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College Students Level of Educational Success and Social Capital: A Comparison of Traditional and Nontraditional Students

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COLLEGE STUDENTS LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

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COLLEGE STUDENTS LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

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I dedicate this to my grandpa Jerry Travis. I know he would have been proud that I did not give up even when I faced challenging times. He would have loved this research and be proud of the work that was put into it. He was always the writer of the family, but he made sure that we all knew that we are capable writers. Thank you, Grandpa for loving me and leaving behind your words. When I am no longer in this body, I hope that my words will always live on. I also dedicate this to my partner in life Bobby Perdue. You always believed in me even when I doubted myself.

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The present study investigated how female/male nontraditional and traditional college students' educational success could be influenced by both the social capital their family and friends provide and the responsibilities those close to them require. However, gender socialization may influence how certain networks, such as family and peers can help or hinder college students. Previous research found family and peers could help college students' educational success (Betts et al., 2013; Seon, 2019), however, they can also be detrimental (Dill & Hayley, 1998). This study examined whether (1) gender and traditional/nontraditional student status are associated with educational success; and (2) whether support from and responsibility to family and friends explains those relationships. I hypothesized that *nontraditional female* college students' levels of educational success (i.e., *cumulative GPA* and *perceived confidence in college graduation*) will be lower than *nontraditional male* students, and traditional college students despite gender. To test this hypothesis, I surveyed a stratified random sample of undergraduates at Western Kentucky University (N=12,361), with a sample size of 594. The strata were college women who are less than 25 years old, college men who are less than 25, college men who are 25 years or older, and college women who are 25 years or older. When controlling for family and *traditional female* students' *cumulative GPA* 0.20 was significantly higher than *nontraditional female* students. The difference could be due

to the increase in family responsibilities exacerbated by the pandemic. The variable for *perceived confidence in college graduation* was highly skewed which could mean that even during a pandemic WKU ensured that students felt like they were supported even if they were struggling. In this study, college students had a higher *cumulative GPA* (0.20) if they had general support from peers. Based on the current findings, WKU could focus on strategies that support single parents, as well as peer support groups for students.

Keywords: Traditional and nontraditional college students, social capital theory, family support, peers support, gender socialization, educational success

Introduction

Going to college is the norm now, and this matriculation is not limited to recent high school graduates. According to the *National Center for Educational Statistics* (2002), nontraditional college students have increased in America's colleges. These students are often returning to school after years spent in a career, raising children, or taking care of an aging parent. The roles that nontraditional college students assume come with many responsibilities, and the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated such commitments.

In December 2019, in Wuhan, China, a new coronavirus named COVID-19 started to spread rapidly. By the end of January, the COVID-19 death rate worldwide rose exponentially and spread across the United States and other developed countries (A Timeline of COVID-19, 2020). By mid-March, the *World Health Organization* (WHO) classified COVID-19 as a pandemic. After the pandemic was classified as such, most schools and businesses closed in the United States to slow the spread of the virus (A Timeline of COVID-19, 2020). Closures posed a disruption for many workers, parents, and students. In Kentucky, more than 1,500 public schools were closed, sending around 674,000 students home (Map, 2020). For some parents, the public-school system was their sole source of childcare, enabling them to succeed in their own schooling as well as their careers. It is plausible that the increase in childcare responsibilities hurt nontraditional college students' educational success. It must be acknowledged that the current study took place under the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gender differences in caregiving responsibilities exist, with women taking on more caregiving responsibilities than men (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Montgomery &

Datwyler, 1990; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Traditional college students may not have the same level of responsibility to their family as a nontraditional student and may be more concerned with forming relationships with peers. A gender difference also exists in the commitment one has to their peers that affects a college students' ability to be successful (Johnson et al., 2007). Therefore, understanding how family and peers can influence college students' educational success—with specific attention to the students' age and gender—is crucial for helping all students be successful.

Understanding whether family or/and friends provide social capital or if these relationships are harmful, especially during a pandemic, is essential. It is also crucial for universities to understand how specific relationships can affect students, especially nontraditional college students. For the academic year of 2011/2012, almost three-fourths of all undergraduates have at least one characteristic of a nontraditional student (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Therefore, understanding how certain relationships may impact college students' success, which may vary depending on whether students are traditional or nontraditional, will allow universities to better support the entire student population through programming, policy, and support.

The findings from this study are important to me because I am a nontraditional college student. I have experienced stress trying to balance family, school, and a social life. Being a part of specific groups (i.e., campus clubs and groups) helped me to be more successful in college. Moreover, understanding this issue is also equally important to the larger society because the success of future generations is based on the success of the current one. Gender differences may influence the way family and peers can help or hinder college students' success in America, especially for nontraditional students.

Although researchers suggest that family and peers provide social capital that is beneficial, I argue that such an assertion is too generalized (Ellison et al., 2007; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004) and that the responsibilities that nontraditional students in particular have to their family and peers may hinder their ability to be successful.

For this study, *Qualtrics* was used to create an electronic survey. The sampling frame consists of undergraduates at Western Kentucky University (WKU) during the Spring 2021 semester and the final analytic sample size is 578 undergraduates. *Qualtrics* is a secure platform that can minimize the risk of a confidentiality breach. The benefit of collecting my own data instead of using a secondary source is that doing so has enabled me to construct a survey that will answer my specific research question and will be applicable in helping WKU make changes to help the student body. I am a nontraditional college student and a graduate student, therefore, I might have a bias toward the subject. To help reduce any biases that I may have, this study drew its sample from the undergraduate population. In addition, this study used a stratified random sample to ensure that the sample matches the gender and age distribution of the undergraduate population. In turn, this will allow the results to be tentatively generalized to the WKU undergraduate population.

The following section will define traditional and nontraditional college students in America. Second, family and peer relations that the study will focus on will be discussed. In that section, family and peers are considered to either hinder or help nontraditional and traditional college students. Third, I argue that through gender socialization, family and peer responsibilities may affect male and female college students' success differentially. Fourth, I will discuss the current study, describe the data, the measurements to be used,

and the analysis plan. Lastly, I will discuss the results, limitations, and suggestions for future researchers.

Literature Review

Traditional Students: Who are they?

Before we can understand nontraditional college students, understanding traditional college students in America is important. It is typical that traditional college students are less than 25 years old and enroll almost immediately after high school (MacAri et al., 2005; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002; Ross-Gordon et al., 2017). Most traditional college students are not married and do not have children. If these students work, they most likely work on campus or part-time off-campus. Traditional students are also not considered independent; they depend on parents for financial support (MacAri et al., 2005). In 2017, of the students enrolled full-time at a four-year university in America, 90% were under the age of twenty-five (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). In America, the number of traditional students is significant, but many college students are not fitting that definition anymore. The number of students that are not fitting the mold of a traditional student has increased over the years. Research noted that the college students 25 years or older has increased from 28% to 39% within approximately 30 years (Choy, 2002). In the next section, I will describe how the *National Center of Educational Statistics* defines a nontraditional student.

Nontraditional College Students: Who are they?

In this study, I will be using the same definition of nontraditional students used by the *National Center for Education Statistics* (NCES). NCES is a federal agency that provides data and expert analysis relating to education. A nontraditional student is

defined by seven characteristics, and they can have one or more to be a nontraditional student: not enrolling in college after high school graduation; having a dependent other than a spouse; being a single parent; attending part-time; not depending on parents for financial support; working a full-time job; or receiving a GED or other high school equivalence (Choy, 2002; Horne, 1996). Recently there has been an increase of studies using this definition. These seven defining characteristics are related to behaviors or choices that decrease the likelihood of staying in college or even going in the first place (Choy, 2002; Horne, 1996; Ross-Gordon et al., 2017). *NCES* states that the seven characteristics used are interconnected, therefore, most nontraditional students usually have more than one (Nontraditional Undergraduates / Definitions and Data). For example, a student who works full-time and goes to school part time is a nontraditional student with two qualifying characteristics. In addition, a single parent has dependents and is considered independent as well will have multiple characteristics being a nontraditional student (Nontraditional Undergraduates / Definitions and Data). Therefore, having at least two out of the seven characteristics or being at least 25 years old will be considered a nontraditional student for this study (Nontraditional Undergraduates / Definitions and Data).

Difficulties being a Nontraditional College Student

Nontraditional college students that have dependents other than their spouse create scenarios that could significantly affect their college outcome. Having a dependent could mean having children for some students but it could also mean caring for aging parents. For nontraditional college students, this could mean less time and finances toward their education (Horne, 1996). Many nontraditional college students also work

full time and will have less time for their schoolwork. They will have even less time for their schoolwork during the pandemic because most are having to work from home or having to assist children with virtual learning. According to the *Household Pulse Survey*, adults that live with school-aged children are spending an average of 8.7 hours per week helping with all teaching activities (Census Bureau, 2020), leaving less time to work on their own schoolwork. Compared with traditional students, nontraditional college students have more people depending on them and have more responsibilities than traditional students (Dill & Henley, 1998). They also have more roles to fulfill than traditional students (Dill & Henley, 1998). Nontraditional students are now having to take the role of a teacher to their school-aged children because of virtual learning. This could harm nontraditional college students' ability to stay in school and have passing grades. On the other hand, having a supportive family while in college could be beneficial. A supportive family may mean that they help with childcare, finances, or even offer words of encouragement. Having a supportive group of people to count on for encouragement and tangible support may make a difference in their ability to be successful in college, especially for nontraditional college students during the current pandemic. However, the increased needs of family members due to the pandemic may pull nontraditional students away from college. Therefore, understanding the ways that family or other relationships can help or hinder nontraditional students while they are in college, especially during a crisis like the COVID pandemic, is important.

Social Capital Theory

This study uses social capital theory to explain the connection between relational ties, such as family and peers, that can help or hinder college success. Bourdieu and

Wacquant's (1992) definition of social capital is “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” as cited by Ellison et al. (2007, p. 1145). Other researchers have defined social capital as informational or supportive resources that come from relational ties with others (Crosnoe & Schneider, 2010). These resources could be in the form of a babysitter or even a friendly face during stressful times. An important takeaway here is that the resources of interest here stem from the persons’ networks or relational ties. Ellison and colleagues (2007) realized that the resources acquired from these relationships or networks depend on how they were formed and how strong the bonds are.

To be successful in college, may be related to who is or is not in ones’ social network and the social capital gained through this relationship. Therefore, seeing what relationships can create social capital that can lead college students to be successful even during crisis times is important. Without resources, such as financial or childcare support, certain students, like nontraditional college students, probably cannot complete a degree or get a better job after graduation. Conversely, members of one’s family unit may drain resources, such as time or money, making it more difficult to be successful educationally. One’s own social capital may benefit others at the cost of their own success.

Multiple researchers have demonstrated that strong ties provide information or resources that lead to success in employment or earnings (Bian, 1997; Burgos, 2007; Harknett, 2006). The goal of Harknett’s research was to understand the relationship between social capital provided by social networks and employment or welfare for low-income single mothers from three counties in the United States. Harknett (2006) claimed

that single mothers who had supportive social networks upon whom they could depend on during "times of need" would be more successful keeping a job and earned more earnings (pg. 172). In comparison, single mothers who do not have a supportive social networks or who had a very demanding social network were less likely to work and had less earnings, due to the lack of social capital provided by these networks. Harknett (2006) actually found that single mothers who have social capital from supportive social network work approximately a month more than those mothers who do not have supportive friends or family on which they could rely. In that study, low-income single mothers could work more because they had friends or family that could help with childcare, transportation, or finances on a short notice (Harknett, 2006).

