



5-2004

The Experiences of Undergraduate Reentry Collegiate Males During Times Of Perceived Psychological Stress

Elaine West-Anderson
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

West-Anderson, Elaine, "The Experiences of Undergraduate Reentry Collegiate Males During Times Of Perceived Psychological Stress. " PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2004.
https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/4579

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Elaine West-Anderson entitled "The Experiences of Undergraduate Reentry Collegiate Males During Times Of Perceived Psychological Stress." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Ralph Brockett, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

John Peters, Mary Ziegler, Glenn Graber

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Elaine West Anderson entitled "The Experiences of Undergraduate Reentry Collegiate Males During Times Of Perceived Psychological Stress." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

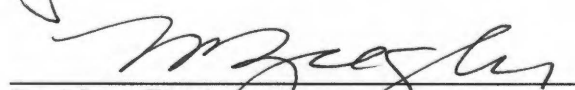


Dr. Ralph Brockett, Major Professor

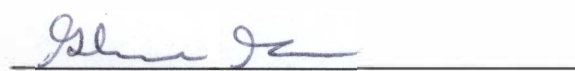
We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Dr. John Peters




Dr. Mary Ziegler



Dr. Glenn Graber

Accepted for the Council:



Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

**THE EXPERIENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE REENTRY COLLEGIATE
MALES DURING TIMES OF PERCEIVED PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS**

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Elaine West-Anderson

May, 2004

Thesis
2004b
W39

Copyright © 2004 by Elaine West Anderson
All rights reserved

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Greg Anderson who supplied the love, encouragement, and technology necessary to complete this work, to my mother, Nellie H. West, who encouraged, loved, pushed, and prodded me to continue the journey I began, and to the many friends who patiently lent their support during the years it took me to travel the road to my doctorate.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank all those who helped me complete my Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education. Many people contributed to my research and the completion of this dissertation. First, and foremost, I would like to thank the eight men who participated in this study and freely shared their experiences.

I would like to thank Dr. Ralph Brockett, my advisor, teacher, and ardent supporter during this long and sometimes arduous process. I am also grateful to Dr. John Peters, Dr. Mary Ziegler, and Dr. Glenn Graber, each of whom served on my doctoral committee and provided the guidance necessary to finalize this project.

My appreciation goes to Dr. Russ French and my co-workers in the Institute for Assessment and Evaluation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, for the flexibility to arrange my work schedule as needed. Without their understanding and support, this dissertation would not have been completed in the time allotted.

I would like to express appreciation to Dr. Maxine Thompson, Dean of Students, and her staff who were instrumental in assisting me with the beginning phase of my data collection.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my family and friends, whose suggestions and encouragement helped me to persevere on my journey to the doctorate. Without their prayers, words of encouragement, and patience, this work would not have been possible.

Abstract

While adult education can occur in a variety of settings, the number of adults returning to higher education has increased over the years. Because these adults tend to be older than the “typical” college student, they are frequently categorized as “nontraditional” students. Many nontraditional students struggle to manage the student role as it interacts with other life roles. Even though multiple roles provide the heterogeneity of experience that adult learners bring to higher education classrooms, they can add to the daily stress experienced by returning students.

Stress has been reported to be a major barrier faced by adults returning to school. However, at present very little is known about the ways in which adult learners navigate the challenges of coursework, especially during times of perceived stress. Stressors experienced by returning women have been explored though little has been done to investigate issues and concerns of men returning to academia in their adult years. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of nontraditional, reentry, undergraduate male students engaged in academic coursework during times of reported psychological stress. The research question that served as the guide for inquiry was: How do undergraduate, reentry male, college students navigate through academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress?

Men between the ages of 43 and 54 were interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique. Major themes that emerged were: 1) the

occurrence of stress while engaged in coursework; 2) perspectives on academic coursework; and 3) strategies utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework. Findings indicated that the stress experienced did not emanate so much from the academic coursework as it did from personal struggles, relationships and/or family obligations, and work demands. Several participants spoke to a difference in self over time with regard to engagement in collegiate studies as well as a difference in their perception of learning. Strategies utilized to navigate through academic coursework were activated to maximize the potential for academic success while not adding to the stress being experienced. Recommendations for theory and practice are offered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
One. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Question	5
Theoretical Influences	5
Significance of the Study	11
Limitations of the Study	12
Personal Statement	14
Definitions	15
Summary	16
Two. METHOD AND PROCEDURE	18
Study Site	18
Participants	20
Art	22
Sidney	23
Ed	24
Filbert	25
Mack	26
Sagan	27
Seke	28
Vincent	29
Summary of Participant Profiles	31
Research Design	32
Procedure	33
Data Collection	33

Chapter	Page
Data Analysis	38
Summary	40
Three. THE OCCURRENCE OF STRESS WHILE ENGAGED IN	
 COURSEWORK	42
Stress Experienced While Engaged in Academic Coursework	46
Stress of a Personal Nature	47
Stress Related to Relationships/Family Obligations	49
Stress Related to Work Demands	53
Summary	56
Four. PERSPECTIVES ON ACADEMIC COURSEWORK	58
Difference From Earlier Self	59
Learning As Understanding	69
Summary	76
Five. STRATEGIES UTILIZED TO FACILITATE ENGAGEMENT IN	
 ACADEMIC COURSEWORK	79
Self-Regulation	81
Goal-Setting and Planning	86
Seeking Social Assistance	90
Compartmentalization	95
Summary	97
Six. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	100
Summary of the Study	101
How Do Undergraduate Reentry Collegiate Males Navigate Through Academic Coursework, Especially During Times Of Perceived Psychological Stress?	103

Chapter	Page
Perceived Stress During Engagement in Academic Coursework	104
The nature of the stress during engagement in academic studies	104
Engagement in academic studies as a stress reliever	106
Summary of perceived stress during engagement in academic coursework	108
Strategies Utilized to Navigate Academic Coursework	108
Goal-setting and planning	109
Seeking social assistance	111
Compartmentalization	112
Summary of strategies utilized to navigate academic coursework	113
Additional Insights	114
Difference from earlier self with regard to academic coursework	115
Learning as understanding	118
Summary of additional insights	119
Recommendations	120
Recommendations for Theory and Research	121
Recommendations for Practice	124
Concluding Thoughts	125
REFERENCES	129
APPENDICES	139
Appendix A (Letter Of Invitation To Participate)	140
Appendix B (Willingness To Be Contacted Form)	141

Chapter	Page
Appendix C (Follow-up Participation Letter)	142
Appendix D (Interview Guide)	143
VITA	144

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Although it is difficult to determine just how many adults are engaged in adult education activities at any given point in time, the number of adults involved in organized, academic educational experiences has increased over the years (Merriam and Brockett, 1997; Dill and Henley, 1998). These adults are generally past the “typical” college age for students and are frequently categorized as “nontraditional” because they tend to be over twenty-five, usually fill multiple life roles, and have had at least one year between high school and college (Yarbrough and Schaffer, 1990; Dill and Henley, 1998).

