

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Students on the College Student Reasons for Living Inventory

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Research addressing maladaptive traits of individuals considering suicide has been conducted for many years. It was only recently that an inventory was written examining positive, life-maintaining traits of these individuals or their reasons for living. The College Student Reasons for Living Inventory (CSRLI) was written in response to questions concerning the usefulness of the original questionnaire with the college population. However, the authors of the CSRLI did not delineate between nontraditional college students and traditional students and did not examine gender as a variable of interest. The purpose of the present research project was to provide preliminary data in this area, examining the CSRLI's usefulness in a clinical setting. More specifically, the present study examined the reasons for living and not committing suicide reported by both male and female, traditional and nontraditional college students. The data

indicated that neither gender nor student status affected the students' reasons for living (i.e., no significant differences were found for the main effects of gender or type of student on the total CSRLI score). Additionally, only one of the six CSRLI subscales was found to be significant for gender, while none of the subscales were significant for type of student. The results were discussed and possible reasons for their occurrence given. Implications for future research were also provided.

A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL
COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THE COLLEGE STUDENT REASONS FOR LIVING
INVENTORY

A Thesis

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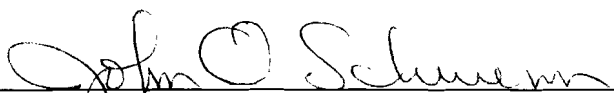
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Suicide is undeniably a major health concern in the United States. Over 35,000 persons kill themselves each year in the United States (Vital Statistics of the United States, 1994), and it is estimated that 50,000 to 200,000 persons a year attempt suicide (Linehan, Goodstein, Neilsen, & Chiles, 1983).

Certain demographic variables are known to have an impact on suicide in the general population. Schwartz and Reifler (1988) suggested that one variable, and possibly the most crucial variable, is gender. Men are more successful at suicide than women at a rate of five to one (Public Health Service, 1987); yet, women attempt suicide one and one-half to three times more often than men (Fremouw, de Perczel, & Ellis, 1990).

A second major demographic variable affecting suicide is age. Risk of suicide increases with age; however, suicide as a cause of death reaches its peak during adolescence and early adulthood (Range, 1993). Suicide completion ranks as the second leading cause of death for persons ages 15 through 24 years (Brent & Kolko, 1992). Further, suicide was the second leading cause of death among college students in 1980 (Silver, Goldstein, & Silver, 1984). It has also been suggested that suicide rates for college-age individuals are higher for

those who attend college than for those who do not attend college (Carson & Johnson, 1985).

The statistics on college-age suicides are distressing. Although there is an abundance of research examining personality characteristics of traditional-aged college students, nontraditional college students have been a neglected population. Nontraditional college students are defined in the literature as students who are 25 years or older; traditional students are defined as being 18 to 24 years old. The changing demographics of the college campus, which features a steady decrease in traditional college students and a steady increase in nontraditional students (Hruby, 1985), pose new questions for suicide researchers.

Historically, suicidology research has focused on the determinants of suicide behavior and identification of characteristics of suicidal persons. Some of these characteristics include hopeless (Minkoff, Bergman, Beck, & Beck, 1973), depression (Leonard, 1973), social desirability (Linehan & Nielsen, 1981) and attributional style (Priester & Clum, 1992). While most of this research has focused on maladaptive characteristics of suicidal ideators, a recent shift in studying adaptive characteristics has begun. Linehan et al. (1983) were among the first to address the question of coping strategies for not contemplating suicide used by persons in both the general and

psychiatric populations. Westefeld, Cardin, and Deaton (1992) expanded on this research to address the coping mechanisms used by college students. Adaptive characteristics, or reasons for living, were examined using a college age sample. However, these researchers failed to assess possible gender differences as well as delineate between nontraditional and traditional students in their cognitive belief systems or reasons for living.

The purpose of the present research was to provide preliminary data in this area of suicide research. More specifically, traditional and nontraditional students of both sexes were evaluated using the College Student Reasons For Living Inventory (CSRLI; Westefeld et al., 1992). The two questions addressed were: a) do male and female college students differ in their reasons for living, and b) do traditional and nontraditional students have different reasons for living?

