

Homeschooled Students in College:
Background Influences, College Integration, and Environmental Pull Factors

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Abstract

How do pre-entry attributes of homeschooled students influence their college experience? What are their academic and social integration patterns? What role did outside factors play in their college experience? Using Tinto's research as a foundation, this study examined the influence of pre-entry attributes on the college experience, academic and social integration patterns, and environmental pull factors of college students who were homeschooled in high school. The authors found that homeschooled students were equipped to succeed academically and socially. Outside influences encountered by the participants included work, family, and finances.

There were an estimated 1.5 million homeschooled students in k-12 settings in the United States during the spring of 2007 (Bielick, 2008). Homeschooling has become increasingly more common, rising from 300,000 students in 1991, to 850,000 students in 1999 (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001), to 1,096,000 students in 2003 (Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2004), to

1,508,000 students in 2007 (Bielick, 2008). While it is difficult to know with certainty, Cox (2003) suggested that about 30,000 homeschooled students begin college each year.

The transitional first year of college for homeschooled high school students, the focus of a study by [Authors' identities concealed] (2007), identified issues that were prominent during the first year of college (e.g., leaving home, independence, meeting others with different world views) and several institutional interventions that were helpful to them. Five years later the authors returned to the same individuals that matriculated in fall 2005 to explore, from a longitudinal perspective, the influence of their homeschool background on the college experiences, including their academic and social integration into college, and environmental pull factors, such as work, finances, and family commitments.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation for this study rests with the literature on transition to college, the role of involvement, and outside influences in college success. Tinto (1993) developed the model of institutional departure, adapted from Van Gennep's [1909, 1960] studies on assimilation. This model consisted of three stages: separation from past communities, transition between high school and college, and incorporation into the college community. The model suggested that pre-entry attributes, such as an individual's family background, talents, and prior education influence a student's degree commitment and can play a role in institutional departure. In addition to these background influences, Tinto (1975) also discussed academic and social integration in relation to the person-environment fit and associated these with a student's retention, involvement, and persistence to graduation. Regarding academic integration, intellectual development was a reflection of the student's intellectual integration into the academic system, often measured

in terms of grade performance. Social integration took place primarily through informal peer group associations, interaction with faculty and administration personnel, and semi-formal extracurricular college activities. Of the multiple forms of social interaction that occur during college, peer group associations appeared to have the greatest influence on a student's social integration; with extracurricular activities and faculty interactions appearing to be equal in secondary importance. The greater the student's level of social and academic integration, the greater the student's commitment to the institution and to graduation.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1980, 1983), building on Tinto's model, identified the strong contribution that student-faculty relationships made toward social and academic integration. In both their formal teaching and informal nonteaching roles, the quality and influence of student-faculty relationships contributed positively to a student's sense of integration. The results of Pascarella and Terenzini's investigations affirmed Tinto's assertion that persistence/withdrawal behavior is the result of a longitudinal process of person-environment fit. Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2005) expanded Tinto's notion of student interactions within the academic and social systems of an institution to include outside environmental push and pull factors (e.g., family responsibilities, work responsibilities, commuting to college), formal interactions with faculty, involvement in learning communities (i.e., in-class experiences, out-of-class collaborative learning), campus climates (e.g., perceptions of prejudice/discrimination, tolerance versus acceptance), and validating mentoring experiences.

Homeschooled College Students

Many authorities are concerned about homeschooled students' success in college. The most common concern is a fear that homeschooled students lack socialization (Luebke, 1999). Sutton and Galloway (2000) examined the undergraduate experiences of high school students from three different secondary educational backgrounds (i.e., public school, private school, and homeschool) and measured success based on five factors (i.e., achievement, leadership, professional aptitude, social behavior, and physical activity). They found little difference in the areas of achievement, professional aptitude, social behavior, and physical activity based upon the school environment. They concluded that all three types of educational settings prepared students for a college career of comparable achievement, aptitude, social skills, and physical activity. Holder (2001) found that homeschooled students were academically and socially adept, demonstrating the ability to learn on their own, maintain good study habits, be self-motivated, exhibit responsibility, be flexible in learning at their own pace, and maintain self-discipline. While homeschooled students assimilated well to the social environment of college, they encountered challenges adjusting academically such as writing research papers, meeting assignment deadlines and managing time, and getting accustomed to class schedules.