For many nontraditional students, it can be a struggle to manage the various life roles in which they are engaged. Even though these multiple roles provide the heterogeneity of experience that adult learners bring to the academic arena, they can “also add to the everyday life stress of individuals as students and as adults” (McClary, 1990, p. 66). Adult students may find it difficult to allocate time for study outside the classroom, complete assignments, and participate in other activities that are part of the academic context as they attempt to meet the demands of other, non-student life roles.

The stress experienced in everyday life is hard to define. Bee and Bjorklund (2000) claim that “writing a definition [*of stress*] would be a simple task if there were agreement among stress researchers” (p. 333). According to them,

stress can be defined as the body's response to some somatic and/or mental demand placed on it. Stress can also be characterized in terms of events or environmental demands experienced by the person that require adaptation (Bee & Bjorklund, 2000). Pearlin (1989) writes that "many stressful experiences, it should be recognized, don't spring out of a vacuum but typically can be traced back to surrounding social structures and people's locations within them" (p. 242).

In addition to these views of stress, Bee and Bjorklund (2000) indicate that stress can also be examined from an interactionist approach, which focuses on the "person's perception of an event or on the extent to which some experience exceeds a person's ability to adapt" (p. 336). Stress, in this view, considers that what might be stressful to one person may not be to another. In this definition of stress, the individual's stress level may not necessarily be governed by the occurrence of a certain event or by a degree of quantifiable external or internal pressure, but by a sense of difficulty in meeting the demands of various experiences as they interact.

Much of the literature regarding nontraditional students has focused on the stressors experienced by women returning to college (Home, 1995; Pirnot, 1987; Droegkamp and Taylor, 1995; Flannery and Hayes, 1995; Home, 1998). However, little has been done to explore the issues and concerns of men who return to academia in their adult years (Dill and Henley, 1998; Widoff, 1999). According to Doyle (1995), men and women "learn to define and, consequently,

come to experience themselves and their worlds differently” (Doyle, 1995, p. 75). Just as women and men may differ in the way they experience their worlds they may also differ in how they relate to the psychological stress in their lives. It has been suggested that men and women vary not only in the sort of events or predicaments they define as stressful, but also in how they cope with stress-producing situations (Eisler and Skidmore, 1987; Eisler, Skidmore, and Ward, 1988). However, according to Widoff (1999), men and women seem to echo similar concerns in meeting academic, familial, and social demands. In her study of the reentry undergraduate male student experience, Widoff (1999) concludes that “time, family, money, and childcare needs and concerns resonates with similar concerns and themes in the literature on returning women students” (p. 22).

So, while themes and concerns associated with the return to college may be similar for men and women, they may be experienced in dissimilar ways as, for example, when learners are trying to navigate through academic coursework during a period of perceived psychological stress. The idea of perceived psychological stress being juxtaposed to engagement in academic studies provided the spark for the present study.

Statement of the Problem

The number of adults involved in organized, formal education has increased over the years (Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Dill & Henley, 1998). These students tend to have had a break in schooling between high school and college, are usually older than their traditional counterparts, and often contend with the student role while engaged in multiple other life roles. As adult learners interact simultaneously with the collegiate student role and various other life roles, they may experience competing demands and what they perceive to be psychological stress. Stress has been reported by some researchers (Flannery, 1985) to be the most severe of all the major barriers faced by adults returning to school after an interruption in their schooling. Other authors (Dill & Henley, 1998) indicate that little research has been conducted concerning stress and returning nontraditional collegiate students.

While there is a reported lack of data related to perceived stress and nontraditional adult learners, there is an even greater lack of data regarding nontraditional male students (Dill and Henley, 1998; Widoff, 1999). Although some studies include men in their sample, very few have dealt specifically with the experiences of nontraditional, male students (Widoff, 1999). Therefore, the problem around which this study revolved was the need to better understand the experiences of nontraditional, male, college students, especially during times of perceived psychological stress.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the problem stated in the previous section, this study was designed to add to the limited information that currently exists regarding the academic educational experience of nontraditional, male, reentry college students during times of perceived psychological stress. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of reentry, collegiate men who report the occurrence of psychological stress at some time during their academic coursework, with emphasis on how it is that participants navigated through their academic studies, especially during times of reported stress.

Research Question

The research question that served as the guide for inquiry is: How do undergraduate, reentry male, college students navigate through their academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress?

Theoretical Influences

The theoretical support for this study comes from two areas of previous inquiry: the works of McClusky (1963) and Dill and Henley (1998). McClusky (1963) formulated the theory of power-load-margin as a way to better understand

the lives of adults in relation to the demands required of them. Dill and Henley (1998) explored differences in how traditional and nontraditional students perceive stressful events provide the primary theoretical influences. It is the work of these researchers that provides the frame that surrounds this study.

McClusky (1963), in his theory of power-load-margin, considered the load that one carries to be the result of internal and external demands or pressures experienced by the person during the course of everyday living. External demands relate to the responsibilities of everyday life, such as those associated with family, career, and/or socio-economic status. Internal pressures relate to the individual's self-concept, expectations, and goals.

Power "consists of the resources that a person can command in coping with the load" (Main, 1979, p. 22). The power necessary to cope with the load an individual carries comes from a variety of resources, both internal and external to the person. External resources may include the family support system as well as financial and social capabilities while internal resources likely involve a bank of acquired skills and experiences that contribute to one's resiliency and personality development.

According to McClusky (1963), the ratio of load to power equals margin, which is defined as the surplus power available to respond to life's demands. Changes in load and/or power can alter the margin available to an individual. While participation in organized, formal adult education may provide a mechanism to increase one's power and thus create more margin with which to

meet life's demands, it may also increase the load being carried by an individual. An increase in load with no concomitant increase in power may deplete margin to the point where it is insufficient to meet the demands of life, including those imposed by the context of the organized, formal adult education. According to Day and James (1984) "very low or negative Margin would make it difficult for an adult to initiate or participate in a learning endeavor" (p. 5). Therefore, if the power available to the adult learner is not sufficient to offset the load requirement, he or she may have difficulty meeting the demands of the student role as it interacts with other life roles.

The research findings of Dill and Henley (1998) speak to events that traditional and nontraditional students report as stressful. Using the Adolescent Perceived Events Scale (APES), Dill and Henley (1998) investigated 94 traditional and nontraditional students from a research-oriented university in the southeastern United States. According to them, "despite its name, this scale demonstrates high levels of reliability and validity for college-aged adults" (p. 27). Forty-seven of the participants, 38% of whom were male, were matched as closely as possible for class standing, gender, and ethnicity. Students were compared with regard to perceived stress and stressors. Dill and Henley (1998) hypothesized that some stressors would be reported by both groups (for example, stress related to performance on exams and overall academic performance). They further conjectured that other stressors reported by

students would be unique to a particular group (for example, family obligations and financial problems for nontraditional students).