The practical significance of this study is unequivocal. Knowledge of gender and student differences or similarities among the college population regarding their reasons for staying alive and not committing suicide would help in assessing suicide risk for this population. Furthermore, the ratings of individual items on the scale would be helpful to a counselor in building on the adaptive characteristics of students previously deemed at risk for suicide. A

clear understanding of similarities or differences among men and women and traditional and nontraditional college student's reasons for living is necessary in order to use the CSRLI for therapeutic purposes.

Literature Review

Gender

Research on the demographic variables affecting suicide is abundant in the literature. Gender is one such variable known to affect the suicide rate. Among all ages, men are more successful at committing suicide than women (Schwartz & Reifler, 1988). Further, in 1990 the suicide rate for white males ages 20 to 24 years old was 26.8 per 100,000, nearly four times the rate of women of the same race and age (Vital Statistics of the United States, 1994).

In a 1992 study by Rich, Kirkpatrick-Smith, Bonner, and Jans, gender differences among adolescents were examined in relation to suicidal ideation, depression, loneliness, life stress, and reasons for living. Of the 613 subjects in the study, ages 14-19, male adolescents were found to have significantly greater feelings of loneliness in comparison to female adolescents on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). Female adolescents, however, were found to be significantly more depressed on the Self-Rating Depression Scale (Zung, 1965), and had more thoughts of suicide than

did male adolescents. Scores on the Reasons for Living Inventory (Linehan et al., 1983), indicated female adolescents had a greater fear of death and injury than did male adolescents, while male adolescents had a greater fear of social disapproval.

Rich et al. (1992) proposed reasons for the greater number of attempted versus completed suicides among women. These researchers proposed that because women are more depressed they are more likely than men to make an attempt at suicide. However, because of their greater fear of injury and death, women may choose less violent means than men.

Similarly, Rosenthal (1981) proposed a "fear of cowardice" hypothesis for explaining the higher rates of suicide among males in the adolescent population. He posed that if males are going to attempt suicide, they are more likely to make a successful attempt to avoid being viewed as weak or as cowards by their peers.

Gender difference research on various personality characteristics has been documented in thousands of studies. For example, research studying self-esteem in college students suggests men have higher self-esteem than do women (Davis, Bremer, Anderson, & Tramill, 1983). In contrast, research on anxiety suggests that women have a higher level of manifest anxiety than do men (Tramill, Kleinhammer-Tramill, Davis, Parks, & Alexander,

1984). In a study by Reynolds (1991), significant correlations were found among measures of depression, hopelessness, anxiety, self-esteem and adult suicidal ideation. Given the vast amount of literature supporting various gender differences in certain personality characteristics and the marked differences in numbers of attempted and committed suicides among the sexes, the present study wished to examine possible gender differences in relation to adaptive characteristics.

Age

Age is another crucial variable affecting the suicide rate. Previous research has indicated that suicidal risk increases with age (Range, 1993). However, in the past 40 years, suicide rates among the elderly have decreased, while youth suicide rates have increased (McIntosh, 1987). Interestingly, suicide in the 20-to-24-year-old and 25-to-34-year-old age groups has steadily risen since 1950 (Vital Statistics of the United States, 1994). Suicide rates among young persons differ by age, as well. Young persons (ages 20-24) had approximately twice the number of suicides as teenagers from 1970 to 1980 (Centers for Disease Control, 1986).

Various factors have been listed as possible reasons for the increasing rate of youth suicide. One researcher listed multiple factors influencing the youth suicide rate including "family

disorganization, drug and alcohol abuse, social alienation, intense and premature interpersonal relationships, pressures related to the population dynamics of the "baby boom" generation, unemployment among youth, and high social expectations and achievement demands" (Maris, 1985; cited in Nelson, Farberow, & Litman, 1988, p. 34).

Student Status

Attending a college or university seems to be another demographic variable related to suicide. It has been estimated that the college student suicide rate is 50% higher than that of the general population (Craig & Senter, 1972; Westefeld & Pattillo, 1987). Furthermore, the suicide rate among college students has been found to be significantly higher than that of individuals of the same age who are not attending college (Mishara, Baker, & Mishara, 1976).

