of colleges and universities” (Davis, Nagle, Richards & Awokoya, 2013). In this phase, students are also engaged in a process of information-seeking, this phase may include commentary about information carriers, focusing on the information students receive from people in the network. The final phase, the choice phase is where students “evaluate their options and create a ranking of first and second choice institutions” (Davis, Nagle, Richards & Awokoya, 2013). The similarities between the college choice model and the CMIS position seem to position it as a logical choice for examining information-seeking in the college admissions process, but the college choice model dismissed in favor of the CMIS because of its focus on traditionally aged learners. The college choice model may seem "general enough to apply to most potential students" but "individual characteristics in the predisposition phase and interactions with institutions in all three phases take on a different nature" for nontraditional students (Southerland, 2006). Information sources within the college choice model are largely relegated to authority figures for traditionally aged students; figures like parents, teachers and school administers are positioned as information sources, omitting other sources and leaving little or no room for a discussion of Internet-based sources of information. Furthermore, though the CMIS includes demographic features like socioeconomic status, here the status is still dependent on the parent's income. The college choice model fails to acknowledge other factors that are valuable to understanding adult learner information-seeking experiences. The college model has been critiqued for its narrow focus on traditionally aged students. A more inclusive model that recognizes the adult learner experience might recognize that "nontraditional students may be influenced by marital status, dependents, work status, and a variety of other factors […a need for] geographic proximity and a student's eventual choice of an institution may have far less to do with rational choice […] and far more to do with constraints imposed by limited time and financial means (Southerland, 2006).

As enrollment numbers for non-traditional students are projected to increase "in 2013, 12 million non-traditional students were enrolled in higher education, and this is projected to rise 14% to 14 million students by 2024" there is a growing need to study this population in various educational context, including the early stages of the admissions process (as cited in Macdonald, 2018). The CMIS's ability to explore adult learner information-seeking experiences made it a viable tool for exploring information-seeking in other contexts, like the college admissions process. This study continues to push for a "college choice" model that acknowledges the complexity of the adult learner experience. Other scholars have also suggested that "a second shortcoming involves the oversight of critical psychological factors such as those outlined in Bourdieu's (1973) work on cultural capital and habitus" another omission that this study has attempted to address (Southerland, 2006).

Critical Race Theory

Scholars have also expressed the need for a College Choice Model that places a larger focus on examining how identity markers like race impact decisions about college. Well-known college choice models like those developed by Hossler and Gallagher or another model developed by Tinto and Astin were developed using relatively homogenous participant groups. Critics note that "Hossler and Gallagher fail to discuss time impact of race […] in-depth, probably due to the limited populations on which their literature review is based" while Tinto and Astin's model was "developed based upon studies of traditional college students (white, middle-class, 18 to 22-year-olds)" (Southerland, 2006). Four out of eight students in this study on information-seeking behaviors of adult learners identified as non-white. Despite having a number of adult learners that self-identified as belonging to a racial minority, discussions about race and in many cases ethnicity were often embedded in other conversations about feelings of being cast as an "other" within the higher education landscape.

In a study of underrepresented adult learners, researchers assert that racial stereotypes create "dispositional or psychological barriers […these] barriers to learning, psychological barriers such as fear, low self-esteem, and negative attitudes toward education [which] are the most resistant to change" (Hyland-Russell & Groen, 2011). Data collected from participants in this study like Joseline show how negative attitudes about education can be internalized by the underrepresented student and serve as barriers to returning to school. We see Joseline position herself as an outsider when discussing her path to enrolling in school. When asked

> **[00:06:02] Researcher:** Was it easy for you the first time [you applied] or do you remember what the experience was like?

Joseline replies:

> **[00:06:15] Joseline:** To be honest with you, it was not that easy because I came from another country when I was 15 years old so, I did not understand the system I lived with my cousin and she got me through the whole process. Oh yeah, it was kind of like I did not have no idea what I was doing, to be honest. Sorry

Joseline makes the connection between her status as an immigrant and her ability to navigate the admissions process or her sense of belonging several times throughout the interview. Later in the interview, she shares that attempting to navigate her institution's website by herself is a barrier to accessing information. Joseline says that finding the right information begins with talking to people because

> [00:09:49] they tell you to what page to go, but you go yourself first to the internet you not going to find what you are looking for. Specifically for me, I am not from the country (Joseline Participant Interview, 2017).

Other students describe feeling like a secondary audience to traditionally aged students, but Joseline describes being further marginalized as an underrepresented student that also identifies as an adult learner.

In Joseline's narrative, we can see how her identity as an immigrant impacts her information-seeking during the admissions process. Though this narrative is not directly tied to a discussion of race, rather more strongly to her ethnic background, the literature from Critical Race scholars is still valuable as a body of work that interrogates how minoritized populations navigate the academic field in comparison to their white counterparts. Other studies using Critical Race Theories (CRT) echo Joseline's descriptions of a "campus climate wherein Whites enjoy a sense of entitlement, while Students of Color face charges of being unqualified and 'out of place'" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009).

Critical Race theory focuses on race and more specifically racism "as a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015). For another participant, Don, we race and more importantly larger racist structures impact his ability to return to school. Throughout Don's narrative, we hear him discuss how drug addiction and his related criminal history impact his ability to return to school. Prior to being accepted into a program, Don must provide paperwork showing that he has been rehabilitated; he has to prove that his past will have no will not create any issues in the classroom. Don explains

> **[00:10:03] Don:** […] I had to go to the courthouse […] and […] find the right offices and see how much stuff cost [..] luckily I had a little bit of money […] I had to actually show these people […] that I'm not going to be a bad influence on the students they have there now or the ones coming in […] it was […] a little interview […] and I felt a little self-conscious but I gave them my criminal record (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

Don’s story gives life to conversations about the racial inequality present in the criminal justice system, a conversation that is also tied to decades of drug policies that have been described as “racially disproportionate […by creating] practices that further marginalize […minority] groups” (Provine, 2011) Don aspires to return to school and earn an engineering degree, but his story reminds us that human experience is mediated by subjective and objective forces. For Don, his need to prove himself illustrates the power that larger “structural barriers to racial equality created by the war on drugs” can have over his ability to succeed academically. Don is able to produce both verbal and physical evidence that he has been rehabilitated producing a “non-violent letter from the federal government” but it is clear that his past further marginalizes him (Don Participant Interview, 2017). Don has to engage in a different pattern of information-seeking from his peers, he has to find out how to obtain the necessary documentation to address his criminal record. In addition, he is forced to discuss and disclose information about his criminal past at several times throughout the process though he shares that he has

> **[00:10:03] Don:** I've been accused of but never convicted, you know. Things that was thrown out of court and dismissed and all that other stuff (Don Participant Interview, 2017).

Don’s narrative is viewed through a CRT lens and with the knowledge about a long history of the relationship between drugs, race and the criminal justice system in the United States. Don does not make direct reference to the impact his past plays on his ability to return to school, but decades-long research about the “racialized construction of crack” where the drug was used to stoke racial fears, using stereotypes to paint the crack epidemic as a criminal issue instead of health problem support this reading of Don’s narrative (as cited in Provine, 2017).