According to Dill and Henley (1998), findings indicated that while there were some reported stresses that were unique to a particular group, nontraditional students reported less school-related stress than did traditional participants in the study. They suggest that this finding may indicate that adult students have buffered themselves against stressful events associated with the student role by success with other life roles such as employee, spouse, and/or parent. However, it may also indicate that the instrument failed to capture events most often perceived as stressful by nontraditional students. Dill and Henley (1998) write:

The APES is geared to traditional students, and the addition of a fill-in page did not adequately cover possible stressful events of the nontraditional group, even though they listed more events than the traditional students did. Some areas not covered by traditional measures of college stressors include childcare, role conflict, and the specific financial problems many nontraditional students face. (p. 31)

Although nontraditional students in the Dill and Henley (1998) study listed more stress events than did the traditional participants, nontraditional students also indicated feelings of satisfaction with being back in school and attending classes more than did the traditional students. Findings revealed “the events of returning to school after time off and attending class were viewed as more

desirable by the nontraditional students than by the traditional students” (Dill & Henley, 1998, p. 28). This finding, according to them, may represent an increase in the nontraditional student’s eagerness to learn and, if so, “may indicate that the years out of school have put a new perspective on the classroom experience” (p. 30).

The current study was not designed to verify McClusky’s (1963) or Dill and Henley’s (1998) study findings. However, the works of these researchers provide a boundary with which to frame the present study. Experiences that contribute to the load carried by nontraditional collegiate males and ways in which they go about increasing the power needed to carry the load, especially during times of perceived psychological stress are encircled by the work of these researchers.

Although not originally thought to be a theoretical influence, as data were analyzed the work of Knowles (1989) seemed to be embedded in the fabric of the current study. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, the ways in which participants spoke about their experience with academic coursework seem to support three of the assumptions proposed in Knowles’ (1989) andragogical model of adult learning. One of the assumptions Knowles (1989) suggests is that “adults become ready to learn those things they need to know or to be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (p. 84). Another presumption articulated by Knowles (1989) is that the learning in which adults engage is problem-centered; that is, their learning is “organized around life tasks

or problems” (Knowles, 1989, p. 84). The third assumption proposed by Knowles (1989) that the current study seems to support is that “while adults are responsive to some extrinsic motivators. . .the more potent motivators are intrinsic motivators” (p. 84).

Prior to data collection and analyses for this project, I had proposed to incorporate the research of Merriam, Mott, and Lee (1996) as a theoretical influence. Their work questioned the “prevailing assumption underlying much of the adult learning literature. . .that growth-oriented changes are the result of adult learning” (p. 222). Participants in their study had experienced a life event that challenged some aspect of each one’s self-image. Findings indicated that if the aspect of the self-image that “is challenged is highly vulnerable, and/or if the challenge is viewed as too threatening to the self, the meaning one makes of the experience results in the learning of growth-inhibiting behaviors or attitudes” (Merriam, Mott, & Lee, 1996, p. 224).

As participants in the current study described their engagement in academic studies during a time of perceived stress, they did not focus on what had been learned from the experience or whether the learning had been growth-oriented or growth-inhibiting. Rather, they described ways in which they managed to navigate through the academic experience in the face of perceived stress. Therefore, the work of Merriam, Mott, & Lee (1996) seemed inappropriate for use as a theoretical frame for the current study.

Significance of the Study

It is anticipated that this study will make a contribution to the areas of research, theory, and practice within adult education. Hopefully, it will serve to stimulate questions and discussion regarding men and their experience with academic coursework in the face of perceived psychological stress. At present, very little is known about how nontraditional, undergraduate collegiate males navigate through their coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress.

In years past, data collected from male participants involved in adult education were used to construct theories that included women participants. As feminist ideology began to inform research into, and the practice of, adult education, gender differences became an area for exploration. However, the term *gender issues* now seems to be synonymous with issues related to women. If adult education is truly going to address gender issues, in the broader sense, data related to men needs to be included in our research, theory, and practice efforts. Just as the experiences of men cannot be generalized to women, neither can the experiences of women be generalized to men. It is anticipated that this study may help to broaden the conception of what constitutes gender issues as they relate to adult education.

As Brookfield (1992) wrote, adult education is not exclusively a joyful experience but includes both joyous and stressful elements. It can be a time of

struggle and great difficulty for learners. The experience of engagement in adult education during times of reported struggles by nontraditional collegiate male learners is virtually unexplored at present. The findings reported here have the potential to encourage future journeys into the world of academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress. Data from this study could be used to create instruments that allow for more accurate interpretation of the association between perceived stress and engagement in adult education for the nontraditional collegiate male.

Through attention to the voice of the participants in this study, adult educators may be able to identify coping strategies utilized by adult male learners as they engage in academic coursework during times of perceived psychological stress. Support systems that men employ to facilitate their educational journey may be identified. Equipped with this information, educational institutions and adult educators may be able to better define their roles in assisting nontraditional, male students during times of psychological stress.

Limitations of the Study

Qualitative research is assumed to be subjective in nature. Therefore, the study is limited to the views and truthfulness of the participants. Results are neither intended to be generalized to all male adult learners nor to all

psychological stress experienced by those learners. The study is further limited by the gender of the interviewer. As categories and themes were developed out of the raw data, it is possible that my own perspective as a woman influenced the meaning attached to the words of the participants. Although no bracketing interviews were done, pilot interviews utilizing male participants were conducted. These interviews assisted in refining the research question and interview guide developed prior to initiation of data collection. All participants were Caucasian, therefore findings cannot be generalized to men of color and their experience with learning during perceived psychological stress.

A decision was made to intentionally focus the study on the exploration of the experience with academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress. A majority of the men who responded to the request for participation had long-standing mental health and/or substance abuse problems. I do not consider myself qualified by education or training to probe deeply into the details of these kinds of stressors as described by the men in this study. To do so, I believe, would have been irresponsible and could have had detrimental effects on the participants. Therefore, I decided to probe for only as much detail about the stress each participant described as was pertinent to their experience with academic coursework. I decided the study would be better served in this manner since my interest lay more in the way individuals navigate through their academic studies during a time of perceived psychological stress.

Personal Statement

Interest in how individuals negotiate their way through a learning experience in the face of psychological stress is born out of personal experience. At one point in my professional career, I was an instructor in a vocational school and worked with men and women who were seeking licensure as practical nurses. Most of the students would be considered non-traditional in that they were over the age of twenty-five and had a gap between secondary and post-secondary educational experiences. During the years I worked with the school, I saw students who were physically and emotionally battered by spouses or significant others in their lives. Others encountered the economic hardships so often prevalent in lower income groups: lack of reliable transportation, affordable childcare, or lack of money for rent or food. Still others experienced personal tragedy, as in the case of one young man whose house burned while he was in his last three months of school. However, these learners persisted in their studies and clinical work, and graduated in spite of economic and personal stresses. At other times in my life, I have worked with nurses who elected to go back to school to pursue a degree in nursing despite family, social, and work responsibilities. These individuals achieved their goal even though engagement in formal education, by their own admission, was filled with stress and strain.

As I thought about these encounters in my life, I discovered that it was not the association between persistence and psychological stress that was of

personal interest. Rather, my interest lie in the way in which individuals negotiated their way through a forma, adult education experience when faced with what they defined as psychological stress. This study, although limited as described above, speaks to that interest.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used.

Adult education as used in this study refers to a formal educational experience that “takes place in educational institutions and often leads to degrees or credit of some sort” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 21). Other terms used to indicate adult education as it is being used in this study are formal education, academic educational experience, academic studies, and academic coursework.

Learning, for the purposes of the current study, is defined as “to gain knowledge or understanding of or skill in by study, instruction or experience” (Merriam-Webster On-Line, 2004).