There is considerable disagreement in the literature concerning the relationship of being a college student and suicidal behavior. In a study by Hoffer (1972), it was suggested that the college environment "pulls students with problems closer to death" (p. 9). However, Bernard and Bernard (1982) stated "it may be an error in judgment to assume that it is something inherent in the status of colleges that prompts this [suicidal] behavior" (p. 413). Baechler (1979), suggested that inclinations toward suicide are not

created by student status, but the college environment seems to intensify the problems.

Some of the disagreement among the researchers concerning student status may be due to the problems found in the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of data kept by university officials concerning student suicides. Westefeld and Pattillo (1987) suggest the rates of college suicides may be misleading due to the inaccuracy or lack of student suicide records kept by the schools. Mishara et al. (1976) suggest that college administrators may intentionally omit the numbers of suicides as attempts to spare the family or school. Record keepers may unintentionally omit data when an accident or injury is not recognized as a suicide.

The college environment places students under high levels of stress regarding academic challenges, time management, peer pressures, and financial burdens. Previous research indicates suicide attempters report four times as many negative life events in the six months before their attempt than do persons in the normal population (Paykel, Prusoff, & Myers, 1975). In 1982, Schotte and Clum tested the theory that life stress interacts with difficulty in problem solving to increase the probability of attempting or committing suicide. These researchers hypothesized that if placed under high levels of stress, persons who have difficulty in effective

problem solving will become helpless or hopeless under these circumstances. Based on research correlating hopelessness with suicidal intent (Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1979), the researchers hypothesized that these same individuals will be placed at a heightened risk for suicidal behavior. The study sampled 175 college students to test these hypotheses. The results indicated that stress was significantly related to both the level of depression and the level of hopelessness, and differentiated high suicide ideators from persons not thinking of committing suicide.

Nontraditional College Students

While psychological research using college students has been conducted for many years, studies comparing and contrasting personality characteristics of traditional and nontraditional college students are lacking. The changing demographics of the college population identifies nontraditional students as a group of potential research interest.

Reports show a decline in the enrollment of traditional-aged students with a steady increase in the enrollment of nontraditionals (Hruby, 1985). In 1987, it was estimated that 32.7% of all men enrolled as undergraduates were age 25 or older and 27.8% of all female college students were over the age of 24 (U. S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1987). It

is projected that by the year 2000 approximately 50% of the male college students and 23% of the female college population will be 25 years of age or older (U. S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1989).

Kasworm (1982) suggested that nontraditional students differ from traditional students in their psychological, psychosocial, and behavioral needs. Nontraditional students must cope with additional stressors outside the classroom that many of their traditional-aged peers do not. For example, many nontraditional students attempt to balance the roles of spouse, parent and full-time employee as well as student. Gender differences are also seen in nontraditional students. Rogers (1981) stated that nontraditional women face such problems as "1) an undue amount of self-inflicted pressure; 2) test anxiety; and 3) a lack of emotional and/or physical support from other family members" (pp. 1-2).

These additional burdens may place nontraditional students at a greater risk for suicide. Therefore, this population was thought to merit study in the present research project.

Reasons For Living

Prediction and prevention of suicide have been studied extensively in the literature (Dyck, 1991; Kralik & Danforth, 1992; Priester & Clum, 1992; Schwartz & Reifler, 1988; Steede & Range,

1989; Strosahl, Chiles, & Linehan, 1984). Most of the work, however, has been aimed at identifying maladaptive traits of suicidal persons. The recent growth in cognitive and cognitive-behavioral theories has sparked interest in assessing the adaptive cognitive characteristics that might distinguish suicidal persons from individuals not considering suicide (Ellis & Ratliff, 1986).

Linehan et al. (1983) were among the first to hypothesize that nonsuicidal persons have different beliefs and expectations than do suicidal individuals. These researchers asked 431 subjects in the general population to list reasons why they would not kill themselves if the thought were to cross their minds. Factor analysis reduced the 343 generated responses to 48 statements, later named the Reasons For Living Inventory (RFL; Linehan et al., 1983).

After subsequent analysis, six distinct clusters of reasons for living emerged: (a) Survival and Coping Beliefs; (b) Responsibility to Family; (c) Child-Related Concerns; (d) Fear of Suicide; (e) Fear of Social Disapproval; and (f) Moral Objections related to suicide. A second study by Linehan and her colleagues (1983) involved the administration of the newly formed RFL to 197 subjects in the general population and 175 subjects in inpatient psychiatric units.