Traditional and nontraditional students could be less successful in college due to hypermobility. Researchers defined hypermobility as having to move frequently without any benefits of the move (i.e., moving to a neighborhood that is less safe than the previous one, moving to a food desert, or even moving away from supportive family and peers) (Metzger et.al., 2018). Hypermobility can hurt the ability to form bonds that generate social capital that can help a student to be successful in school and other arenas of their life. Moving, whether frequent or not, can make it difficult to be able to take any social capital earned with you. In addition, moving a lot can negatively affect students who depend on family or peers for free day care, a ride to class, or help paying living expenses. Therefore, building relations that provide social capital when they move frequently or experience hypermobility can be hard for students (Metzger et.al., 2018). However, traditional college students, shuffling from dorms to home, then back to the dorms again, may not result in a significant disruption of life; however, nontraditional

students could be subject to such fluidity causing a hindrance to their academic performance and ability to adapt.

Alternatively, a book review of *Mexican Immigrants in the Labor Market: The Strength of Strong Ties* by Maria Lusia also revealed that strong ties are beneficial for recent Mexican immigrants' employment (Burgos, 2007). In the book, Lusia explored Mexican immigrants gained employment from social capital provided by their social networks. Lusia collected data through interviews of 40 illegal Mexican immigrants that have lived in America for no more than five years. It was found that strong ties provide more social capital than weak ties when it comes to securing employment. Lusia claimed that marginalized populations, such as recent immigrants, do not have access to the same social capital as a person that has been in the county for a more extended time, meaning that they do not have any weak ties. Recent immigrants from Mexico must rely on their strong ties for everything, including finding a job (Burgos, 2007).

Strong ties have been conceptualized as people that are emotionally close to one another and have commitments or obligations to each other (Ellison et al., 2007). Family members or friends one can count on in short notice are considered strong ties and are sources of social capital. Older family members who need support in different forms, such as preparing meals or picking up medications, are also considered a social network with strong ties. Therefore, a college student might be obligated to help a friend or a family member because they are close to one another. College students might not be successful in school because they have to spend their time supporting friends or being caregivers for family members instead of doing schoolwork. However, it could be very beneficial for college students if their friends or family can provide childcare, help pay

for educational and living expenses, or give a ride to campus on a short notice. Researchers have even found a gender difference in caregiving responsibilities within families, with women taking on more responsibilities than men (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Montgomery& Datwyler, 1990; Yavorsky et al., 2015). It has been found that friends and family are crucial for college students to succeed in college, especially during times of stress, such as the current pandemic (Seon et al., 2019). Here it could be argued that depending on family and peer responsibilities, strong ties could be either a hindrance or a valuable resource to success in college. Therefore, considering the current pandemic, understanding the relationship between social capital provided by strong ties and college success, depending on gender and age is crucial.

The current pandemic has dramatically changed who we have contact with to slow the spread of COVID-19. Instead of going to school in-person, college students are staying home while they attend classes. This means that they may not have access to weak ties or classmates that could help them navigate their course. In addition, no one is around to ask to take notes if they had to miss a class. Instead, college students must rely on their (strong ties) family members that live in their household to help support them while in school instead of relying on weak ties. Since COVID-19 restrictions have limited our contact with friends and family outside our home, strong ties could provide the social capital needed for college students to be educationally successful. Close friends or family could help with childcare and help with the child's virtual learning. However, as I stated earlier, it has been found that there is a gender difference in caregiving responsibilities, with women bearing the weight (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Montgomery & Datwyler, 1990; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Therefore, during the current pandemic, female college

students, who shoulder most of the caregiving responsibilities especially if they have children, probably cannot get help from people outside their household to be successful in college. In this instance, strong ties may not provide social capital that is helpful for female nontraditional college students to be successful. With this concept in mind, exploring whether strong ties provide support to college students or if these ties are detrimental to college success is crucial.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it could be possible that college men, especially nontraditional college men, may have more social capital that leads to educational success in comparison with women. Moreover, since women are spending more time in the caregiving role, they may not have enough time for what is needed to be successful in college, such as the single mothers in Harknett's study (2007). The conclusion here could be that strong ties may not provide that much social capital for women than men, and women may in fact have to do more caregiving work than men for their families. Therefore, seeing if strong ties create or take away social capital that can lead college students to be successful, depending on gender is crucial during times of crisis.

Family

Major social networks that college students may be a part of could include family and peers; both networks provide social capital in the form of physical, emotional, and financial support. However, these networks also require reciprocity. Therefore, understanding the positive and negative impacts these networks can have on college students' educational success levels is crucial.

For all college students, the family is an essential social network. However, it may be that the roles and responsibilities connected to their family social network may not allow them to create social capital that is helpful for college success. Even the pressure that some parents place on their college-aged children could be harmful and might hinder their success in school (Dill & Hayley, 1998). College students with family members that are positive and supportive could help them have a higher level of success (Betts et al., 2013). Family could give financial support by helping with educational and living expenses. In turn, college students could have more time for coursework instead of having to work to pay for their expenses. Family members who live nearby could help with coursework or even give a ride to class on short notice. If family members live too far, they may not provide any social capital even if they wanted to help. For college students who have dependents, they have to be financially and emotionally supportive to them, which can take valuable time away from what is needed to succeed in college. It may be possible that family social networks could help or hinder college students' educational success differently.

College students who have children may depend on public schools, childcare facilities, or even a grandparent to succeed in college. Unfortunately, when COVID-19 was first detected in Kentucky, the Governor advised schools to close by March 16, 2020 and childcare facilities to close by March 20, 2020 to minimize the spread (Kentucky's Response to COVID-19, n.d.). The closure of public schools made it difficult to find childcare for parents in school and working full-time. Before COVID-19, older family members could be alternative forms of childcare. Unfortunately, current research has found that the elderly who have "underlying health conditions" are at a higher risk of

dying from COVID-19 (Ritchie, n.d.). Therefore, nontraditional college students with children may balk at putting elderly family members at risk. They may be forced out of college because their family social network cannot provide any resources or social capital to succeed during a pandemic.

A college student taking care of their child and taking care of an aging parent is part of the sandwich generation (Pierret, 2006). Even if both aging parents and children do not live at home, they may still need support. Support may be given in the form of paying for college for their child/children or help run errands for their aging parent (Pierret, 2006). A college student who is part of the sandwich generation may have to help other family members with childcare (Pierret, 2006). Family members who require more support than they can give will make it hard for college students to succeed. Time is a valuable resource for all college students, and commitment to the family potentially takes away the time needed to be successful in college.

Peers

Similar to family, peers can also provide social capital to college students. Both family and peers can be emotionally, physically, or even financially supportive. However, friends give support differently than families. For first-generation students, friends in college could help them navigate the campus, use technology, and even handle difficult professors. Friends may provide the support needed for a college student to be successful. This support could be in the form of a babysitter, a tutor, transportation, or even a friendly face in times of stress. Research has found that students with more friends in their social networks than those with less are more successful in college (Seon et al., 2019). Supportive peers have been found to support students during stressful situations

while being in college (Yang et al., 2020). College students have to manage their course work, social life, and the pressure to succeed (Bland et al., 2012). Having supportive peers can help college students balance their stress in order for them to be successful and achieve their academic goals (Seon et al., 2019).

Recent research of college students in Wuhan, China, found that dealing with stressful events related to COVID-19 caused "psychological symptoms" that affected success in school (Yang et al., 2020, pg. s11). It was noted that "psychological symptoms" due to the pandemic can cause "a sense of tension, fear of infection, insomnia, and low mood" (Yang et al., 2020, pg. s11). Therefore, having connections with friends may elevate one's mood during the current pandemic so that college students can be successful. In turn, college students may require a higher level of support from their friends or even their family during a crisis.

Although I have stated that peers could be beneficial, sometimes peers may actually be harmful to college students' educational success. It has been found that traditional students spend much time with their friends, which could take away from their schoolwork (Dill & Hayley, 1998). Some peers may value a partying lifestyle over education that would not support college students' educational success. Traditional students view peers as more important than other relations, which could be a reason to believe that peers could be harmful (Dill & Hayley, 1998). However, peers that value education may help push you to be better in school. These friends could help your child with their virtual learning so that you have more time on coursework. Friends that value education might also help pay for living or educational expenses. The value the student places on a social network may depend on whether the network is helpful or not.

Therefore, understanding to what degree which social networks influences college students' ability to stay in school and to be successful is important.

From the literature, family and peers, could benefit college students by providing social capital. However, it is also essential to see if these networks are hindering college students' success. These are substantive reasons to look at social networks related to social capital by traditional/nontraditional status of the college student. Seeing how family or peers help or hinder college students is crucial. However, it is equally important to know how these relationships operate based on gender.

Gender Socialization

Women

Socialization allows people to learn what networks they should be a part of and how they should interact within them (Ridgeway, 2009). It is through the process of socialization that we internalize behaviors and expected structures of the social networks that we are a part of. Social capital gained through social networks may look different for women and men because of gender socialization. Ridgeway (2009) argues that gender is the salient mechanism that organizes how we interact with others. Therefore, when trying to understand how social capital impact students we need to see if it is true that women and men may interact differently within social networks that may influence their level of success in college. Typical women who are socialized to have a small circle of close friends (Burt, 1998) are more likely to seek out social support than men (Cecen, 2008). Peer social networks could be beneficial for college students that are trying to balance school and family. However, women are usually the ones that take care of aging parents and aging in-laws (Montgomery & Datwyler, 1990). During the recent pandemic women

have been less successful in their careers because of an increase in caregiving responsibilities. For example, it has been reported that academic women's publications have declined dramatically due to the increase of family responsibilities (Matthews, 2020). The *New York Times* noted that women are taking on even more caregiving responsibilities than before the pandemic because of school and day care closures. Women are more likely lose their job or, worse, must drop out of school or the labor force because of having to take on even more family responsibilities because of the lockdown (Cohen & Hsu, 2020). For women, family social networks could actually be harmful to nontraditional college students.

Men

Men are often socialized that they need to be the breadwinner and to keep the family safe. They often prioritize family or even their career over school, unless school means making more money. Family may be a place for nontraditional, male students to find support that can help them to be successful in college. Men may not be that concerned about grades and are less engaged in school than women. Men also spend less time and effort on school (Marrs & Sigler, 2012). Through the socialization process men learn to have multiple acquaintances rather than good friends. Therefore, men may not need support from peers' social networks as much as women do. Previous research mentioned that men use more active ways to deal with stress (Cecen, 2008). Men in college might not ask for help from any social network since they are socialized to be self-sufficient. In my opinion, asking for support while being in college is important for nontraditional students to be successful. Nontraditional college students may need a

babysitter or maybe extra time with a tutor. If the student thinks that they must be independent and not ask for help, their educational success could be hindered.

Success

Nontraditional and traditional students often have different reasons to go to college, however, both still need to be successful in college (Adams & Corbett, 2010). For this study, success will be defined by using two items. First, college students who perceive that they will graduate from WKU will indicate college success. Second, to be able to earn a degree at WKU students will need to have at least a 2.0 grade point average (GPA). Therefore, students' cumulative GPA will also be looked at as well to understand what success means for a college student because it relates to degree attainment.

A recent article from the *Times Higher Education* claimed that the pandemic has increased family commitments which negatively impacted women being successful in their careers. Data showed that academic publications dropped significantly for women when schools started to close in March 2020 due to the pandemic (Matthews, 2020). Another article from the *Times Higher Education* expressed that many women in academics who have children or even aging parents have found it hard to balance work with an increase in responsibilities (Donald, 2020). Therefore, it could be plausible that female college students' educational success could be affected by family responsibilities or other social networks differently than men (Donald, 2020; Cohen & Hsu, 2020; Matthews, 2020).