Nontraditional Students are individuals over the age of twenty-five (Yarbrough and Schaffer, 1990; Darkenwald and Novak, 1997; Chartrand, 1990; Jeffreys, 1998) who fill multiple social roles (Ashar and Skenes, 1993; Dill and Henley, 1998). In addition, they often have at least one year between high

school and college (Dill and Henley, 1998). Nontraditional students may have received either a high school or a general equivalency diploma (GED).

Reentry Male is one who has reentered the university or college after at least a year's absence from their last college or university experience.

Stress is defined as a response to a perceived imbalance between demand and one's ability to respond. It is a "sense of strain or difficulty in coping with the pressures that he or she experiences" (Bee and Bjorkland, 2000, p.337).

Summary

At present, very little is known about how nontraditional, reentry male students navigate through academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress. This chapter provides the introductory background and sets the stage for further exploration into this phenomenon. A statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research question that guided the study, theoretical influences, limitations of the study, key definitions, and a personal statement have been included in this introduction. It is anticipated that this study will be important to areas of research, theory, and practice within adult education as it may serve to stimulate further inquiry into the experiences of men as they engage in academic coursework during times of perceived psychological stress.

Chapter Two will address the method and procedure used in the study. The following three chapters will be a presentation of data relative to three major themes: the occurrence of stress while engaged in academic coursework, (Chapter Three), perspectives on academic coursework (Chapter Four), and strategies utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework (Chapter Five). Relevant literature will be reviewed in conjunction with the presentation and discussion of themes within each chapter related to description of findings. Chapter Six will provide a conclusion to the study with a summary of key findings in relation to the research question asked, implications for the theory and practice of adult education, and recommendations for future adult education research.

CHAPTER TWO

Method and Procedure

The preceding chapter introduced the study, identified the problem and research question designed to address the problem, provided the theoretical influences that frame the present work, addressed the significance, and described the known limitations. As indicated, the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of nontraditional, reentry, male, collegiate students who report psychological stress at some time during their academic coursework. At present, what happens as nontraditional male learners engage in adult education during times of perceived psychological stress is virtually unexplored, thus limiting the knowledge base from which adult education theorists and practitioners operate. If theorists and practitioners of adult education are to discover the most appropriate ways to better serve adult learners, it is crucial to examine the collegiate experience, especially from the learner's perspective. Chapter Two describes the study site, participants, research method and process, and procedures related to data collection and analysis.

Study Site

The study site was a major, land grant university in the Southeast: known by the fictitious name of Southeastland University in the current study. The

university serves both traditional and nontraditional students seeking various undergraduate and graduate degrees. During the academic year in which participants were interviewed, the Southeastland's Office of Institutional Assessment reported that greater than 25,000 students were enrolled with approximately 79% of those enrolled as undergraduates. Data regarding enrollment by age and gender were reported for each year of age for students ages 18 through 40; however, after age 40, data were reported by ages 41-45, 46-50, 51-64, and 65 and over, respectively.

Data reported for Fall, 2000, revealed that men attending Southeastland comprised approximately 47% of the total student population while those 25 and over represented only 12% of the total student population and just 26% of the total male student population. Males 40 to 64 years of age represented approximately 4% of the total male population and 2% of the total student population. These statistics tend to support what Johnson (1993) reported; namely, that over three-quarters of males returning to college tend to be in their late twenties to late thirties "with men in the forties, fifties, and sixties making up increasingly smaller percentages of the total" (p.179). I found it interesting that while male student enrollment had declined over the years until men 40 years of age constituted only about 0.5% of both the total student population and the total male population, by ages 41-45, the percentage of men enrolled at Southeastland had quadrupled for both populations.

Sheehy (1998) claims, "it is no longer unique to see a 70 year old enroll in an undergraduate or graduate program" (p. 250). Student data provided by Southeastland for Fall, 2000, indicated that approximately 49% of the undergraduates were men with slightly more than 80% of the total male population being undergraduates. Undergraduate males 25 years of age or older comprised only around 6.5% of the total undergraduate population but constituted slightly over 13% of the total male undergraduates. Male undergraduates, 40 to 64 years of age, represented approximately 0.6% of the total student population and 1.6% total male population. Just as data previously reported for the overall student population, undergraduate enrollment declined with increasing age until persons 40 years of age comprised only about 0.2% of the total student population and total male population, respectively. However, by ages 41-45, the total student population and the total male population percentages increased to approximately 2% each. The interest sparked by these data served as an inducement to narrow the focus to the study of men in their middle years, particularly those who have returned to complete undergraduate studies.

Participants

The study participants consisted of eight, Caucasian, male students who were between 43 and 52 years of age and enrolled on a part-time basis (that is,

registered for one or two classes a semester) during the 1999-2000 academic year. At the time of the interviews in February and March of 2001, one person had graduated the previous December and two were expecting to graduate by the end of spring semester. Of the 30 men initially contacted regarding participation in the study, nine individuals responded to the mailings and two requests were returned as undeliverable. Although one of the individuals responding to the request to participate indicated a desire to be interviewed, he was dropped from consideration after four phone calls and two email correspondences failed to establish a meeting time. At the time of our correspondence, he reportedly had what he described as overwhelming stress issues and was struggling just to maintain day-to-day activities. Another individual failed to show for scheduled interviews on two different occasions. One person was added to the interview schedule as the result of a suggestion from another participant.

Although each participant was unique in his life experiences, there were some similarities among the group. Five of the eight reported prior military experience with two being retired from the armed services. Seven of eight participants in the study had some prior college, two had earned associate degrees from community colleges, and one had completed a B.S. in the 1970s. While only four of those interviewed were currently married, six of the eight reported having children. Even though only two individuals were currently employed, all talked about having been employed at some time during their past.

A brief profile of each participant is presented below. Each participant is identified by a pseudonym either chosen by the participant or by me at the request of the participant.

Art

Art is retired military who had taken college courses during his military years. As with most military personnel, he had moved around about every two to three years as he accepted various assignments. His last assignment was with a college Army ROTC department and, because of that experience, he perceives the transition to college has not been difficult for him. During his military years, he was involved in combat and also taught classes of one kind or another. According to him, the experience of teaching during his military days has helped him be more comfortable when having to be in front of a class to present a project or paper of some kind. He is married and has a son who recently graduated from college.

He considers the stress experienced since he has been in school to be trivial when compared with his military days. However, as the result of a project for his major area of study, memories of his combat experience surfaced and he is currently being treated for post-traumatic stress syndrome. He has been declared 100% disabled by the Veterans Administration and struggles with the manifestations of PTSD daily. These struggles have not deterred Art from being able to finish his undergraduate degree. At the time we did the initial interview,

he was expecting to graduate with a baccalaureate by the end of that semester: a goal he had accomplished by the time we met the second time for him to review his interview transcript.

Sidney

Sidney is also retired military but, unlike Art, reports no lingering problems as the result of his armed forces experience, even though he reports having encountered a lot of stresses during his military years. For him, school is not a means of changing careers or economic advancement; on the contrary, he is content with his current job and considers himself to be making “good money.” As a maintenance worker at a large facility in the area, his normal workday can be 10 hours long. He can be called back into work anytime during the night or on weekends if there is a problem with one of the machines. This has proven to be a source of stress for him, at times, in relation to his schoolwork. At 47 years of age, he is thinking about the future and has plans after he retires from his second job to perhaps complete college and become a technology teacher in a secondary school system.