The idea that stereotypes work to limit or place structural barriers on underrepresented students engaged in the admission's process is illustrated in both Don and Joseline's interviews about applying to school. We can also see how these identities impact information-seeking, whether it is a need to seek additional information or the feeling that information pathways are not built to support students from minoritized backgrounds. The impacts that race and ethnicity have on information-seeking may operate in the background, but CRT works to uncover how "race and racism impact educational structures" (McCoy & Rodrick, 2015).

Theories of Reproduction & Resistance

An underlying goal of this study is to understand how a student's status as an adult learner impacts information-seeking during the application process. An analysis that favors a limited view of social reproduction theories might argue that adult learners are bound by larger structures and unable to exercise true agency during the admissions process. Bourdieu, a scholar known for his social reproduction theories, introduces concepts like capital, agency, habitus, and field. These concepts are presented in a previous section, but work to illustrate the relationship between the individual (subjective) and the structure or environment that the individual is embedded in (the objective). The subjective and objective forces work in concert with one another. Using language from Bourdieu, he would define the objective structure or force using the term "field [which is a group] of interrelated social actors, and 'capital' used to describe the specific forms of agency and prestige within a given field" (Sterne, 2003). The term habitus is also associated with Bourdieu and is described as the individual disposition that operates between the objective (social) and subjective (individual) spheres. Habitus works to collapse the division between the subjective and objective spheres operating on a mental level while being viewed as “embodied social knowledge” that individuals develop through sustained interaction with other social actors within a larger field (Sterne, 2003). Bourdieu asserts that individuals are locked in a cycle of social reproduction; capital is passed down from generation to generation and the “position of each particular social actor in the field is the result interaction between the specific rules of the field, an agent’s habitus and an agent’s capital” (as cited in Robinson & Robertson, 2014). The field can limit or enable the actor’s ability to navigate the field. If we end our conversation of Bourdieu here, it might be difficult to see how the individual can exercise agency, escaping the circumstances of birth, where capital is largely dependent on previous generations and the ability to control capital is regulated by the field.

In order to push for a more flexible reading of Bourdieu, other scholars are introduced. Scholars like Weber and Coleman take conversations about social reproduction in another direction. Weber uses the concepts “life conduct” and “life chance” where life conduct is described as the choices we make within larger social structures that govern our movement with a field or system. The decision to describe life conduct as a choice reinforces the idea that individual movement on the field is strategic. On the other hand “life chances” are viewed as “the chances people have in life because of their social situation […] chance is socially determined. We see the interplay between agency and structure because the ability to make choices, even within the confines of the field still suggests some freedom to act.

Social reproduction theories are also recast by another scholar named James Coleman. Coleman’s work maintains the idea that capital is a resource passed down from one generation to another but removes the negative view of social reproduction as a tool for maintaining existing social classes presented by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman instead views social capital as an intergenerational network that works to protect traditional values ensuring that communities can maintain social control and harmony (Dika & Singh, 2002). Coleman views social as a tool for preserving the “good” in a community from generation to generation. Coleman treatment of social reproduction has useful commentary about “information channels” as a special type of capital, the channels are “a form of social capital [that hold the] potential for information that inheres in social relations […] all social relation create an information channel of some sort (Coleman, 1988).

Finally, we draw from John Dewey, as a bridge between theories of social reproduction and theories of resistance which will be discussed in the following section. Dewey begins by acknowledging the interplay between the individual and the environment. Dewey asserts that responding to outside stimuli is a function of living that even when “living things” face harm that they “nonetheless [try] to turn the energies which act upon it into means of its own further existence” (Dewey, 1990). Dewey challenges the idea that the individual is helpless against objective or external forces and instead argues that the individual is able to struggle against external forces ultimately creating a space for individual or collective growth. Dewey places the idea of growth at the center of this discussion. Dewey places the power to subvert oppressive structures in the hands of the individual (regardless of class) and building to a type of collective power that works to subvert oppressive structures in society. We see a movement from the individual to collective, replacing reproduction with a project of reconstruction where a “ great community” relies on the interaction between diverse groups, these groups “ fully connected with other groups” in order to “resolve social problems” (Nelsen, 2016). Dewey reframes the relationship between the individual and the environment, pushing us away from social reproduction narratives that remove the possibilities for human agency and change within larger objective structures.

Reading Coleman, Weber, and Dewey in conjunction with Bourdieu serves two purposes. The first is creating a space where we can begin to question overly deterministic reading of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. We can begin to revisit concepts like habitus, recognizing that "situations vary-so, habitus can [also] vary to fit the situation. Habitus is an open system of dispositions […] the same habitus can generate different, even opposite outcomes" (as cited in Cockerham, Rütten & Abel, 1997). This reading of Bourdieu, precipitated by engaging with scholars like Coleman and Weber, helps make agency visible in Bourdieu's approach to social reproduction. This more open, less restrictive view of Bourdieu also allows for a second project, it allows scholars to create a bridge between social reproduction theories and theories about resistance.

Theories of resistance credit social reproduction theories for placing school at the center of the conversation about social reproduction. In social reproduction theories schools are viewed as social sites that "function as agencies of social and cultural reproduction […that legitimize] capitalist rationality and sustained dominant social practices" (Giroux, 2016). In our study of adult learners, we see participant actively trying to reenter schools, we might argue that adult learners are willingly entering a reproductive space, but as scholars, we are tasked with adding complexity and questioning if participant narratives leave room for moments of resistance. We search for moments where "the concept of resistance must have a revealing function that contains a critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection and struggle in the interest of social and self-emancipation" (as cited in Quigley, 1990). Adult learner narratives provide several moments where adults exercise agency, resistance theories call scholars to look for moments of resistance by examining oppositional behaviors. In schools, we see a form of social reproduction where institutions operate to provide “different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they needed to occupy their respective places in a labor force stratified, by race, class, and gender” (Giroux, 1983). The idea that we are capable of social mobility or that we can question existing patterns of reproduction leave rooms for resistance. In this study, we can see adult learners engaged in moments of “self-reflection and struggle” that should, in turn, be examined, asking whether or we see an agency that rises to the level of resistance.

One such moment is presented in Anna’s interview. Anna shares that her first attempt at earning her bachelor’s degree is in large part dictated by her father

> **Anna:** I was a business major, my dad was a businessman and he guided my sister and I to business [then I switched schools] and then I ended up getting into banking, did everything in finance, I did it all has success in it, but it did not feel my soul (Anna Participant Interview, 2015).

Anna’s narrative begins as a textbook cycle of social reproduction. She is driven to enter the same field as her father, where she experiences success. Regardless, we can see some oppositional behavior, first illustrated by Anna’s decision to leave school. Anna enters a business program on two separate occasions but fails to earn her bachelor’s degree. Anna returns to school decade later to earn a degree as a speech pathologist. For Anna, early failures to earn her degree might be interpreted as oppositional behaviors that worked to resist acquiescing to expected social roles, but true resistance is seen in her decision to leave a field or career where she was successful to pursue a career that is driven self-interest. For Anna, her age seems to fuel agency by giving her some space and freedom to question her career without her father's influence.