Furthermore, it has been noted that nontraditional college students enjoy going to class and interacting with others (Ross-Gordon et al., 2017). However, given social distancing rules related to COVID-19 and the increase in online and hybrid courses might

deter nontraditional students from going to college or may hinder their ability to be successful. Having to keep a social distance away from others and not be in large groups may make it harder for students to have access to helpful social networks like peers. Learning completely online may not be suitable for older students who may lack the technological skills needed to perform efficiently online (Ross-Gordon et al., 2017). These students may drop classes or switch to part-time status. Part-time students have been found "significantly less likely" to graduate compared with a student that is enrolled full-time (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005, pg. 923). However, for nontraditional college students that work a full-time job, they may need to enroll part-time to be successful in college. From the literature it is plausible that college students' educational success can be influenced by the roles and responsibilities connected to their social networks.

Current Study

Traditional and nontraditional college students are quite different. On one hand, traditional students are usually under the age of 25 and entered college right after high school (MacAri et al., 2005; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). On the other hand, nontraditional college students are much older and have more roles and more responsibilities than traditional students (Horne, 1996). Social capital can provide resources that lead to achievement for students (Chen & Starobin, 2019). Social capital has been defined as the level of resources provided by being in social networks (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Crosnoe & Schneider, 2010; Ellison et al., 2007). However, gender socialization may influence how certain networks, such as family and peers can help or hinder college students. Previous research has found family and peers could help college students' educational success (Betts et al., 2013; Seon, 2019), however, they can also be

detrimental (Dill & Hayley, 1998). Moreover, researchers have found gender differences in caregiving responsibilities, with women taking on more responsibilities than men (Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Montgomery& Datwyler, 1990; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Recently, *Times Higher Education* claimed that female academics were not as successful in academics compared with men most likely because of the increase in family responsibilities exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Donald, 2020). Therefore, it is plausible that college students' educational success could be influenced by both the resources their social networks provide and responsibility their networks require. Seeing if gender socialization influences their educational success especially during a pandemic is just as important. This study will examine whether (1) gender and traditional/nontraditional student status are associated with educational success; and (2) whether support from and responsibility to family and friends explains those relationships. I will examine whether being male or female affects the relationship between the social capital provided by social networks and success. The prior literature and theory review led to my hypothesis. I hypothesize that nontraditional college women's levels of educational success will be lower than nontraditional men, and traditional college students despite gender. To test this hypothesis, I will be using data collected from administering a survey to a stratified random sample of undergraduates at Western Kentucky University.

Method

Data

This study used primary data collected from surveys distributed to undergraduates at Western Kentucky University (WKU). Graduate students will not be included in the sample because most of them are older and considered a nontraditional student, which

may skew the results. This study's sample was obtained from a cohort of 12,361 (N) undergraduates during the Spring 2021 semester. This study used a stratified random sample. My stratus will be college women that are less than 25 years old, college men that are less than 25, college men that are 25 years or older, and college women that are 25 years or older. An advantage of using a stratified random sample is that it will allow me to have a sample that represents the population based on age and gender. To obtain the sample, my committee chair submitted a data request for students' names, email addresses, phone numbers, gender, and age. This file was then separated by gender and age to get four groups that were added to *Qualtrics* so that the program could send out emails randomly. From each group 500 random respondents were sent emails (i.e., initial letter and 2 follow-up letters see *Appendix C*) requesting their response was needed. After the initial respondents were selected, another 500 random female and male traditional students were selected. In the population there were not that many nontraditional students, therefore the rest of the traditional male students were selected, and 300 more female nontraditional students were selected to participate in the study. A total of 3,462 students was selected to participate in the study (table 1). My goal was to take a proportionate stratified random sample, my sample should match the distribution of the WKU population by gender and age, with 54% of my sample being *traditional female*, 33% *traditional male*, 8% *nontraditional female*, and 5% of my sample was *nontraditional male* (See table 1). However, since the focus here is on nontraditional students, I thought it was wise to oversample nontraditional student and aim for a sample made up of 25% of each group. For my study, the response rate for *traditional female* students was 22.80% (frequency of 228), 19.20% for *traditional male* students (frequency

of 192), 29.25% for *nontraditional female* students (frequency of 234), and 18.73% for *nontraditional male* (frequency of 124) students (table 1). Finally, any respondents that just opened and closed the survey was omitted, as well as those that only answered the first two questions. After all the data was cleaned and re-coded a sample of 594 was used for the multivariate analysis. The overall response rate of 22.47% is objectively low, however, given that it was the end of the semester I only anticipated getting 200 respondents would be challenging. Therefore, I was extremely happy that more than 700 students responded, given the restrains of time and the population under study.

Table 1: Population, Sampling, and Response Rate Information

	Students in Population		Students Sampled		Number of Responses		Response Rate
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Traditional Female	6651	54%	1000	29%	228	29%	22.80%
Traditional Male	4091	33%	1000	29%	192	25%	19.20%
Nontraditional Female	957	8%	800	23%	234	30%	29.25%
Nontraditional Male	662	5%	662	19%	124	16%	18.73%
Total	12361	100%	3462	100%	778	100%	22.47%

I am a graduate student at WKU and will not be included in the population. However, being a nontraditional student while I was an undergraduate might pose some ethical risks because I might know some sample participants. However, I minimized the ethical risks by ensuring anonymity. No identifying information was collected. Being a graduate student at WKU does have some benefits because I can have access to *Qualtrics* and other data analysis programs at no cost. Therefore, collecting my sample from WKU is a cost-efficient way to answer my research question.

Content validity is established by using the same characteristics that the *National Center of Educational Statistics* uses for nontraditional college students. In addition,

other measurements were done by asking multiple questions to create indexes. The measurement regarding *family support of parents*, *general family support*, and *general peer support* was done by asking multiple questions that relate to support. Using indexes in this study can help ensure that the survey is actually measuring support from peers and family. I calculated Cronbach's alpha to ensure the items are measuring the same underlying construct.

The reason I am collecting my sample from undergraduates at WKU is not just because it is convenient or cost-efficient, but I am concerned about how specific social networks can provide or take away social capital that can affect the success for nontraditional college students in comparison to traditional students in my community, with gender being a difference. A study like this could show valid reasons why a national study is needed to see how successful all nontraditional students are in American depending on their family, peers, and gender. If this were possible, such a study would allow for a national representative sample that can be generalizable to all college students instead of just undergraduates at WKU.

Measurements

This study's measurements will be collected from a self-administered survey and will be discussed in more detail in the following subsections. Only the cases without missing responses for each variable will be used in the analysis.

Dependent Variables

College Success. *Cumulative GPA.* Respondents were asked to provide their *cumulative GPA* using a sliding scale. Responses could range from 0 to 4.0. Note that at WKU, a GPA of at least 2.0 is required to earn an undergraduate degree. Response choices are continuous, with higher responses indicating a higher GPA.

Perceived confidence in college graduation. Perceived confidence in college graduation was measured with a single question asking respondents how confident they are that they will graduate from WKU. Possible response choices are *not at all confident*, *not very confident*, *fairly confident*, and *very confident*. The variable was highly skewed with 75.76% of the respondent selecting *very confident*, 21.72% selecting *fairly confident*, 1.85 % selecting *not very confident,* and 0.67% selecting *not at all confident*. Therefore, a dummy variable was created to indicate whether the respondent is *very confident they will graduate from WKU* (1) or not (0).

Independent Variables

Nontraditional college student. Beyond age, my study will use the same characteristics that the National Center for Education Statistics uses when defining *nontraditional college students*. Delayed enrollment, no high school diploma, part-time enrollment, financial independence, having a dependent, being a single parent, and/or working full-time while enrolled are the characteristics of being a *nontraditional college student*. These characteristics may negatively influence students' chances of doing well and staying in school. Studies have even found that these characteristics are

linked to increased stress levels, lower state of well-being, and dropping out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Respondents with at least two of these seven characteristics or respondents over 25 years old will be coded as 1; otherwise, they will be coded as 0. Below are the following variables used to define a *nontraditional college student*. Any case that was missing for all eight characteristics was set to missing on the final variable. If only some characteristics were missing, information that was not missing was used to identify student classification with the missing cases assumed to be 0.

*Age. R*espondents were asked their age in years using a sliding scale. Responses can range from eighteen to eighty-five years old. Respondents who indicate they are twenty-five years or older are considered a *nontraditional college student* (1; 0 otherwise). There was an issue using a sliding scale with *Qualtrics*. If respondents just left the scale at 18 without clicking on the slider, *Qualtrics* thought it was a missing variable. To compensate for this issue, I recoded the variable. If the question before (gender) and the question after (race/ethnicity*)* was answered then *age* was recoded to 18 instead of missing. Before the recode there were 26 missing responses for *age*. After the recode, there was just one missing, which was recoded to the mode of 0.

Delayed enrollment. Only respondents who completed a high school degree were asked how many years they waited to enroll in college after graduating from high school. Respondents answer this in years using a sliding scale, which started at 0.5 to indicate they started college less than a year after high school graduation. Those who had a response of one year or greater were counted as having delayed enrollment and coded as

1, otherwise coded as 0. The same issue with the slider scale as outlined above was evident here and the same recoding strategy was applied.

No high school diploma. Respondents were asked if they received a *high school diploma*, a *GED*, or another *high school equivalence* before college enrollment. Respondents that answered *GED or other high school equivalence* will be coded as 1, otherwise coded as 0. The five cases that were missing was re-coded to the mode of 0.

*Part-time enrollment. R*espondents were asked how many credit hours they took for the current semester (Spring 2021). Respondents that answered taking more than one credit hour and less than 12 credit hours are enrolled part-time (1), otherwise coded as 0, including missing responses.

Financial independence. Financial independence was found by asking respondents if they are considered a dependent on another persons' taxes. Respondents could choose yes, no, or unsure. The question provides an example; yes, if their parents claim them on their taxes; no, if they are married and filed jointly or file independently; or unsure. Respondents that answered no will be coded as (1) meaning they have *financial independence*, otherwise coded as 0. (Note: Respondents that answered unsure was set to missing and all missing was set to zero.)

Other dependents. Respondents were asked if they have dependents whom they financially support (i.e., that they provide more than half their financial needs). The categories are: *parents, grandparents, other relatives, in-laws,* or *no dependents.* Those

who indicated they have at least one dependent are categorized as having *other dependents* (1; 0 otherwise, including missing).

Single parent. For a respondent to be considered a single parent, they need to have selected *single, never married or divorced/widowed* for *relationship status* and selected having at least one *biological child* (Note: *Biological child* was removed from the analysis). Those that meet these criteria will be considered a *single parent* (1), otherwise coded 0.

Work full-time while enrolled. Respondents were asked how many hours they work for a typical week. Those that respond to work more than 35 hours for a typical week will be coded (1), otherwise coded 0.

Gender. Respondents were asked their gender identity. Choices were *female, male*, *trans-female, trans-male*, *non-binary*, *gender fluid,* and *other gender*. The responses were grouped into a set of dummies that measure *gender*, indicating that the respondent is *female (reference), male, or other gender. Trans-female* was recoded as *female* and *trans-male* was recoded as *male*. Since not many respondents indicated *non-binary* (frequency of 13) and *gender fluid* (frequency of 2), both were recoded as *other gender*.