As some of the other men did, he indicates that his prior encounter with school was not a particularly good experience and attributes that to his lack of readiness. Since re-entry in higher education, however, he indicates that he has really enjoyed his classes, teachers, and interactions with other students. He is married, has two daughters, and describes his family as very supportive of him.

School seems to be a family affair with his wife and daughters also in school at the time of the interview. In his estimation, the fact that they are all in school helps them to understand what he is going through.

Ed

Like Sidney, Ed had worked in the trades. He was an electrician until a couple of years ago when he began to write curriculum as part of his job. Re-entry into school has been gradual for him, beginning when he taught in an apprenticeship program and found that he enjoyed it but needed to know more than what he currently knew in order to do his job well. Although he had started college just out of high school, he could not continue due to financial difficulties and describes his younger years as years of wandering without a clear master plan or goal. He jokingly states that he wishes he had known what he wanted to be when he grew up and attributes the lack of a master plan or "big goal" as contributing to him just now getting an undergraduate degree at 52 years of age.

For him, education is not about obtaining a degree but, rather, what can be learned from a course and how that knowledge can be applied to his job. Education, however, is viewed as the avenue to become better at two of his life roles in particular: worker and father. He looks younger than his stated age of 52 years and describes himself as inquisitive by nature; he has to know the "why" of things. The strong bond to family and church is evident when talking with him and he indicates that nothing, including school, stands in the way of Wednesday

night church services and Sunday services, as that is time set aside for his family to be involved in church activities together.

Filbert

Unlike Ed, Filbert does not seem to have a particularly strong bond with his family (that is, mother and father, brother, sister). He indicates that he provides some support for his mother as she cares for his ailing father. Reportedly during his childhood he served as a buffer between the siblings and the father. The father, according to Filbert, took delight in “tearing other people down”. Prior military experience has allowed him to access the educational arena via a veteran’s assistance program located on the grounds of Southeastland University . Although he perceives the organization as having, what he terms, a cookie cutter view of those who access their services, he is grateful that they got him “in the door of the university”. School has never been particularly easy for Filbert and he perceives himself as a not particularly good student. He had difficulty in high school and was expelled but then reinstated at a later date. An earlier attempt at college was described as an on again, off again experience for which he was neither prepared, academically, nor ready, interest-wise. Now, however, he has a plan; specifically, to graduate from college with a baccalaureate in hopes of teaching some day. When listening to his life story, one gets the sense that relationships have not come easy for Filbert. Even so, he seemingly has a sense of obligation and commitment to

those with whom he feels the closest connect such as siblings and members of a recreational social group to which he belongs.

Apparently at nineteen years of age, Filbert suffered severe physical injuries that left him with memory problems, particularly related to names. These injuries coupled with several chronic medical problems has made him cognizant of the fact that work as a physical laborer is no longer feasible; thus, the return to school. Although he is not particularly optimistic in his view of life, he perceives himself as one who perseveres unless there is no reasonable argument to stay in the situation. One of the tactics he has employed in order to remain reasonably content with school is to take what he terms as some “fun” classes in addition to the more academic offerings required by his particular program of study.

Mack

When we met, Mack had just graduated from the Southeastland at the end of the previous semester. He was excited about the prospect of entering graduate school later in the year. Mack describes his younger life much like Ed and Filbert do: he went through life without a clear direction or plan. When he talks about having been employed in sales and loving it, it is easy to see why he also says he was good at it; there is a ready smile and an engaging personality. His prior military experience and being the oldest sibling in his family, has lead him to the conclusion that he is a good leader and team player with the ability to

gain cooperation from those under his command or direction. A serious medical problem and subsequent lengthy recovery has changed his life dramatically. At 46 years of age, he has moved back in with his parents due to the loss of his job, his memory has been affected due to complications of the illness, and he feels more fear now about his physical health than he previously did. Although Mack perceives the loss of how he saw himself in his earlier years, he has a newfound awareness of who he is now and what he wants out of life.

He anticipates that school will provide the means by which he can once again be a contributing member of society and pursue his goal: to work with healthcare professionals and improve the way in which they communicate within the healthcare setting. An unplanned pregnancy from an earlier relationship resulted in a son who is now four years old. Mack believes that pursuing an education will also help him be a better provider for his son both now and in the future when the child is ready for college. He previously was enrolled in college classes at a local community college, and participates with a group of individuals who meet regularly due to a common social interest.

Sagan

Sagan came back to school after being disabled for a number of years: a disability that, according to him, has made him nervous and anxiety ridden. At this point in his life, he perceives that his disability has been overcome and he is now ready to be employed again. He attended college in the 1970s but admits

that his mind was not on his work like it is now. Presently, not only does Sagan want to learn but he finds the material incredibly interesting. One of his longstanding goals had been to get back into school in any capacity, which he has accomplished and although he appears to be doing well, he perceives himself as struggling between a tendency to be a perfectionist and the potential to be a slacker unless motivated.

Currently, he is financially stable and indicates that he has been so for a number of years. He has a two year-old son and asserts that he is working very hard to be a good parent even though there are tensions and struggles with the child's mother. Because of these tensions, Sagan is less forthcoming with personal details than are the other participants and is somewhat more guarded with information about his life outside of school. His interview proves to be most difficult for me in terms of how much to probe when he is talking about the stress in his life. He regards life as difficult for everyone with some having worse luck than others.

Seke

The journey back to school for Seke began as a self-directed inquiry; one in which he just picked up an astronomy book in hopes of making some sense of the laws of the universe. In 1969, he started college in electrical engineering but became distracted by what he terms youthful activities (that is, bicycling and girls). School lost its interest for him, he dropped out, became an entrepreneur

and perceives himself as having rambled through life for a couple of decades. Life for him during this period is described as relatively stress free and uncomplicated. However, with this second entry into school, he indicates that has changed. Seke describes himself as somewhat of a loner who married for the first time just three years prior to the interview date. The marriage has brought its own elements of stress to his life, however he perceives that he and his wife have coped well and indicates that without her, he probably would not have made it through.

Seke appears to be doing just as his pseudonym implies: seeking. He seems to be on a journey to find answers about the universe and his place in it: a journey he hopes is just getting started. Although, he is not sure where what he is learning will lead, he takes comfort that his goal is more defined now than it was in his youth. He plans to enter graduate school later in the year with the anticipation that he will be able to test out his own theory of how one small piece of the universe may work.

Vincent

Vincent has held many different jobs over the years but, by his own account, never mastered any of them. Most of these jobs were in the trades or construction arena and when they would become routine, he would lose interest. At the time of our meeting, he was having the same struggle with school. He isn't sure if it was where he needs to be. At the time of our second meeting, he

has graduated and is considering graduate school later in the year. When reading over his transcript, he expresses amazement at how much he has grown in the year since we last talked. The transcript, for him, seems to provide a window to his emotional past.

