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A Search for Understanding Why Male, Long Term High School Dropouts Resist Returning to Complete a Secondary Credential

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by

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Abstract

Education is a human capital variable that is important and can lead to a higher quality of life for many individuals both in the United States and around the world. Despite the well documented benefits of earning an education beyond the secondary school level, there are many adults who never complete or continue their education. The current study was conducted to better understand why adult males resist returning to education after dropping out of high school. The design looked for understanding by interviewing adult males over 21 who have not successfully completed a high-school equivalency exam, such as the GED, and have avoided similar test and program preparations and experiences about education from time in high school and after dropping out, assuming that such experiences have some impact on personal decisions about further education.

Study results told the story of adult men who were generally bored with the high school curriculum and how it was delivered, often focusing on the lack of practical education and the over emphasis on traditional core and college preparation coursework. Four themes emerged from the field-note based interviews: (1) the belief that all students do not learn the same way, (2) the need for more participatory learning, (3) that learning should be relevant to life as perceived by the student, and (4) the dislike of computer content that is not supported by personal instruction. These findings can be of great assistance to those working both in public education and in the improvement of post-high school training and further education programs.

Acknowledgments

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Dedication

I dedicate my work to those we leave behind.

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I. Introduction

In 2003, only about 70% of all students graduated high school, with females graduating at a significantly higher rate than males (Greene, & Winters, 2006). Of the students who dropped out of high school, there was a significant number of adult males who had not completed a General Education Development (GED) diploma or other secondary credential (US Census, 2012). Despite numerous programs to counter the known barriers to returning to school, over 28.5 million adults over 25 years of age, or 13.7% of the population, does not hold a credential for secondary education (US Census, 2012). Research conducted in Florida found that six years after taking the GED test, male GED recipients earned 13% more than those who attempted but did not pass the test (Tyler, 2004). A further understanding of why adult males do not return to earn a secondary credential could be helpful both to this population and for the quality of life of society as a whole.

People who resist obtaining a GED or similar secondary education credential have been restricted to lower-paying jobs, are ineligible for military service, are more likely to end up on unemployment, and are imprisoned at higher rates those who hold a secondary credential (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). As men get older, it is more difficult to motivate them to complete a secondary credential because their resistance to return to school is likely to increase as they grow older (Bradley, & Renzulli, 2011).

There are numerous reasons people drop out of high school. Sometimes they quit or are pulled out by factors that compete with school, or they may be pushed out by the school because of issues such as behavior. The core reasons for dropping out of school may be masked by a perceived disability, and psychological barriers are difficult to identify and address (Boylan, & Renzulli, 2014).

Living without a GED is not easy. The cost of not having a GED is high, yet despite this understanding, there are people who resist completing the credential (Thomas, 2008). People without a GED or an equivalent certification are not eligible for many valuable educational opportunities, such as apprenticeships and workforce training programs, leaving them disadvantaged (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

Past research has identified external factors that have prevented dropouts from returning to school such as transportation, time, family, and money. More elusive are the intrinsic thoughts and perceptions that become barriers to returning to education, such as not feeling safe, feelings of not belonging, and not getting along with teachers or other students (Berktold, Geis, Kaufman, & Carroll, 1998; Boylan, & Renzulli, 2014). Other internal barriers for adults to return to school may consist of feeling they are not capable of completing the GED program (Zimmerman, 2000) or that the content of school is not of value or relevant to their needs (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

This study was a search for reasons why adult males resist returning to school. The identification of barriers that were most serious from the perspective of the respondents can enable educators to concentrate efforts on barriers that cause the greatest resistance to the group, allowing the most return for the effort expended. Educational designs that help resolve the larger and most common issues faced by adult dropouts could motivate and enable adult men to overcome the less important barriers so they will be more likely to complete their GED. An initial step that must be taken in this research is a thorough description of why adult males do not return to learn, and therein lies both the significance and purpose of the current study.

Research Questions

The purpose for conducting the study was to understand, from their own perspective, why some adults resist returning to school to complete their secondary school credential.

1. How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe themselves and their experiences in formal education?
2. How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe their reasons for dropping out of school and to what extent is this consistent with previous research?
3. How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe real or perceived barriers to returning to formal education to complete a credential?
4. To what extent were there similarities and differences in the responses and themes voiced by the purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers?
5. What strategies could be drawn from study responses that can be used by both formal and informal agencies to encourage adult males to return to education to earn a secondary credential?

Assumptions

The study accepted the following assumptions:

1. Adult males over the age of 21 would be willing to openly discuss thoughts and feelings regarding what may be a difficult topic for them.
2. Respondents could be located and would participate in the exploratory interview sessions.
3. Respondent interviews could provide identifiable external and internal barriers.
4. Respondents had the cognitive ability to articulate what has led them to their current situation.

5. Adults' experiences in high school influence educational decisions made after high school.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was limited by the accuracy of the participant responses and the ability of the researcher to interpret the data.
2. The study was limited to adult males over 21 years old in the metropolitan Kansas City, Kansas, area. The sample size is limited to five participants due to the difficulty of locating and interviewing people from the selected demographic.
3. Any bias held by the researcher was controlled, as outlined in Chapter III. Great care was practiced to ensure that all aspects of the research process remained objective and clear of subjective matter. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in an objective manner.
4. The process of snowballing was utilized as a method of finding participants through referrals from current participants.
5. The study was conducted in 2015, and this time period has certain connotations in a historical context.

Definitions

General Educational Development (GED) Diploma: A test measuring an adult's skills and knowledge, awarding a high school credential (GED Testing Service, 2014).

External Barrier: Barriers that are situational or beyond the individual's control. such as lack of transportation, lack of funds, or family responsibilities (Johnstone, & Rivera, 1965; Thomas, 2008).

Internal barriers: A psychological barrier that can be the product of many things, such as feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, like believing one was not capable of success in education (Johnstone, & Rivera, 1965; Thomas, 2008).

Dropout: The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2007) defined a dropout as an individual who:

> 1. Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year.
> 2. Was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year.
> 3. Has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved education program; and does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district-approved education program; temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or death (p.1).

Significance of the Study

Over 13% of the population over the age of 25 does not hold a high school credential (US Census, 2012). Despite the disadvantages of not having a GED, the adult male's resistance to formal education increases as he grows older (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Those who obtain a GED diploma have the opportunity to make higher pay, are eligible for military service, and are less likely to end up on unemployment or in prison (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). Understanding why adult males resist returning to school could enable educators to create innovative educational programs to motivate dropouts to return to complete a secondary education credential. Eliminating dropouts' internal barriers to returning to education could motivate them to overcome additional external barriers so they will be more likely to complete their pursuit of a secondary education credential.

The results of this study will be useful to educators in understanding what the male high school dropout perceives about education and why he resists returning to school. Listening to dropouts' responses will allow educators to better understand what issues of internal resistance

exist; it would then be possible to construct an educational experience that would be more appealing and suitable to the adult high school dropout. These results could also help high school educators create new strategies and programs to prevent young people from dropping out. State policy makers will find these results useful when considering improvements in future reforms in education. From a practical perspective, study findings can help public school administrators, community college leaders, adult education providers, and activists learn how to better package, prepare, and promote school for older youth and adults who resist school.

Theoretical Perspective

Adults may desire to obtain skills or technical training to advance into career opportunities, but without a GED they usually cannot enroll (Liebowitz & Taylor, 2004). Adults who have never obtained a secondary credential have many opportunities to return to school to prepare for their GED test. These include great efforts from government, private, and not-for-profit ventures designed to eliminate barriers to returning to school. Many institutions and organizations offer preparation opportunities, including many public school systems, libraries, workforce development state agencies, and organizations such as Goodwill Industries. The Goodwill Industries Foundation's NexStep Alliance in Wichita, Kansas, offers classroom training, individualized learning, and more than 750 free online classes through the Learn Free website to help prepare people to take the GED test (Barrett, 2013). There are methods of access to GED training that include opportunities to attend technical, post-secondary training and obtain a GED simultaneously through programs such as the Accelerating Opportunities program in Washington state (Pleasants, 2011).

Adults choose to pursue education for various reasons. Most adults share a common goal of wanting to use the knowledge and skills they acquire from school for opportunities to obtain

better jobs, promotions, and higher salaries (Aslanian, 2001; Wlodkowski, 2008). As adults increase participation in post-secondary educational experiences, their desire to learn may increase. This desire to learn is thought to be addictive: the more adults learn the more they wish to continue to learn (Mehrotra, 2003; Wlodkowsdki, 2008). Changes in work and personal lives require adults to obtain a greater understanding of technology so they are able to perform and participate in a changing culture. Adults can learn to understand and practice new technologies through participation in collegiate programs (Kasworm & Polson, 2003). Satisfaction with understanding the world and accomplishment can further drive adults who have attended college to value and desire to learn more just for the sake of learning (Lewis, 2009; Wlodkowski, 2008).

Summary

There are a significant amount of adult males who do not have a secondary credential. There are reasons these men dropped out and resisted returning to school to prepare for a GED test. Not having a secondary education credential causes difficulty for families and has negative effects on society. Men leave school for various reasons, including external and internal causes. External causes may be family problems or lack of money, transportation, or time. Internal causes include feelings they do not belong, feelings they are not capable of completing the program and feelings the program content is not relevant to their needs.

Understanding why men resist returning to education could enable educators to better design programs to remove barriers and support completion. By asking men why they dropped out of school and why they resist returning to education, a better understanding of the phenomenon may be achieved and their views may be analyzed for new content for further study. From responses of these interviews known issues may be better prioritized and understood to promote unique or creative solutions.

II. Review of Literature

Understanding who dropouts are and why some are unable or unwilling to overcome barriers to return to school has complexity. This examination of past knowledge of understanding why people drop out and do not return to school, is the foundation used to frame the design of this study. While the information contains answers, it also begs for answers as to what solutions may improve this phenomenon.

The definitions of "graduate" and "dropout" actually vary. The Common Core of Data (CCD) explained that while they defined a graduate as a student who completed a "regular diploma." states may award some form of alternate credential, such as an in-school GED, that require fewer credit hours and may be counted as a "regular diploma" (NCES, 2013a). Interpretations of definitions for high school dropouts have been inconsistent across states (GAO, 2005). Regardless of the criteria, it can be said that many people do not finish high school.

Statistical dropout rates can be misleading. A student who drops out of high school to complete a GED or approved secondary credential may be counted as a graduate and utilized in National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) graduation rate statistics; therefore, the statistical dropout rate does not include students who dropped out and completed a GED (NCES, 2013b).

The 1990 Status Dropout Rate, or percentage of dropouts between 16 and 24 years old who were not attending school and did not have a high school level of attainment, was 12%. The 2012 Status Dropout Rate was been reduced to 7% (NCES, 2014). In 2012, the percentage of 18 to 24 year olds with less than a high school diploma (no GED) was 14.8%, or 4,657,875 people; for those over 25 years old, the percentage was 13.7%, or 28,596,215 people (US Census, 2012).

In 2012, 3.1 million public high school students, or 78.2%, graduated on time with a standard diploma (NCES, 2014). Approximately 500,000 dropouts obtain a GED each year (Tyler, 2004).

A Dropout Faces Serious Consequences

An individual who drops out is more likely to face adversity than those who graduate from high school. The dropout is more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and ultimately single parents with children who drop out from school themselves (Rumberger, 2001). If the all the people that dropped out from the class of 2006 had graduated, the U.S. could have saved more than $17 billion in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured health care over the course of each dropout's lifetime (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). A high school dropout will have a negative net fiscal contribution to society in the form of unpaid taxes of $292,000 in their lifetime (Sum, Khatiwada & McLaughlin, 2009).

The financial burden to the dropout and family carries a cost as well. The children and families of a dropout are more likely to live in poverty. High school dropouts will make about $260,000 less in their lifetime, than a high school graduate (Rouse, 2005).