To test my hypothesis, I combined traditional/nontraditional student status and gender into a set of four dummy variables indicating that the respondent is a *nontraditional female* (reference), *nontraditional male, traditional female* and *traditional male*. *Other gender nontraditional* and *other gender traditional* will be included in the

tables with the other descriptive variables but will not be included in the multivariate analysis.

Family Support. *Perceived family support of parents.* The following four items measure *perceived family support of parents*: how many family members can watch your child or children so you can do coursework; how many family members can watch your child or children so you can go to class; how many family members can watch your child or children on short notice; and how many family members can help your child or children with their virtual school. Response choices range from all of them (3), most of them (2), some of them (1), and none of them (0). These items are averaged to create an index of *perceived family support of parents*, ranging from 0 to 3, with higher scores indicating family members give support to a parent. To include respondents who are not parents in this scale, Respondents who indicated they do not have children that live in the household, and therefore did not answer this set of items, were recoded from missing to a 4. The logic of coding in this way is that respondents who do not have children do not have the *responsibility* of having children so if we are thinking about the well-being of respondents and competition for their time, those who have children and do not have support are likely having the hardest time (0), followed by parents will some help (1) while parents with a lot of help might be doing even better off (3) and students who do not have responsibility for their own children do not have that competing responsibility on their time at all (4).

General family support. The following six items measure *general family support*: how many family members can give a ride to class if needed; how many family members

can help with coursework; how many family members encouraged you to go to college; how many family members encouraged you to stay in college; how many family members can be depended on for help in a short notice; and how many family members live within an hour from you. Response choices range from all of them (3), most of them (2), some of them (1), none of them (0), does not apply, which will be omitted and counted as missing. These items were summed to create an index of *general family support*, ranging from 0 to 18, with higher scores indicating that family are generally supportive (Cronbach α=0.74). The question asking how many family members live within 30 minutes was dropped, which increased the Cronbach α by 0.01.

Any financial support received from family. *Any financial support received from family* is measured using two questions asking approximately how much money their family pays for their educational and living expenses during the Fall 2020 and Spring 2020 semesters. For this study, educational expenses will include tuition, course fees, books, supplies (i.e., computer, paper, backpack, etc.), and tutors. Living expenses will include food, rent, utility bills, internet, clothing, insurance, medical expenses, etc. Respondents answered both questions in dollars using a sliding scale and both responses will be summed. The sliding scale only goes to 10,000 dollars; therefore, any responses equal to or over that amount will be counted as $10,000 or more. There was an issue with the sliding scale so any missing for this variable was re-coded to 0. Due to the skewness of the variable, a dummy was created to indicate *any financial support received from family* (1) or not (0). Responses of zero dollars will suggest that the family is not financially supportive.

Family Responsibilities. *Time caring for family members.* Respondents responded to three questions asking for a typical weekday, how many hours do they care for child/children in their household (biological or non-biological), another family members' child/children, and/or for an aging family member (not mutually exclusive). Possible response choices for each question are from 0 to 24 hours, with 0 hours indicating that respondents are not responsible for caring for family members. For this study, family members are spouses or significant others, biological or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Responses from the three questions were summed, ranging from 0 to 72 hours, with higher total responses indicating they are spending a significant amount of *time caring for family members.* The sliding scale issue applies here and was addressed the same way as described above.

Any living expenses paid to family. Using a slider, respondents were asked how much money they gave to their family for living expenses through the Spring 2020 and the Fall 2020 semesters, not including a spouse or significant other. Response choices are continuous from $0 to $10,000, with $10,000 equaling to any amount greater than or equal to $10,000. However, a dummy was created due to the skewness of the data indicating *any living expenses paid to family* (1) or not (0).

Number of children in house. Using slider respondents were asked how many children, either biological or not, live in their home. Response can range from 0 to 10 or more children. (Note: The variable *biological children* was omitted since both variables were highly correlated and residential children would likely have more of an impact on

time than nonresidential children if true, especially for nontraditional students who many have adult children out of the house).

Peer Support. *General peer support. General peer support* was measured using the same items and coded the same as *general family support*. These items were summed to create an index of *general peer support*, ranging from 0 to 18, with higher scores indicating that peers are generally supportive (Cronbach α=0.82). The question asking how many peers live within 30 minutes was dropped, which increased the Cronbach α by 0.01. This was recoded the same as *general family support*.

Peer Responsibilities. *Living expenses paid to peers.* Respondents were asked how much money they gave to their friends for living expenses through the Spring 2020 and the Fall 2020 semester with the same set of responses and coding strategy as living expenses paid to family.

Times moved in the past year. *Times moved in the past year*. Respondents were asked how often in the past year have the moved. Response choices are 0 to 5, with 5 indicating moving 5 or more times in the past year. The variable was skewed, with 8 people indicating that they moved 3 times in the past year, only one person indicated that they moved 5 or more times, and no respondents indicated that they moved 4 times. Therefore, a new categorical variable was used in the analysis to indicate whether the respondent did not move in the past year (0), moved once (1), or moved 2 or more times (2).

Relationship status. *Relationship Status.* Respondents were asked their relationship status with response categories as follows: *married, engaged and not living together, engaged and cohabiting, cohabiting but not engaged, divorced or separated, widowed, in a relationship and not living together/cohabiting*, *or single, never married*. The responses were recoded to minimize the number of dummies used for *relationship status*. The new set of dummies used are *single,* in a *cohabiting/engaged* relationship (i.e., *engaged and cohabiting, engaged and not living together*, and *cohabiting but not engaged), married*, *dating* (*in a relationship and not living together/cohabiting)*, and *divorced or widowed* (*divorced or separated* and *widowed*). *Single* was the modal category and will be used as the reference in the analysis.

Education characteristics. *Average credit hours*. *Average credit hours* will be calculated by taking the average of credit hours for the past three semesters (i.e., Spring 2021, Fall 2020, and Spring 2020). Respondents were asked how many credit hours they took during the Spring 2021, Fall 2020, and Spring 2020 semester. These three questions used a sliding scale and were recoded according to the method described above.

Race/Ethnicity. *Race/Ethnicity*. Respondents are asked to check all races/ethnicities that apply. A set of dummies indicate that the respondent is *non-Hispanic white*, *non-Hispanic Black*, *Hispanic*, *Asian American*, *Native American/Pacific Islander*, *Bi- or multi-racial*, or *another race*. Due to the low numbers of respondents who selected *Asian American, Native American/Pacific Islander* or *another race,* those categories are collapsed into one Other Race category. *Non-Hispanic white* was the modal category and will be used as the reference category in the analysis.

Analytic Strategy

First, I will show descriptive statistics for all my variables and then I will present a table of the distribution of the eight characters that categorize nontraditional students. An OLS regression analysis is used to examine cumulative GPA and logistic regression is used to examine perceived confidence in graduation. For both sets of analyses, the focal independent variables are: *female nontraditional* (reference), *female traditional*, *male nontraditional*, *male traditional* for all models.

> *H1:* Nontraditional college women will be less successful in college in comparison to men nontraditional college students, female traditional college students and men traditional college students.

The analysis of *cumulative GPA* and *perceived confidence in college graduation* will use the same first four models, with the last model being different. The first model for both analyses will include student status by gender (i.e., *female nontraditional* [reference], *female traditional*, *male nontraditional*, *male traditional*). The second model will add factors relating to family support (i.e., *general family support*, *family support of parents*, and *any financial support received from family*) and family responsibilities (i.e., *time caring for family members*, *any living expenses paid to the family*, and *number of children in the household*). The third model will add factors relating to peer support (i.e., *general peer support*) and peer responsibilities (i.e., *any living expenses paid to peers*). The final model for both analyses will add *times moved in the past year*, the set of relationship status dummies, *average credit hours*, and the set of dummies for

race/ethnicity. For the analysis of perceived confidence in college graduation, Model 4 will also include *cumulative GPA*.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics from the sample of WKU undergraduates during the Spring 2021 semester (n=594). The average *cumulative GPA* for the sample was 3.28 with a standard deviation of 0.68. In other words, this sample of undergraduates has a B average, on average. Looking at *perceived confidence in college graduation*, 75.76% (frequency of 450) of the sample indicated that they are very confident that they will graduate from WKU. Given the skewness of this variable, all other categories were collapsed (i.e., fairly confident, not very confident, and not at all confident), however, only 0.67% reported that they have no confidence that they will graduate from WKU. There were 217 (36.53%) nontraditional females, a frequency of 130 (21.89%) for both nontraditional males and traditional females, and 104 (17.51%) traditional males in the sample used for the analysis. There were only 8 (1.35%) nontraditional other gender and 5 (0.84%) traditional other gender students. Therefore, these groups will not be included in the multivariate analysis.

Family support was measured with three indicators (i.e., *family support of parents*, *general family support*, and *any financial support received from family)*, as well as family responsibilities (i.e., *time caring for family members*, *any living expenses received from family*, and *number of children in house*). The mean for *family support of parents* was 3.14, which ranges from 4 – 0 with higher scores indicating more family

support and/or having fewer parental responsibilities, with a standard deviation of 1.46. *General family support, which* ranges from 0-18, with higher scores indicating family is more supportive, with a mean of 7.89 and a standard deviation of 4.27. This indicates that respondents perceive they are slightly supported by family while attending college. *Any financial support received from family* is the last indicator of family support, with 25.08% (frequency 149) of the sample indicating that their family supports them with living or educational expenses. On average respondents in the analysis indicated that they spend 5.7 hours a week caring for family members, ranging from 0 – 72 hours, with a standard deviation of 10.48, which is the first indicator for family responsibilities. Having a high standard deviation indicates that the range for *time caring for family members* is wide. The respondents were asked how much financial support they gave to their family members to help with the living expenses. From the sample, 21.89% (130 frequency) of the respondents indicated that they give money to help their family pay for their living expenses. The mean for *number of children in house* was 0.58 with a standard deviation of 1.17. A mean of 0.58 for *number of children in house* indicates that most people in the sample do not have children.

Peer support was examined with one indicator variable *general peer support* that ranged from 0 – 18, with higher scores indicating more *peer general support. Any living expense paid to peers* is the only indicator for peer responsibilities. *General peer support* has a mean of 7.31 with a standard deviation of 4.81, which was lower than *general family support.* It could mean that for college students in this study, family and peers support students in different ways. From the sample, 13.8% (82 frequency) of the respondents indicated that they help their peers with living expenses.