His first experience with college was in pursuit of an associate degree from a community college. Although he was heavily involved in what he calls the party scene, he managed to maintain a good grade point average and graduated with a 3.76 G.P.A. He attributes involvement with Alcoholics Anonymous as the start of his journey back to school. Through the spiritual component of the organization, he began to question the direction he needed to take; a direction that eventually led him to decide on re-entry to the university. Since he is not originally from the geographic area in which Southeastland is located, he has felt somewhat isolated, especially following the dissolution of his 20-year marriage. Divorce has been difficult for him and has led to feelings of depression for which he has sought counseling. He perceives that he is doing much better now and is beginning to develop some friendships. Vincent, like Ed, has strong ties to a local church community and has become involved with various activities there, which provide him with a widening circle of friends and acquaintances. Like several of the other participants, Vincent has prior military experience although he is not a retired service person.

Summary of Participant Profiles

While similar in age, in some past experiences, and the desire to be engaged in academic coursework at the university level, each participant had sought re-entry into higher education with different outcomes in mind. For some, their return was necessary due to changing physical abilities that limited job choices. School, for them, was perceived as a way to open career doors that might otherwise be closed. For others, school was something they wanted to do but not something that would make a real difference in their careers or financial situation.

Feelings about engagement in higher education also varied, to some extent, among participants. A majority of the participants expressed that they enjoyed the return to the classroom and liked their classes, teachers, and interactions with other students. This supports Dill & Henley's (1998) findings that nontraditional students indicate feelings of satisfaction with being back in school and attending classes more than do their traditional counterparts.

Participants came with an eagerness to talk about their experiences upon returning to school. Their eagerness led to details and vivid descriptions that allowed for a better understanding of what happens as reentry male students engage in academic coursework during time of perceived psychological stress. Through a better understanding of what happens, it is anticipated that the ways in which participants in this study navigate through their coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress will become clearer.

Research Design

This study was designed to be descriptive in nature and to focus on understanding the male, undergraduate student's experience with academic coursework during times of perceived psychological stress. Traditional qualitative methods of data collection and analysis provided the most appropriate avenue for accomplishing this task since they can "take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). In qualitative research, methods of gathering information about a particular area of interest can vary (for example, direct observation in the research setting, in-depth interviewing, and document review). The semi-structured, in-depth interview was chosen as the method of collecting the data for analysis as it hopefully gives the researcher a chance to understand how it is that the subject-matter being explored is perceived by participants in the study. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), "this, in fact, is an assumption fundamental to qualitative research—the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (p. 80).

The semi-structure interview technique was selected because other qualitative data collection methods such as direct observation in the research setting and document review were not as appropriate given the nature of the study. The setting varied from participant to participant and events described by

them had occurred in the past—often years before—thereby, making it impossible to conduct direct observation in the research setting. Since the focus of the research revolved around perceptions of the men in relation to individual experience, there were no documents to review. Therefore, the semi-structured, in-depth interview surfaced as the most feasible method from which to gather the information being sought. This enabled the researcher to engage a participant in conversation designed to ascertain that person's account of an event or phenomenon being explored.

Procedure

The remainder of this chapter will speak to the way in which data were collected and analyzed. I will describe the process used to obtain participants, the technique employed for interviewing the men who agreed to participate, and the methods utilized to organize and analyze data.

Data Collection

Upon approval of the proposed research, the Associate Dean of Students' office at Southeastland University was contacted in order to obtain names of persons who could be approached about participation in the study. A list of male undergraduates age 45 to 55, enrolled Fall, 1999, or Spring, 2000, was provided by office personnel. Per university policy, information that is available through

the printed student telephone directory or on the intra-web site directory is available to third parties without first obtaining written consent from the student. Included in the directory information is the student's name, local, home and email addresses, telephone listing, and birth date. I had proposed to enlist the assistance of the Associate Dean of Students' office at Southeastland in mailing introductory, request for participation letters to potential participants in order to protect the identity of those declining participation. However, the Associate Dean of Students' office personnel expressed a lack of time and resources necessary to assist in the mailing. University policy allows for information contained in university records to be shared without the students' consent as long as such information is not revealed to any other parties. Therefore, in order to comply with the policy regarding disclosure of student information, I determined that it was necessary for me to mail the letters to potential participants explaining the purpose and design of the study and requesting their participation (see Appendix A). In this way, names, addresses, and other student information open for review are known only to me, have not been shared with any other party, and remain in a locked receptacle.

Enclosed with the introductory letter was a self-addressed, stamped envelope and a response form (Appendix B) that allowed respondents a way to indicate the best time of day to call, a telephone number where they could be reached and/or an email address. At the end of two weeks, a reminder letter

was sent that incorporated references to the initial letter as well as the response form to be sent back (see Appendix C).

To insure protection of the rights of individuals interviewed, each participant was given a verbal and a written explanation of the research project prior to beginning the actual interview. The purpose of the research and their rights regarding participation were discussed. They were afforded the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns about participation before being given a written consent form. Details regarding confidentiality, use of audiotapes, dissemination of data, and the right to withdraw at anytime was emphasized both in the verbal and written explanation of the project. Although each person was asked to provide a pseudonym, only one provided his own; the others asked me to supply the name to be used in the transcripts of the interviews. Every precaution was taken to prevent the pseudonym from being connected with the true identity of the individual.

Because the focus of the study had been an interest of mine for some time, I had done a total of four pilot interviews for various class projects in the recent past. These aided in refinement of the interview guide questions as well as my own interview skills. Prior to the pilot interviews, I had used the words "emotional distress" when giving the prompt to begin the interview. The men I interviewed during these pilot interviews had difficulty thinking in terms of "emotional distress." According to them, "distress" implies a catastrophic event.

As the result of their input, I changed the wording of the prompt to include the term “psychological stress.”

Once the preliminary work was done, interviews for the current study began. Each interview began with the following prompt:

For just a moment think about the coursework you have been engaged in since your return to college. Now, think about a time during that coursework when you perceived yourself to have experienced psychological stress and tell me about it.

By virtue of responding to the invitation to participate in the study, the participants had self-identified as experiencing psychological stress while engaged in coursework at the university. I did not provide a definition of psychological stress for them, but allowed them to describe what they meant by psychological stress.

Interviews were audiotaped and lasted approximately one and one-half hours for each participant. An interview guide (see Appendix D) provided a mechanism whereby details of the participant’s experience could be elicited. The guide was not intended to restrict individuals in what they could talk about, but rather was designed to facilitate their description should that be necessary.

The interview guide was as follows:

1. How would you describe yourself during this time?
2. What all was going on in your life at this particular time?
3. How did others influence you during this time in your life?

4. Describe, in as much detail as you can remember, what you were trying to learn at this time.
5. Describe, in as much detail as you can remember, the psychological stress you were experiencing during this time.

Since interviews were being electronically recorded, few notes were taken during the actual interviews. Participants, for the most part, addressed the interview questions without much prompting. The interview guide was very beneficial in providing redirection when the conversation lagged or moved in a direction that had no connection to their experiences with academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress. Because the interviews were conducted in various conference rooms or offices throughout an academic department located on the campus of Southeastland University, field notes did not prove particularly useful other than to give some added depth to the participant's general description of himself.