Unemployment for people with less than a high school credential is much higher than for people who have attained any level of education beyond high school. The graph in Figure 1 illustrates that regardless of the unemployment rate overall, the correlation between each group's percentages of being out of work remains somewhat constant, and in 2012 the rate for unemployment for a high school dropout was near 28% (NCES, 2013b).

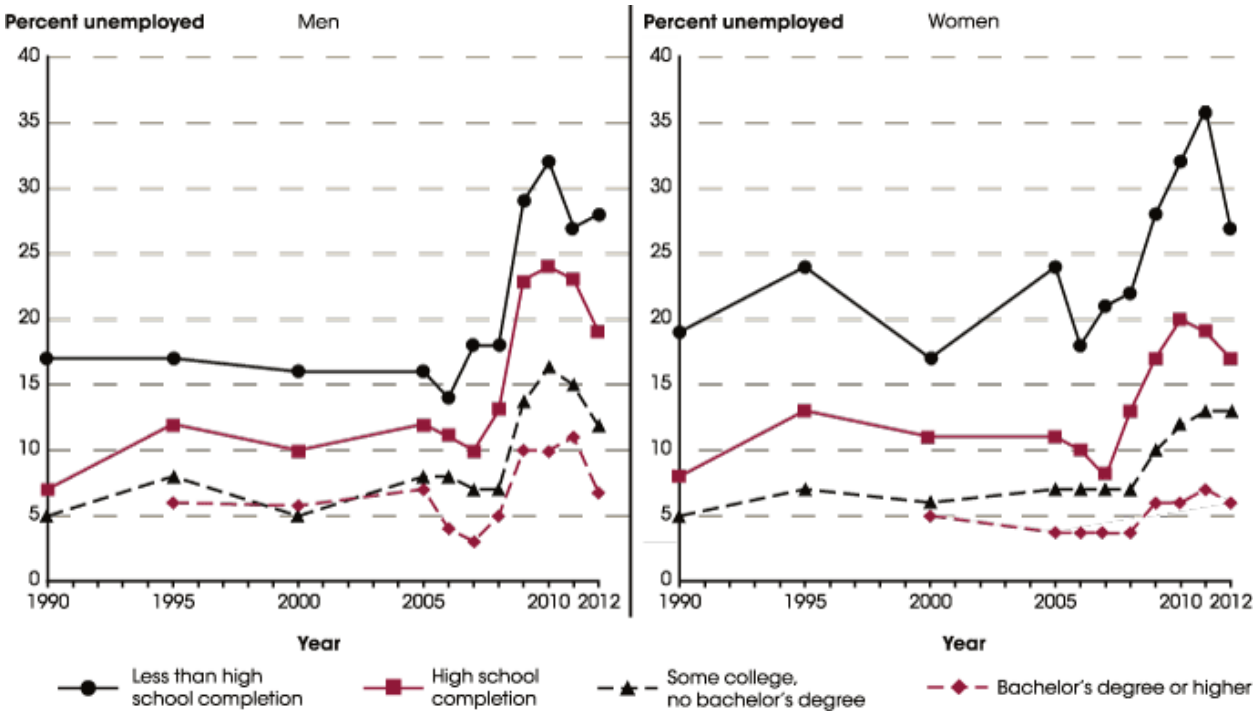

Figure 1 *Unemployment Rate for Less than High School Achievement* (NCES, 2013a)

Those people who dropout and their families were less likely to participate in education and their children were more likely to dropout as well. According to the NCES, 30% of GED recipients will get some postsecondary credit, while 8% of dropouts will receive postsecondary credit (Beatty, Neisser, Trent, & Heubert, 2001). People who do not have a secondary certificate are six times more likely to be institutionalized than someone with a high school credential. Clearly life as a dropout would be a difficult one (Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009).

Reasons for Dropping Out

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) issued the report *The Silent Epidemic*, funded by the Gates Foundation, that explained the phenomena of dropping out of school from the perspective of the people who did not complete a secondary credential. The research was based on interviews with dropouts in an attempt to discover what causes were present and if any had been overlooked. The top five reasons for dropping out were: (1) classes were not interesting,

(2) missed too many days and could not catch up, (3) spent time with people who were not interested in school, (4) had too much freedom and not enough rules, and (5) was failing in school. Other external causes were listed such as needing to work, becoming a parent, and having family responsibility, but clearly there was much more that caused young people to drop out of school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

The Silent Epidemic suggested that although the dropouts mostly blamed themselves, there were things that could be done to support them as students. One of the most important conclusions was that fundamental changes needed to be made in the school itself, including the need to improve teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connection between school and work" (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006, p.6). Four out of five respondents said they needed to have real-world learning experiences and to see the connection between school and getting a good job. Students do not always see that what they are learning is relevant to their lives, and they desire training that fits their (perceived) needs. Of the respondents, 71% said that school was not interesting, which could suggest that educators need to change their teaching approach or package content more creatively to be perceived as having greater value to the student. Additional results suggested that students should have a strong relationship with at least one adult at the school and that different school designs for different students could help those who are at risk and offer better connections between learning and work to satisfy the needs of the students (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

These results offer many reasons why students left school, but they could also indicate why some students resist returning to school. If dropouts believe returning to a GED preparation program will be a repeat of the experiences they had in high school, they may resist the experience.

Research has indicated that students drop out because of the difficult transition to high school, deficient basic skills, and lack of engagement (Editorial Projects in Education, 2010). Although race seems to be a predominate factor in dropping out of school, results have suggested that class and poverty are also determining factors. Because minorities are more likely to be in a lower class and income, they show a higher dropout rate; however, race itself is not the issue (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). Race can be a factor when the teacher's racial composition within a school does not mirror that of the student body (Boylan & Renzulli, 2014).

Factors that contribute to people dropping out of high school are often divided into two categories: pull out and push out (Boylan & Renzulli, 2014). A pull out could be explained as some force that draws a student out of school, such as pregnancy or the need for money leading to increased work, resulting in difficulty in staying in school. A push out could be a student who does not get along with a teacher or administrator, leading to suspensions and even an expulsion. This defines two different groups, but it could be said that some people could be pulled and pushed out at the same time. A large issue regarding push outs is a student not getting along with teachers or other students and feeling like an outsider. This unwelcoming environment can have a negative effect on the student who can last long after they leave school. Understanding why dropouts left high school may shed some light on why they are reluctant to return for GED preparation classes. Students who are pulled out of high school by life events such as pregnancy or family issues are more likely to return when the reason for the pull out is resolved, where as a student who is pushed out because of suspension or expulsion is less likely to return (Boylan & Renzulli, 2014). Recognizing that dropouts' past high school experiences differ and that some were pushed out while others were pulled out can help to clarify why the two groups have different levels of resistance to returning to school (Boylan & Renzulli, 2014).

Students often attribute a perceived lack of support from teachers and schools as contributing to dropping out (Black, 2002; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Meeker, 2005). In a Texas study, more than one-sixth of the participants reported that conflicts with school personnel or school dysfunction played a large role in preventing them from graduating high school (Meeker, 2005).

Problems at home contributed to many students dropping out of high school, while 10% reported working too many hours. The greatest single reason for women to drop out of school was pregnancy or parenting a child (Meeker, 2005). Other issues from home included problems with parents. Gallagher (2002) noted that some of the dropouts interviewed had hardship issues at home; participants stated "I watched over my sister when my mom drank" or "That year, in the 7th grade, it was so hard…I mean, there were people coming and going all the time and you didn't know where to sleep" and "My parents were clueless. I could be high 24/7 and they didn't notice" (Gallagher, 2002, p. 48).

The GED test itself increased the dropout rate when it was made available to students of high school age, as the students saw this as an alternative to completing high school (Heckman, Humphries, LaFontaine, & Rodríguez, 2012). Some school districts might push low-achieving students into GED programs to keep dropout rates down (Sipple, Killeen, & Monk, 2004). Other districts restricted GED access for school-age children to discourage students from dropping out. Some have argued that such a restriction to access to the GED is harmful to youth and that the GED itself is not a significant motivation to drop out of high school (Summers, 2002).

Race or ethnicity can also be a factor in dropping out of high school. Almost one-third of students failed to graduate in public schools, while nearly one half of African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics failed to graduate (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). About

77% of teachers in the secondary schools are White, and White teachers are more likely to evaluate the behavior of Black students unfavorably compared with their White peers (Downey & Pribesh, 2004).

Students' learning styles can clash with school culture and design. Students with high visual-spatial ability may have limited ability to process thought using linear methods. Everyone possesses the ability to process thought using both linear and visual-spatial methods, but some people are more linear while others are more visual-spatial (Silverman, 2002). At school, students with spatial strengths may struggle to master material that is typically considered "easy" and requires rote memorization yet thrive when engaged in activities that require higher order thinking skills and creative problem solving (Baum, 1998). Visual-spatial learners think more in images, read maps well, are late bloomers, and are whole-concept learners who relate well to space but not to time, whereas people with strengths in sequential ability think primarily in words, relate well to time, are well organized, read instructions, excel in rote learning, and think in steps (Silverman, 2002). Females tend to be more audio-sequential learners whereas males tend to be more visual-spatial (Moir, 1991). Two noted males with visual-spatial strengths include Einstein and da Vinci. Einstein described his process of thought as two-mode, meaning he thought primarily in images and only in a second stage did he have to seek laboriously for the right words and mathematical symbols to express the ideas in the verbal to communicate with others. Einstein's sister explained that although he was excellent at higher mathematics, he had a difficult time with arithmetic. Da Vinci relied heavily on mental rotation and the recognition of mirror-image similarities in triangles and polygons, but various authors have described his spelling as being by ear, bizarre, and inconsistent. Da Vinci was clearly aware of his problems, as he sometimes commented on his literary weaknesses while demonstrating his scientific skills

(West, 1997). Teachers are more likely to possess strengths in audio-sequential methods of reasoning, as they are a product of an environment (school) that relies heavily on this form of processing thought. As a result of teachers being more audio-sequential, students who process thought differently are viewed as learning disabled and treated as though they are deficient (Mann, 2006). Many students who are likely spatial learners are incorrectly diagnosed as ADD/ADHD (Freed, 1997). Approximately one-third of youth are considered strongly visual-spatial (Silverman, 2002).

The GED

GED certification began during World War II to enable soldiers who enlisted before completing high school to earn a secondary credential (Ryder & Hagedorn, 2012). There have been five generations of the GED test, which was first issued in 1942 and revised in 1978, 1988, 2002, and 2014. The first test (1942) was often used to show that the taker qualified with a functional level understanding in English, social studies, science, and literature for the purposes of qualifying for entry-level work positions. The second test (1978) concentrated more on real-life contexts relevant to adults. The third version (1988) added a direct writing sample and an increased emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This test also increased the reflection of diverse roles for adults in society, placed a greater emphasis on understanding societal change and reflected changes to better qualify candidates for post-secondary education. The fourth version (2002) again placed more emphasis on preparing for post-secondary education with a shift from liberal education toward language arts and mathematics. The fifth version (2014) offered two levels of completion, a GED and a GED with honors. The GED with honors demonstrated college readiness, while the GED demonstrated high school equivalency skills and abilities. The latest content expanded the mathematics and language arts sections to

meet requirements determined to better answer modern demands and match current high school requirements (GED Testing Service, 2014).

External Barriers to Returning to School

Adult participation in GED preparation classes is dependent on many factors including family, childcare, availability of time, transportation, and other issues. Many of these mirror the causes for dropping out of school. While GED programs attempt to address these concerns, not all have resources to do so effectively.

Transportation is a consistent barrier for participants in GED programs, and care must be applied to ensure that public transportation or other remedies are in place to give access to those in need. Locations of training centers must be accessible (Lewis, 2009). Transportation can be more of a challenge in rural areas because the limited public services (Olesen-Tracey, 2010). Technology could help with this obstacle in the form of online classes, although this assumes that the person has access to a computer with Internet. Online classes bring learning opportunities home, reduce transportation problems, and should be available for part of the GED preparation learning experience. .