Other resistance theorists also use narratives as a means of exploring oppositional behavior within an educational context. Allan Quigley's study of resistance uses classic characters from various works of fiction to bring attention to adult learner experiences of "failure" focusing on students that are characterized as dropout or non-participants. In one example, Quigley introduces Duddy, a fictional character that drops out of school in favor of joining an Irish street gang. Duddy achieves great success as a member of street gang; he is able to achieve success outside of the accepted or normative systems associated with a formal education. A story like Duddy's reinforces the idea that the decision to leave school is an oppositional behavior that requires analysis beyond the surface (Quigley, 1990). In my own study of adult learners, Xena's decision to enter a post-secondary program is complex, characterized by oppositional behavior that seems to challenge and reinforce theories of social reproduction. For Xena school

> **[10:00:53] Xena:** was way out of poverty for me um I don't go back much my father's deceased and I don't connect with my younger life like that, like that high school, grade school […] there was a point probably in my mid-twenties where I didn't fit there anymore. I didn't talk like them [… so] I went on to school"

Xena feels a clear sense of disconnect between herself and her community, and view school as space where she can escape. She describes school as the site where she can increase her cultural and economic capital. Xena views remaining at home as a path to social reproduction, and views education as a path to personal emancipation from "oppressive" social structures tied to her childhood home. Nonetheless, Xena ultimately rejects formal schooling instead finding success through, what she calls the "school of hard knocks" (Xena Participant Interview, 2018). Even Xena's decision to return to school culminates in a financial act of resistance. Xena is forced to return to school when she is denied a 5,000 dollar bonus from work. Xena explains

> **[00:12:34] Xena:** One of the things that was my dirty little secret was that I don't have a college degree, but my ability to do like lifelong learning and did stuff on my own to make myself employable. Well I started with this new company and […] I handed them my resume and they saw that I didn't have a degree […] they agreed to hire me but I had to return to school to get a degree.

Like Duddy, Xena is able to succeed outside of normal channels; she, in turn, questions the value of a formal education. Xena rejects the idea that formal schooling is required time and time again. Later in her interview, she shares

> **[00:13:56] Xena:** I should have gotten a $5000 bonus. There were three components that I had to achieve to get the $5000 and I only did, two of the three. And the one I didn't do was go back to school and they docked my bonus

Xena is finally driven to return to school, but it is clear that she engages is some level of resistance against formal schooling. Though we never receive a clear reason about why Xena resists, the behavior forces the researcher to "emancipatory interests that underlie such resistance and to make them to […] others so that they can become the object of debate and political analysis" (Giroux, 1983).

The decision for adult learners to return to school is complex, we can view previous attempts to obtain a post-secondary degree as failures, but we should also interrogate whether or not these behavior serve as oppositional behaviors against larger limiting structures of social reproduction. We must also ask how a decision to return to school for financial gain or social mobility feeds into larger cycles of reproduction. The adult learner experience can simultaneously exist as a moment of resistance while reinforcing “contradictory consciousness that are never free from the reproductive rationality embedded in capitalist social relations” (Giroux, 1983). Nonetheless, the researcher becomes responsible for highlighting and questioning moments that seem to resist or outrightly reject social reproduction as a sign of a struggle and then work to explore those moments. This type of exploration helps to understand how human agency can continue to operate even within systems of social reproduction.

Structural Description of Information-Seeking

There is a growing body of statistical data that stresses a shift in student demographics. Higher education institutions are seeing “a far more diverse population that typically work part-time or full-time, has greater family commitments, is over 24, and is juggling various competing responsibilities (Osam, Bergman, Cumberland, 2016). This shift should serve as a signal for educational institutions to begin the necessary project of learning how to support adult learners. There is a need to understand the adult learner population at each stage of the post-secondary experience, including the admissions process. In most cases, the college admissions process servers as the first interaction between the individual and the institution, a courting process that either leads to a long-term union or falls apart on the first date. Current adult education scholars have argued that the “university has attempted to maintain its historic ethos to serve the young, residential undergraduate” failing to “acknowledge [a] xenophobic culture and customs” (Kasworm, 2010). This study lends to a body of scholarship that interrogates adult learner experiences within higher education settings. Focusing specifically on the admissions process we work to investigate information-seeking while completing college applications and the FAFSA. Past studies in the field, have also warned that adult learners “report problematic situations with admissions and advisement staff; experiences of youth-oriented university catalog and Web sites; and policies, procedures and curricular scheduling” (Kasworm, 2010). This perspective is also reflected in this study of adult learners and serves as a starting point for understanding how adult populations are able to navigate the system, a system that is not built with them in mind.

Adult learners openly expressed feelings of discontent, alienation or frustration with the lack of materials targeted to them during the admissions process. Participants like Joanna said "that welcome functions and an orientation […] so to speak is more so geared toward the younger people" (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017). Other participants connect this youth-centered approach directly to the information seeking process during the application process. Another participant explains that she was unable to learn about what classes transferred, available course, or modes of instruction like online versus face-to-face courses without paying for orientation (Marie Participant Interview, 2017). Marie also felt that "they [the institution were] obviously more geared to kids coming out of high school going into college, probably not so much on the adult learner" (Marie Participant Interview, 2017). This sentiment is expressed in several interviews reinforcing the need to understand how adult learner access information. The first lens for examining this experience was the comprehensive model of information-seeking, demographic factors of age, occupation, income and race/ethnicity how identity predisposes adult learner to seek-information in specific ways. Factors like income determined whether or not adult learners would need financial aid, or if they would need to seek additional information about scholarships. We see participants like Anna explain how her income resulted in a federal aid package that consisted exclusively of loans; she in turn, applies for a scholarship. Applying for scholarships leads her to ask specific questions about the different types of scholarships. Anna tells the interviewer "I applied for the scholarship, I did not receive any. So I called [blank] and she explained that these are need-based scholarships" (Anna Participant Interview, 2017). Demographic factors like occupation also work to guide information-seeking related to major-choice or program. Adult learners often described choosing a major based on current occupations. The other two demographic factors, age, and race/ethnicity served as a background to larger conversations about navigating university systems. Age introduced earlier in this section was often discussed as a point of comparison between adult learners and younger counterparts or as a measure of time in reference to short and long-term education goals. Finally, race and ethnicity became valuable in discussions about identity for a subsection of a student in this study, utilizing Critical Race Theory and participant narratives about cultural capital to explore the relationship between these identity markers and information-seeking.

The CMIS included factors like salience, belief, and personal/direct experience and information carrier characteristics as part of the conversation of adult learner information-seeking behaviors. Salience and belief often worked together helping us understand how adult learners synthesized applied information. Salience asked us to examine how individuals "perceived [the] applicability of information to a problem he or faces while belief considered "the efficacy o the information" (Johnson & Meischke, 1993). Adult learners often related salience and belief, which was illustrated by a willingness to view the information as accurate or helpful, to the ability to connect received information to a specific educational counselor or advisor. Students describe returning to a specific counselor at several times during the application process or using educational professionals to confirm information. Moments, where participants describe making big decisions like dropping classes, changing majors or enrolling in a degree program after speaking to a representative, suggests a high degree of belief and salience.