The Linehan et al. (1983) study found that in both the general and clinical adult populations, individuals reporting prior suicidal

behavior also reported fewer important reasons for living when considering suicide than persons with no such history. Additional research has found Linehan's RFL reliable and effective in distinguishing suicide ideators from nonideators (Osman, Gregg, Osman, & Jones, 1992; Osman et al., 1993; Range, Hall & Meyers, 1993).

While the RFL may be reliable and valid for adults, it is not clear if the scale is appropriate for other age groups. Linehan's subject pool did not differentiate between adolescents, young adults and the adult population. Maris (1985) cautioned that "there are differences in characteristics critical to suicidality between different age populations" (cited in Kralik and Danforth, 1992, p. 168).

College Students Reasons for Living

Westefeld et al. (1992) suggested "college students constitute a distinctive population due to the developmental characteristics of their age group and the unique stressors that they are subject to as a result of their involvement in the university setting" (p. 444). These researcher's objective was to develop a college student version of the RFL. Westefeld et al. (1992) hypothesized that college students would generate unique reasons for staying alive, representing their unique stage of life.

Westefeld et al. (1992) used the same method that Linehan

et al. (1983) used in generating reasons for living, with the exception that the Westefeld study included only college students as subjects. One hundred and twenty-five students were asked to list reasons why you would not commit suicide even if the thought were to cross your mind. Factor analysis reduced the 271 obtained responses to 46 items, producing the College Student Reasons For Living Inventory (CSRLI; Westefeld, Cardin, and Deaton, 1992). Six factors emerged from the factor analysis: (a) Survival and Coping Beliefs; (b) College and Future-Related Concerns; (c) Moral Objections; (d) Responsibility to Friends and Family; (e) Fear of Suicide; and (f) Fear of Social Disapproval. Reliability estimates for the 6 factors ranged from .639 for Fear of Social Disapproval to .864 for Survival and Coping Beliefs.

Differences in reasons for staying alive generated by the college population included the College and Future-Related Concerns subscale, a scale that deals with issues specifically related to college-aged individuals. Further, while Linehan's (1983) study included a Responsibility to Family subscale, the CSRLI produced a Responsibility to Friends and Family scale. Westefeld and his colleagues (1992) interpreted this to mean that friends play an important role for college students. Also, the CSRLI did not generate a separate scale for child-related concerns. The authors suggest

child-related concerns are not as prevalent for college students as there are few 18-to-24-year-old parents.

Two major weaknesses are found in the Westefeld et al. (1992) study. First, no mention of age range, mean age or demographic information is included in this study. Therefore, nontraditional students may or may not have been included in their subject pool. Second, gender differences were not examined. Given the vast amount of literature reflecting gender differences in various personality characteristics and the marked disparity in the numbers of attempted versus committed suicides among men and women, the failure to include gender as a variable of interest is viewed as a weakness in the Westefeld study.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present research project was to examine traditional and nontraditional college students reasons for living and to examine possible gender differences involved. For the CSRLI to be useful in a therapeutic relationship, it is necessary to have some preliminary data concerning traditional and nontraditional differences or similarities on their respective reasons for living. This information may be used in the future in order to build on or strengthen the adaptive characteristics of students deemed at risk for suicide.

CHAPTER 2

Method

Participants

The participants were volunteers from lower division psychology classes during the spring and summer terms at a midwestern, regional, state university, having an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 5,000 students. Nontraditional students, defined by the university as 25 years old or older, represented 19% of the student body within the university's total population in the fall semester of 1993. With the aim of reflecting the current practice of going beyond the age-based definition for "nontraditional student" (Roberts, Criswell, Schneider, Fevurly, & Davis, 1994), this study used a different set of criteria for defining nontraditional.

Students were considered nontraditional if they were 25 years or older, if they had children or if they met both these criteria. Traditional students were defined as any student not meeting the nontraditional definition. Therefore, the number of participants in each group in this study did not necessarily reflect the university's reported percentages of traditional and nontraditional students.