[Authors' identities concealed] (2007) examined the transitional experiences of traditional-age, matriculating, first-year college students, who graduated from high school in a homeschool setting. The qualitative study sought answers regarding what transitional issues homeschooled students encountered in adjusting to college life, how were these issues related to Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory of institutional departure, and what institutional interventions at the university aided or hindered the transition. As the students transitioned to college life, those who lived on-campus indicated feelings of

loneliness after leaving home. However, they also enjoyed their newfound independence. They encountered others with value systems different than their own and developed a new identity away from parents and home friends. The participants were also involved in co-curricular activities at various levels and indicated that the college experience helped them develop confidence. The authors also found that meeting others from different worldviews was especially spiritually enlightening for the homeschooled students. The students appreciated the opportunities and skills homeschooling provided them, and indicated that homeschooling equipped them with time management and study skills needed to be successful in college. Several institutional interventions that were helpful in the students' transition to college were cited. Orientation helped them adjust to college life, Resident Assistants had a positive impact, and student organizations served as a location to meet others with similar interests. The authors noted that the transitional issues these students encountered during their first year of college were closely related to the three stages of separation, transition, and incorporation identified in Tinto's (1993) theory of institutional departure. As they left home, the participants experienced separation and periods of loneliness. The second stage, transition, was experienced on different timelines among the students. Some participants quickly disassociated themselves from their life at home while others took longer to make friends and leave their shell. The third stage of incorporation was experienced as the students began to refer to college as "home," adjusted to college academics, and built their own community of friends.

There is a void in the literature on academic and social integration patterns of homeschooled students after their transitional year. How do they experience college? Are their experiences different than other students? The purpose of this study was to examine

the longitudinal transition and integration of college students who were homeschooled in high school in order to identify how prior experiences affected integration and transition, determine the role that social and academic integration played in persistence to graduation, and understand how environmental factors influenced the students' college experiences. The study sought to answer three questions.

1. How did the homeschooled students' pre-entry attributes influence their college experience?
2. What are the academic and social integration patterns of homeschooled students?
3. How do outside environmental pull factors experienced during college influence homeschooled students?

Method

Design of Study

Qualitative research methodology was chosen based on the researchers' belief that the best way to understand the college experiences was through questioning, understanding, and analyzing individual experiences, searching for common themes among these experiences, and comparing these experiences to Tinto's (1975, 1993) theoretical framework. The phenomenological study was conducted as a longitudinal follow up to the study conducted by [Authors' identities concealed] (2007) that examined the transitional issues of first-year college students who were homeschooled in high school. At the university where the initial research was conducted (Midwest State, pseudonym), a midsized, public, primarily residential, research university in the Midwest, the six students

originally interviewed were contacted five years after the initial interview for a follow-up interview. Five students participated.

Data Collection

Personal interviews were conducted. A semi-structured interview guide was created based on the guide used by [Authors' identities concealed] (2007). Questions were modified and developed according to the study's primary research questions, informed by the theoretical framework. They were organized to address separation from home and transition to college, academic experiences, social experiences, and environmental pull factors. Examples of the questions asked of students were "How did your homeschool experience prepare you for college academics? How did being homeschooled influence your social experiences in college in any way? While in college, how did outside responsibilities influence your college experience?"

To increase the trustworthiness of the instrument, the interview guide was reviewed by a panel of experts who were experienced university educators working with homeschooled students in college. The interview guide was also pilot tested with former and current students who were homeschooled in high school and had attended college. The panel of experts and the pilot group provided suggestions to improve the guide. After approval by the Institutional Review Board, interviews were conducted and lasted about one hour. They were audio recorded and transcribed. The informants' personal information was kept confidential by usage of pseudonyms. During the interviews, the researchers adhered to the suggestion of Lofland and Lofland (1984) to write brief notes during the interview process to help in creating field notes. Field notes, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), are "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the

data” (p. 108). We also utilized reflexivity. Through reflexivity we examined “the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228). One researcher’s personal experiences, as a homeschooled student who completed college, informed the data collection process. All of these methodological techniques were used to increase the trustworthiness of the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was multifaceted and was based on the open and axial coding techniques described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This type of data analysis is iterative in nature and required the researchers to visit the data multiple times. We utilized the constant comparative analysis method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to modify and develop how participants integrated academically and socially to college. In evaluating the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study, we adhered to the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985) for qualitative research studies. We used member checking (full transcript review for accuracy) to further improve credibility and dependability.