Childcare is an issue for many GED class participants, and some classes are missed due to babysitting problems. When a child is sick, the parent may not have the resources to care for the child and may have no choice but to miss classes (Lewis, 2009). This issue may be avoided if GED classes incorporate a section or class time that offers a child-care option. Adult education providers need to offer childcare for participants of the GED program who require this service. Larger institutions, particularly community colleges, need to expand child-care services during nontraditional hours to facilitate GED participants (King, 2002).

A major factor keeping dropouts from participating in GED programs is family concerns: in particular, loss of time spent with family, demands from children, and lack of encouragement at home. GED programs need to be family-oriented to ensure that all family members of the adult student understand the importance of completing the GED (King, 2002).

Some programs have begun using shortened modules that divide the content so that it can be offered in an open entry/open exit format. This allows an adult to take a module and then either continue or return at a later date to begin the next module (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). GED classes are often presented in the form of study booklets or online test preparation that allows practice for skills needed to pass the test. While these classes are flexible and self-paced, they lack the human element and the personal interaction between the student, the teacher and other classmates (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). GED programs need to offer flexibility to allow participants to enter at their convenience and should be geared toward individuals, not groups in a classroom. Program design should allow for instruction when the student is able to attend (King, 2002).

McCaskill-Mitchell (2009) concluded that the age of participants in GED programs is an important factor, with older participants (age 21-29) finishing 50% of the time and younger participants (age 16-20) finishing 30% of the time. Lewis (2009) found a 40% drop-out rate of the GED program she observed, which is typical. Older adult men were more difficult to motivate to return to school as the dropout's resistance to complete a secondary credential will likely increase as they grow older (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011).

One external barrier that could influence GED success is the program itself. Although other external causes are a major reason for dropping out of programs, bad program experiences can lead to dropouts not wanting to return. Teachers and administrators often do not realize they

are at fault due because students who quit school are not likely to blame the school after they leave when it is likely the school was the cause of their leaving. A study revealed that when a group of students taking classes were asked why they thought their peers dropped out, they indicated that only 30% quit because of problems outside the school, but later, when these same students dropped out, they indicated that outside causes were overwhelmingly responsible because they wanted to avoid tension between the school and themselves (Balmuth, 1988).

Internal Barriers to Returning to School

Internal barriers are psychological barriers that can be the product of many life experiences. Research by Boylan and Renzulli (2014) suggested that when determining if a student left school because they were pushed out or pulled out to determine a pathway back to school, one must also listen to the internal causes or particular reasons the student gives for leaving school. Not having a good relationship with teachers and friends can make the school feel unwelcoming. These effects can lead to negative long-term feelings that could play a role in when or if the student re-enters school. Still, psychological barriers are more challenging to measure or realize, as they are within a person rather than an element that can be readily seen such as not having transportation or childcare. Despite the many attempts to incentivize adults who dropped out of high school to return to complete a secondary school credential, many continue to resist. Efforts to help dropouts with money, transportation, and other assistance have helped, but clearly there is more to the problem (Boylan & Renzulli, 2014).

Psychological barriers may be described as beliefs, attitudes, values, and perceptions about oneself. Psychological barriers to returning to education seem to get the least attention in the literature (King, 2002). Goto & Martin (2009) wrote about how most efforts to remove barriers are in the form of supports, instructional delivery, and marketing, while it is less clear

what can be done to address psychological barriers. Educators assume that psychology is beyond their influence; in actuality, they can affect the way adults perceive and respond to education-related barriers (Goto & Martin, 2009). Of all barriers, psychological barriers are probably the least understood and least often addressed. A word-of-mouth marketing campaign can help to address these barriers, as potential students are more trusting of peers. Students are more likely to deal with external barriers, when they are exposed to role models and support from their peers. Coordination between professionals and students ensure that the student has an accurate understanding of the program and the support and encouragement that is available (Goto & Martin, 2009).

Research has found that students who have a clear idea of what they want are more likely to complete a class, so helping students form a vision and produce a plan to where they want to go would be helpful (Goto & Martin, 2009). People in need of a GED have various levels of academic experience. Jean (1999) discussed some of the challenges she confronted early in her teaching career: "Many of my students, most of whom were homeless, had great difficulty giving long-term attention to academic subjects and retaining the information" (p.1).

Previous research has suggested that the likelihood of an adult completing a GED preparation program is no different for first-time participants than participants who have attempted a GED program more than once. Success was based primarily on the academic level of the student, with the higher level students finding greater likelihood of completing the program and taking the test (Charleroy, 1989; McCaskill-Mitchell, 2009).

Students frequently perceive that the academics that are presented as part of GED preparation do not have value and are not useful to their daily lives. Blending academic learning and life learning that adults see as more useful could motivate students to learn many skills

simultaneously. Linking high-demand workforce skills with liberal arts and critical thinking skills allows the adult to obtain a GED while learning marketable skills (Liebowitz & Taylor, 2004). Programs exist that alternate between academics and vocational training. For example, the LAYC YouthBuild program alternates between one week in an academic classroom and one week at a job site learning construction skills. Fresh Start students spend two hours a day in a classroom and the rest of the day learning hands-on work skills. Students in SIATech Charter School at the Sacramento Job Corps Center spend half of the day learning academics and the other half in vocational training (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Jean (1999), a GED instructor who shared her experiences in motivating adults to stay with and complete her GED classes, shared that her students did not like the traditional work book-format of learning academics to prepare for testing. After careful research and practice, she learned to teach students through hands-on experiences. Jean quoted several students who described how their minds drifted as they used the work-book to study and how hands-on instruction allowed them to *do* things instead of just read about them. Students stayed interested in the subject and enjoyed the work. Jean also found that by identifying the students' learning style and teaching to their strengths she could be successful in teaching the content.

While many programs exist to help youth to train for the GED and many of these programs offer much more in terms of services and assistance, they also require students to volunteer and in many cases satisfy requirements that demonstrate motivation and commitment. The challenge can be to present a program that encourages the student to volunteer and have a desire to see it through to the end (Bloom, 2010).

Many students who drop out of high school do not see the purpose of their lessons or how the lessons are relevant to them or their perceived needs (Bridgeland, Bilulio, & Morison, 2006).

A study in rural Appalachia revealed that one of the major reasons students were leaving high school was they failed to see the value of its content (Hendrickson, 2012).

Hendrickson (2012) wrote about the importance of the perception of the relevance of educational content, based on research in student resistance to schooling:

> …these students related to the relevance or irrelevance of academic school subjects, decreasing their motivation to do the assigned work. While vocational courses have an explicit relation to careers, other "academic" courses do not. Teachers in rural areas can attempt to bridge the gap between school knowledge and place-based knowledge by connecting school content to "real life" and local content. (p.48)

People may understand the value of school but may lack efficacy expectancy, in the form of doubting that they have the ability to do the work, and therefore not expend the effort to go to school. People tend to avoid threatening situations that they believe exceed their ability to cope (Bandura, 1977; Goto & Martin, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000). Students are more likely to participate in education when they have a strong outcome expectation or believe that going to school may help them achieve certain advancement (Goto & Martin, 2009).

GED Programs

Society perceives dropouts negatively and this negative social view can motivate dropouts to return to school. Family encouragement and the desire not to be looked down upon by society may pressure dropouts to prepare for school (Sloan, 2008). Brouillete (1999) described how inner-city dropouts reported that the GED represented an opportunity to shed the pejorative label of "dropout," proving to themselves and to others that they are capable. Brouillete also described how many traumatized, demoralized young people in the GED program needed the counseling and support as much as the education.

Prison

Consider that GED holders in prison read better than people in the general public. Part of this is because prisoners have the time and a greater opportunity to read than the general public does (Harlow, Jenkins & Steurer, 2010). The U.S. prison population increase is partially driven by the incarceration of low-skilled males. Lower skilled adult males leaving prison face an even more difficult time in the labor market, which brings about the need for a corrections-based GED program. Studies have shown that completing a GED does significantly improve the chances that an ex-offender will not recidivate (Zgoba, Haugebrook, & Jenkins, 2008). Studies suggest that the GED from prison can make little or no difference in improved jobs, income increase or recidivism for an inmate (Tyler, & Kling, 2004). Inmate education programs have successfully increased wages and educational attainment, resulting in slightly higher wages and reductions in inmates who reoffend. The difference is much greater for those who went from non-readers to readers (Fabelo, 2002). On average, during incarceration, inmates receive 604 hours of schooling to allow them to advance their level of education by one and a half grade levels. (Fabelo, 2002).

High School Dropout Prevention

In Houston, Texas, a program called Communities in Schools (CIS) was established in a single school to support youth in high school and prevent dropping out. This is a campus-based program that is linked to hundreds of support agencies to provide direct social services to at-risk students; it has been duplicated at 14 other locations (ICF, 2010).

In the urban core of Kansas City, Missouri, at-risk high school youths are challenged by working on projects involving design and construction of electric vehicles in a program called Minddrive. This program is designed to allow at-risk students to work with mentors on projects

that make a connection between education and real-world applications in automotive design, communication, welding, Computer Assisted Drafting (CAD), and leadership. Programs like this offer at-risk students the opportunity to engage in school and participate in meaningful experiences that drive them to complete high school and inspire learning (Buchner, 2012).

Second Chance GED Programs

Job Corps is a residential program for 16-to 24-year-old high school dropouts who have low incomes. This program offers GED preparation, vocational training, and education in health, social skills, driver education, and other support systems. A participant in Job Corps is 17% more likely to obtain a GED or high school diploma within 48 months (Sipple, Killeen, & Monk, 2004).

The National Guard Youth Challenge is a residential program for 16-to 18-year-old dropouts who offers GED preparation, leadership development, and job skills training while requiring community service. Participants in the National Guard Youth Challenge were almost 20% more likely to complete a high school credential (Bloom, Gardenhire-Crooks, & Mandsager, 2009).

One of the greatest motivators to return to school is that it will open the door to post-secondary education and job training (Beatty, Neisser, Trent, & Heubert, 2001). Accelerating Opportunities (AO) is an initiative that utilizes an integration of Adult Basic Education into technical education through a model developed by Washington State called Integrating Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST). This model was designed to advance people without a high school credential to successfully complete the GED while earning a post-secondary technical certificate utilizing blended learning techniques. This blended learning opportunity is designed to motivate participants to engage in learning by presenting a desirable job-training

program with general education to enable simultaneous learning of a trade with completion of a technical post-secondary certificate and a GED (Pleasants, 2011).

Summary of Literature

A high school dropout has been redefined so that measures of dropout rates may not include people that leave traditional schools and then finish through non-traditional means. This could make it difficult to understand whether the dropout rate is really improving or is just a representation of the new methods of measure (GAO, 2005; NCES, 2013a). There are more than 28 million people over the age of 25 that do not have a high school diploma or an equivalent (US Census, 2012). Dropouts face difficulties in life as they are restricted from opportunities and are more likely to be unemployed, in poverty, in prison, unhealthy, divorced and have children that dropout themselves (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Reasons for dropping out of school include perceived relevance of subject matter to life, responsibilities outside of school pulling them away, the need to work and family issues (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Some believe the GED test itself is a cause of dropping out of school as it offers what appears to be an easier option than staying in traditional school (Heckman, Humphries, LaFontaina & Rodriquez, 2012). Race, language, and poverty are also factors (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Some students who process thoughts using more creative or spatial means that differ from the more linear methods utilized at school may have great difficulty (Silverman, 2002). It is believed that some of our most celebrated historical inventors and creators were highly spatial and had difficulty with more linear skills (West, 1997). Teachers are more likely to possess strengths in audio-sequential methods of reasoning and treat highly spatial learners as deficient or learning disabled (Mann, 2006).