The CMIS factors end with personal experience and information carrier characteristics. Personal experience factors describe information-seeking experiences that are influenced by the adult learners past experiences or past experiences of people within their network. The personal experience served as a strong indicator of information-seeking related to major and program choice or decision about financial aid. Past work experiences predisposed adult learners to remain in or leave a certain field. Past educational experiences created a foundation for adult learner expectations during their current admissions process. One participant explains that she had “turned to them [advisers] before at the community college […] so I figured that there had to be a support system similar to that at [blank] university” (Joanna Participant Interview, 2017). Personal experience also stems from adult learners interacting with people in their personal networks. Adult learners often use spouses or friends as sources of information during the financial aid process or as they investigate educational programs. For example, we see many participants make the decision to apply or not apply for financial aid based on their spouses’ or children’s experience during the process. Finally, the information carrier theme was used throughout the study to explore how adult learners responded to a characteristic like “tone or perceived credibility” related to the information source (Johnson & Meischke; Ruppel, 2016). This theme often revealed instances where participants found information carriers unreliable because of negative experiences or messaging that discouraged adult learners from continuing their education.

Themes like cultural and social capital, most strongly associated with scholars like Pierre Bourdieu, also provided a foundation for understanding how adult learners utilize social networks or cultural artifacts and markers strategize during the information-seeking process. Social capital is built into the adult learners’ social networks, and this theme was used to mark places in the data where adult learners describing using personal networks to learn more about the admissions process. Adult learners describe relying on a friend or spouse that recently returned to school. Interestingly enough, several adult learners also identify children or other college-aged family members as valuable sources of information. One parent even describes visiting an educational institution for the first time during a college visit with her son (Marie Participant Interview, 2017). These types of findings may ask educational professionals to reconsider how they are engaging with adult learners as parents. We may begin using campus visits geared to children as potential sources of recruitment for parents.

Cultural capital is defined as “familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated language” (Sullivan, 2001). Cultural capital is expressed through the adult learners’ ability to use language associated with a particular field. Due to past work or schooling experience, many adult learners in the study often used “educated language” associated with a particular field of study or carrier.

Remaining themes in this study, like social role and meaningful access to technology, were also valuable in exploring adult learner information-seeking experiences. Social role emerged as a theme for understanding experiences for several participants in the study. The theme “social role” was used to identify how roles as a parent or employee impacted decision-making related to school. For example, we see this impact when participants discussed the need to enroll in a program close to home to manage conflicting parental and educational responsibilities. We also roles as parents discussed in relation to financial decisions about school. Finally, roles as spouses and employees also push adult learners to think about their decision to return to school while continuing to satisfy responsibilities associated with each role.

The last theme used to analyze data is “meaningful access to technology” where we examine how access to software and information technologies like the internet impact the information-seeking process for one student in comparison to other participants interviewed within the study. One student describes using his cell phone and public libraries to search for information during the application and financial aid process. His story stands in stark contrast to students who are able to search for information using a personal laptop in a private setting.

Each theme provides us with a lens for understanding adult learner experiences of information-seeking. These themes were also analyzed using scholarship about theories of social reproduction and resistance. Where we ask how adult learners exercise agency while being embedded in larger structures that often work to restrict or limit access to information or the opportunities for social mobility. Age and strategic use of social and cultural capital become powerful resources for examining how adult learners resist oppressive structures.

Adult learners will continue to enter post-secondary programs, data suggests that the numbers of adult learners are projected to rise steadily in the coming years (as cited in Osam, Bergman, Cumberland, 2016). The growing adult learner population highlights the need for studies that continue to identify how the adult learner identity, complete with competing roles as parent, employees etcetera impact their experiences in higher education. This study is an attempt to contribute to larger conversations about adult learner experiences by exploring information-seeking during the phenomenon of returning to school.

Beyond the Study: How this study can be used to inform practice

For many of the study participants, interviews served as a vehicle for providing targeted feedback about the college admissions process from the adult learner perspective. Students discuss their experiences with advisors, admissions and orientation staff; the narratives about their interactions with staff members in each area reinforce how sharing this data with these respective audiences can serve as a foundation for improving the process for adult learners. In an interview with a participant like Jay, we can see how navigating the admissions process as an adult learner may result in a situation unique to adult learners as a population. Jay shares that "admission advisor tells you what you are supposed to do, now theoretically that is supposed to be the smooth process however because I applied at a later age the [community college] already had me registered with a student ID from ten years ago" (Jay Participant Interview, 2017). Interviews serve as a resource for understanding barriers or challenges that are unique to adult learners. The interviews also provide a starting point to evaluate these challenges and begin discussions about potential solutions. Finally, interviews serve as a resource for identifying appropriate stakeholders to address these issues, by serving as a vehicle for adult learners to self-identify the professional staff and units that support them throughout the process.

Limitations of the Study

This study utilized a snowball sampling approach for recruiting participants. Snowball sampling "is […] a type of purposive sampling [where the researcher reaches out to] participants or informants with whom contact has already been made [in order to] use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study" (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey 2012). The criterion used to identify viable participants included age, status as a student, and a number of assigned markers used to define students as non-traditional. Though gender was not included as a criterion for recruitment, six out of eight participants identified as women. Examining collected data through a feminist or gendered lens may have resulted in important discussions about the role that gender plays in a student's ability to access information during the admissions process. Data trends about college enrollment have reflected a growing rate among women, indicating that in "In fall 2010, only 43% of enrollees in U.S. 4-year and 2-year postsecondary institutions were male and [that] the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projects an enrollment increase of 21% for women relative to only 12% for men through 2019" (Conger & Long, 2013). The study was not designed with gender as a focus, and the importance of gender as an analytical lens emerged in the late stages of data analysis. It is clear that any future study examining the admissions process from the adult learner perspective should also include a discussion of the role that gender plays in driving access to resources and information during the process.

References

Abel, T., & Frohlich, K. L. (2012). Capitals and capabilities: Linking structure and agency to reduce health inequalities. Social Science & Medicine, 74(2), 236-244. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.10.028

Anna Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2015).

Adult Learner Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2015).

Aanstoos, C. M. (1983). A phenomenological study of thinking as it is exemplified during chess playing.

Awokoya, J. T., Richards, D. A. R., Nagle, B., & Davis, R. J. (2013). The impact of the gates millennium scholars program on college choice for high-achieving, low-income African American student. Journal of Negro Education, 82(3), 226.

Baptiste, I. (Presenter). (2015). Comparing Qualitative Research Approaches. Live performance in Pennsylvania, University Park.

Barrett, B. D., & Martina, C. A. (2012). Towards a non-deterministic reading of Pierre Bourdieu: Habitus and educational change in urban schools. Policy Futures in Education, 10(3), 249-262. doi:10.2304/pfie.2012.10.3.249

Battilana, J. (2006). Agency and institutions: The enabling role of individuals' social position. Organization, 13(5), 653-676. doi:10.1177/1350508406067008

Beller, E., & Hout, M. (2006). Intergenerational social mobility: The united states in comparative perspective. The Future of Children, 16(2), 19-36. doi:10.1353/foc.2006.0012

Bergerson, A. A., Heiselt, A. K., & Aiken-Wisniewski, S. (2013). Refocusing college choice: Women's reflections on their postsecondary education choices. NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education, 6(2), 185-211. doi:10.1515/njawhe-2013-0013

Bettinger, E. P., Long, B. T., Oreopoulos, P., & Sanbonmatsu, L. (2012). The role of application assistance and information in college decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA experiment. Quarterly Journal of Economics, 127(3), 1205.

Bourdieu, P., 1986. The forms of capital. In: Richardson, J.G. (Ed.), Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. Greenwood Press, New York, pp. 241–258.