Sociodemographic characteristics used in this study include *times moved in a year*, relationship status, *average credit hours*, and race/ethnicity. On average respondents from the sample said that they moved 0.47 times in the past year with a standard deviation of 0.72, indicating that respondents on average did not move often during the school year. Relationship status was also included in this study. *Single* was used as the reference category with 44.44% (448 frequency) of the sample, 26.6% are *married* (158 frequency), 14.44% are *dating* (84 frequency) (i.e., in a relationship and not cohabiting), 9.93% are *in a cohabiting/engaged relationship* (59 frequency) (i.e., engaged and cohabiting, engaged and not cohabiting, and cohabiting), and 4.88% are *divorced or widowed* (30 frequency). The *average credit hours* over the last three semesters for the sample were 11.82 with a standard deviation of 3.9. *Average credit hours* would be 12 if I were to round this up, meaning that the sample are full-time students on average. The respondents were asked their race/ethnicity, resulting in 75.42% of the sample classifying as *non-Hispanic white*, 9.09 % *non-Hispanic black*, 3.37% *Hispanic*, 7.07% *biracial*, and 5.05% *other race.*

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Sample (n=594)					
	Freq.	**Percent**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Range**
Dependent Variables					
Cumulative GPA			3.28	0.93	0-4
Perceived confidence in college gradution	450	75.76			0-1
Independent Variables					
Status					
Nontraditional female	217	36.53			0-1
Nontraditional male	130	21.89			0-1
Traditional female	130	21.89			0-1
Traditional male	104	17.51			0-1
Nontraditional other gender	8	1.35			0-1
Traditional other gender	5	0.84			0-1
Family support					
Family support of parents			3.15	1.46	0-4
General family support			7.89	4.27	0-18
Any financial support received from family	149	25.08			0-1
Family responsibilities					
Time caring for family members			5.7	10.48	0-72
Any living expenses paid to family	130	21.89			0-1
Number of children in house			0.58	1.17	0-8
Peer support					
General peer support			7.31	4.81	0-18
Peer responsibilities					
Any living expenses paid to peers	82	13.8			0-1
Sociodemographic characteristics					
Times moved in the past year			0.47	0.72	0-5
Relationship Status					
Single	264	44.44			0-1
Married	158	26.6			0-1
Dating*	84	14.44			0-1
Cohabiting/Engaged **	59	9.93			0-1
Divorced or widowed	29	4.88			0-1
Education characteristics					
Average credit hours			11.82	3.9	.33-19.5
Race/Ethnicity					
Non-Hispanic White	448	75.42			0-1
Non-Hispanic Black	54	9.09			0-1
Hispanic	20	3.37			0-1
Biracial	42	7.07			0-1
Other race	30	5.05			0-1

*Dating includes realtionship and not cohabiting

**Cohabiting/Engaged includes engaged and cohabiting, engaged and not cohabiting, and cohabiting

Recall from the *National Center for Educational Statistics* (2002) definition that nontraditional college students can be classified as such by meeting any of eight possible criteria. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the nontraditional characteristics. From the sample, 48.65% of the sample indicated that they are *over 25 years old* and 25.25% enrolled in college at least a year after high school graduation. Surprisingly, only 3.5% of the sample indicated that they had a GED or an alternative high school diploma. Approximately 48% of the sample indicated that they are a part-time student and 58.42% are independent students. Lastly, 13.97% have *other dependents*, 2.86% are *single parents*, and 31.99% *work full-time.*

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Nontraditional Characteristic (n=594)

	Frequency	**Percentage**
Over 25 years old	289	48.65%
Delayed enrollment	150	25.25%
No high school diploma	21	3.54%
Part-time enrollment	285	47.98%
Independent college student	347	58.42%
Other dependents	83	13.97%
Single parent	17	2.86%
Work full-time	190	31.99%

Note: Frequency will not equal to 100% because student can have mulitple characteristics.

While it is possible that students can have only one characteristic to be defined as nontraditional, often students meet multiple criteria. To examine that more thoroughly, Table 4 shows the top five characteristics combinations of nontraditional students in my sample. Going in order from the highest to the lowest, 45 respondents in the sample indicated that they are part-time students as their only defining characteristics. The second highest was the combination of *over 25 years old, delayed enrollment, part-time*

enrollment, *financial independent*, and *work full-time* with a frequency of 44. Clearly, for this sample, the combination of these characteristics are interconnected. The next highest characteristics with a frequency of 38 were *over 25 years old*, *part-time enrollment*, *financial independent*, and *work full-time*. The fourth highest was the same as the previous, except *work full-time* was not included with a frequency of 34. The fifth top was just *financial independence* with a frequency of 28.

Table 4: Top 5 Characteristics of Nontraditional Students

Over 25 Years Old	Delayed Enrollment	GED or Other	Part-time Enrollment	Financial Independence	Dependents	Single Parent	Work Full-time	**Total (n)**
-	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	45
x	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	44
x	-	-	x	x	-	-	x	38
x	-	-	x	x	-	-	-	34
-	-	-	-	x	-	-	-	28

For this study, it is essential to look at the frequencies and percent by gender/status of those who care for family members since I am claiming that nontraditional female students may be less successful than others due to family responsibilities. Table 5 shows that 60% of female nontraditional students and 48% of nontraditional male students indicated that they care for their family members (i.e., biological child/children, family members' child/children, and aging parents). The frequencies for nontraditional students are drastically higher than female traditional (9%) and male traditional (14%) students. Other gender traditional and other gender nontraditional category were not included in the analyses; however, noting that there is a big difference between these two groups is important. From the sample used, no one in the other gender traditional category indicated that they care for family members. Any

generalization here is approached with caution because the sample only had five respondents indicating other gender traditional and eight other gender nontraditional (note: results are not shown).

Table 5: Frequencies and Percent by Gender/Student Status of Those Who Care for Family Members

	Female Nontraditional		Female Traditional		Male Nontraditional		Male Traditional		Total	
Cares for family members	131	60%	12	9%	62	48%	15	14%	223	38%
Does not care for family members	86	40%	118	91%	68	52%	89	86%	371	64%
Comparision of groups	***[b,d]; †[c]		***[c]		***[d]					
Total	**217**	**100%**	**130**	**100%**	**130**	**100%**	**104**	**100%**	**581**	**100%**
Model F (p >F)	50.93 (0.0000)									
x^2 (p>x^2)	52.75 (0.0000)									

Note: [b]Traditional Females; [c]Traditional Males; [d]Nontraditional Males; †p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.0001

As I stated before, building relationships that provide social capital when they move frequently or experience hypermobility can be hard (Metzger et.al., 2018). Therefore, it was crucial to look at the expected frequencies and percent by times moved with both dependent variables (i.e., *cumulative GPA* and *perceived confidence in college graduation*). From table 6, there is not that much variation between times moved and those who have at least a B *cumulative GPA*. From the sample, 70% of the respondents indicated they did not move in the past year, 73% of those who moved once, and 64% of those who moved twice or more all had at least a B average. Not many respondents that moved two or more times who had a B average in this category (frequency 55); therefore, no generalizations can be made.

Table 6: Frequencies and Percent by Times Moved of Those Who Have a High or Low GPA								
	0		**1**		**2 or more**		**Total**	
High GPA (Cumulative GPA ≥ 3.0)	267	70%	116	73%	35	64%	418	70%
Low GPA (Cumulative GPA < 3.0)	112	30%	44	28%	20	36%	176	30%
Total	379	100%	160	100%	55	100%	**594**	**100%**

Note: x^2=1.546, df=2, p=0.418

Table 7 shows the expected frequencies by times moved with my other dependent variable, *perceived confidence in college graduation*. There is not much difference between times moved in confidence in graduating. From the sample used for the analysis, 75% of the respondents indicated they did not move, 76% of those that moved twice, and 80% of the respondents that moved more than twice indicated they were very confident that they will graduate from WKU.

Table 7: Frequencies and Percent by Times Moved of Those Who Have Confidence in Graduating								
	0		1		2 or more		Total	
Very Confident in Graduating from WKU	284	75%	122	76%	44	80%	450	76%
Not Very Confident in Graduating from WKU	95	25%	38	24%	11	20%	144	24%
Total	379	100%	160	100%	55	100%	**594**	**100%**

Note: x^2= 0.7001, df=2, p=0.705

NCES uses a scale by summing nontraditional characteristics to classify nontraditional status so the groups can be examined. Minimally nontraditional students have just one characteristic, moderately nontraditional has two to three characteristics, and highly nontraditional status has more than four characteristics (Nontraditional Undergraduates / Definitions and Data). Not all nontraditional college students are the same; they may have just one or all seven characteristics. However, nontraditional college students are different from traditional college students. As the characteristics of college students change over time, understanding how certain social capital could influence students' success especial during a pandemic is important. For my sample, majority of the respondents fell into one of the three classifications and 50% of the sample can be considered moderately nontraditional (Table 8).

Table 8: Frequencies of Nontraditional Status by Level		
	Frequency	**Percentage**
Minimally nontraditional (nt ≤ 1)	139	30%
Moderately nontraditional (2 ≤ nt ≤ 3)	229	50%
Highly nontraditional (nt ≥ 4)	94	20%
Total	462	100%
Note: 0 ≤ sum of characteristics nontraditional, not including age (nt) ≥ 7		

My hypothesis is that nontraditional students, especially *nontraditional female* students are less successful in college due to family responsibilities and not having access to the same social capital as others. Therefore, it is important to look at the frequencies and percent by gender/student status of those who have a high or low *cumulative* GPA (See Table 9). From the sample used for analysis, 66% of *nontraditional female* students, 83% of *traditional female* students, 60% of *nontraditional male* students, and 75% of *traditional male* students, all indicated having at least a B average. Therefore, no matter their gender, traditional students in the sample have a higher *cumulative GPA* in comparison to nontraditional students.

Table 9: Frequencies and Percent by Gender/Student Status of Those Who Have a High or Low GPA										
	Female Nontraditional		Female Traditional		Male Nontraditional		Male Traditional		Total	
High GPA (Cumulative GPA ≥ 3.0)	144	66%	108	83%	78	60%	78	75%	223	38%
Low GPA (Cumulative GPA < 3.0)	73	34%	22	17%	52	40%	26	25%	371	64%
Comparisons across groups	***[b]		***[c]							
Total	**217**	**100%**	**130**	**100%**	**130**	**100%**	**104**	**100%**	**581**	**100%**
F (p>F)	6.66 (0.0002)									
x^2 ($p>x^2$)	10.84 (0.0002)									
Note: [b]Traditional Females; [c]Traditional Males; [d]Nontraditional Males; †p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.0001										

Multivariate Results

The regression statistics for the dependent variable of *cumulative GPA* can be found in Table 10. For the first model, which only include the focal variables (i.e., *nontraditional female*, *nontraditional male*, *traditional female*, and *male traditional)* adjusted R-squared of 0.0188 indicates that the independent variables in this model explain 1.88% of the variance in *cumulative GPA* due to chance. For the second model, which adds family support and responsibilities adjusted R-squared of 0.0328 indicates that the independent variables explain for 3.28% of the variance in *cumulative GPA*, with a change of 0.014. The adjusted R-square for the third model, which adds peer support and responsibilities, was 0.0376 which indicates the independent variables explain for 3.76% of the variance in the dependent variable. The final model adding relationship status, educational and sociodemographic characteristics, and race/ethnicity, which had

an adjusted R-square of 0.0792, which indicates that the independent variables explain for 7.92% of the variance in *cumulative GPA*. In the final model the R-squared increased 0.0416 means that the independent variables added increased the explanation of the variance in cumulative GPA by 4.16percent.

The coefficients of the independent variables in my four models show some interesting findings (See Table 9). In Model 1, it is statistically significant ($p<0.01$) that *traditional female* students' *cumulative GPA* is 0.20 higher than female nontraditional students. In model 2, family support and family responsibilities were added to see how the social capital received or taken away by family impacts *cumulative GPA*. In model 2, the difference between traditional and nontraditional female students persists ($b = 0.22$, $p<.01$). For a unit increase in *general family support*, *cumulative GPA* increased by 0.02 ($p<.01$) while holding all other variables constant. When adding peer support and peer responsibilities to the model, *general family support* was no longer statistically significant. The reason for this change could be that student in my sample do not feel like they need to be supported by both family and peers. For a unit increase in *general peer support*, *cumulative GPA* increased by 0.02 while holding all other variables constant ($p<.05$). In this third model, *traditional female* students' *cumulative GPA* was on average 0.19 units higher than *female nontraditional* students in the sample. This is statistically significant at an alpha level of 0.05. The fourth and final model for the analysis of *cumulative GPA* includes educational and sociodemographic characteristics and race/ethnicity. In this model, there is no longer a statistically significant difference between *traditional female* and *nontraditional female* students. However, *nontraditional male* students have a *cumulative GPA* that is .21 units lower than *traditional female*

students. No other contrast categories are significant. *General peer support* was statistically significant at an alpha level of 0.01. For a unit increase in *general peer support*, *cumulative GPA* increased by 0.02. For a unit increase in *average credit hours*, *cumulative GPA* increased by 0.003 ($p<0.001$). On average *non-Hispanic Blacks*' *cumulative GPA* is 0.34 lower in comparison to *non-Hispanic whites* ($p<.001$). No other racial/ethnic contrast categories are significant.