Findings

The findings begin with a discussion of the participants’ pre-entry attributes and demographics related to their background as homeschooled students. Then academic and social experiences and integration are discussed, followed by a review of environmental pull factors.

Pre-Entry Attributes

Demographics. Three female students and two male students took part in the study. All five participants had been homeschooled throughout high school, and were traditional-aged when they began their college career.

- Rebecca – The eldest of twelve children, Rebecca identified herself as coming from a religious and sheltered background. While in college, she questioned her values and experienced a profound personal transformation. After her freshman year, Rebecca worked on-campus. She completed her bachelor’s degree in three years, with a major in history, and then attended graduate school.
- John – John’s father worked at Midwest State and John initially selected this university in part because of the tuition discount. He was a student worker in the computer services department. John completed only three semesters and indicated that he did not continue because of financial reasons; he also struggled academically during his final two semesters. While he did not continue his education elsewhere, he intended to attend college in the future.
- Eva – An in-state student, Eva’s parents had both attended Midwest State. Eva was involved in Campus Crusade for Christ and joined a professional business fraternity her junior year. She worked on-campus in a computer lab and completed a double-major in marketing and hospitality and food management. Eva graduated within four and a half years.
- Jeff – When Jeff initially selected Midwest State, his parents’ were living out-of-state, but they moved closer during his first semester. Jeff appreciated the distance from his parents and joined a social fraternity in his freshman year. He majored in architecture and graduated within four years.
- Sidney – Sidney lived off-campus, commuted, and was married. She had a baby during the end of her first semester at Midwest State. Sidney failed her first two semesters at Midwest State and withdrew from her third term. After a brief

career in the military, she began attending a local propriety school that offered career focused degrees.

Degree Commitment. All except one of the participants indicated a strong commitment to obtain a college degree. The students expressed various influential factors in their level of commitment such as parental expectations and a desire to improve life for themselves and their families. They also valued learning and acquiring knowledge. The participant who was not very committed to graduating withdrew after his third semester. Rebecca was very committed to her academic pursuits, largely because of the value that she and her parents placed on education. However, Rebecca indicated that she was raised with the belief that it was not a woman's role to have a career. Initially a motivating factor was the desire to have a degree as something to "*fall back on,*" should she need to support herself. Rebecca's beliefs on the role of women changed during her time in college. After she completed her bachelor's degree, she earned a master's degree, and was pursuing her Ph.D.

John was the only student who explained that he was not very committed to obtaining a degree. "*There was very little that I thought that college could offer me, that I couldn't learn on my own, cheaper.*" For John, a degree was a helpful piece of paper when trying to find a job. He believed he could learn just as effectively on his own, and felt that internet searching was more productive than college coursework.

Influence of Homeschooled Background. The students acknowledged that being homeschooled influenced their social and academic experiences in college, but described the influence in neutral terms. For example, when group conversations turned to discussion of high school experiences with teachers or friends, the students didn't have any

shared experiences to add. Or because of being homeschooled, they didn't know high school classmates who were attending Midwest State. For example, Eva shared that she didn't have high school classmates who were attending Midwest State. Some students indicated that they had not been exposed to much pop culture while homeschooled. When references were made to certain movie stars or popular songs in conversation, they sometimes did not understand the reference.

Academically, students had to get used to classes being at a specific time, but were prepared to complete reading and assignments on their own. Jeff felt well prepared and explained that many of his core classes, such as chemistry and history, seemed to be a repeat of high school coursework. Eva had to adjust to different teaching styles. She also felt she might have been challenged more academically in a traditional high school setting, where students are ranked. She shared, *"I might not have been pushed as much as I probably could have been, or should have been, if I was in more of a public setting. Because you have the, just all of the pressure, of like 'Oh you want to be the top student' . . . Being homeschooled I was the only student, so you don't have quite that pressure all the time."*

John did indicate some initial challenges in learning how to meet people and socialize, and credited this to his background being homeschooled. While he had to work at it in the beginning, John adapted quickly. On the other hand, he also partially credited homeschooling to preventing him from segregating fellow students into cliques or stereotypes. As he explained, *"I didn't have any preconceived ideas . . . I was familiar with such stereotypes from media, TV, movies, stuff like that, but they never really mattered to me."* Because of this openness, he developed a social circle of friends with varied backgrounds.