Bourdieu, P. (2002). Pierre Bourdieu on marriage strategies. *Population and Development Review, 28*(3), 549-558. doi:10.1111/j.1728-4457.2002.00549.x

Chao, E. L., DeRocco, E. S., & Flynn, M. K. (2007). Adult Learners in Higher Education: Barriers to Success and Strategies to Improve Results. Employment and Training Administration. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497801.pdf

Cole, C. (2012). Information need: A theory connecting information search to knowledge formation. Medford, New Jersey: Published on behalf of the American Society for Information Science and Technology by Information Today, Inc.

Cockerham, W. C., Abel, T., & Rutten, A. (1997). conceptualizing contemporary health lifestyles: Moving beyond Weber. Sociological Quarterly, 38(2), 331-342.

Collins, A., & Halverson, R. (2009). Rethinking education in the age of technology: The digital revolution and schooling in America. New York: Teachers College Press.

Collyer, F., Willis, K., Franklin, M., Harley, K., & Short, S. (2015). Healthcare choice: Bourdieu's capital, habitus, and field. Current Sociology, 63(5), 685-699. doi:10.1177/0011392115590082

Conger, D., & Long, M. C. (2013). Gender gaps in college enrollment: The role of gender sorting across public high schools. Educational Researcher, 42(7), 371-380. doi:10.3102/0013189X13503983

Connell, J. (2011). adult learners and universities. International Journal of Arts & Sciences, 4(16), 93.

Connelly, L. M. (2010). What is phenomenology? Medsurg Nursing: Official Journal of the Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses, 19(2), 127.

Choy, S. (2002). Nontraditional Undergraduates. The Condition of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002012.pdf

Closson, R. B. (2010). Critical race theory and adult education. Adult Education Quarterly, 60(3), 261-283. doi:10.1177/0741713609358445

Cockerham, W. C., & Hinote, B. P. (2006). Quantifying Habitus: Future Directions. In K. Robson & C. Sanders (Eds.), Quantifying Theory: Pierre Bourdieu (pp. 201-210). Springer.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. American Journal of Sociology, 94, S95-S120. doi:10.1086/228943

Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.

Crowell, S. (2015). Existentialism (E. Zalta, Ed.). Retrieved June 5, 2016, from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/

Davey, G. (2012). Beyond a binary model of students' educational decision-making. *Sociological Research Online, 17*(3), 1-11. doi:10.5153/sro.2585

Davis, R. J., Nagle, B., David A. R. Richards, & Awokoya, J. T. (2013). The impact of the gates Millennium Scholars program on college choice for high-achieving, low-income African American students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 82*(3), 226-242. doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.82.3.0226

Deggs, D. (2011). Contextualizing the perceived barriers of adult learners in an accelerated undergraduate degree program. Qualitative Report, 16(6), 1540-1553.

Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & ebrary, I. (2001). Critical race theory: An introduction. New York: New York University Press.

Denice, P. (2017). Back to school: Racial and gender differences in adults' participation in formal schooling, 1978-2013. Demography, 54(3), 1147. doi:10.1007/s13524-017-0570-6

Dewey, J. (1990). Democracy and Education. Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg.

De Graaf, N. D., De Graaf, P. M., & Kraaykamp, G. (2000). Parental cultural capital and educational attainment in the Netherlands: A refinement of the cultural capital perspective. Sociology of Education, 73, 92-111

Dika, S. L., & Singh, K. (2002). Applications of social capital in educational literature: A critical synthesis. Review of Educational Research, 72(1), 31-60. doi:10.3102/00346543072001031

Don Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2017).

Dougherty, B. C., & Woodland, R. (2009). Understanding sources of financial support for adult learners. The Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 57(3), 181-186. doi:10.1080/07377360903250445

Dowling, M. (2007). From Husserl to Van Manen. A review of different phenomenological 54 approaches. International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44(1), 131-142. doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2005.11.026

Dowling M, Cooney A (2012) Research approaches related to phenomenology: negotiating a complex landscape. Nurse Researcher. 20, 2, 21-27.

Dutta-Bergman, M. (2006). Patient's Online Information-Seeking Behavior. In M. Murero & R. E. Rice (Eds.), Media Use Theory and Internet Use for Healthcare (pp. 83-106). Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates.

Eatough, V., Smith, J. A., & Shaw, R. (2008). Women, anger, and aggression. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*(12), 1767.

Ecclestone, K. (2007). An identity crisis? using concepts of 'identity', 'agency' and 'structure' in The education of adults. Studies in the Education of Adults, 39(2), 121-131. doi:10.1080/02660830.2007.11661544

Edgerton, J. D., & Roberts, L. W. (2014). Cultural capital or habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the explanation of enduring educational inequality. Theory and Research in Education, 1477878514530231.

Flynn, S., Brown, J., Johnson, A., & Rodger, S. (2011). Barriers to education for the marginalized adult learner. Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 57(1), 43.

Fonteyn, M. E., Kuipers, B., & Grobe, S. J. (1993). A description of think aloud method and protocol analysis. Qualitative Health Research, 3(4), 430-441. doi:10.1177/104973239300300403

Frère, B. (2011). Bourdieu’s sociological fiction: A phenomenological reading of habitus. The The legacy of Pierre Bourdieu: Critical Essays, 247-270.

Friedland, R. (2009). The endless fields of Pierre Bourdieu. Organization, 16(6), 887-917.

Fuchs, Christian. 2012. Political economy and surveillance theory. Critical Sociology 38, 2 April 2012. doi 10.1177/0896920511435710

Gifford, D., Briceño-Perriott, J., & Mianzo, F. (2005). Pen to mouse: Web-based technology's impact on college admission applications. Journal of College Admission, (188), 16.

Gillies, V., & Edwards, R. (2006). A qualitative analysis of parenting and social capital: Comparing the work of Coleman and Bourdieu. Qualitative Sociology Review, 2(2), 42-60.

Giroux, H. A. (1983). Theories of reproduction and resistance in the new sociology of education: A critical analysis. Harvard Educational Review, 53(3), 257.

Graaf, N. D. d., Graaf, P. M. d., & Kraaykamp, G. (2000). Parental cultural capital and educational attainment in the Netherlands: A refinement of the cultural capital perspective. Sociology of Education, 73(2), 111;92;-111.

Grenfell, M. (2011). Field (Bourdieu). In P. C. Hogan (Ed.), The Cambridge encyclopedia of the language sciences. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from http://ss360.libraries.psu.edu/cgibin/ssredirpg?D=7F9&U=http%3A%2F%2Falias.libraries.psu.edu%2Feresources%2Fproxy%2Flogin%3Furl%3Dhttps%3A%2F%2Fsearch.credoreference.com%2Fcontent%2Fentry%2Fcupelanscis%2Ffield_bourdieu%2F0%3FinstitutionId%3D725

Guo, R. X., Dobson, T., & Petrina, S. (2008). Digital natives, digital immigrants: An analysis of age and ICT competency in teacher education. Journal of Educational Computing Research, 38(3), 235-254. doi:10.2190/EC.38.3.a

Hildreth, R. W. (2009). Reconstructing Dewey on Power. Political Theory, 37(6), 780-807. doi: 10.1177/0090591709345454

Hill, L. D., Bregman, A., & Andrade, F. (2015). Social capital for college: Network composition and access to selective institutions among urban high school students. Urban Education, 50(3), 316-345. doi:10.1177/0042085913514590

Holt, B. (2012). Identity matters: The centrality of 'conferred identity' as symbolic power and social capital in higher education mobility. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 16*(9), 929-940. doi:10.1080/13603116.2011.580458

Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three-phase model and the implications for policymakers. College and University, 62(3), 207-222.