After dropping out of high school, students' most common alternative was to complete a GED diploma. The first GED tests were developed during World War II to enable solders to complete high school. Modern versions include expanded language arts and mathematics to better match high school requirements. Men who dropout often resist returning to education for various reasons including external barriers, such as transportation, money, and family responsibilities. These external barriers can frequently be overcome with aid or flexible programs to help make GED accessible. Other internal barriers include psychological challenges such as beliefs, attitudes, values and perceptions about oneself or the program. These barriers are more challenging to identify and deal with. Motivation, self-expectancy, and self-efficacy are internal barriers that can prevent men from believing they are capable or it is possible to undertake the process of completing the GED.

III. Methodology

Although past studies have described reasons why some adult males resist returning to school to prepare for a GED, many adults are still difficult to reach and the problem persists. In order to explore this phenomenon, this study conducted personal interviews with men who were resisting returning to school and then searched for common themes from their responses. This effort represents a search for understanding for which of the known reasons are most relevant or if there are different and unique reasons causing this phenomenon. Qualitative measures were utilized to search for better understanding of barriers associated with adult males returning to school so that stakeholders can refocus their efforts on the barriers that are most significant.

Research Design

Adults who have resisted returning to school have stories that could contain commonalities that need to be better identified and further understood. This study utilized a qualitative methodology using a case study approach. This research utilizes the qualitative method because it best represents the needs of the problem being explored and attempts to describe a human situation.

Creswell (2007) explained the value of qualitative research:

> We also conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. (p.40)

This study utilized a similar strategy as Breaux (2006) in her dissertation S*haring the Legacy: Reflections of Exemplary Community College Presidents,* which told a group of stories of each participant, to evaluate and produce common themes. A case study is an appropriate strategy to provide in-depth understanding of identifiable cases and comparison of several cases (Moustakas, 1994). A collective case study design was selected to study the identifiable group of

adult male dropouts, allowing research of the phenomena and a search for common themes that transcend the cases (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). This method of research will enable the group studied to openly describe their unique perceptions about education to discover new criteria for future quantitative studies (Creswell, 2007).

The study utilized a general interview guide approach, which involved structured, open-ended questions to encourage consistency of the questions while allowing the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Turner, 2010).

Participants had the opportunity to respond to open-ended questions with detailed and lengthy answers that would generate new or unique perspectives addressing the subject of discussion. To reduce variance, each participant's questions were scripted and designed for consistency. Known variables are age, background, and life experiences. The participants variables are that the participants are from the metropolitan Kansas City, Kansas, area; have not completed a secondary credential; are not currently enrolled in GED preparation or equivalent program; and are over age 21.

Selection of Subjects

A convenience and purposeful sampling method was utilized to locate participants for the study. Recruiting for participants was verbal in the form of announcements to groups and individuals around the Kansas City, Kansas, community and written in the form of handouts (See Appendix A). Snowball or chain sampling methods were utilized, as participants were asked to refer other adults who fit the criteria for the study. A snowball or chain sampling strategy helps to identify cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are rich with information (Creswell, 2007).

The criteria for the selection of participants are as follows:

1. Residents of the greater Kansas City, Kansas metropolitan area.

2. They must be over the age of 21.

3. They must not have a high school diploma or equivalent.

4. They may not be currently enrolled in a GED preparation program.

Rational for Participant Criteria.

1. The study was limited to residents of the Kansas City, Kansas, metropolitan area to reduce the variable of geographic consideration.

2. Participants must be over 21, as students who complete a GED under this age can still be recorded as a high school completer in most states or potentially may no longer be a dropout after they participate in this study. It is assumed that men over 21 have experienced greater resistances to obtaining a GED or equivalent.

3. If the participant obtains a GED before or during the study they are no longer a dropout and ineligible to participate in this study.

4. If the participant was enrolled in a GED program or school then they are not resisting returning to school and would not be appropriate for the subject of this study.

Interview Guides

The interviews consisted of two personal, one-on-one meetings during which the participants were asked 13 open-ended questions to determine their story (See Appendix C). To assure consistency of the interviews for each participant, an interview guide was utilized with a scripted opening describing the details of the interview and the informed consent agreement form. The open-ended research questions were listed on the interview guide with suggested elements for consideration to present a consistent foundation for the interview process. These questions were designed to encourage discussion and avoid leading from the interviewer. The

form asked age, race, and the date they left high school. Participants were then asked to verbally respond to the 13 questions from the 5 groups of subjects. Respondents were given the opportunity to e-mail or call in afterthoughts should they need to offer insight or corrections to the questions they were asked to encourage response validity and accuracy. In another attempt to improve validity and accuracy of the data, the respondents were encouraged to meet for a second interview to review the summary of the first interview. The second interview gave the respondents' time to become more comfortable with the process and the interviewer while also giving them the opportunity to refine their answers into more thought-out responses. The location of the interviews was left up to the participants so they were comfortable, with some conditions. This place had to be quite, non-distracting, and suitable for audio recording (Creswell, 2007).

The interview questions are listed under each heading below:

Past experiences in formal education:

How would you describe yourself?

How would you describe your experiences in school?

What were the dominating factors that led you to leave school?

Have you attempted to return to school and if so, please tell your story?

Do you have experience preparing for a GED test?

Life barriers to education:

What outside forces are or have contributed to preventing you from going to school?

Are there solutions to overcoming these external barriers that prevent you from returning to school?

Internal barriers to education and attitude toward learning:

What are the good things about school?

Are the bad things about school?

What makes you want to go to school?

What makes you not want to go back to school?

Subject matter:

What are your feelings about the subjects or materials you studied in school?

Scholastic design:

What do you think school should be like?

Interview Question Reliability and Validity

These questions were designed by narrowing the central questions and sub-questions into open-ended questions to invite the interviewee to open up and talk (Creswell, 2007). Interview questions were refined from pilot tests on participants who were not a part of the study sample to improve validity (van Teijlingen, & Hundley, 2001). A journal was maintained with entries during the interview process to allow for triangulation between transcripts, observations of behavior and integrity, peer comments, and past research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

In order to enhance reliability and validity, the participants were asked to meet for a second interview to give the respondents the opportunity to revise or correct their responses. This second interview enabled the respondents to take the needed time to recall and reflect on past experiences and make sure the information collected best represented their beliefs about their perception. The researcher explained the purpose of the second interview at the beginning of the first interview.

Data Collection Procedures

The sample size was six participants. Interviews occurred in a timeframe of approximately 12 weeks. Participants were interviewed individually in the quiet setting of their choice. They were informed the process would take approximately one hour but that they were free to take the amount of time they would like. They were informed this was opportunity to contribute to educators who wanted to hear their opinions about how to improve the adult education experience. Interviews were audio taped and the participants were given the opportunity to object.

The University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study (See Appendix B). All permissions and protocols for the University of Arkansas were followed, as outlined by the parties involved.

Participants' names will remain confidential to the extent allowed by law and university policy and are represented by numbers on all documents. Transcripts and recordings of the interviews were password protected and stored electronically. Transcripts and recordings will be destroyed after seven years from the date of interview.

Data Analysis

The participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts from the first interview for accuracy and clarification as a form of member checking (Angen, 2010). This member checking did not include summaries, observations, or notes by the researcher but did allow for clarification of statements made. The transcripts from the interviews were reviewed for significant statements from their experiences and thoughts about the research questions. A final summary along with journal entries describing observations, impressions, and thoughts of each interview from the researcher were reviewed by a second, qualified peer to further triangulate

and validate this research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These summaries were utilized when comparing the interviews as a group. All significant elements were clustered into common themes with emphasis on the unexpected responses. These statements were reviewed for recurrent ideas and concepts and then compared with other participant responses to determine major categories or theories that may evolve (Bloomberg, & Volpe 2012). The research results were reviewed and a summary was prepared to explain the result. Throughout the process of analyzing the data, the Constant Comparison Method was practiced to simultaneously compare the results between categories and types of data with the emergence of new analysis while constantly comparing with previous and new relationships to discover and refine new categories and relationship discovery (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to respondents in the Kansas City, Kansas, metropolitan area. The sample selection was determined by snowballing, which could limit the ability of getting an accurate representative sample of the population due to the shared experiences of the respondents. The demographics may not represent the race, age, or gender of the population due to the difficulty of producing a sample. The survey accuracy is limited to the responses and interpretation of the responses by the researcher.

Researcher Bias

The researcher has taught high school students in the past, is presently an Associate Professor of automotive technology at a community college, and has preference toward technical and life-long educational subjects. The researcher had a difficult time in high school as a student (over 30 years ago) and has family members who have never completed secondary education.

These experiences have left in the researcher a dislike of current high school practices; with this awareness, the researcher made sure that peers involved in this process were aware of this bias and every effort was made to promote objectivity. Because reliability ultimately rests with the researcher, careful thought was given to avoid researcher bias (Bloomberg, 2012).

Summary

In order to understand why some adult male dropouts resist to returning school it is first necessary to find them and ask them why. The subjects of this study were adult men who are over 21, as below this age they could be considered a completer of high school if they achieve a GED credential. It is also important that they were not enrolled in a GED preparation program, as it could be debated that they are no longer resisting education if they are enrolled in a GED preparation program. In order to establish a base of understanding for future research it is first necessary to undertake a qualitative case study. Each participant was asked open-ended questions to encourage detailed and lengthy answers, so they had the opportunity to communicate their feelings and perception of the phenomenon. A general interview guide approach was utilized to assure structured, open-ended questions and to promote consistency between the participants. Participants' rights and IRB protocol were carefully followed. Reliability and validity of the study was assured by pilot testing the research questions on participants who were not a part of the study. A journal was maintained throughout the data collection process to triangulate with other inputs. Participants were interviewed a second time to enable them to verify the transcript and assure accuracy of statements. Each participant's interview was summarized and journal entries recorded to note observations and impressions. The data was then reviewed by a qualified peer to assure validity.

The results were reviewed for recurrent ideas and concepts and then compared with other participant responses for emergence of categories that may evolve using the Constant Comparison Method to develop new possibilities for future research. Although the study sample was limited in size, it is believed to be representative of the population of men who do not have a GED.

IV. Results

Despite numerous programs to counter the barriers of returning to finish high school, a significant number of adult males who did not complete traditional high school have also not completed a GED (US Census, 2012). This study looked at the known reasons for resisting returning to school to complete a GED and compared them to the responses of participants who currently live within the phenomenon. The participants were given the opportunity to provide their perceptions of the phenomenon and share their stories. The study is presented with the intent of better understanding why adult males resist returning to complete a GED after dropping out of high school.

This chapter includes a summary of the study, presentation of data organized by research question, and a chapter summary.

Summary of the Study

This study was a search for reasons why adult males resist returning to school. By analyzing the results from interviews of adult men who had not completed a secondary credential, barriers to education can be better identified. These participants' responses provided a view from the perspective of the adult who is dealing with the phenomenon. With a better understanding of these significant barriers, educators can improve educational designs to better motivate and enable adult men to return to education and complete a GED.

Significance of the Study

Understanding why adult males resist returning to school could enable educators to create improved and more innovative GED programs and better motivate dropouts to return to complete a GED. Reducing dropouts' internal barriers to taking GED classes could enable them to overcome external barriers so they can complete a GED.

The results of this study will enable educators to better understand the perceptions of adult male high school dropouts toward education and returning to school. Understanding responses from adult males who have not completed a secondary credential will allow better understanding of the issues of resistance that are most important to them. A better understanding of this phenomenon will enable a more successful and appealing educational experience that responds to the male adult client. The results of this study will also help high school educators create improved strategies to prevent dropouts. State policy makers will find these results useful when considering improvements in future reforms in education. From a practical perspective, study findings can help public school administrators, community college leaders, adult education providers and activists learn how to better package, prepare, and promote school for older youth and adults who resist school.