Academic Experiences and Integration

Academic Preparedness. The students felt that homeschooling had prepared them well for college academics. They specifically credited their educational background with preparing them to be self-motivated and organized learners. Both John and Eva indicated that homeschooling equipped them with the ability to figure things out on their own. Rebecca was surprised that she got good grades by doing what she described as merely following the syllabus. She explained, *“I got A’s in all of my classes, I couldn’t understand it at first. I couldn’t understand how I got the grade for doing nothing more than what the syllabus asked. I didn’t feel like I was doing anything special.”*

The students also indicated some specific aspects of the traditional academic setting that they had to adjust to. These included adapting to different professors’ teaching styles and having to attend class at a set time. However, two of the students had taken college courses while in high school, and thus had some prior experience in a traditional setting.

One student, Sidney, did not feel well prepared for college academics. While homeschooled, her mom worked often and Sidney only completed the requirements necessary for graduation. In her homeschool coursework she just *“did what had to be done, to pass the class”*. Sidney struggled academically and failed her first two semesters. It was difficult for her to learn and feel supported academically in her large classes of 200+ people.

Academic Participation. Initially class attendance and completion of assignments were priorities for all of the students. However, over time there was a marked difference in class attendance and participation between the students who graduated and those who withdrew. For Rebecca, Eva, and Jeff, who graduated from Midwest State, class attendance, participation, and completion of assignments was important throughout their college

careers. These students developed ways to balance studying and academic commitments with social time. Rebecca devoted a large amount of time to studying and viewed pursuing her degree as her “*job*.” Eva chose not to work during her freshman year, so she could focus on her studies, but also indicated that she took time off to be with friends and relax. During his first year, Jeff went to every class and completed every assignment. As time passed, he continued to complete all assignments, but missed class a few times. He explained, “*By senior year, I never missed more than two or three total classes per semester . . . the only reason I ever saw as a good enough reason to skip class was sleep.*”

For both Sidney and John, who did not complete their degree at Midwest State, class attendance and preparedness decreased quickly. Sidney attended class less and less frequently during her first semester, eventually forgetting or failing to complete homework. While John went to class studiously at first, as time passed he would not attend class but just showed up to turn in assignments. Also, he indicated that drama within his social group distracted him from class attendance.

Academic Relationships. As the students attended classes, they interacted with their classmates and professors to varying degrees. All of the students except Sidney mentioned contacting professors for clarification on coursework or with questions about the material. Rebecca indicated that she sat near the front, was vocal in class, asked questions, and contributed to discussion. This enabled her to develop strong relationships with her professors, who recognized her and appreciated her contributions. Starting her sophomore year, she also worked as a teaching assistant. As Rebecca pursued her master’s degree at the same institution, she kept in touch with some of these professors. One professor, whom Rebecca had had during her freshman year, and with whom she worked

with while completing her master's degree, gave her his *Chicago Manual of Style* as a good luck gift during her Ph.D. studies. Rebecca appreciated all that she learned from these relationships

The students mentioned study groups as beneficial in developing relationships with other classmates, but these relationships were largely casual. As Eva described: *"Definitely when you are in groups, you kind of build a community out of it. I would lean more towards those people I would be working with, and we would start small social things. I never got a best friend out of it or anything."* Depending on the nature of the project, the students frequently took a leadership role in group assignments. This was often motivated by the desire to earn a certain grade, and to ensure that the project was competently and successfully completed. John felt that professors intentionally paired him with students who were not as committed to projects.

Social Experiences and Integration

Making Friends. As the students started their college career, they began to make friends and develop a social life. Some of the participants were proactive in getting to know others, others waited for fellow students to approach them. Oftentimes strong friendships were developed with students in the same residence hall. Relationships also developed out of participation in student organizations. Jeff quickly joined a fraternity to meet others and become a part of a community. John made friends as his residence hall neighbor invited him to hang out. He explained, *"He invited me out to Johnson's and we had a hot dog and just talked and just started hanging out and then from that, I did eventually become the center of a hub of friends."* Eva described herself as a *"social butterfly"* and was positive about the opportunity to meet new people. She joined Campus Crusade for Christ her freshman year

and took on a leadership role during later years. During her junior year, fueled by a desire to meet others with different values and broaden her social network, Eva joined a professional business fraternity. She described this as a learning experience that helped her transition to the work environment after graduation.