Houston, S., & Mullan-Jensen, C. (2012). Towards depth and width in qualitative social work: Aligning interpretative phenomenological analysis with the theory of social domains. *Qualitative Social Work, 11*(3), 266-281. doi:10.1177/1473325011400484

Hoyt, J. E., Howell, S. L., Touchet, J., Young, S., & Wygant, S. (2010). Enhancing Nontraditional Student Learning Outcomes in Higher Education. PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning, 23-37. Retrieved from https://www.iup.edu/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=104527

Hyland-Russell, T., & Groen, J. (2011). Marginalized non-traditional adult learners: Beyond economics1. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education, 24*(1), 61.

Jay Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2017).

Joanna Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2017).

Jenkins, R. (1982). Pierre Bourdieu and the reproduction of determinism. Sociology, 16(2), 270-281. doi:10.1177/0038038582016002008

Josefsson, U. (2006). Patient's Online Information-Seeking Behavior. In M. Murero & R. E. Rice (Eds.), The internet and health care; theory, research, and practice (pp. 127-148). Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates.

Joseline Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2017).

Johnson, J. D., Andrews, J. E., & Allard, S. (2001). A model for understanding and affecting cancer genetics information seeking. *Library and Information Science Research, 23*(4), 335-349. doi:10.1016/S0740-8188(01)00094-9

Johnson, J. D., Donohue, W. A., Atkin, C. K., & Johnson, S. (1995). A comprehensive model of Information-seeking: Tests focusing on a technical organization. *Science Communication, 16*(3), 274-303. doi:10.1177/1075547095016003003

Johnson, J. D., & Meischke, H. (1993). A comprehensive model of cancer-related Information-seeking applied to magazines. Human Communication Research, 19(3), 343-367. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1993.tb00305.x

Johnson, J. D. (1996). Information seeking: An organizational dilemma. Westport, Conn: Quorum.

Johnson, J. D. (1997). Cancer-related information seeking. Cresskill, N.J: Hampton Press.

Johnson, R. (1993). The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature. New York: Columbia University Press.

Johnson, N. E., Johnson, J. D. E., Case, D. O., Andrews, J., & Allard, S. L. (2006). Fields and pathways: Contrasting or complementary views of information seeking. Information Processing and Management, 42(2), 569-582. doi:10.1016/j.ipm.2004.12.001

Kasworm, C. E. (2010). Adult learners in a research university: Negotiating undergraduate student identity. Adult Education Quarterly, 60(2), 143-160. doi:10.1177/0741713609336110

Kasworm, C., Rose, A., and Ross-Gordon, J. (2010). Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education. Los Angeles: Sage.

Kim, K., & Baker, R. M. (2014). The assumed benefits and hidden costs of adult learners' college enrollment. Research in Higher Education, 56(5), 510-533. doi:10.1007/s11162-014-9351-x

Kimmel, S. B., & McNeese, M. N. (2006). Barriers to business education: Motivating adult learners. Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management, 7(3), 292.

Kobrin, J. L., & Edwards, K. (2013). The impact of online applications on higher education outcomes. College and University, 89(1), 2.

Langdridge, D. (2007). Phenomenological psychology: Theory, research and method. Pearson Education.

Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 102-120. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp062oa

Lansing, J. (2017). A new model of college choice for distance learners. Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 45(3), 365-389. doi:10.1177/0047239516673183

Laurent, M. R., & Vickers, T. J. (2009). Seeking health information online: Does Wikipedia matter? Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association: JAMIA, 16(4), 471-479. doi:10.1197/jamia.M3059

Lee, H. O., & Kim, S. (2015). Linking health information seeking to behavioral outcomes: Antecedents and outcomes of childhood vaccination information seeking in south korea. Journal of Health Communication, 20(3), 285-296. doi:10.1080/10810730.2014.927035

Leonard, M. (2005). Children, childhood and social capital: Exploring the links. Sociology-the Journal of the British Sociological Association, 39(4), 605-622. doi:10.1177/0038505052490

MacDonald, K. (2018). A review of the literature: The needs of nontraditional students in postsecondary education. *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly, 5*(4),. doi:10.1002/sem3.20115

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). Qualitative research methods: a data collector's field guide.

Manafo, E., & Wong, S. (2012). Exploring older adults' health information seeking behaviors. Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 44(1), 85-89. doi:10.1016/j.jneb.2011.05.018

Marie Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2017)

McCoy, D. L., & Rodricks, D. J. (2015). Critical race theory in higher education: 20 years of theoretical and research innovations. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Mills, C. (2008). Reproduction and transformation of inequalities in schooling: The transformative potential of the theoretical constructs of Bourdieu. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 29(1), 79-89. doi:10.1080/01425690701737481

Mills, C. (2015). Implications of the my school website for disadvantaged communities: A Bourdieuian analysis. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 47*(2), 146. doi:10.1080/00131857.2013.793927

Moran, D. (2000). Introduction to Phenomenology. London: Routledge.

Mossberger, K., Tolbert, C. J., & Gilbert, M. (2006). Race, place, and information technology. *Urban Affairs Review, 41*(5), 583-620. doi:10.1177/1078087405283511

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.

Nash, R. (2003). Social explanation and socialization: On bourdieu and the structure, disposition, practice scheme. The Sociological Review, 51(1), 43-62. doi:10.1111/1467-954X.00407

National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by attendance status, sex, and age: Selected years, 1970 through 2021. Retrieved May 25, 2016, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_224.asp

Nelsen, P. J. (2016). Growth and resistance: How Deweyan pragmatism reconstructs social justice education: Growth and resistance. Educational Theory, 66(1-2), 231-244. doi:10.1111/edth.12165

Nienhusser, H. K., Vega, B. E., & Mariella Cristina Saavedra Carquin. (2015). Undocumented Students' experiences with micro-aggressions during their college choice process. Teachers College Record, 118(2), 1.

Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education. (2009). College Success Scholars. Retrieved from http://omse.umd.edu/college-success-scholars.html

Osam, E. K., Bergman, M., & Cumberland, D. M. (2016). *An integrative literature review on the barriers impacting adult learners' return to college*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications. doi:10.1177/1045159516658013

Peillon, M. (1998). Bourdieu's field and the sociology of welfare. Journal of Social Policy, 27(2), 213-229. doi:10.1017/S0047279498005273

Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., & Kostere, S. (2015). Generic qualitative research in psychology.The Qualitative Report, 20(2), 76.

Poock, M. C., & Berryhill, P. O. (2000). The impact of an online application process on minority graduate students. College and University, 75(4), 13.

Posselt, J. R., Jaquette, O., Bielby, R., & Bastedo, M. N. (2012). Access without equity: Longitudinal analyses of institutional stratification by race and ethnicity, 1972–2004. American Educational Research Journal, 49(6), 1074-1111. doi:10.3102/0002831212439456

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. Annual Review of Sociology, 24(1), 1-24. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. On the Horizon, 9(5), 1-6. doi:10.1108/10748120110424816

Peillon, M. (1998). Bourdieu's field and the sociology of welfare. Journal of Social Policy, 27(2), 213-229. doi:10.1017/S0047279498005273

Perna, L. (2007). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C

Smart (ed.). Higher Education Handbook of Theory and Research XXI, 99–157. Netherlands: Springer.