Design of the Study

This study utilized a qualitative methodology using a case study approach. This method of research enabled the group studied to openly describe their unique perceptions about education to discover new criteria for future quantitative studies. Using an interview guide approach, the participants were allowed to respond to open-ended questions with detailed and lengthy answers. To reduce variables, each question was scripted to insure consistency during the interview process. Participants were from the metropolitan Kansas City, Kansas, area; had not completed a secondary credential; were not enrolled in a GED preparation or equivalent program at the time of the interview; and were over age 21. Convenience and purposeful sampling methods were used as handouts to the public and announcements were utilized to recruit participants in conjunction with snowball sampling methods, as study participants found other men to participate in the study.

Participants were asked to verbally respond to 13 questions from the 5 groups of subjects listed in the Interview Guide (Appendix C).

Data Collection Results

Six people participated in the interview process. Two of the participants were located by a student who responded from handouts at a community college. One of the participants was a friend of a family member of the researcher. The remaining three participants were friends who were referred by two of the previous participants. Each of the interviews was arranged by appointment and at a location chosen by the interviewee. Two of the interviews were around 65 minutes, one was 60 minutes, one was 50 minutes, and two were approximately 45 minutes long. Each participant seemed eager to share experiences and ideas once the interview was under way.

In an effort to member check (Angen, 2010) the results, four of the participants met with the researcher for a second interview in person to review the data and add further comments, and one participant reviewed the data over the telephone for a second interview. Unfortunately, one did not reply to the follow up interview, although the results were consistent with the other participants' interviews. The participants' transcripts were simultaneously compared with each newly collected result to recognize and record new relationships and commonalities utilizing elements from the Constant Comparison Method (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Glaser, & Strauss, 1965; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The completed transcripts, resulting documentation, journal entries, and summaries were peer reviewed by an adult educator to assure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1:

How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe themselves and their past experiences in formal education?

The participants' ages were 23, 32, 21, 23, 25, and 24, respectively. They left high school in grades 10, 11, 12, 9, 10, and 11, respectively. Each participant made less than $10 an hour with the exception of the second participant that made $11. Participant One was still employed at the same restaurant he worked at during high school and lived in a rented home in a lower rent area of Kansas City, Kansas, with his girlfriend. Participant Two lived in an apartment in the suburbs, not far from his high school, and restocked shelves at a retailer at night. Participant Three lived in downtown Kansas City, Kansas, and worked at a hardware store. Participant Four lived in Kansas City, Missouri, and worked in a body shop. Participant Five grew up in Overland Park, Kansas, at the time of his interview, had recently moved further out of town and worked at an auto repair shop. Participant Six was unemployed and living with family at the time of the interview. Each of the participants who had a job described the limited opportunities in work and working at a low wage. Every Participant explained the difficulty of living without a secondary credential and the inability to enter workforce development opportunities, such as technical schools or any postsecondary alternatives.

The participants described conditions within school that they thought were not what they wanted and not what they needed. Most of the participants described leaving school more than one time, then returning only to leave again. Each participant expressed a dislike for school but showed a strong desire to learn. Each of the participants seemed ready to explain what he perceived was wrong with school and most felt they were forced to learn subjects that were not relevant to life while they were not allowed to take classes that were relevant or important to what they perceived as preparation for their lives.

Five respondents discussed their "hatred" for sitting in a classroom setting. Participant Three stated that "you can't put a whole bunch of people who learn real well with a bunch of people who don't learn real well." This seemed to describe that the teacher was forced to teach to the people who were behind or the students who were not keeping up. The participants generally agreed the teachers usually taught to the students who did well so that the students who fell behind would have trouble catching up, thus falling further behind. Participant Three stated that "it's set up for kids who are good (do well in class) to succeed and kids who are bad (do poorly in class) to fail." Two participants mentioned the class content seemed to be repeated every year, over and over. The journal entries mention the visual cues of anger expressed by the subjects when discussing these past difficulties in school, and it is worth noting that discussions about falling behind contained elements of both pain and anger.

Several participants expressed a preference for learning by doing or hands-on learning and that school did not engage them with interesting content. Participant One expressed a dislike for science but described environmental science as interesting because they went outside to do experiments. Participants described their interest in taking classes like woodshop, cooking, jewelry and auto tech because they were hands on and seemed relevant to learning what they perceived as life skills. Participants were particularly unhappy that school was not teaching things that would help them live independently after school. They suggested learning content that included how to do budgeting, getting loans, survival skills, and generally understanding life while learning job-related skills.

Participant Two described school as institutionalized, "like jail," and not for him. He described his experience with people trying to change themselves to fit in because young people lacked identity and did not know who they were, and when they were picked on they may

commit suicide. He believed that forcing a student to take the classes at the school made them lose identity, as they had no choice in what they learned and who they would become.

Therefore, the sample described themselves as frustrated with their current professional position and with the formal nature of attending high school. Journal observations throughout the process offered insight into the feelings and behaviors of the sample during the interview process. When attempting to locate participants, it was noted that they were reluctant until they saw the passage in the handout (Appendix A) that said educators wanted to listen to them and they could make a difference. The participants seemed anxious to share a message of protest about what they had experienced throughout their educational past, and they were anxious to express their views. Participants would at first express external causes for why they left school or could not return, but as they opened up they exposed more of the underlying causes of resistance relating to their feelings about school from past experiences and their current beliefs. When the participants spoke about past school experiences and returning to school in any form, they seemed to be describing their resistance as more of a protest. They wanted to learn and pursue an education but they did not want to endure the system of education that is school. They, of course, have no choice but to go to classes and learn the content required to pass the GED test, but it is this content and its delivery that they seem to protest. Throughout the interview process the participants' behaviors, mannerisms, and actions showed that they wished to go to school to learn content they perceived as meaningful and useful but they disliked the academic and core subjects to the point that they would endure losing opportunities in life rather than return. While the negative reinforcement of losing these life opportunities is powerful, it does not seem to be successful in itself as a motivator to complete the GED process. When these men did return to school, their feelings about past classroom experiences seemed to return with

them, and they appeared to have difficulty working through these feelings and lost interest quickly, leading to again dropping out.

Research Question 2:

How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe their reasons for dropping out of school and to what extent was this consistent with previous research?

Each adult male described limited opportunities in work and working at a low wage. Each explained the difficulty of living without a secondary credential and their inability to obtain meaningful work or enter into workforce training opportunities such as technical schools. This was consistent with previous research that suggested those living without a secondary credential are more likely to face adversity than those who graduate (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Rouse, 2005; Rumberger, 2001; Sum, Khatiwada, & Morison, 2006;).

Four of the participants discussed being diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, resulting in treatment by medication. One participant discussed a diagnosis of Bi-Polar disorder resulting in treatment. None of the participants were on medication as adults at the time of the interview. Participant Five believed that medication given to him and other kids was giving them different problems, "like the remedy is worse than the disease." He believed drugs did not help him. Participant Three believed he had a photographic memory, and he described his ability to remember images and what he learned. It is not uncommon to mistake people with different learning styles as having learning disorders such as ADHD (Freed, 1997).

Five of the six participants described at length how they did not like the classroom experience and the great difficulty they had sitting in the classroom. They did later indicate a more willing acceptance of a classroom environment if the content of the class was of interest or

perceived to have value to them. Two of the participants described the feeling of sitting in class as so unbearable that they would frequently skip class, leading them to finally drop out of school. The participants frequently described themselves as learning by doing or working. Participant One stated that "I needed to get out, I am a hands on guy, not a book guy." Journal entries and observations suggested this issue could be due more to a lack of engagement or interest in the class rather than actual sitting, although it is difficult to discern.

Perhaps the greatest reason for dropping out was having to take classes in school that did not teach subjects they saw as relevant to life. These young men seemed to think that core subjects of general education were not important to them, as they wanted to learn subjects that would be useful for them in life and work. Many examples were given about the uselessness of the content of the classes and how they would never need to use that content in their future. These men wanted to be taught what they perceived as important subjects about life. These results are consistent with past research that a significant number of students feel school is not interesting and needs to be more relevant and engaging (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison; Hendrickson, 2012).

Two of the participants had a great deal to say about bullying and how anything that would differentiate one person from another could cause this to occur. Participant Three spent a great deal of time describing how youth are in a search for themselves; they do not know who they are, so they try to be someone else. He mentioned that young people would attempt to differentiate themselves by belonging to groups, from jock to gang member, or being associated with other groups that were wrongfully treated badly derived from race, dress, income, weight, or disability. He further claimed that the instigators of bullying were often in good standings with authority (teachers) and would get away with things. One of the participants said bullying

was a significant factor that contributed to dropping out and how he hated the disrespect of others. It was suggested that teachers may unknowingly contribute to bullying or even bully themselves. Participant Three said youth are searching for themselves and often join groups or bully others because they are in this search for who they are. He seemed to suggest that there is a correlation between bullying, searching for identity and being forced to be "institutionalized." When Participants Three and Five used the term "institutionalized," they seemed to be describing the act of making students give up their identity and conform to a system in which they were molded into a desirable human form as established by the educational institution. After further discussions and observations the participants seemed to be circling around the idea that students should have academic freedom in secondary school so they could explore their interests and develop into a unique individual to discover who they are while respecting others for their uniqueness. This reflects on past educational philosophy, as Paulo Freire once described how learners must first find a critical consciousness by seeing their place in the world and finding themselves before learning to begin (Freire, 2012).

Several participants felt that teachers either lack the time to deal with students who fall behind or just tended to spend more time with the better students. Participant Three said "you would not think that teachers pick favorites but they do… the nerdy kids with glasses are going to be the favorites…but the kids who need help, need help." Participant One stated that "Sometimes it feels like they favored certain people…If they had a question, they pretty much came first over your question…when you started to fall behind you stay behind." Participant Three stated that "School is set up for kids who are good (in academics) to succeed and kids that are bad (in academics) to fail, if you need help, you can't find it." Participant Four stated that "the teacher would make me read out loud in class, and I did not like that." Participant One

stated that people who could not read should not be forced to read out loud in class. Participant One explained that class was too hard, but the learning center was too easy; it seemed a common belief that if a student fell behind they could not catch up and that the teacher spent more time with the better students while those who fell behind did not get the attention. These results are supported by past research that shows students need to have a relationship with at least one adult at school and that students attribute a perceived lack of support from teachers and schools as contributing to dropping out (Black, 2002; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Meeker, 2005). Research shows that people who drop out of high school sometimes report conflicts with the school personnel or school dysfunction played a large role in preventing them from graduating (Meeker, 2005).

The participants all explained or admitted that they did not do homework or at least did not do it as intended. While different reasons were offered for this, the work did not get done. One reason for the separation of students who were doing well and not doing so well in class could be the inconsistency of some students doing homework and others not. Reasons for not doing homework seemed to vary based on external forces, such as family and work, and internal causes that vary.

Participant Two quit school his senior year to care for a child when the mother, his girlfriend, was sent to prison for drug charges. Each respondent expressed a desire to leave school to work and make money. Participant Six quit school after his older brother died, as his brother was the force that was trying to keep him in school. Research supports these problems at home as being a significant reason for dropping out of school (Gallagher, 2002; Meeker, 2005).