All of the students who lived on campus described their social experiences in a positive light, but some students identified challenges in getting to know others. While Rebecca connected with three girls at orientation, and later developed strong friendships with them, she felt her sheltered background created hurdles for her. She quickly noticed that she stood out because she dressed differently and didn't wear makeup. Besides her three close friends from orientation, Rebecca felt that others saw her as *"strange and different."* When she ran for a leadership office in her residence hall, Rebecca heard through hearsay that she was not voted for because fellow students feared she would impose a *"puritanical"* agenda. This was difficult for Rebecca; she explained that her hall mates *"saw me as different and strange and such, that year. And actually what happened, that summer, after the first year, I looked back and I didn't like some of the things that I stood out for, so I spent the entire summer getting into shape."* She also got new clothes and started wearing makeup.

Sidney, who commuted, did not develop any social connections with fellow classmates or participate in co-curricular activities. She explained, *"I went to class, I sat in my seat, I took my notes and I left."* With her outside responsibilities as a wife and mother, Sidney indicated that she felt much older than her peers. At the second smaller college Sidney attended, after her short career in the military, she made friends with classmates and kept in touch outside of class.

Co-Curricular Involvement. There was a marked difference in co-curricular involvement between the students who graduated and those who did not graduate. Each of the three students who graduated was involved in co-curricular activities such as fraternities, honorary societies, religious organizations, and sports clubs. Rebecca and Eva also took on leadership roles in various organizations during their later college years. Both John and Sidney, who did not graduate, did not indicate regular involvement in co-curricular activities. While John attended a few events on-campus, he did not join any clubs or organizations.

Environmental Pull Factors

Family. Each of the participants indicated that their family was supportive of their decision to go to college. Many of the students' parents expressed a strong expectation that their child would attend college. Although parents and family members were supportive, this support was expressed in different ways. Jeff's parents expected him to at least give college a try for a few semesters. They believed it would be a good experience in transitioning to adult life. However, because Jeff's older brother dropped out of the private college he attended, his parents were unwilling to provide any financial support. Sidney indicated that her husband encouraged her to attend class. As a new wife and expectant working mother, she had many outside commitments vying for her time.

The students' largely indicated that their parents gave them freedom and flexibility to adjust and integrate into college life. Eva indicated that both her parents' had attended college at Midwest State. As she shared, *"They definitely encouraged being able to grow there and get what I needed done there. Of course they wanted to see me, but they were totally supportive in that."* One advantage Eva described in being homeschooled was that she did

not need to visit home to connect with old high school friends. Because of this, she was able to spend more time on campus and assimilate into the college community.

During her time in college, Rebecca re-examined the worldview imparted to her by her parents. This questioning led her to develop new beliefs and values. While her parents were strongly supportive of her education, they did not understand the changes in her values and beliefs. Rebecca indicated that her time home, during the summer between her second and third college years, was very difficult and that she felt attacked by her family. She explained, *“My relationship with my parents changed dramatically, as I questioned their views. And like I said, the more I questioned them, the more the relationship changed.”*

Because of the deterioration of her relationship with her parents, Rebecca did not go home the summer after her third year in college. She took on all of her living and school expenses and provided for herself.

Employment. All of the participants worked at some point during their college career. The four students who lived on-campus worked on-campus. Eva worked in a computer lab, where she was able to catch up on homework when things were slow. Jeff worked in the dining hall for his first year, but did not continue in the position because he felt that student employment jobs did not pay well and believed that his time could be better spent on other things. He decided to take out loans and pay them back after he graduated when he had more earning potential. Sidney was very busy working full-time while also attending Midwest State. Her family commitments, new baby, and work all influenced her success in college. As she explained: *“I wanted to succeed and stuff, but at that point I had just had my daughter, and then you know I was working full-time, trying to go to school full-time, trying to be a mom. And just, one thing had to go.”*

Withdrawing. The two students who did not graduate credited their withdrawal largely to outside factors; however, there were also some factors within the college environment that contributed to their departure. John did not continue his academic studies due to lack of finances. However, John planned to attend and complete his degree in the future. His motivation to attend college in the future was more for the credential than for the knowledge gained. He noted: *"Some day I do intend, once I get a hold of the money, I do intend to go back and get that piece of paper, but it's more just for the piece of paper than for any other reason."* John also explained he had to work very hard to acclimate socially. As time passed, division and strife ensued within his diverse social group, who did not have anything in common with one another besides knowing John. Discord developed in the group, causing stress and drama for John. However, John did not indicate that social issues were his reason for withdrawing.