Poock, M. C., & Berryhill, P. O. (2000). The impact of an online application process on minority graduate students. College and University, 75(4), 13.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. On the Horizon, 9(5), 1-6. 56 Retrieved from http://ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/docview/214629645?accountid=13158

Provine, D. M. (2011). Race and inequality in the war on drugs. Annual Review of Law and Social Science, 7(1), 41-60. doi:10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-102510-105445

Quigley, B.A. (1990). "Hidden logic: Reproduction and resistance in adult literacy and adult basic education." Adult Education Quarterly, 40, (2). 103-115.

Reay, D. (2004). 'it's all becoming a habitus': Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25(4), 431-444. 10.1080/0142569042000236934

RL Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2017).

Rogers, A. (2006). Escaping the slums or changing the slums? Lifelong learning and social Transformation. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 25(2), 125. doi:10.1080/02601370500510736

Robinson, M., & Robertson, S. (2014). Challenging the field: Bourdieu and men's health. Social Theory & Health, 12(4), 339-360. doi:10.1057/sth.2014.8

Robinson, K. J., & Roksa, J. (2016). Counselors, information, and high school college-going culture: Inequalities in the college application process. Research in Higher Education, 57(7), 845-868. doi:10.1007/s11162-016-9406-2

Ruppel, E. K. (2016). Scanning health information sources: Applying and extending the comprehensive model of information seeking. *Journal of Health Communication, 21*(2), 208-216. doi:10.1080/10810730.2015.1058438

Seftor, N. S., & Turner, S. E. (2002). Back to school: Federal student aid policy and adult college enrollment. Journal of Human Resources, 37(2), 336-352

Seidman, J.J. (2006). The mysterious maze of the World Wide Web: How can we guide consumers to high-quality health information on the Internet? In M.Murero & R.E.Rice (Eds.), Internet and health care: Theory, research and practice (pp. 195–212). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Selwyn, N. (2004). Reconsidering political and popular understandings of the digital divide. New Media & Society, 6(3), 341-362. doi:10.1177/1461444804042519

Shaw, E. J., Kobrin, J. L., Packman, S. F., & Schmidt, A. E. (2009). Describing students involved in the search phase of the college choice process: A cluster analysis study. Journal of Advanced Academics, 20(4), 662-700. doi:10.1177/1932202X0902000405

Sirigatti, S. (2006). Foreword. In M. Murero & R. E. Rice (Eds.), Media Use Theory and Internet Use for Healthcare (pp. Xvii-Xxi). Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates.

Smith, M. A., Baum, S., & Mcpherson, M. S. (2008). Financial independence and age: Distributive justice in the case of adult education. Theory and Research in Education, 6(2), 131-152. doi:10.1177/1477878508091108

Smith J. A., Osborn M. Interpretive phenomenological analysis. In: Smith J. A., editor.

Qualitative psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods. 2nd Ed.. London: Sage Publications; 2008. p. 53-80.

Southerland, J.N. (2006). Formulating a New Model of College Choice and Persistence. Paper presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA, November 2–4.

Strayhorn, T. L. (2010). When race and gender collide: Social and cultural capital's influence on the academic achievement of African-American and Latino males. The Review of Higher Education, 33(3), 307-332.

Sterne, J. (2003). Bourdieu, technique and technology. Cultural Studies, 17(3), 367-389. doi:10.1080/0950238032000083863a

Stone, J. E. (2005). The student aid gauntlet: Making access to college simple and certain. Final report of the special study of simplification of need analysis and application for title IV aid. Washington, DC: Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance.

Sullivan, A. (2001). Cultural capital and educational attainment. Sociology, 35(4), 893-912. doi:10.1017/S0038038501008938

Taylor, M., Trumpower, D., & Pavic, I. (2012). A social capital inventory for adult literacy learners. International Forum of Teaching and Studies, 8(2), 12.

Tlili, A., & Obsiye, M. (2014). What is Coleman's social capital the name of? A critique of a not very social capital. Critical Sociology, 40(4), 551-574. doi:10.1177/0896920513479615

Tierney, W. G. (2009). Applying to college. Qualitative Inquiry, 15(1), 79-95. doi:10.1177/1077800408325329

Tierney, W. G., & Venegas, K. M. (2009). Finding money on the table: Information, financial aid, and access to college. The Journal of Higher Education, 80(4), 363-388. doi:10.1353/jhe.0.0059

Seftor, N., & Turner, S. (2002). Back to School: Federal Student Aid Policy and Adult College Enrollment. *The Journal of Human Resources, 37*(2), 336-352. doi:10.2307/3069650

U.S. Department of Education. (2013). FAFSA Dependency Status Graphic. Retrieved from https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/infographic-accessible

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). Digest of Education Statistics, 2013 (NCES 2015-011), Chapter 3.

U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Educational Opportunity Centers Program. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2018). Federal TRIO Programs. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html

University of Maryland. (2013). Transfer Credit Services. Retrieved from http://www.transfercredit.umd.edu/faqs.html

Van Manen, M. (1997). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy (2nd ed.). London, Ont: Althouse Press.

Van Manen, M. (2017). Phenomenology in its original sense. Qualitative Health Research, 27(6), 810-825. doi:10.1177/1049732317699381

VanSlyke, T. (2003). Digital natives, digital immigrants: Some thoughts from the generation gap. The technology source, 7(3).

Venegas, K. M. (2006). Internet inequalities: Financial aid, the internet, and low-income students. American Behavioral Scientist, 49(12), 1652-1669. doi:10.1177/0002764206289147

Wheeler, M. (2011). Martin Heidegger (E. Zalta, Ed.). Retrieved June 5, 2016, from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/

Woodard, F. J. (2004). A phenomenological and perceptual research methodology for understanding hypnotic experiencing. Psychological Reports, 95(3), 887-904. doi:10.2466/pr0.95.3.887-904

Xena Participant Interview [Interview by N. Dolet]. (2018).

Yosso, T. J., Smith, W. A., Ceja, M., & Solorzano, D. G. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. Harvard Educational Review, 79(4), 659.

Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hello,

We are looking for participants for a research study. We are doing a study of adults who have applied to a certificate or bachelor's degree program, or who have returned to school recently. If chosen, you will be entered in a drawing for a $50 Amazon gift.

This study focuses on understanding the adult learner experience of applying for school. We will ask you if you were you able to access the right information during the application process, and if the information was relevant to your needs as an adult learner. The goal of the study is to help institutions better serve adult learners.

Chosen participants will be asked to participate in a short interview via telephone or videoconference, whichever you prefer. Take the following survey if you are interested in participating. All survey responses will remain confidential.

The data collected in this study will be used in a dissertation, but may also be used at professional conferences or symposia, and may be published in professional publications. All participants will remain anonymous.

Please click the following link to participate in the "Applying to College as an Adult Learner Survey" https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cU7FqNW8w3CyAS1 . The survey will help determine if you are eligible to participate in the survey.