The Participants described heavy usage of computer instruction when returning to classes to prepare for GED testing which was not popular. They described an experience of just sitting

in front of the computer and how it lacked human interaction. The participants described an environment where teachers would come by when you had a question, but the experience did not offer the opportunity to compare and share ideas with other students who were learning at the same time. Participant Four spoke of a program that consisted of a virtual classroom on a computer and how chaotic it was to keep up, reminding him of a crowded classroom. These computer programs were developed to enable shortened modules to divide content so that students may work individually and at their own pace (King, 2002). The subject's reflections seemed to focus on problems with the support around the computer rather than the computer itself. These findings were consistent with other studies that suggest computer instruction for GED, while sometimes useful, can lack the human element and may need greater personal interaction between the student, teacher, and other classmates (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Participant Four described an experience taking a program that combined the GED with workplace skills, called Accelerating Opportunities (AO). In this program he was allowed to take classes in automotive technology while also taking classes to prepare for the GED test after the technical training. He described how great the program was because he was able to learn about cars and skills he can use in his current job. Unfortunately, he did not complete the GED and ran out of funds for the automotive program. He explained that the automotive training was great but the GED preparation was a computer program that once again lacked the human interaction and support he felt was needed. While the computer portion of this program for the GED was not popular for this participant, the program did allow him to enter workforce training without a GED and gain skills for employment. His experience is consistent with research that shows blending academics within technical or trade subjects can be beneficial (Pleasants, 2011).

The sample first expressed external causes for their departure from school or return to school. After they were more comfortable, they seemed to open up and express more internal beliefs as the cause for barriers to returning to school and learning. These internal causes indicated that while they enjoyed and desired learning opportunities, they did not always consider school an educational opportunity but more of a barrier to the credential they needed to move forward in life. Participants seemed eager to share their opinions about school and how they perceive its content to be irrelevant to life and their needs and how they found the methods of instruction as undesirable. While their demeanor was serious when discussing past school and current opportunities, they became happy and laughed when given the opportunity to describe to educators what school should be like. This exercise brought on smiles and laughter as they explained how school should mirror life's needs and prepare students for life and adult independence, whether their futures would lead to college or something else. They expressed a vision for the educational experience that involved all of life's subjects and the freedom to explore and learn. A theme that emerged seemed to declare that these men desire to have greater control to learn and discover the world and themselves without being forced to conform to what leaders in society perceive they should be. They seem to live in protest, as if returning to school means giving up some portion of their identity.

Research Question 3:

How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe real or perceived barriers to returning to formal education to complete a credential?

Each participant described work, time, and money as external or outside forces that would prevent them from returning to school. Three participants mentioned family responsibilities, two participants mentioned that transportation was an issue, and one participant

named babysitting as a problem. These external causes that prevented the participants from returning to school are consistent with previous research (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

As the participants became more comfortable, their focus shifted from that of external causes to what seemed to be more underlying internal resistances to returning to school or thoughts and perceptions that prevented them from returning to school. The listed external causes, while sure to be genuine, seemed also to be a cover for causes that had more to do with feelings or internal causes. Psychological barriers are more challenging to realize and receive less attention (Boylan & Renzulli, 2014; King, 2002). Participant Three said that "People don't want to put themselves through the same experiences they suffered when they were in high school." Participant Four said "Same old stuff," referring to how GED preparation was much like the secondary experience in some forms. Participant Five expressed that he had no desire to return to school. He said he was resigned to the idea and believed he did not belong there and that his life goals could be achieved without it. Much of the resistance encountered by the participants seemed largely due to their own negative educational experiences from the past. Three participants mentioned teachers who were not skilled. Participant One stated that he was not interested "knowing that the experience will have only core classes, no important stuff." Participant Four simply stated "English."

Participant Three described the need to have teachers who were more like the students they taught; he wanted teachers who taught like he learned. He presented the idea that teachers are different, just like the people they teach; therefore "teachers could be fitted for different people." What he was explaining was that students who learn in certain ways should be paired with teachers who learn the same way. Participant Three continued, "I feel like that's the big thing about teachers at the school, different learning for people who learn different, not

everybody's the same." He then defended people who had trouble in school by saying that he saw people struggling every day and that this does not mean they are stupid; they just do not learn the same way.

Participant Three then moved on to explain the importance of supporting reading and writing with visualization. Participant Three also said he had a photographic memory. Participant Three's observations about how people learned differently and his references to visualization and photographic memories lead one to wonder if he is highly spatial and recognizes those around him who are highly spatial or process thoughts differently like he does. These descriptions are consistent with past research describing highly spatial or visual-spatial learners (Silverman, 2006). Highly spatial or visual-spatial learners are known to struggle using more linear methods of thought commonly used in modern education, such as rote learning, and may struggle to master material that is typically considered easy, yet excel when engaged in activities that require higher order thinking skills and creative problem solving (Baum, 1998). Visual-spatial learners think more in images, read maps well, are late bloomers, and are whole-concept learners who relate well to space, not time (Silverman, 2006). Our subjects may have benefited from being placed with a teacher who possesses similar spatial strengths (Freed, 1997).

While describing why school should be like a miniature world, Participant Five explained that "Everybody learns different," and then later went on to state that

> They got to learn for themselves because you can take bits and pieces of everything you learned and put together and actually form something, like an understanding of what goes on around you, the possibilities are endless.

He seemed to be describing his desire for a holistic learning environment similar to adult teaching strategies, such as Whole-Part-Whole learning (Knowles, 1998), and Whole-Concept learning (Silverman, 2006).

Five of the six participants described the difficulty of sitting in class as a barrier to returning to school. Part of this phenomenon seemed to be a desire for physical activity, but another part seemed to be that students were not engaged by the learning experience. These comments were often followed with explanations that they learned by doing or working and how the classroom was not for them.

Each of the participants who returned for a GED preparatory class described their dislike of having to sit in front of the computer. These complaints were followed with comments about little human interaction with the computer experience. Participants commented on the need for interaction with instructors and peers to help understand the content of the class. Participant One stated that he "had trouble staying still in some classes, unless they held my interest."

Each of the participants expressed a desire to learn life skills rather than the traditional core subjects of school. Much of this was related to the belief that the traditional core content was not relative to their needs in life. Participant One thought he should be able to take classes he was interested in and was unhappy that people who "are good at core classes be considered smart while someone who can master fixing a car is stupid." Participant Four stated that "I just need a diploma not the stuff I don't need to know." Participant Five felt high school should teach basic life skills, like how to sew, cook, keep financial records, and understand banking and the core classes to a reasonable level. Participant Four felt like there should be more industrial classes and life classes like cooking. The participants elaborated extensively on how school should consist of classes that were fun, engaging, hands on, or related to work or life. The feelings expressed by the participants were consistent with past research describing how students recognize the relevance of classes that relate to life and work but see the academic courses as irrelevant, and past research supports that students desire programs that contain more hands on

coursework that is related to life and work (Bridgeland, Bilulio, & Morison, 2006; Hendrickson, 2012; Jean, 1999; Liebowitz & Taylor, 2004; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

The participants described their desire not to take higher levels of core general education classes. Each of the participants was critical about having to learn higher levels of core classes like math and especially English. While there seemed to be an understanding of the necessity to understand basic elements of math and English classes, it was felt that it should not be required to master the content to such a high level. The interview journal comments noted that perhaps the issue was again the ability of the subjects to relate the content of the classes to life. This seems consistent with descriptions by Freire where he described his "Banking Model of Education", where educators dump knowledge into the heads of youth without making it relative to the learner first (Freire, 2012).

Participants described a strong desire to return to school if the content was seen as meaningful but little desire to return to take certain academic core subjects. Each of the participants expressed a desire to go to school; they just seemed to think school should be different than it is. Each of the participants had ideas on what school should be like and oddly enough, even Participant Five, who said he would never go back to school, seemed very interested in the idea of school if it were changed to suit what he believed school should be like.

The participants described how they believed learning should be interesting and contain real-world learning experiences. Participant Three stated that "electives should be the core classes, economics is very important so you understand money, loans, APR rates, checkbooks, taxes, and how to buy a house." Participant One explained there should be more classes on life issues, fewer boring classes, and more fun classes. All participants commented on having more classes that were hands on. Participant Four said, "I liked Industrial Tech class in middle school.

It had small parts of wood, mechanics, wiring, flight simulators, bridge building. That's pretty fun." Participants generally described that equal time should be given to the classes that are seen as life learning with the examples of cooking, business, welding, woodworking, and other classes that may now be considered electives. The core classes of education, such as mathematics and English, were not perceived to have been useful because the participants did not see themselves as engineers or writers after high school. Participants frequently expressed that they were "hands-on" people who did not learn well from a book. The idea that students need relevant and engaging content that enhances the connection between school and work is consistent with past research and reasons people drop out of school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Hendrickson, 2012).

Participant One also told a story where he had a very good teacher who taught math who empowered him to help other students with their work and how he learned a great deal. From his description, this math teacher left a very positive impression and appeared to have overcome the problem of keeping him engaged in the classroom by challenging him.

Five of the participants liked art classes. Participant Five stated he liked art because "I can sit there and create", It was interesting that he used the words "sit there," when it appeared he did not like to sit in other classes. Participants Three and Five mentioned that they liked to write poetry, which was of interest because they also said that they did not like to write in English class. Three participants said that they liked physical education classes. Participant One said that he liked math class if the teacher was good, but the other participants did not like math. One participant liked science and two did not like science because it was boring and it was the same "stuff" every year. Participant one said he liked science very much, but that school did not make science interesting so he learned it on his own. The most important statements were the

near collective dislike for English class. They each said that they did not like the writing and the elements of writing while reading seemed to be enjoyed by most if the material was interesting. A similar dislike for grammar and punctuation existed for each of the participants.

When questioned about how GED preparation programs and high schools should be improved, and given the opportunity to explain how they would design a school without limitation, the participants responded with smiles and laughter. Journal entries describe their somber attitude shifting to happy and excited as they presented their design of how school should be, and they were surprisingly detailed and thought out. A summary of the responses and journal entries described a school where they had academic freedom to discover and learn about life skills and all subjects related to their own interests. These responses were consistent with previously mentioned research about the desire of people to learn subjects in school that contain coursework relevant to life and work (Bridgeland, Bilulio, & Morison, 2006; Hendrickson, 2012; Jean, 1999, Liebowitz & Taylor, 2004; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Two of the participants actually brought up a movie called *Accepted*, (Pink, 2006), in which some young people created a fictitious college because they were trying to show their parents they had been accepted to a college. They described a learning structure where the students had the opportunity to create their own educational pathway and create their own curriculum to obtain the needed learning to attain their goal. This movie seems to have made an impression on them as each of them laughed and explained that this would be a model for their own fantasy school (these two subjects knew each other but did not communicate between the two interviews). The idea that these two participants were demonstrating seemed to be that of academic freedom. They wanted to learn and explore life but on their own terms.

Participant Four described how the core classes of a school should be made up of the student's particular interests and life goals, so if they want to learn about business, they should learn about business, this should be the core, not the general education. The participants often described the important classes as classes that were relevant to life and higher level general education as irrelevant unless it supported the person's personal educational goal. Interestingly, none of the participants suggested an easy school or a school that would just give them a credential, but instead an opportunity to learn something that meant something to them.

Participant Four described his school as including training for mechanics and diesel. He further described an experience where he was able to take a new program called Accelerating Opportunities that involved taking automotive training classes with GED training on the computer. When asked how the school would teach the math that would be necessary to work on these trucks he stated that "it's just like you can relate it to something. Something visible, like in math class they were just teaching you math, I guess I want to say numbers, not math but the numbers." Therefore, he was explaining that just doing numbers has little perceived value but when you learn math that is related to something that you perceive as useful, you do the math. Participant Four further described how a couple of his friends had become electricians and for them it was "not just learning math but doing it."

Participant Five explained his high school would be all about basic skills. Participant Five stated; teaching respect would be a priority to eliminate bullying. This school would be like a miniature world where you would learn how not to waste, banking, getting along, basic math, and history. He expressed beliefs that you should bring the closeness of homeschooling into the classroom, like a family setting. He believes life skills need to be taught, including survival, cooking, fixing a car, digging a hole, and more. Participant Five further mentioned he would

offer a class in foraging as it teaches people about how to make things from plants, like food and colors, to encourage creativity and that it would be fun. He said in cooking class you do not want to learn by measuring the components at first as it would have only one outcome, but if you cooked by a pinch of this and a pinch of that and by taste, not by the book, you can get a million outcomes. Participant Five continued by stating that if you cook it too long it burns, if you don't cook it enough it bleeds; he described a learning model rich in experiment. In his school, students could work on math or be a welder as "that would make a more useful educational opportunity than trying to keep everybody the same."