The traditional student group consisted of 70 male undergraduates and 80 female undergraduates. The nontraditional

student group consisted of 22 male undergraduates and 41 female undergraduates. Of the nontraditional group, 17 students met the definition by age only, 15 students by parent status only, and 31 met the criteria for nontraditional by being both 25 years or older and parents. The average age for the traditional students was 19.76, with a range of 18-24. For nontraditional students the average age was 30.68, with a range of 18-52.

Instrumentation

The instruments employed consisted of an informed consent form (see Appendix A), a demographic form (see Appendix B), and the College Student Reasons for Living Inventory (CSRLI; Westefeld et al., 1992; see Appendix C). The CSRLI examines college student's reasons for not committing suicide (i. e., reasons for living). The instrument consists of 46 items that are rated on a 6-point Likert type scale, with 1 corresponding to "not at all important" (as a reason for not killing myself) and 6 corresponding to "extremely important" (as a reason for not killing myself). More specifically, the CSRLI examines a student's reasons for living in the 6 subscales listed below (with example items included):

a) SURVIVAL AND COPING BELIEFS "I have a lot of things going for me"

- b) COLLEGE AND FUTURE RELATED CONCERNS "I want to put my college degree to good use"
- c) MORAL OBJECTIONS "It is against my religious beliefs to commit suicide"
- d) RESPONSIBILITY TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY "I would not want to disappoint my family"
- e) FEAR OF SUICIDE "I'm scared of the pain that I would experience"
- f) FEAR OF SOCIAL DISAPPROVAL "I would be afraid of what others might think."

Reliability estimates for the 6 factors range from .639 to .864 (Westefeld, et al.,1992). The questionnaire was normed on a sample of 208 college students.

The demographic form requested personal information concerning the student's gender, age, classification, marital status, and number of children. To insure confidentiality, the students were instructed not to place their names on any of the materials within the questionnaire booklet (which included the demographic form and the CSRLI). However, they were asked to sign and return the informed consent forms.

Procedures

Test administration took place during a regularly scheduled class hour. Each student was given an informed consent form and

instructed to read the printed directions on the consent form. The students who were willing to participate signed the consent form and returned it to the experimenter. Those students unwilling to participate were thanked for their time and dismissed. After all consent forms had been returned, the participants were given a questionnaire booklet that included a demographic form on page one, directions for the CSRLI on page two, and the CSRLI on pages three and four. The experimenter instructed the participants to read the printed directions on the demographic form, complete the form, and wait for further instructions. After all demographic forms had been completed, the examiner read aloud the directions for the CSRLI. The participants were instructed to silently read the directions with the experimenter. The participants were informed that the booklets would be collected when all students had finished.

All participants were asked not to discuss the questionnaire with students from other classes so to avoid contamination of the research. The participants were thanked for their time and dismissed. All comments from the experimenter were delivered via a prepared script. Although no time limit was imposed, the testing procedure required approximately 15-20 minutes for total administration.

CHAPTER 3

Results

Scores on the six subscales were created by summing the unit weighted responses to the items identifying the six factors. A total CSRLI score was produced by summing the six subscale scores. In order to determine if the three groups of subjects meeting the criteria for nontraditional student status (i. e., age only, parent status only or both age and parent) were homogeneous, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the total CSRLI scores. As the analysis indicated that the three groups did not differ significantly, $F(2, 60) = .771$, $p = 1.00$, they were pooled and hereafter are referred to as the nontraditional student group.

A 2 x 2 ANOVA was employed with gender (male/female) and type of student (traditional/nontraditional) as the independent variables and total CSRLI score as the dependent measure. Results of this analysis revealed nonsignificance for gender, $F(1, 209) = 3.37$, $p = .068$, type of student, $F(1, 209) = 1.08$, $p = .299$, and gender x type of student interaction, $F(1, 209) = .13$, $p = .717$. Although no significant differences were found, it is noteworthy that the traditional female students had the highest total CSRLI scores ($M = 25.29$) and the male nontraditional students scored lowest ($M = 23.65$) on this measure. A comparison of the mean total CSRLI

scores for the student participants is shown in Table 1.