For Sidney, who failed her first semester, other commitments such as working and new motherhood took priority over school. She struggled to feel at home at Midwest State. After taking time off and joining the military, Sidney attended a smaller local college. She had many positive things to say about this college compared to Midwest State, *"There's a complete difference between going to Midwest State and going to [the smaller college]. One of them, you feel like you are a part of something . . . Everybody cares, everybody knows your name as soon as you walk in the door. At Midwest State your professor is struggling to remember your name."*

Discussion

The discussion is organized based on conclusions drawn in relation to the study's three research questions: influence of pre-entry attributes, academic and social integration,

and environmental pull factors. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are offered.

Influence of Pre-Entry Attributes

Nearly all of the students were largely prepared through homeschooling to be academically and socially successful. The students indicated that homeschooling equipped them with organizational skills and self-motivation in their studies. While they had to adjust to a formal educational setting and different teaching styles of their professors, this did not negatively affect the students' ability to learn and succeed. One student who withdrew after her third semester did explain that she did not feel academically prepared by homeschooling. However, she attributed her outside family and work commitments as preventing her from spending enough time on academics. This student began studies at a difference college a few years later. The participants' experiences are consistent with findings of Holder (2001), Lattibeaudiere (2000), and Sutton and Galloway (2000) indicating that homeschooled students were equipped with the academic skills necessary to succeed in college.

The homeschooled students did not have the same high school social relationships and experiences as their traditionally educated counterparts. However, the participants quickly met and developed relationships with fellow students. One student particularly appreciated the opportunity to develop new friendships while not having a commitment to prior relationships. Another student indicated that homeschooling allowed him to be less influenced by stereotypes, enabling him to be open-minded in developing friends from various backgrounds. This corresponds with the experience of homeschooled participants

in Holder's (2001) study, who indicated that they were less influenced by their peers and had more self-confidence.

One student's strongly religious family beliefs and background were largely different than those she encountered in college. She quickly realized that she stood out from her peers and experienced internal questioning of her original belief system. While this background was not necessarily related to her being homeschooled, it did create distinct challenges for her, and turmoil in family relationships during her time in college. This student's experience follows Tinto's (1993) assertion that students from unique or exclusive backgrounds may have greater difficulty in separating from their past identity and community. Also Lattibeaudiere (2000) found that homeschooled students from strong Christian backgrounds, who attended public universities, experienced greater challenges in transitioning to college than they initially expected. The student successfully met this challenge, completed her degree, and went on to graduate school.

While the students' background appeared to have a neutral affect on their transition, their level of degree commitment was strongly related to their success and persistence in college. The students who indicated a strong commitment to completing their degree either graduated or continued their education at a different institution after taking time off. The student who indicated low commitment to obtaining a degree withdrew. This is correlated with Tinto's (1993) theory that an individual's commitment and goals influences how they respond to the challenges encountered in transitioning to college. Nora et al. (2005) indicated that a higher level of educational ambition was positively correlated with student persistence.

The students' educational background and commitment to obtaining a degree had different levels of influence on their college experience and persistence. While the students' were equipped for college to varying degrees, their homeschool background did not seem to influence their persistence to graduation, or to negatively affect their college experience. On the other hand, the students' initial goal commitment appeared to have a larger influence on persistence. This is consistent with Pascarella and Terenzini's (1983) findings that background characteristics did not directly influence students' successful degree completion, but were "indirect, being transmitted through social and academic integration or subsequent institutional and goal commitment" (p. 222). It is also consistent with their conclusion that the long-term role played by students' pre-entry attributes and commitment was more accurately seen by how these factors influenced the students' first-year in college. Also, [Authors' identities concealed] (2007) found that the transitional issues encountered by homeschooled students in their first year of college were similar to those encountered by traditional students.

Academic and Social Integration

The students who persisted to graduation exhibited strong involvement in both academics and co-curricular activities. Through involvement in religious organizations, fraternities, honorary societies, and residence hall associations, they developed friendships. After their first year, many students took on leadership roles in on-campus organizations. This compared with findings of other studies which demonstrated that homeschooled students were largely well socialized in college, at a level comparable with their traditionally educated counterparts (Holder, 2001; Lattibeaudiere, 2000; Sutton and Galloway 2000). According to Tinto (1993) involvement in student groups provides

opportunities for students to connect with peers and more fully incorporate into the college life. Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) found that there was a direct correlation between social and academic integration and an individual's persistence.