At first, the participants again seem to lose sight of the goal of education in that they do not seem to put priority on teaching the core subjects that will be on the GED test or that would be required for a high school diploma. With further examination it becomes apparent that the bigger point they are trying to provide in these descriptions is that the problem with school is the fundamental philosophy that a high school diploma should be based on college rather than life skills. Therefore, to these young men a school should indeed represent the skills necessary for a person to prepare for life after high school and enable them to survive independently. Simply stated, it is really quite bold that perhaps we need to consider life for our young people may be greatly improved if our schools really did follow the example given by these men who never even completed high school.

The sample described their past educational experiences and beliefs as the main reason for resisting to return to education. While the participants initially described external resistances for returning to school such as money, transportation, and time, it became apparent that internal causes or feelings were likely the main reason for not returning to school. The major causes for not wanting to return to school seemed to parallel the same reasons they left high school. These

perceived causes for resistance were not seeing the learning content as relevant to life and not wanting to sit in the classroom. Interestingly, participants who described a dislike for sitting in the classroom also discussed enjoying classes with content that was interesting to them, suggesting that maybe the "sitting" is not as much of the issue as content or methods that make up the class itself.

Research Question 4:

To what extent were there similarities and differences in the responses and themes voiced by the purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers?

While minor differences in detail did exist, the major themes from their shared experiences were remarkably similar. Most of the participants seemed eager to share information and had many ideas and opinions to present. They all seemed to reject the notion of teaching core education in favor of teaching life subjects and almost seemed to resist education in protest to it not being the way they wanted it to be. Observing patterns of similarity were not difficult and even obvious for this purposeful sample and leaves one to wonder if this can be repeated with this much consistency.

Summary

Each of the participants of this study were without a secondary credential, living in poverty, and facing difficulties in life on numerous levels. Each of the respondents had a difficult time in secondary school and resisted returning to school largely based on their negative experiences from attending schools in the past. Participants largely saw school as a collection of uninteresting material that was not relevant to their needs, although they understood the importance of a GED in the form of a credential that must be obtained to allow them to have opportunities in work and education.

The participants described high school as an institution much like jail, in which they did not have the freedom to choose to learn what they perceive was interesting or important. They expressed a need to explore learning in the form of their own interests and had little desire to sit in class and learn topics they perceived as irreverent and not important. Participants described having to take classes that forced them to be institutionalized where everyone should learn the same things instead of having the opportunity to explore and learn things of interest so they could find their own identity and grow.

Most of the participants had been diagnosed with some form of learning disorder and had at one time taken medication for these ailments. None of the participants were still on their medication and one was vocal about how the medication only created other issues and could have been worse than what they were trying to cure. Several of the participants described how they had a difficult time sitting in class and their belief that not all people learn or teach the same way. One participant expressed the need to pair up the learning style of the student with a teacher that shared a similar learning style.

Participants seemed to think that the teachers picked favorites and spent most of their time with students who were performing well in class while leaving other people behind. The participants seemed to think that school was designed for people who perform and who students who fall behind are not likely to catch up. Part of the reason for this was that some students are further ahead in class and others are behind could be due to the fact that each person in the class seems to do homework to a different level or not at all.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Education plays a major role in an individual's search for both an economic and personal quality of life. Yet despite the importance of education, many students never complete their secondary school experience, and this is particularly troubling as many of these dropouts continually resist the opportunity to attempt to further their education or training. The current study sought to identify why adult men who dropped out of secondary school never returned to complete a secondary credential. The current chapter includes a summary of the study, including the study's findings, conclusions from the research, recommendations for both further research and for practice, and a general discussion of what the findings mean. A chapter summary has also been included.

Summary of the Study

In this study, high school dropouts who had resisted returning to attain a GED were looked at as the experts of the phenomenon of resisting to return to education. Six individuals, all identified in the metropolitan area of Kansas City, were included in the study; all were over 21 years old and were males who had never completed a GED or similar program. The subjects were interviewed over a period of about three months during the winter of 2014-2015 utilizing an interview guide developed from test pilots. The interviews were conducted in the setting of the subjects choosing, recorded, and transcribed. A journal was maintained with entries during the interview process to record observations of behavior and integrity. Peer comments and past research were triangulated with the transcriptions and journal entries for a final result.

The findings of this study will be useful to educators, school administrators, adult education providers, college leadership, and activists to better design, package, prepare, and promote school for men. These findings will help them understand, from the perspective of the

dropout, why men leave school and resist returning to education. With better understanding of these men's perspectives, it will be possible to better construct educational programs to be more effective and appealing while improving retention in adult education programs and preventing high school students from dropping out.

Research Question 1: How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe themselves and their past experiences in formal education?

Each adult male described limited opportunities in work and working at a low wage. Each explained the difficulty of living without a secondary credential and their inability to obtain meaningful work or enter into workforce training opportunities such as technical schools. This was consistent with previous research that suggested that individuals living without a secondary credential are more likely to face adversity than those who graduate (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Rouse, 2005; Rumberger, 2001; Sum, Khatiwada, & Morison, 2006).

Research Question 2: How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe their reasons for dropping out of school and to what extent is this consistent with previous research?

The subject's reasons for dropping out and resisting to return to education were nearly the same. The external causes for leaving and not returning to school were overshadowed by the internal causes leaving and for resistance to returning to school. The largest factor in leaving school and not returning was the perceived lack of value or relevance of the coursework to life and work, and is consistent with previous research (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Hendrickson, 2012). Subjects described bullying as a factor in leaving secondary school and inadequate support from the teacher to solve this. The subjects described conditions in school where they fell behind and could not catch up. They explained that not all people learn the same

way and that they desire more of a learning by doing environment. They perceived that the teacher would spend most of their time with better students and that there was a divide in the classroom between students who did well and did not do well with their studies. This is consistent with previous research that shows students attribute a perceived lack of support from teachers and schools as contributing to dropping out (Black, 2002; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Meeker, 2005). Some of the subjects demonstrated they could be highly spatial with descriptions of spatial abilities and a desire for holistic learning environments (Silverman, 2006).

Research Question 3: How did a purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers describe real or perceived barriers to returning to formal education to complete a credential?

The participants described a desire to learn subjects that they perceive as having value to them, but they had little desire to learn some of the academic core, particularly higher math and English composition. Past learning experiences seemed the basis for perceptions in current educational decisions. They further described a dislike for GED preparation programs that were too centered on the computer, as they desired human interaction with peers and instructors to better support the content of the class. The participants objected to sitting in class or the classroom experience and felt that learning by doing was the desirable alternative. The subjects described the realization that students do not learn the same way and therefore should be given the opportunity to learn in an environment that better matches their learning style. When given the opportunity to explain what school should be, they were enthused to explain that classes that teach you about life and work were what they wanted to take and what school should be focused on rather than only the academic core. Examples given were cooking, sewing, arts,

bookkeeping, home skills, and work skills like welding and automotive. The participants seemed to have interest in having all these classes as part of the core curriculum or having the current academic core subjects become more like electives so they can take classes of interest to help them "find an identity," as one participant called it. Each of the participants seemed to have a strong desire to go to school, but they wanted to learn on their own terms and learn the subjects they desired.

Research Question 4: To what extent were there similarities and differences in the responses and themes voiced by the purposeful sample of adult male non-secondary credential completers?

The subjects who participated in this study were remarkably similar in their outlooks on high school and returning to school. This could be a result of the methods of obtaining the participants or simply that these are common thoughts among typical men who dropped out of high school. Only replication of the study will answer this.

Conclusions

There are too many adult males who resist returning to school to complete a GED. While external barriers such as money and transportation have been identified as important, underlying internal resistors appear to be of at least equal significance. Each participant was living with great difficulty of losing the opportunities that a secondary certificate would provide, but despite this they still had not completed the GED. Internal causes seemed to be a major factor for leaving high school and for resisting the return to prepare for the GED. Below are five key elements resulting from this study:

1. The content of the classes in school are not relevant to life or work and are not perceived as of value or importance to the participants of this study. This further demonstrates this

known reason why people drop out of school, and seems to remain a leading cause for resisting to return to school after dropping out. The participants feel that classroom content should contain less academic core and more life subjects that they perceive as important to them and that prepare them for living independently. These participants do not see classes as interesting or engaging, although they do have a strong desire to learn. They seem to associate school as a place to obtain a credential to enable them to move on rather than a place of learning.

2. The participants have a perception that when they fall behind, they stay behind. There are many causes for falling behind in class, but once behind, students had the perception the teacher would spend too much time with the better students and not enough time with them. The classroom appears to be divided between those who understand the content and those who are behind, leaving the teacher to balance the needs of each group. One reason for falling behind seems to be that, for whatever cause, these participants did not appear to do much, if any, homework after school, leading to the participant falling further behind with each incomplete assignment.
3. There needs to be compatibility between the learning styles of participants and the instructors and an appropriate classroom methodology. The participants described the act of sitting in class as difficult, even unbearable, although the reason for this restlessness appears to be their desire to learn a more meaningful subject or the desire to learn from a different method of instruction. These participants described a desire to learn subjects such as math not by sitting but by doing, as in doing some activity where the math is practiced within other meaningful content and not just taught as math alone. Writing, for example, would be used as part of an exercise within a more engaging content that is

relevant to the learner rather than within a class that only contains writing. While classes that offer only core content seem to have little value to these participants on their own, it can be acceptable when embedded within a content that is perceived as meaningful to the learner.

4. Bullying and identity are related to education. Two participants implied that bullying played a role in leaving school and that this may be related to identity. One participant kept explaining that when in high school you are forced to become an example of the ideal college-ready graduate that fits the educator's perception of who you should be. His argument suggested that in conforming to this ideal you lose your own identity, as you do not have the opportunity to choose what to explore and discover who you are. He associated this lost identity to causes of unhappiness, bullying, and even suicide. His solution seemed to be that people need to have some form of academic freedom to learn what they want to learn to discover themselves and to be satisfied with who they are.
5. Computerized learning can be too much of a good thing. The participants described the GED process as often too computerized and lacking the support of or interaction with others. While these computer programs frequently seem beneficial for students and do allow individualized instruction, creative content, and the opportunity to work at their own pace, it may be tempting to reduce staff and rely on them too heavily. The participants discussed a need to discuss their lessons with peers and a desire for more one-on-one time with the instructor.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Further Research

1. The purposeful sample that provided the data for this study was located mostly by word of mouth from a snowball or chain sampling strategy process of selection, in which one participant brought in the next; this meant that some of the participants knew each other. As some of the participants were friends with each other, they likely discussed the phenomenon with each other over time. It would be of great value to repeat this study in some form to enhance its strength. It would be beneficial to ask current high school students and GED participant's similar questions to see if their feelings for high school contained any commonalities.
2. Further research needs to be conducted to better understand the concept of embedding academic core within more interesting subjects for GED training and secondary education. Could a semester of classes that were labeled cooking, sewing, metallurgy, or any other life skill be an effective vehicle to deliver academic learning when this academic content is embedded in the more interesting subject, and would it be comparable to outcomes from a traditional delivery? Would these types of classes enable people with various learning styles and disabilities to better understand or support the academic core with the possibility of greater engagement, and participation?
3. There needs to be better understanding as to why a classroom of students can be divided into groups of students who understand content and those who do not. Could classroom cohesion and a more uniform understanding of the classroom content be attained by removing outside variables such as homework? If learning for a specific class only took place within the classroom, would the divide between those who understand and those who do not understand be reduced, and would this cohesion reflect a higher learner outcome for the group as a whole?