Next, the data from the six CSRLI subscales were analyzed using a three factor repeated measures ANOVA with 2 between subject factors (gender and type of student) and one within factor (subscales). Significance was found for the within subject effect of subscale, $F(5, 1045) = 134.35, p = .0001$. In order to determine where the differences occurred, a post-hoc Newman-Keuls test was employed. Results of this analysis indicated that scores on the Survival and Coping Beliefs, Responsibility to Friends and Family, College and Future Related Concerns, and Moral Objections subscales differed significantly from the Fear of Suicide and Fear of Social Disapproval subscales at the $p < .05$ level of significance. All other comparisons were nonsignificant. Table 2 lists the mean subscale scores for the entire sample of college student participants.

The repeated measures ANOVA also revealed significance for the gender x subscale interaction, $F(5, 1045) = 2.54, p = .027$. To probe the interaction a 2 x 2 ANOVA, incorporating gender and type of student as factors, was performed on each of the six subscales. Significance was found only on the Responsibility to Friends and Family scale, $F(1, 209) = 10.48, p = .001$, where females placed significantly more importance on this scale as a reason for living than did the males. The means and standard deviations for each of the

Table 1

Comparison of Mean Total CSRLI Scores for College StudentParticipantsType of Student

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Traditional</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Nontraditional</u>	<u>n</u>
Male	24.04	70	23.65	22
Female	25.29	80	24.49	41

Note. Maximum score = 36.0. Higher numbers indicate stronger reasons for living.

Table 2

Comparison of Mean Subscale Scores for College Student Participants

<u>Subscale</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>
Survival and coping beliefs	4.985	0.838
College and future concerns	4.595	0.895
Moral objections	4.163	1.294
Responsibility to friends & family	4.664	0.942
Fear of suicide	3.045	1.057
Fear of social disapproval	3.194	0.903

Note. Maximum score = 6.0. Higher numbers indicate stronger reasons for living.

subscales are listed in Table 3. All other subscales were nonsignificant for gender, type of student, and the interaction of the two factors.

Table 3

Comparison of Mean Subscale Scores for Traditional and
Nontraditional College Students

Scale	Mean	SD
Survival and Coping Beliefs		
Male		
Traditional	4.847	0.873
Nontraditional	4.714	0.719
Female		
Traditional	4.990	0.871
Nontraditional	4.890	0.776
College and Future Concerns		
Male		
Traditional	4.641	0.975
Nontraditional	4.364	0.861
Female		
Traditional	4.682	0.870
Nontraditional	4.471	0.814
Moral Objections		
Male		
Traditional	3.194	1.396
Nontraditional	4.191	1.295
Female		
Traditional	4.344	1.182
Nontraditional	4.222	1.318
Responsibility to Friends & Family		
Male		
Traditional	4.481	1.071

Table 3 Continued

Scale	Mean	SD
Responsibility to Friends & Family		
Male		
Nontraditional	4.241	0.888
Female		
Traditional	4.891	0.875
Nontraditional	4.759	0.731
Fear of Suicide		
Male		
Traditional	2.950	1.048
Nontraditional	2.736	1.185
Female		
Traditional	3.210	1.063
Nontraditional	3.051	0.967
Fear of Social Disapproval		
Male		
Traditional	3.206	1.005
Nontraditional	3.409	0.782
Female		
Traditional	3.172	0.864
Nontraditional	3.102	0.865

Note. Maximum score = 6.0. Higher numbers indicate stronger reasons for living.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The purpose of this research project was to examine similarities and/or differences between male and female traditional and nontraditional college students on their reasons for not committing suicide using the CSRLI. Since little research has been conducted using the CSRLI, the conclusions drawn are only speculative in nature.

Type of Student

Results of the study indicated that traditional and nontraditional college students do not differ from each other in their life maintaining beliefs or reasons for living. The data corroborate Epstein's (1987) belief that "there is insufficient data to suggest that being older or younger necessarily set people apart as adult learners" (p. 15). It is noteworthy that, although the differences were minimal and nonsignificant, the traditional group scored higher than the nontraditional group on the following four scales: a) Survival and Coping Beliefs, b) College and Future-related Concerns, c) Responsibility to Friends and Family and d) Fear of Suicide. These findings are more supportive of the research by Kasworm (1982), Prager (1983), and Rogers (1981) that suggest nontraditional students have differing personal needs when compared to traditional

students. The disparity between the present and previous results may be due in part to definitional problems faced in categorizing nontraditional students. Future research on nontraditional students might avoid the definitional difficulties by considering the maturity level of the student rather than various individual demographic (e. g., age or parental status) involved.