Thank you for your time,

Nakita Dolet
PhD Candidate
Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
Email: ncd138@psu.edu
Phone: 240-413-7069

Appendix B: Recruitment Survey

PennState

Please complete the following survey in order to see if you qualify to participate in this study exploring the unique adult learner experience of applying to school.

You will be asked to provide your contact information at the close of the survey if you qualify to participate. You will be contacted in 1-2 weeks following the completion of the survey to receive additional details about the study and confirm your participation. The survey should take no more than five minutes to complete. All survey responses will remain confidential. Chosen participants will be entered in a drawing for a $50 Amazon gift card. Thank you for your time.

Note: If you are not prompted to provide contact information during the survey, then you did not meet the requirements to participant in the study.

Best,

Nakita Dolet
PhD Candidate
Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802

1. What is your age?

- ○ 17-23
- ○ 24-30
- ○ 31-37
- ○ 38-44
- ○ 45-51
- ○ 51-57
- ○ 58-64
- ○ 65 and older

2. Please indicate how long you have been enrolled in an educational program?

- ○ Entering the first semester
- ○ 0-6 months
- ○ 6 months to a year

3. Please select all that apply?

- ☐ Enrolled in college for the first time as an adult
- ☐ Plan to or currently attend school part-time
- ☐ Employed full-time
- ☐ Defined as independent according to federal financial aid standards
- ☐ Responsible for care of children or parents
- ☐ Single parent
- ☐ Earned GED
- ☐ Less than two of the listed choices apply to my experiences as a student

4. Please provide your contact information if you would like to be contacted for further details concerning this study (Name, email address, and phone number).

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Introduction text:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study describing the experience of applying to an educational institution/program using a fully online admissions application and FAFSA from the perspective of an adult learner(s).The combined observation and interview should take 1 to 2 hours. If you have any questions during the interview, please feel free to ask them. We will discuss your experience applying for college online and then we will discuss your experience of applying for financial aid online.

Demographic Data

Name (Pseudonym):

Age:

Race/Ethnicity (Please Circle One): **Hispanic or Latino**

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander

White

Experience of applying to college online – Interview Questions

1. How was education viewed in your household growing up, and how was that message conveyed. How do you think does that impact your own views about education?
2. What prompted your decision to return to school? What prompted your decision to apply to school?
    (a) Why did you choose this specific program of study?

(b) How did you learn about the program?

3. Please, describe the application experience.

   (a) Was this your first time applying to a post-secondary program? If No, did you use a paper or online application the last time you applied?

   (b) What resources provided by the university have you used during the application process? (Ex. Phone Calls, Online Chat, admissions websites).'

4. What other resources have you used to apply? (Ex. pamphlets, flyers, campus visit)

   (a) Did you use a search engine like Google or Bing to search for information about the application or institution you are applying to? What search terms did you use?

5. Where did you work on your application? Why did you choose this location to work on your application?

6. Please, describe what you accomplished during this application session.

   (a) What are your next steps in the application process?

   (b) Do you feel confident where you are in your application?

   (c) Have all of your questions been addressed using the available resources?

Experience of applying for FAFSA online– Interview Questions

1) Have you ever applied for financial aid?

   (a) If yes, did you use a paper or online application last time you applied?

   (b) If yes, what did you think about the application process last time (ex. was it easy or hard, straightforward or confusing, etc.)?

2) What documentation did you bring with you or do you have in order to complete FAFSA?

3) Do you feel like you knew what type of documentation you needed to complete the FAFSA prior to logging in to the website for the first time?

(a) If yes, how did you learn about the required documentation?

(b) If no, were you able to proceed through the application without the required documentation?

4) What resources (websites, on-line chat, etc.), if any, did you use during the FAFSA application process?

5) Did you submit your application today?

(a) If yes, what is the next step in the application process?

(b) If no, what is the next step in the application process?

6) How do you feel about your application for financial aid? Do you think you'll receive it? Do you think you won't?

Concluding Question:

What else, if anything, would you like to share about the FAFSA application or college admissions application?

Appendix D: Consent for Exempt Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: *A Phenomenological Study of Adult Learners Navigating the College Application Process*

Principal Investigator: *Nakita Dolet*

Telephone Number: *240-413-*

Advisor: *Dr. Adnan Qayyum*

Advisor Telephone Number: (814) 863-

You are being invited to volunteer to participate in a research study. This summary explains information about this research.

- The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of applying to a post -secondary educational institution/program using fully-online forms from the perspective of an adult learner(s). The study will focus on the college application process including the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The study will ask adult learners to answer questions about their approaches to seeking information to aid in the completion of both admissions and financial aid application.
- The researcher will record data by taking field notes and recording audio of interviews with permission from participants.
-
- Data will be transferred to an external hard drive following each interview; the hard drive will be stored in the investigator's office and destroyed in a period of 5 years from the original study date.

If you have questions or concerns, you should contact Nakita Dolet at 240-413-. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject or concerns regarding your privacy, you may contact the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775.

Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer.

Tell the researcher your decision regarding whether or not to participate in the research. *[For verbal consent]* **OR** Your participation implies your voluntary consent to participate in the research. [*For implied consent*]

VITA
Nakita C. Dolet

- *Doctor of Philosophy*, Lifelong Learning & Adult Education, Pennsylvania State University, 2017
    - Advisor: Dr. Adnan Qayyum
- *Master of Science*, Professional Writing, Towson University, 2013
- *Bachelor of Arts,* English Language and Literature, University of Maryland, 2009

WORK EXPERIENCE

- ***Outreach Assistant,*** Academic Achievement Programs, Office of Undergraduate Studies, University of Maryland ~ November 2009 – June 2011
- ***Administrative Assistant,*** Student Success Office, Office of Undergraduate Studies, University of Maryland ~ June 2011 – August 2013
- ***Counselor & Diversity Advocate,*** Multicultural Resource Center, Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity, Penn State University ~ August 2017 – July 2018

ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

- ***Graduate Assistant***, Adult Education, College of Education
Pennsylvania State University ~Fall 2013- Spring 2014
- ***Program and Evaluation Intern***, Learning Edge Academic Program (LEAP), Office of Summer Session, Pennsylvania State University ~March 2014-August 2014
- ***Lead Graduate Assistant*****,** Adult Education, College of Education Pennsylvania State
- ***Assistant Mentor Coordinator*****,** Learning Edge Academic Program (LEAP), Office of Summer Session, Pennsylvania State University ~March 2015-August 2015
- ***Instructor*****,** Upward Bound Migrant, Office of Education Equity, Pennsylvania State University ~May 2015- July 2015 & May 2016-July 2016
- ***Graduate Assistant*****,** World Campus Student Affairs, Outreach, Pennsylvania State University Summer 2016-Present

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- Nominated for Undergraduate Studies Staff Recognition Award (April 2012)
- Awarded Robert W. Graham Endowed Graduate Fellowship (Fall 2013 & Spring 2014)

PUBLICATIONS

- Dolet, N. (2014, July 24). E-learn Magazine: Online and Distance Education Demands Researchers Pick a Topic and Get to Work. Retrieved from http://elearnmag.acm.org/archive.cfm?aid=2652487
- Dolet, Nakita and MacDonald, Maeghen L. (2016). "Personal Growth, Social Change or Human Capital: A document analysis of an online education program for adult learners," Adult Education Research Conference. http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2016/papers/16