4. Further research should be conducted to understand if there are ways to better match students to teachers who share similar learning styles. For example: can a learning outcome be better achieved by having highly spatial instructors teach highly spatial students?
5. Additional research should be conducted to better understand the effect of returning to education to gain identity. The participants of this study described a desire to take classes in cooking, welding, and similar subjects while in high school but not wanting to take classes in writing or higher math. As adults, they wished to become a welder, electrician, or technician, but without a high school diploma their opportunities were limited. Can their desire to become a welder be utilized to carry them through the less desirable academic core if given the opportunity?

Recommendations for Practice

1. Study findings should be shared with public school and education leaders to illustrate the power of effective teaching in retention.
2. People without GEDs live with difficulty because they are barred from jobs and opportunities for training. Perhaps barriers to job training need to be reduced so that people without diplomas can enter into appropriate work and educational opportunities to enter the practice of learning. It makes little sense to withhold them from bettering themselves only because of a lack of a diploma. Job training may be the catalyst to becoming a practicing student who, when practicing as a student to learn meaningful things, will then more easily engage in more academic subjects and eventual completion of a GED. Men returning to learn things that are perceived as meaningful may learn to learn and then advance into more difficult and challenging content.

3. Perhaps teaching youth about life and work would be a better approach in a world that is so rich in information. Teaching youth to be independent and love to learn can drive them to discover and be passionate about their interests while encouraging them to pursue advanced study. Students who are engaged in study and work may develop an identity they can take pride in, and, once the desire to learn is established, it will likely continue to grow.
4. One of the better ways to improve the problems of dropping out of school is to improve secondary schools so people do not drop out to begin with. Perhaps it would better serve students to leave the school building each day and leave their studies behind them, in the building, until the next school day. Life is so rich with experiences that they may be better served by being free to explore the world from home with only the homework that is established by family from home. Perhaps without the schools' influence, the family could increase their bond and reliance on each other. Schools could be responsible for the school day and parents could take responsibility for life at home.
5. Perhaps the diploma's time is past and it should be replaced with more of a portfolio design that would measure individual's strengths and interests to allow others in higher education and industry to recognize the student's unique abilities and help him find a place to belong. There are people who have had difficulty in school and have grown up to become great contributors to our history. The participants of this study, living in despair, seem to have unique skills in some things. An employer looking for someone with creativity and communication skills may not be concerned with less-than-average ability in higher mathematics. A portfolio may be just the thing to improve the process of

matching people to work or even applying for a program at a college. Employers and employees may have a greater chance of finding compatibility and success.

Discussion

High school students seem to complain a lot. These complaints seem at first to be just noise and a release of school-related stress. After listening more closely, a common theme seems to evolve concerning common dislikes for school and a desire to enter the real world. Some of these high school students would soon leave school to become dropouts. Often these students would be smart, capable people who just did not seem to fit in well within the school design. With this study complete, it is easy now to look back, realizing many of the results of this study are consistent with the high school students' comments from the past. Comments like "I don't need to know this crap" or "I can't stand school" were common-place. It is almost as though the participants of this study were resisting school as a form of protest against the system and their perception of what school was not and what it should be. As educators, perhaps it is time to consult current students and non-completers, for they are the experts. It is time to listen to what they are saying.

The biggest surprises from this study came in response to the request to explain what school should be like and how they would design a school if they could. The responses were fantastic and unexpected. It was as if they had spent years thinking about it for they all had ideas about what they thought school should and should not be like. To summarize these responses would be to describe an institution that supported academic freedom for the student. These men all seemed to possess a strong desire to learn about life subjects and what they perceive as important, but not what the school was attempting to make them learn. These men almost

seemed to resist returning to school as if they were in protest to having to return to the classroom experiences from their pasts.

While at first these respondents described external causes as being responsible for their resistance to returning to school, after further discussion, it did not take long for them to reveal that internal causes seemed to play an even a larger role in resisting education in any form. The participants seemed eager to discuss their stories and opinions about school much like they wanted to explain or defend their position. These men were distressed from their experiences, and when treated with respect and asked for their opinions, they became excited to share their views. The flyer that was distributed explained they would have a chance to make a difference by expressing their opinions about school, and they seemed to feed on that. These participants were serious about wanting to help fix schools.

Initially, there was difficulty locating willing participants for this study. The difficulty was in finding people who did not graduate but were not associated with a school or GED program. The best result came from word of mouth. One man who responded seemed to want to vent about school and make a difference, and after the interview mentioned he had a friend; that friend responded and also knew of another friend. It was not difficult to motivate the individuals to participate after explaining this was a serious effort that needed their help and would give them the chance to be heard.

Chapter Summary

The participants' descriptions were remarkably similar. They have lived in poverty without the benefit of a secondary credential and had only limited access to education and job opportunities. Some of the men seemed to possess different learning styles that would likely be more compatible with instruction that was designed with them in mind. The participants were

eager to learn, but they desired to learn subjects they saw as important, relevant to life, and interesting to them. Some participants were victims of bullying and believed this was a major issue. One participant related that when young people search for identity and cannot find it, they end up belonging to groups with negative influence which leads to insecurity and bullying. This participant believed that school forces youth to lose their identity by forcing them to be alike and take classes designed to make them a model of an ideal youth as designed by the system. Participants described the desire to learn in a more holistic learning environment so they could grow as individuals. Participants described taking classes that were of unique interest to the students so they could learn and discover who they were and establish an identity. Academic freedom and the opportunity to chart their own learning pathway seemed to be a theme that ran within the discussions. Homework could contribute to classes dividing students into those who were far ahead and those who were far behind. As long as there is variation in the amount of homework each student does at home, each homework day students will drift further apart in the divide of understanding the content. Perhaps the greatest remedy to reduce the amount of high school dropouts is to make high school more interesting and engaging by offering classes that are reflective of life and work so that students can find satisfaction in choosing the classes that will allow them to discover their own identity and pathway through life.

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Appendix A

Handout Seeking Participants

Are you an adult male over 21 that have not completed a high school diploma or GED?

Do you have opinions and beliefs about the educational system that you would like to share with educators?

I am looking for a few good men to help with a research project to improve our understanding of your thoughts toward high school education, the GED and school in general.

This research involves two interviews and gives the participant the opportunity to explain their beliefs and opinions about the educational process to educators that want to listen and learn from you.

If you would like to make a difference and improve our schools, this is your chance to be heard.

Contact:
Bob McGowan
xxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxx

Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate in Study Form

A Search for Understanding: Why Adult Male Dropouts Resist Returning to School to Complete a GED

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Principal Researcher: Robert McGowan
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Michael Miller

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

You are invited to participate in a research study about why adults who do not graduate high school resist returning to school to complete a diploma. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an expert in this field of study.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Who is the Principal Researcher?

Robert McGowan
xxxxxxx
xxxxxxx

Who is the Faculty Advisor?

Dr. Michael Miller
xxxxxxx
xxxxxxx

What is the purpose of this research study?

The purpose of this study is to better understand your experiences and prospective about education and the experiences you have had with school.

Who will participate in this study?

Adult men that have not completed high school or a GED.

What am I being asked to do?

Your participation will require the following:
Participating in an interview so you can explain your experiences as a high school student and your prospective about your educational experience.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

No risks have been indicated by participating in this research.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

Participation in this research offers the opportunity for others to better understand your situation and help to potentially improve adult GED programs and how they are designed. Participants will gain the satisfaction that they contributed their unique knowledge of the subject to benefit themselves and others by improving the GED preparation experience in the future.

How long will the study last?
This interview will last approximately 20 minutes to an hour, depending largely on how much time you wish to contribute to each subject on the survey.

Will I receive compensation for my time and inconvenience if I choose to participate in this study?
No.

Will I have to pay for anything?
No.

What are the options if I do not want to be in the study?
If you do not want to be in this study, you may refuse to participate. Also, you may refuse to participate at any time during the study. You will not be affected in any way if you refuse to participate.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
All information will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable State and Federal law.
Each interview will be assigned a number which identifies the interviewee. The names of the interviewee will be secured and known only by Robert McGowan. Personal information and transcripts will be secured and password protected by Robert McGowan and destroyed after a period of seven years.

Will I know the results of the study?
At the conclusion of the study you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You may contact the faculty advisor, Michael Miller, xxxxxxx Principal Researcher, Robert McGowan, xxxxxxx. You will receive a copy of this form for your files.

What do I do if I have questions about the research study?
You have the right to contact the Principal Researcher or Faculty Advisor as listed below for any concerns that you may have.

Robert McGowan, xxxxxxx

Michael Miller, xxxxxxx

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
210 Administration

Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
xxxxxxxxxx
irb@uark.edu

I have read the above statement and have been able to ask questions and express concerns, which have been satisfactorily responded to by the investigator. I understand the purpose of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I understand that participation is voluntary. I understand that significant new findings developed during this research will be shared with the participant. I understand that no rights have been waived by signing the consent form. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

_____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Interview Guide

A search for Understanding Why Adult Male Dropouts Resist Returning to School to Complete a GED
Interview Guide
University of Arkansas

Time of interview: _____

Date: _____

Participant: _____

Interviewee Code: _____

Approximate Date left school: _____

Script:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about a search for understanding why adult male dropouts resist returning to school to complete a GED.

I am providing you with an informed consent form for you to review and sign, if you agree. As noted, your identity will be held in strictest confidence and your identity will not be linked directly or indirectly with the study findings.

The interview will be recorded for audio but this is only for the purpose of transposing information to assure accuracy of the material generated from the conversations. Notes will be taken on this interview guide during the interview.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you maintain the right to withdraw at any time.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

Do I have your permission to begin?

You should have the interviewer's (Me) contact information should you have any questions or comments. Should you have questions or concerns that I cannot answer you may contact my advisor, Dr. Michael Miller, University of Arkansas, (479) xxxxxxx, mtmille@uark.edu

SECTION I: PAST EXPERIENCES IN FORMAL EDUCATION:

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your experiences in school?

   Other elements to consider:

   -how would you describe yourself

   -how would you describe your high school experience

   -what were the dominating factors that led you to leave high school

   -have you attempted to return to school and what was it like

   -if you have attempted to prepare for the GED test, please tell what it was like

2. Life barriers to education

   What outside forces have prevented you from returning to school?

   Other things to consider:

   -are there solutions to overcoming these external barriers that prevent you from returning to school?

Internal barriers to education and attitude toward learning

   What were or are the good things about school?

   What didn't or don't you like about school?

   What makes you want to go to school?

   What makes you not want to go back to school?

Subject matter

   What are your feelings about the subjects or materials you studied in school?

Scholastic design

   What changes do you feel could be made to school to make it more desirable for yourself and others like you?

Thank you for your time and contribution to this effort. You may reach the interviewer by phone or e-mail as listed below for questions regarding the second interview or to answer any questions.

Bob McGowan
xxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxx

The second interview gives the respondent the opportunity to revise and correct their responses to these same questions after given the time to reflect on the first interview experience. The researcher will explain the purpose of the second interview at the beginning of the interview. This second interview will enable the respondent to take the needed time to recall and reflect on past experiences and make sure that the information collected best represents their beliefs about their perception.

Appendix D

IRB

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

February 4, 2015

MEMORANDUM

TO:	Robert McGowan Michael Miller
FROM:	Ro Windwalker IRB Coordinator
RE:	New Protocol Approval
IRB Protocol #:	15-01-418
Protocol Title:	*A Search for Understanding: Why Male, Long Term High School Dropouts Resist Returning to Complete a Secondary Credential*
Review Type:	☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB
Approved Project Period:	Start Date: 02/04/2015 Expiration Date: 02/03/2016

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 7 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

109 MLKG Building • 1 University of Arkansas • Fayetteville, AR 72701
Voice (479) 575-2208 • Fax (479) 575-6527 • Email irb@uark.edu