Perceived confidence in college graduation is the second dependent variable to measure college success. A logistics regression was used because *perceive confidence in college graduation* was so highly skewed that a dummy variable was created. Model 1 only included the focal variables that are *nontraditional female*, *nontraditional male*, *traditional female*, and *male traditional* student. Model 2 adds family support and responsibilities. In this model, *general family support* was statistically significant at an alpha level of 0.001. A unit change in *general family support* increased the odds of *perceived confidence in college graduation* by 9%, holding all other variables constant. No variable was statistically significant in the third model when peer support and responsibilities were added. However, in the fourth model when relationship status, educational and sociodemographic characteristics, and race/ethnicity are added only a couple independent variables can explain the odds of *perceived confidence in college graduation*. A *traditional male* student has 55% lower odds of being confident they will graduate compared with *nontraditional female* students while holding other variables constant ($p<.01$). However, a *nontraditional male* student has 59% lower odds of *perceived confidence in college graduation* compared with a *traditional male* student. No other contrast variables were significant, such as relationship status or race/ethnicity. A

unit change in *cumulative GPA* increases the odds of perceived confidence in college graduation by 184% while holding all other variables constant (p<.001).

Table 10: Predictors of Success, Cumulative GPA (n=594)												
Independent variables	**Cumulative GPA**											
	Model 1			**Model 2**			**Model 3**			**Model 4**		
Status	Coef.		SE	Coef.		SE	Coef.		SE	Coef.		SE
Nontraditional female	--		--	--		--	--		--	--		--
Nontraditional male	-0.07		0.07	-0.05		0.07	-0.05		0.07	-0.05		0.07
Traditional female	0.20	**	0.07	0.22	**	0.08	0.19	*	0.08	0.14		0.08
Traditional male	0.11		0.07	0.10		0.08	0.10		0.08	0.07		0.09
Family support												
Family support of parents				-0.02		0.03	-0.02		0.03	-0.01		0.03
General family support				0.02	**	0.01	0.01		0.01	0.01		0.01
Any financial support from family				-0.05		0.07	-0.06		0.07	-0.06		0.06
Family responsibilities												
Time caring for family members				-0.01		0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00		0
Any living expenses paid to family				-0.09		0.06	-0.07		0.07	-0.05		0.07
Number of children in house				0.04		0.04	0.05		0.04	0.04		0.04
Peer support												
General peer support							0.02	*	0.01	0.02	**	0.01
Peer responsibilities												
Any living expenses paid to peers							-0.08		0.08	-0.09		0.08
Sociodemographic characteristics												
Times moved in the past year										0.02		0.04
Relationship Status												
Single										--		
Married										0.15		0.09
Dating										0.09		0.08
Cohabiting/Engaged										0.08		0.09
Divorced or Widowed										0.22		0.13
Education characteristics												
Average credit hours										0.03	***	0.01
Race/Ethnicity												
Non-Hispanic White										--		
Non-Hispanic Black										-0.34	***	0.09
Hispanic										-0.18		0.14
Biracial										-0.18		0.1
Other race										-0.09		0.12
Adjusted R-square	0.0188			0.0328			0.0376			0.0792		
Prob>F	0.0027**			0.0008***			0.0004***			0.0000***		
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001												

Table 11: Predictors of Success, Perceived Confidence in College Graduation												
Independent variables	**Perceived Confidence in College Graduation**											
	Model 1			**Model 2**			**Model 3**			**Model 4**		
Status	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR	Coef.	SE	OR
Nontraditional female	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Nontraditional male	0.00	0.26	1.00	0.02	0.27	1.02	0.04	0.27	1.04	0.16	0.29	1.18
Traditional female	0.23	0.27	1.26	0.28	0.31	1.32	0.20	0.31	1.22	-0.18	0.37	0.84
Traditional male	-0.35	0.26	0.707	-0.43	0.30	0.65	-0.44	0.30	0.65	-0.80 **	0.35	0.45
Family support												
Family support of parents				0.11	0.13	1.11	0.11	0.13	1.12	0.15	0.14	1.16
General family support				0.08 ***	0.02	1.09	0.05	0.03	1.05	0.06	0.03	1.06
Any financial support from family				-0.44	0.25	0.644	-0.46	0.03	0.63	-0.48	0.27	0.62
Family responsibilities												
Time caring for family members				-0.01	0.01	0.99	-0.01	0.01	0.99	0.00	0.01	1.00
Any living expenses paid to family				-0.06	0.24	0.94	0.01	0.26	1.01	0.02	0.29	1.02
Number of children in house				0.25	0.17	1.29	0.27	0.17	1.31	0.24	0.18	1.27
Peer support												
General peer support							0.05	0.03	1.05	0.03	0.0	1.03
Peer responsibilities												
Any living expenses paid to peers							-0.26	0.32	0.77	-0.29	0.3	0.75
Sociodemographic characteristics												
Times moved in the past year										0.22	0.2	1.25
Relationship Status												
Single										--	--	--
Married										-0.07	0.4	0.94
Dating										0.33	0.3	1.39
Iohabiting/engaged relationship										0.46	0.4	1.58
Divorced or Widowed										0.76	0.6	2.14
Education characteristics												
Cumulative GPA										1.04 ***	0.2	2.84
Average credit hours										0.06	0.0	1.06
Race/Ethnicity												
Non-Hispanic White										--	--	--
Non-Hispanic Black										0.38	0.4	1.46
Hispanic										-0.63	0.5	0.53
Biracial										-0.33	0.4	0.72
Other race										-0.60	0.4	0.55
Prob>chi2:	0.3031			0.0149*			0.0119*			0.000***		
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001												

Discussion

Being a nontraditional female student myself, I noticed that among my classmates, certain students, based on gender and traditional/nontraditional status, seemed to more successful in college than others. It was even more noticeable that traditional students, regardless of gender had access to different social capital then other nontraditional students. Was this because we have different responsibilities than other classmates? These observations led me to my final research question: Are nontraditional

female students less successful in college in comparison to others? Understanding that gender differences may influence the way social capital can help or hinder college students' success in America during a pandemic is vital, especially for nontraditional students. While the literature suggests that family and peers provide social capital that is beneficial, I argue that this is too generalized (Ellison et al., 2007; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Rather, family and peer responsibilities can drain social capital in relation to college success.

The current study took place under the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic minimized our number of contacts to slow the spread of COVID-19. This resulted in shifting students to online courses and taking them out of the traditional college environment. It has been noted that nontraditional college students enjoy going to class and interacting with others and these students may lack skills to preform efficiently online (Ross-Gordon et al., 2017). Additionally, for nontraditional students who are parents, school and childcare center closings meant that kids were home all of the time, requiring regular care from their parents and help with virtual school that could be hard to balance for working parents and parents going to school themselves. There is evidence claiming that the pandemic has increased family commitments, particularly for women, which negatively impact women being successful in their careers (Donald, 2020; Cohen & Hsu, 2020; Matthews, 2020). While I argue that nontraditional students may not be as successful in comparison to traditional student any time, those differences could be exacerbated by the pandemic.

The aim of this study was to examine whether (1) gender and traditional/nontraditional student status are associated with educational success; and (2)

whether support from and responsibility to family and friends explains those relationships. The prior literature regarding social capital and success led me to my hypothesis. I hypothesize that nontraditional college women will be less successful in college in comparison to *nontraditional male*, *traditional female,* and *traditional male* students. To test this hypothesis, I collected data by administering a survey to a stratified random sample of undergraduates at Western Kentucky University. The stratus used in this study are college women that are less than 25 years old, college men that are less than 25, college men that are 25 years or older, and college women that are 25 years or older. In this study I am focused on nontraditional college students, therefore I oversampled the nontraditional categories. An advantage of using a stratified random sample was that it allowed me to have a sample that represents the population based on age and gender.

My hypothesis was that nontraditional women are less successful in college in comparison to traditional students, no matter their gender. Minimal evidence was found that supports this claim. When controlling for family and peers it is statistically significant that *traditional female* students' *cumulative GPA* is 0.20 higher than *nontraditional female* students. Therefore, among female students in my sample, it can be stated that *traditional female* students may be more successful in comparison to *nontraditional female* students. However, it does not appear, in this sample, that *nontraditional female* students are less likely to succeed than men, traditional or nontraditional. In fact, *male traditional* students report less confidence in the likelihood of graduation than *nontraditional female* students.

Understanding whether family or peers are beneficial, and whether they are harmful is essential, especially during a pandemic. I have experienced stress trying to balance family responsibilities, my career, and college all during a pandemic. However, having supportive peers to fall back on helped me to be more success in college. Therefore, it is crucial for universities to understand how specific relationships such as family and/or peers can affect students, especially nontraditional students. From the literature, it has been found from multiple researchers that friends and family can provide social capital such as information or resources, which leads to being success in employment or earnings (Bian, 1997; Burgos, 2007; Harknett, 2006). It has also been found that peers can help college students balance their stress to be successful and graduate from college (Seon et al., 2019). From Table 10, there is evidence in models 3 & 4 that show college students have a higher *cumulative GPA* (0.20) if they have general support from peers. Therefore, there is support that peers provide social capital that helps colleges students in my sample to be successful.

Alternatively, it has been found that family members can also provide social capital that leads a college student to be successful and graduate from WKU. Table 10 shows evidence that *general family support* does increase *cumulative GPA* (0.02). In the logistic analysis, which can be found in Table 11, a unit change in *general family support* increased the odds of *perceived confidence in college graduation* by 9%. Therefore, it is plausible that college students may need to depend on family members to be successful in college. However, when peer support and responsibilities are added to both analysis (i.e., *cumulative GPA* and *perceived confidence in college graduation*) *general family support* is not significant anymore. The conclusion here is that college students in my sample may

only need to be supported by family or peers, and not both to feel like they are successful in college. These findings need more exploration in future studies.

Limitations

There are a few limitations in this study. The first limitation is that there was an issue when using sliding scales with *Qualtrics* in that if the respondent did not click on the scale at all (perhaps simply to leave the scale at the starting point), they were registered as missing. The following survey questions used sliding scales: respondents age; how many years enrolled in college after high school graduation; hours working; times moved; amount of children in household; current, Fall, and Spring credit hours and GPA; and time spent caring for family members. The strategy employed to address this, namely looking to see if the questions immediately before and after were answered and if so, the slider question was recoded to the lowest scale point, may have inadvertently included some cases that should have been missing if the respondent did, in fact, skip the question on purpose.

The questions relating to *family support of a parent* and *peer support of parents* had an issue with the skip pattern. While the skip pattern was supposed to be the same, only respondents who indicated they have at least one biological child/children and at least one child/children who live in the house was supposed to receive the indicator questions. The skip pattern for indicators of *peer support of parents* used 'or' instead of 'and'. Therefore, both *family support of a parent* and *peer support of parents* was re-code so that those who indicated that they have children living in the house was used in the analysis. The indicators for *family support of a parent* and *peer support of parents* may not show the true quality of parental support, however, I thought these were the best

indicators at the time. For this study, *peer support of parents* was dropped because of multicollinearity with *family support of a parent*. Therefore, only two indicators were used for peer support and peer responsibilities, which may create limitations about the generalizations regarding peers.