Gender

Results of the gender analysis also revealed that men and women do not differ in their overall reasons for living. As stated in the introduction, men are committing suicide at an alarming rate, yet women are attempting suicide more frequently than men (Public Health Service, 1987). It seems many men and women view suicide as a viable alternative to life's problems and differ not in their overall reasons for living but in the way they choose to end their life.

One area that men and women did differ was on the Responsibility to Friends and Family subscale. The women placed significantly more importance on this domain as a reason for not committing suicide than did the men. Shulman (1993) examined the role of close relationships (both peers and family) on coping behaviors of male and female adolescents. Shulman found that female adolescents placed more importance on the support that peers and family provide in times of stress than did male

adolescents. Perhaps since women look to the support of family and friends in times of stress and given the traditional sex-role socialization where women are taught to rely on others and men are taught to be strong and independent, women have a stronger sense of responsibility or obligation not to disappoint these individuals.

While the differences were minimal and nonsignificant, it is interesting to note that the men scored lower than the women on every scale of the CSRLI with the exception of the Fear of Social Disapproval subscale. Higher male fear of social disapproval scores was also found by Rich et al. (1992) using the original Reasons for Living Inventory. However in the Rich et al. study strong gender differences were found across several of the RFL subscales. The lack of significant differences revealed in the present project may be more accurate findings given previous research questioning the use of the RFL with the college population. Additionally, the results may indicate that men and women are becoming more androgynous in their views.

Future Use of the CSRLI

In using the CSRLI for therapeutic purposes, the data indicate that for women a counselor might use her sense of responsibility to friends and family as a strong deterrent to suicide. For college students in general this study suggests that survival and coping

beliefs, college and future-related concerns, moral objections and responsibility to friends and family are important areas to address in keeping a suicidal person alive. Although many similarities were found among men and women, traditional and nontraditional students on their life maintaining beliefs, the results of this project indicate that no one variable is sufficient as an intervention when working with suicidal individuals. Careful assessment of the needs of each individual should be the number one priority.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Participation Consent Letter

Please read this consent form. If you have any questions ask the experimenter and s/he will answer the question.

You are invited to participate in a study investigating the use of the College Student Reasons For Living Inventory with Emporia State University students. The time to take the questionnaire will be approximately 15 minutes.

Information obtained in this study will be identified only by code number. Your answers as well as any identifying data will remain confidential.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you wish to terminate your participation, you are welcome to do so at any point in the study. Termination of participation will have no bearing on your class standing. There is no risk of harm involved in completing the study.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, feel free to ask the experimenter.

Thank you for your participation.

I, _____, have read the above information and
 (please print name)
 have decided to participate. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should I choose to discontinue participation in this study.

(Signature of participant)

(date)

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE EMPORIA STATE
 UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

APPENDIX B

Demographic Information Form

INSTRUCTIONS: Please respond to the following questions and statements as honestly as possible. Fill in the blank or circle your selection directly on this survey.

1. What is your gender? male female

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your classification? FR SO JR SR GRAD

4. What is your marital status?
 single divorced separated married widowed

5. Do you have any children? yes no
 If yes, how many children do you have? _____

APPENDIX C

College Student Reasons For Living Inventory

DIRECTIONS

A survey was conducted to learn more about the reasons why college students do not kill themselves. The statements on the following pages represent the wide range of reasons that students gave.

Many people have thought of suicide at least once. Others have never considered it. Whether you have considered it or not, we are interested in the reasons you would have for not committing suicide **IF** the thought were to occur to you or **IF** someone were to suggest it to you.

We would like to know how important each of these statements would be to you at this time in your life as a reason for you to not kill yourself. Please rate this in the space at the left on each question.

Each reason can be rated from 1 (Not At All Important) to 6 (Extremely Important). If a reason does not apply to you or if you do not believe the statement is true, then it is not likely important and you should put a 1.