The students who graduated also took academics seriously and attained a high degree of academic integration. They attended class regularly, completed homework, and took on leadership roles in completing group projects. They viewed their studies as an important responsibility. Through classes, the students developed casual relationships with their peers and interacted out of class with professors. They asked professors for clarification on homework and also developed meaningful relationships with them. One student used an instructor as a reference for employment. Another stayed in close contact with her professors during her graduate studies. These academic interactions appeared to play a positive role in the students' integration and persistence. The high level of involvement, socially and academically, of the students who graduated corresponds to theory and research indicating that social and academic integration is an important factor in student persistence (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983).

On the other hand, social and academic participation in college life was markedly different for the two students who withdrew. Neither of these students participated in formal social activities or clubs. The student who was married, had a child, and commuted had difficulty relating to her classmates. She felt her situation was so different from her fellow students and did not feel a connection to them. She also had difficulty connecting with instructors in large classes. The other student who withdrew had developed a social network, but indicated some initial challenges in making friends. Over time, his regular class attendance also declined. The experience of these students corresponds to Tinto's

(1993) assertion that failure to integrate academically and socially is a threat to degree completion.

Environmental Pull Factors

Outside influences encountered by the participants included work, family, and finances. Each of the students worked at some point during the college career. The students who lived on campus worked part-time on campus, while the student who commuted worked full-time elsewhere. Employment affected the students in different ways. One student was employed in an academic department related to her major and found her position rewarding. Another student worked in a computer lab, and was able to catch up on assignments during slow periods. For the student who commuted full-time, work infringed on both her studies and her time with her newborn baby. For this student, employment negatively affected her ability to succeed.

Family was a positive influence for most of students. The students all experienced family support in beginning their college education. One student's parents were alumni of the institution and were very supportive of her education. Another student's parents strongly encouraged him to attend college. Although the student who commuted had a difficult time balancing academics, family, and work, she did receive support from her husband and mother.

The family became a negative influence for one student. This student came from a more sheltered background and experienced a decrease in her family's overall supportiveness. While her parents strongly valued higher education, they did not support her internal questioning and personal changes. For this student, family was a source of stress during her later years in college.

Outside factors seemed to have a particularly negative influence on the two students who withdrew. One student withdrew during this third semester because of financial reasons. The other student, who commuted, withdrew because of outside comments, such as new motherhood and work. Both financial challenges and living and working off campus were cited by Nora et al. (2005) as factors that “pulled” students away from college. The factors mentioned by these two students also follow closely with Tinto’s (1993) assertion that external influences from work or family can literally “pull” a student away from college attendance.

While the students who withdrew cited explicit reasons for their departure, implicit factors were also present. Both students, in various ways, failed to integrate academically and socially into college. One student failed to keep up consistent class attendance and indicated minimal commitment to graduating. The other student did not establish any social or personal connections with classmates or professors. This student felt that large class sizes impeded her learning but did not seek out institutional resources. The experience of these two students strongly relates to Pascarella and Terenzini’s (1983) concept of “person-environment fit” (p. 225). They concluded that a student’s persistence or withdrawal is largely influenced by their “fit” with the college environment over time.

While the two students who withdrew did not withstand the stress and challenges of college, the students who persisted did so despite their own challenges. One student in particular encountered family turmoil as she struggled to develop her identity. She met this struggle head on and took advantage of it as an opportunity to grow. According to Tinto (1993) all students encounter challenges, stress, and feelings of loneliness during the

transition to college, but it is not necessarily these challenges themselves that are the cause of withdrawal. Rather it is the individual's tolerance of the stress.

Limitations

The results of this study were limited to the experiences of undergraduate students who were homeschooled in high school and then enrolled at a doctoral-granting, public, midsized, Midwestern, predominately White university. The study did not seek out students from private colleges or universities or from other geographical areas. The experiences of these students were self-reported.

Recommendations

There are several modifications that could be made to the study's design. Conducting this study at a private college or a large research university would provide additional data. For more depth, interviews could be conducted with parents, siblings, roommates, professors, or resident assistants who have interaction with the students in order to obtain more observations on their college experiences.

Conclusion

The authors' intent in this study was to explore the undergraduate experiences of college students that were homeschooled in high school. We found that this subpopulation, as all subpopulations of college students, has somewhat unique issues to contend with, due to their homeschooled background. However, these issues were not prohibitive of their college success. We found that they experienced college in many of the same ways that other, non-homeschooled students, did. In most regards, their undergraduate experiences were unidentifiable from the overall student population: they were normal college students.

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