Another limitation of this study is that the survey was sent to students toward the end of the semester when students are typically more stressed. It is likely that students who were less stressed were more likely to complete the survey and therefore the estimates of measures of college success may be higher than in the actual population. In addition, there was a low response of single parents included in the sample (frequency of 17), which could mean that they were too stressed to complete a survey, especially at the end of the semester. Moreover, students that did not enroll for the Spring 2021 semester due to stress and/or responsibilities were not included. In addition, there was not a good representation of LGBTQ+ respondents in the sample (frequency of 13), as well as other marginalized populations such as, Asian Americans (frequency 0), Native America/Pacific Islanders (frequency of 1), Hispanics (frequency of 20), and Biracial students (frequency of 42).

Lastly, the indicators of the dependent variables used in this study slightly describe success. Success is a complex idea, with variety of meanings and college students may have different interpretations. Some college students may think that having a well-paid job after graduating college is success, and others may think that gaining certain connections through sororities or fraternities means success. Therefore, more indicators could have been used to describe success other than *cumulative GPA* and *perceived confidence in college graduation*.

Strengths and Future Research

Although there were limitations in my study regarding the survey and indicators, there are strengths to the study which can be contributed to the current literature. The first strength is that the sample size was larger than originally anticipated and is a current sample of WKU students. Based on the current findings, WKU could focus on strategies that support single parents, as well as peer support groups for student. One finding that is helpful for WKU is the skewness of the *perceived confidence in graduation* variable. At first, I interpreted this as a weakness since there was not much variability. Upon reflection, this is a positive thing for WKU. Faculty and staff seem to be supporting students and encouraging them to succeed in their classes and make it to graduation - the retention efforts by WKU are working, and students do truly feel like they will graduate from WKU.

Second, the literature suggests that family and peers provide social capital that is beneficial for college students (Ellison et al., 2007; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). However, in my sample, family and peers are not statistically significant when they are in models together. Therefore, this could mean that people who are more supported by family are also supported by friends or that for some people, family support matters more and for others friend support matters more, therefore they are cancelling each other out in the models. This unexpected finding contributes to the literature on this topic and offers an avenue for further research. Exploring other measures of family and peer support would be use, specifically the ways in which family and peers might be supportive in different ways.

For the future, researchers should explore how peers could help nontraditional students to be more successful in college. Supportive peers have been found to support students during stressful situations while being in college (Yang et al., 2020). Therefore, digging deeper into the idea to see if groups or clubs for nontraditional students could increase their access to social capital would be a great idea to explore. Exploring weak ties in addition to strong ties is another avenue for future research that may be particularly important during a pandemic when students are not taking as many face-to-face classes – they may be missing having someone in the class to compare notes with or ask about confusing topics. Interviews or focus groups that could get a broader definition of college success should also be explored. Another suggestion for the future is to focus on marginalized populations, such as the Mexican immigrants explored in Lusia's book or the single mothers in Harknett's research (Burgos, 2007; Harknett, 2006). Such an investigation should yield a depiction of how social capital can beneficial certain populations. A final suggestion for the future is that a sample should be drawn from the entire population of all college students in America. This will allow for generalizations to be made about all college students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research present herein aims to understand if family and peers affect the success for nontraditional college students, especially women. Research has found that family and peers could provide social capital that helps college students to be successful (Betts et al., 2013; Seon, 2019), however, family and peers can also be detrimental (Dill & Hayley, 1998). It was also found that there are gender differences in caregiving responsibilities, with women taking on more responsibilities than men

(Mannino & Deutsch, 2007; Montgomery& Datwyler, 1990; Yavorsky et al., 2015), although those responsibilities do not seem to affect women's success relative to men's.

In the study I found that *traditional female* students had a higher *cumulative GPA* in comparison to *nontraditional female* students. The difference could be due to the increase in family responsibilities t exacerbated from the pandemic. However, the retentions efforts by WKU during the pandemic may have offset any negative impact caused by the pandemic. During the pandemic, WKU supported students in a manner that allowed students to feel supported even if they were struggling. This could be the reason that the variable for *perceived confidence in college graduation* was highly skewed. Lastly, the findings from this study are important to me because I am a nontraditional college student. I have experienced stress trying to balance family, school, and a social life. Also, I have seen many students not succeed in college due to family responsibilities, especially during the pandemic. Being a part of specific social networks has helped me to be more successful in college. Moreover, this is also equally important to the larger society because the success of future generations is based on the success of the current one.

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APPENDIX A

Approval Letter

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

DATE:	April 15, 2021
TO:	Jacklyn Travis
FROM:	Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[1748739-1] FAMILY, PEERS, AND COLLEGE STUDENTS' LEVEL OF SUCCESS: A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS
REFERENCE #:	IRB 21-242
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	April 15, 2021
REVIEW TYPE:	Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by an *implied* consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Robin Pyles at (270) 745-3360 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

APPENDIX B

Implied Consent Document

IMPLIED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: FAMILY, PEERS, AND COLLEGE STUDENTS' LEVEL OF SUCCESS: A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Investigator: Jackie Travis, Department of Sociology & Criminology, Jacklyn.travis@633@topper.wku.edu

Faculty advisor: Dr. Lauren McClain, Department of Sociology and Criminology, (270) 745-5921, lauren.mcclain@wku.edu

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your agreement to participate in this project.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The information below will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project by using the contact information above. Please read this explanation and ask the researcher any questions you may have. If you then decide to participate in the project, please select "I agree to participate" below. If you would like a copy of this form, please print this page.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** The project is meant to measure perceived college support and responsibilities from family and friends.

2. **Explanation of Procedures:** You will be asked to complete an online survey via *Qualtrics*. The online survey will measure your perceived support and your perceived responsibilities while in college. The survey should take no more than 10 minutes.

3. **Discomfort and Risks:** You will be questioned about your perceived support and responsibilities, which should not harm you or bring discomfort greater than situations ordinarily encountered in your daily activities.

4. **Benefits:** Understanding how peers and family members can impact college students' level of college success with an online survey could help the college understand how to support students better. However, there are no direct benefits or incentives to participate in the survey.

5. **Confidentiality:** Your name and contact information is stored separately from your survey responses. There are no identifying questions in the survey itself. Data will be reported in aggregate form. Records will be viewed, stored, and maintained in private, secure files only accessible by the investigator and advising faculty for three years following the study, after which time they will be destroyed.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

Your continued cooperation with the following research implies your consent.

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Robin Pyles, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-3360

(Revised August 2018)

APPENDIX C

***Qualtrics* Survey**

College students and Social Networks

Start of Block: Generic info

What is your gender identity?

- ○ Female
- ○ Male
- ○ Trans-female
- ○ Trans-male
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Gender Fluid
- ○ Other

What is your age? (Select 85 if older than 85)

In Years

18 25 31 38 45 52 58 65 72 78 85

Age	

Which of the following best describes you? Select all that applies.

- ☐ Non-Hispanic white
- ☐ Non-Hispanic black
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Native American/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Bi- or multi-racial
- ☐ Another race

Which of the following did you receive prior to enrolling in college?

- ○ High School Diploma
- ○ GED
- ○ Other high school equivalence

Display This Question:

If Which of the following did you receive prior to enrolling in college? = High School Diploma

Approximately how many years did you wait to enroll in college after you graduated from high school?

Years 0.5 = 6 months

0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30

Waited to enroll in college after high school graduation

Page Break

How many hours do you work in a paid job in a typical week? *If you don't work, keep the scale at zero. If you work more than 60 hours, select 60.*

Hours

0 7 13 20 27 33 40 47 53 60

Typical work week

Page Break

Are you considered a dependent on another persons' taxes (for example, if your parents claim you on their taxes, select "yes"; if you are married and file jointly, select "no")?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Unsure

Page Break

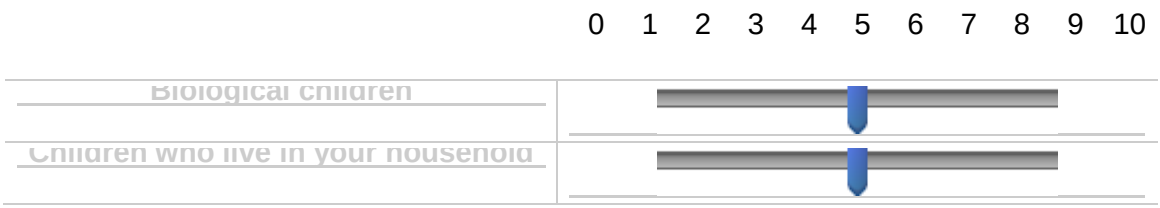
What is your relationship status?

- ○ Married
- ○ Engaged and not living together
- ○ Engaged and cohabiting (living together)
- ○ In a relationship and not living together
- ○ Cohabiting (In a relationship and living together)
- ○ Divorce or Separated
- ○ Widowed
- ○ Single, never married

Page Break

How many biological children do you have? How many children live in your household (include both biological and non-biological children)?

Amount of Children (10= 10 or more)



Page Break

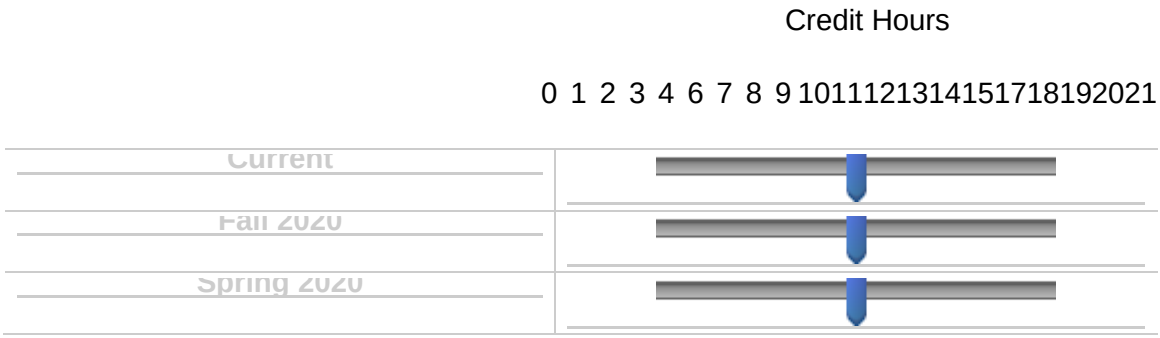
Do you have any dependents who you support financially (dependents are defined as people for whom you provide more than half of their financial needs)? Check all that applies.

- [ ] Parents
- [ ] Grandparents
- [ ] Other relatives
- [ ] In-laws
- [ ] No dependents

End of Block: Generic info

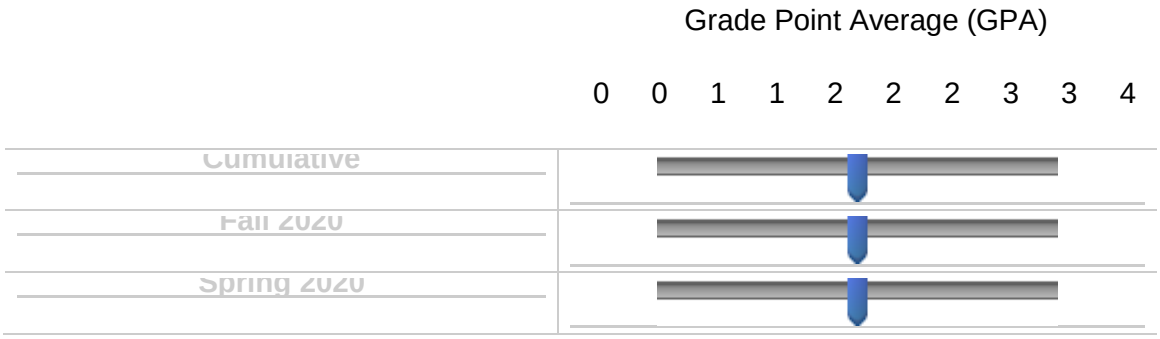
Start of Block: Spring/fall credit/gpa

How many credit hours did you take for the current semester, for the Fall 2020 semester, and for the Spring 2020 semester?