Please use the whole range of choice so as not to rate only at the middle (2,3,4,5) or only at the extremes (1,6).

In each space put a number to indicate the importance to you of each reason for not killing yourself.

1. Not At All Important (as a reason for not killing myself, or, does not apply to me).
2. Quite Unimportant.
3. Somewhat Unimportant.
4. Somewhat Important.
5. Quite Important.
6. Extremely Important (as a reason for not killing myself).

Even if you never have or firmly believe you never would seriously consider killing yourself, it is still important that you rate each reason. In this case, rate on the basis of why killing yourself is not or would never be an alternative for you.

1. Not At All Important (as a reason for not killing myself, or, does not apply to me).
2. Quite Unimportant.
3. Somewhat Unimportant.
4. Somewhat Important.
5. Quite Important.
6. Extremely Important (as a reason for not killing myself).

- _____ 1. Killing myself would show a lack of character
- _____ 2. I have my career to look forward to
- _____ 3. I would be afraid of what others might think
- _____ 4. I believe I have control over my life
- _____ 5. I would be hassled by my family/friends if I failed
- _____ 6. I love and respect myself
- _____ 7. I want people to have good/positive memories of me after I die
- _____ 8. My family might believe I didn't love them
- _____ 9. It is against my religious beliefs to commit suicide
- _____ 10. I want to have children
- _____ 11. I'd be afraid that if I failed I'd be left with a serious injury
- _____ 12. I believe that only God has the right to end life
- _____ 13. I want to contribute to society
- _____ 14. Others depend on me (family, children) and need me
- _____ 15. I wouldn't kill myself because of the values my parents taught me
- _____ 16. I am here for a purpose
- _____ 17. I want to see how people and the world will change in the future
- _____ 18. I have responsibility and commitment to my family
- _____ 19. I'm a coward and would not have the guts to do it
- _____ 20. I have confidence in my ability to deal with problems
- _____ 21. I've worked too hard to throw it all away now
- _____ 22. I would not want to disappoint my family
- _____ 23. I am looking forward to the future

INVENTORY CONTINUES

1. Not At All Important (as a reason for not killing myself, or, does not apply to me).
2. Quite Unimportant.
3. Somewhat Unimportant.
4. Somewhat Important.
5. Quite Important.
6. Extremely Important (as a reason for not killing myself).

- _____ 24. I consider it morally wrong
- _____ 25. I am too stable to kill myself
- _____ 26. I am too young to die
- _____ 27. It would cause a lot of guilt and pain for my friends
- _____ 28. I want to put my college degree to good use
- _____ 29. I believe I can cope with my problems
- _____ 30. I just don't think that things would ever get bad enough to kill myself
- _____ 31. I could not decide on where, when, or how to do it
- _____ 32. I would miss my family
- _____ 33. I want to live to see what potential I have
- _____ 34. Killing myself would be murder
- _____ 35. I would embarrass my college/university
- _____ 36. Killing myself would show that I'm a failure and cannot cope with everyday life
- _____ 37. I would miss my friends
- _____ 38. It would cause a lot of guilt and pain for my family
- _____ 39. I'm scared of the pain that I would experience
- _____ 40. I want to graduate from college
- _____ 41. I enjoy life
- _____ 42. I am happy
- _____ 43. I'd be afraid of trying it and failing
- _____ 44. I have a lot of positive things going for me
- _____ 45. College will enhance my future
- _____ 46. I want to succeed

TO: All Graduate Students Who Submit a Thesis or Research Problem/Project as Partial Fulfillment of The Requirements for an Advanced Degree

FROM: Emporia State University Graduate School

I, Elizabeth Noel Zak, hereby submit this thesis/report to Emporia State University as partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree. I agree the the Library of the University may make it available for use in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I further agree that quoting, photocopying, or other reproduction of this document is allowed for private study, scholarship (including teaching) and research purposes of a nonprofit nature. No copying which involves potential financial gain will be allowed without written permission of the author.

Elizabeth Zak
Signature of Author

September 15, 1994
Date

A Comparison of Traditional and Non-traditional College Students on the College Student Reasons for Living Inventory
Title of Thesis/Research Project

Doug Cooper
Signature of Graduate Office Staff Member

September 22, 1994
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