Page Break

What is your current cumulative grade point average (GPA), Fall 2020 GPA, and Spring 2020 GPA?



Page Break

How confident are you that you will graduate from Western Kentucky University?

- ○ Not at all confident
- ○ Not very confident
- ○ Fairly confident
- ○ Very confident
- ○ Unsure/Don't know

End of Block: Spring/fall credit/gpa

Start of Block: Hours helping others

Display This Question:

If How many biological children do you have? How many children live in your household (include both... [Biological children] >= 1

Or How many biological children do you have? How many children live in your household (include both... [Children who live in your household] >= 1

On average, how many hours a week are you helping your child/children with their virtual learning (grades K-12)?

Hours

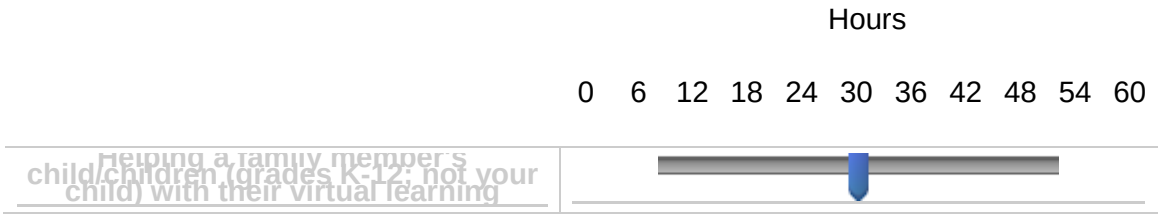
0 6 12 18 24 30 36 42 48 54 60

Helping your child (children) with their virtual learning

Page Break

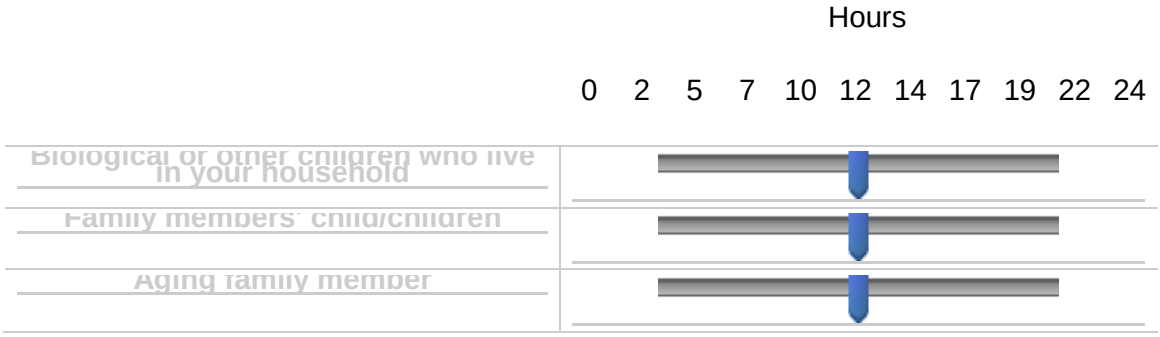
The following questions relate to family members. For this survey, family members are your spouse or significant other, biological children or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.

On average, how many hours a week are you helping a family member's child/children (grades K-12; not your child) with their virtual learning? If you do not help other children, keep the scale at *0*, otherwise set scale to how many hours.



The following questions relate to family members. For this survey, family members are your spouse or significant other, biological children or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.

On a typical weekday, how many hours do you spend directly caring for your child/children in your household (biological or non-biological), another family members' child/children, and/or for an aging family member? If you do not care for others, keep the scale at *0*, otherwise set scale to how many hours.



Page Break

End of Block: Hours helping others

Start of Block: Family support money

For this survey, family members are your spouse or significant other, biological children or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.

Through Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, and not including your spouse (if you have one), approximately how much money did your family or family members give you to help pay for any of your *educational expenses* and your *living expenses*?

Educational expenses include tuition, course fees, books, supplies (computer, paper, backpack, etc.), and tutors.
Living expenses include food, rent, utility bills, cell phone bill, internet, clothing, insurance, medical expenses, and etc.

Amount in Dollars (10,000=10,000 or more)

0 1000200030004000500060007000800090010000

Page Break

End of Block: Family support money

Start of Block: Peers Support money

Through Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, and not including your spouse or significant other, if you have one, approximately how much money did your friends give you to help pay for any of your *educational expenses* and your *living expenses*?

Educational expenses include tuition, course fees, books, supplies (computer, paper, backpack, etc.), and tutors.
Living expenses include food, rent, utility bills, cell phone bill, internet, clothing, insurance, medical expenses, and etc.

Amount in Dollars (10,000=10,000 or more)

0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 450 500 550 600 650 700 750 800 850 900 950 1000
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Page Break

End of Block: Peers Support money

Start of Block: Living ex. for family/peer

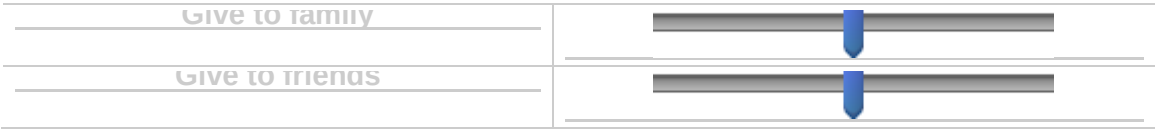
Please respond to the following question that relates to family members and friends. *For this survey, family members are your spouse or significant other, biological children or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.*

Through Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 semesters, and not including your spouse or significant other, if you have one, approximately how much money did you give to your family and your friends to help pay for their living expenses?

Living expenses include food, rent, utility bills, cell phone bill, internet, clothing, insurance, medical expenses, and etc.

Amount in Dollars (10,000=10,000 or more)

0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 450 500 550 600 650 700 750 800 850 900 950 1000
0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0



Page Break

Please respond to the following statements that relate to family members and friends. *For this survey, family members are your spouse or significant other, biological children or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.*

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
The level of support that my family needs from me has increased since the outbreak of COVID-19.	○	○	○	○	○
The level of support that I need from my family has increased since the outbreak of COVID-19.	○	○	○	○	○
The level of support that my friends needs form me has increased since the outbreak of COVID-19.	○	○	○	○	○
The level of support that I need form my friends has increased since the outbreak of COVID-19.	○	○	○	○	○

Display This Question:

If How many biological children do you have? How many children live in your household (include both... [Biological children] >= 1

And How many biological children do you have? How many children live in your household (include both... [Children who live in your household] >= 1

Please respond to the following statements that relate to family members. *For this survey, family members are your spouse or significant other, biological children or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.*

	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	None of them
How many of your family members can watch your children so you can do coursework?	○	○	○	○
How many of your family members can watch your children so you can go to class?	○	○	○	○
How many of your family members can watch your children on short notice (for example, if your normal child care falls through)?	○	○	○	○
How many of your family members can help your children with virtual school if you are unavailable to help them?	○	○	○	○

Display This Question:

If How many biological children do you have? How many children live in your household (include both... [Biological children] >= 1

Or How many biological children do you have? How many children live in your household (include both... [Children who live in your household] >= 1

Please respond to the following statements that relate to friends.

	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	None of them
How many of your friends can watch your children so you can do coursework?	○	○	○	○
How many of your friends can watch your children so you can go to class?	○	○	○	○
How many of your friends can watch your children on short notice (for example, if your normal child care falls through)?	○	○	○	○
How many of your friends can help your children with virtual school if you are unavailable to help them?	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Please respond to the following statements that relate to family members. *For this survey, family members are your spouse or significant other, biological children or stepchildren, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents.*	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	None of them	Does not apply
How many family members can give you a ride to class if needed?	○	○	○	○	○
How many family members can help you with your coursework?	○	○	○	○	○
How many family members encouraged you to go to college?	○	○	○	○	○
How many family members have encouraged you to stay in college?	○	○	○	○	○
How many family members can you depend on to help you out on short notice?	○	○	○	○	○
How many of your family members live within 30 minutes from you?	○	○	○	○	○
How many family members live within an hour from you?	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Please respond to the following statements that relate to friends.

	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	None of them	Does not apply
How many friends can give you a ride to class if needed?	○	○	○	○	○
How many friends can help you with your coursework?	○	○	○	○	○
How many friends encouraged you to go to college?	○	○	○	○	○
How many friends encouraged you to stay in college?	○	○	○	○	○
How many friends can you depend on to help you out on short notice?	○	○	○	○	○
How many of your friends live within 30 minutes from you?	○	○	○	○	○
How many friends live within an hour of you?	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Family support college

APPENDIX D

Emails Sent to Students

Initial Email

Hello [redacted]

My name is Jackie Travis. I am a Master's student in the Department of Sociology and Criminology here at WKU working on my thesis research. You have been personally selected to participate in a short survey about your experiences with family and school during the pandemic. I know this is a really busy time of year but I would appreciate if you could take 5-10 minutes to complete the survey. This research will not only help me graduate but will also help the university understand the experiences of students and hopefully find ways to help students. The consent document is the first page of the survey. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. Thank you for your time, Anna!

Follow this link to the Survey:

Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
https://wku.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6G3sPnCbKj1pbRb?
Q_DL=cvsdeBSd083zvsR_6G3sPnCbKj1pbRb_MLRP_bmx7yU17JyDEeto&Q_CHL=email

Good luck with finals!
-Jackie Travis
jacklyn.travis633@topper.wku.edu
Follow the link to opt out of future emails:
Click here to unsubscribe

First Follow-up Email

Hi again [redacted]

I just wanted to send a quick reminder about this survey on family responsibilities and school during the pandemic. I'd love to have your input. Please take 5-10 minutes to complete this important survey! Thank you so much for your time.

-Jackie Travis
MA student in Sociology at WKU

Follow this link to the Survey:

Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
https://wku.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6G3sPnCbKj1pbRb?
Q_DL=4c2kxWjF74STBio_6G3sPnCbKj1pbRb_MLRP_0oEY5LJqdyL9CEm&Q_CHL=email

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:
Click here to unsubscribe

Final Follow-up Email

Hey [redacted]

It is Jackie again. I just wanted to let you know that my survey about family responsibilities and school during the pandemic will close at **5:00 pm (CT) Sunday, May 2nd.** I really would like to know what you have experienced while going to school during the pandemic. I understand it has been a crazy year, I know it has been for me too. It should only take 5-10 minutes and if you have already started the survey, you can pick up where you left off. Thank you so much for your time and I hope you have a great summer!

-Jackie Travis
MA student in Sociology at WKU

Follow this link to the Survey:
Take the Survey

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
https://wku.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6G3sPnCbKj1pbRb?Q_DL=4c2kxWjF74STBio_6G3sPnCbKj1pbRb_MLRP_6nbu3A7kwTN0JFQ&Q_CHL=email

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:
Click here to unsubscribe