I transcribed each interview electronically and then reviewed it in order to obtain a general feel for what the participant was saying. This aided in providing an overall sense of the experiences being shared by the participant as well as correction of any typographical errors. Following transcription of the interviews, each participant was invited to meet for a second time, review his specific transcript, make changes as he desired, and participate in a follow-up to the first interview. Five participants responded to this invitation. Seke, Sidney, and Filbert gave consent to include their interviews in the data analysis without their

review but had no particular interest in a follow-up meeting. Vincent and Art elected to review what had been transcribed. Vincent had no changes, additions or deletions to what we had discussed earlier. Art, however, chose to write in changes on the original transcript that helped to clarify his meaning and provide additional material. These changes were made electronically to Art's original transcript. Neither Art nor Vincent had time for a second interview and expressed that they had nothing further to add. Once participants had been offered the opportunity to review their particular transcript, analysis of the data collected began.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) have indicated that "analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 157). Data collected during the study were initially organized using coding categories as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). The coding categories outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) include setting/context, definition of the situation, perspective held by participants, ways of thinking about people and objects, process, activity, events, strategies, and relationships/social structure.

The decision to initially organize data using categories described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) was done as a means of getting started with the data

exploration and analysis. Information provided by Bogden & Biklen (1998) regarding data analysis offers “some concrete suggestions on how to proceed to make analysis conceptually manageable as well as mechanically feasible” (p. 157). The coding categories outlined in their work are not meant to represent the only way in which coding can be accomplished, but are suggestions that provide one way to organize data for exploration and analysis.

All documents were read multiple times in order to develop coding categories. Initially, data material was reviewed line by line to get a general feel for what participants were saying about their academic experience as well as their perceived stress experience. The data were then organized using the categories outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). Each document was initially coded by hand and then entered into QSR NUD*IST (Version 4) qualitative data analysis software. Use of QSR NUD*IST (Version 4) allowed documents to be linked, coded, and analyzed in a more flexible, comprehensive, consistent manner than would have been possible by hand-coding alone. The original set of coding categories were updated as the analyses progressed, which took the form of dropping some category codes and/or adding others as the data revealed what participants had to offer regarding their experience with academic coursework during a time of perceived stress.

The choice to begin data exploration and analysis utilizing established categories is not without concern. Use of established categories has the potential to confine the data and narrow the researcher's view of what

participants are revealing about their experiences. It can have a distorting effect on the lens through which the data are viewed and ultimately influence the development of themes. I attempted to minimize possible distortions by viewing the data multiple times and allowing categories to change as data analyses progressed.

Summary

Understanding the experiences of undergraduate, reentry collegiate males during times of perceived stress is virtually unexplored at present. Utilizing a semi-structured, qualitative interview technique, eight men ages 43 to 52, enrolled in an undergraduate program of study were interviewed regarding their experience with academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress. Each participant was given an opportunity to meet for a second time to review his own transcript, make any changes desired, and participate in a follow-up to the first interview. Interviews were electronically transcribed by me, entered into QSR*NUDIST (Version 4) qualitative research software, and analyzed for emergent themes. Data were organized and explored, initially, utilizing established coding categories established by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). As analyses progressed, some initial categories were dropped and others were added according to what the data revealed.

In the chapters that follow, I will discuss findings from this study as they relate to the research question posed in Chapter One and address conclusions and recommendations related to the study.

CHAPTER THREE

The Occurrence of Stress While Engaged in Coursework

As I listened to, and analyzed the ways in which the men in this study talked about their experiences with academic coursework during times of perceived psychological stress, the data seemed to naturally subdivide into three overarching categories. The men spoke of the stress that they were experiencing as they were engaged in coursework, their perspectives on academic coursework, and strategies they utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework. In this chapter, I will discuss findings that describe what participants identified as the stress that occurred while they were engaged in academic coursework. The other two themes will be addressed in Chapters Four and Five.

As indicated in the introductory chapter, stress is a major issue faced by many adults who return to college. However, little is known about what happens as adults engaged in academic coursework experience what is perceived, by them, to be psychological stress. In a study of 43 returning adult students, Flannery (1985) concluded that stress was the most severe of all barriers faced by adults when returning to school, and “was explained by the participants as the result of balancing their multiple roles” (Flannery, 1985, p. 80).

Often adult learners do not give up other responsibilities of their day-to-day lives when they take on the obligations of collegiate coursework. For many

individuals the return to the college adds to what McClusky (1963) termed the load that is already being carried. With this increase in load, the power available to the person to meet the demands of everyday living can be depleted as the student role interacts with other life roles. According to Hiemstra (1993), "a crucial element for meeting learning or other life demands is the ratio between load and power" (p. 42). When discussing the multiplicity of roles that comprise the adult learner's life, Fairchild (2003) indicates "higher education is only one of the many activities in which adult students are involved" (p. 11). She writes that commitments to the other roles in one's life, conflict between and among roles, as well as institutional roadblocks, create barriers that "exclude adults or make it difficult for them to successfully navigate through their higher education" (Fairchild, 2003, p. 12). To think in terms of McClusky's (1963) power-load-margin theory, the power available to some of the participants, at times, may not be sufficient to cope with the demands of the coursework and other life circumstances.

In one of the few studies that specifically focused on male college students, Johnson (1993) explored various characteristics related to adult male reentry students at a community college; specifically "the characteristics, motivations for return, deterrents to participation and needs of adult male reentry students" (p. 178). Thirty-five men were chosen by random sample and stratified by age (that is, 30-39, 40-49, 50+). The men anticipated they would experience situational problems; particularly conflicts associated with work, responsibilities

related to family, and lack of time. According to Johnson (1993), "as the men anticipated, conflicts with work and lack of time were experienced by men in each age group as were problems related to family responsibilities" (p. 188).

The roles that comprise the lives of reentry women have been explored more often than have those of returning adult male students. The implication arising from the various explorations seems to be that the demands placed on women as they attempt to meet school, work, and family expectations, are greater than those experienced by returning male students, thereby possibly leading to greater difficulty for women students than for men students.

In a study that compared the needs of traditional and nontraditional students, Senter and Senter (1998) proposed that nontraditional women students "express a greater need than male nontraditional students for nontraditional student services, suggesting that non-student roles affect women more than men" (p. 276). Home (1997), in a study of the relationships between stress, perceived role demands, role strain and support for multiple-role women students, suggests that "findings indicate women students with higher perceived role demands had more stress and role strain" (p. 335). Other researchers have begun to call this notion into question.

Widoff (1999), in another of the few studies that focus on returning, male college students, examined areas of concern for undergraduate reentry, males as they attempt to combine the student role with other life roles. Findings revealed that in some instances the experiences encountered as a student

“meant less time for family and friends, and coping with the tension of needing to do research, study and be present at family functions” (Widoff, 1999, p.18).

While students in Widoff's (1999) study recognized, overall, that personal sacrifices were required to continue pursuit of their educational goals, sometimes a family crisis or some other obligation took precedent. Once past the crisis or obligation, “the student was left to cope with limited time to play “catch up” regarding class assignments” (p. 20). She concludes that “the male student experience in this study regarding time, family, money, and childcare needs and concerns resonates with similar concerns and themes in the literature on returning women students. This research does not suggest areas of need unique to the male student” (Widoff, 1999, p. 22).

Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, & Slaten (1996) suggest that “men and women are similar in their psychological reactions to the nature and quality of their relationships, a finding that contradicts much sociological theory and suggests that much previous research on gender and relationships may have overemphasized gender differences” (p. 849). Findings from their study on gender differences with regard to relationships indicated that “although women’s family roles are often portrayed in the literature as more demanding than men’s, women report less strain than do men in relationships with their spouses, mothers, and fathers” (Umberson, et al, 1996, p. 843).

This chapter reports findings relative to the perceived psychological stress reported by men in the current study while they were engaged in academic

studies. The findings presented here are categorized as stress of a personal nature, stress related to relationship and/or family obligations, and stress related to work demands.

Stress Experienced While Engaged in Academic Coursework

Seven of the eight individuals interviewed for this study spoke directly about perceived stresses encountered as they tried to meet the expectations of the various roles that comprised their lived experience of student, worker, son, father, social being, and/or husband. Heimstra (1993) in his review of McClusky's (1963) theory of power-load-margin claims that although learning in adulthood can supply the margin necessary in attainment of varied goals, "there are various ways in which an instructor can unknowingly generate excess load for a learner" (Heimstra, 1993, p. 43).

For a majority of participants in the current study, however, the psychological stress encountered did not emanate so much from engagement in academic coursework as it did from issues external to the specific learning in which they were involved. This finding resonates with Dill and Henley's (1998) findings from research focused on events that traditional and nontraditional students report as stressful; namely, nontraditional students in their study reported less school-related stress than did traditional participants. Men in the current study spoke to involvement in coursework during a time of stress that

was personal in nature while others spoke of stress related to their role as worker. Still others described the stress created as they tried to meet family obligations and engage in academic studies.

Stress of a Personal Nature

Stress of a personal nature revealed itself as participants talked about the ways in which personal struggles sometimes made it difficult to do their academic work. For Art, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) often interfered with his ability to concentrate thereby making it difficult to finish assignments on time. He described it in this manner:

One of the problems with post-traumatic is you lose the ability to drive yourself to finish things. You have a sense – you don't have a sense of importance. And it's fleeting, it comes and goes, and you have no control over it.

There were times when I couldn't function. I couldn't do my work. Going through these depressions and things of that nature, even suicidal thoughts have occurred, so it's become somewhat of a problem and I do have one incomplete.

As Art continued to talk about the association between PTSD and his engagement in academic studies, he talked of the medications he needed in order to be able to function. The medication regimen sometimes affected his ability to attend to what was occurring in class.

I have to take sleeping pills because of the fact that I would lose a lot of sleep. I would wake up in the middle of the night from the nightmares and sometimes wouldn't be able to go back to sleep. The next morning I would have, maybe, a critique session where the professors were critiquing my work. It was all I could do to keep my eyes opened. This was nine o'clock in the morning. I need my critique. Hell, five minutes into it I'm like [making a moaning like sound] cause I haven't slept the night before.

Others participants spoke to concerns regarding their ability to successfully complete their studies. Mack spoke of complications following a liver transplant that left him with what he describes as memory difficulties. Not being able to remember had led to feelings of doubt that he would be able to make it in school. As he talked about his beginning semester at Southeastland, the fear in his voice could be heard.

When I came to Southeastland I was petrified. I really and truly didn't think I was – didn't think I could remember anything. In that first class, I thought I couldn't remember. I was still in that, oh my God, I can't remember. I was scared to death that I was basically a vegetable.

Prior to the liver transplant and ensuing encephalopathies, when Mack could not remember something he reports being nonchalant about it.

It wasn't like I had been through a period where I couldn't remember. So, it was just like, well, you know, I didn't know about not being able to

remember. So, if I couldn't remember something I wasn't stressed out that I didn't remember. I just didn't remember.

However, the inability to remember took on new meaning after having experienced encephalopathy following the transplant.

But, once I've been through that encephalopathy and I couldn't remember who you were tomorrow. Am I having that problem again? Am I relapsing? That kind of thing. And when I'm in class now, I tend to revert back to, am I going through this? Am I so old that I don't remember? You know, are my brain cells shot to hell?

For Mack and Art, the experience of psychological stress had not deterred them from pursuit of adult education; however it had created a context that made it sometimes difficult to navigate the way at times. For Art, he was unable to complete tasks on time or remain alert in the classroom at times as he struggled with PTSD. Mack doubted his own intellectual capability due to self-described problems with his memory following a liver transplant.

Stress Related to Relationships / Family Obligations

Just as Mack and Art spoke to the personal struggles that precipitated their experience of stress while engaged in coursework, other men in the study spoke to familial relationships as the source of psychological stress. When talking with these men, it was evident that there were times when the role of student conflicted with family needs or obligations. Filbert's description of his

relationship with his family was one of turmoil and, according to him, has been so since childhood. One of three children, he is the only one who lives in close proximity to his parents and, thus, has become caretaker by default. He described the family dynamics in this way

Well, I'm not the most functional person you will ever meet but you could hold me up as a God compared to my relatives. My father was very destructive. He loved tearing people's defenses apart. Damn, I hated that then, or seeing him do it now. But I used to do it to him. Part revenge, part suffering. If I didn't then he would rip my youngest sister to pieces.

With parents who are aging and in ill-health, sometimes Filbert's academic life competes with that of his family for his attention.

My parents are falling apart. I haven't had a single semester go by since I've come back to Southeastland where he [sic, the father] doesn't have a moment where mom is trying to get my brother and sister, who are out town, to come in for what appears to be an imminent funeral. My mom stresses out a lot and I do feel a lot more about her than I do my dad.

Other men in this study also referred to stress that emanated from family responsibilities and the time it took to meet those obligations. After entry into Southeastland University, Sagan was faced with not only issues related to an ailing father but also struggles associated with a pregnant girlfriend and the

subsequent birth of a son. Sagan talks about his life during that time and the influence it had on his engagement in academic studies.

Those first two semesters, my life began to change. My girlfriend got pregnant and I was under a tremendous amount of stress. And, plus, at the time, I had an aged father whose health was failing. I was spending a lot of time with him. Now my son has since been born and my main stressor is the time that – well, I have my son six days out of fourteen.

Later in the interview, Sagan described how the pregnant girlfriend and ailing father had impacted his collegiate life. He had done very well in the first class he took upon reentry to school; ending the semester with the highest grade in the class. However, with the discovery that he was going to be a father and his own father's failing health, things changed. He described that difference in this way:

I just was not in the position to put that time in [sic, to studying] plus I was emotionally preoccupied. I just didn't have the time or the peace of mind to do that. At that point and time emotionally, I was a wreck. I didn't really want to take on the burden of a class for a grade. So auditing was the perfect solution. It kept me in the university community, I was still able to learn, but I didn't have to go home and read for an hour or two every night then study extensively for the exam. I wouldn't have been happy with a C.

According to Cross (1981) obstacles encountered by adult learners can be classified under three headings: situational barriers, institutional barriers, and dispositional barriers. Situational barriers encountered by adult students arise

from the individual circumstances of one's life at a given time. Cross (1981) concludes, "lack of time due to job and home responsibilities, for example, deters large numbers of potential learners in the 25- to 45-year old age group" (p. 98). Fairchild (2003) indicates that those who work with adult students "know they have made great sacrifices to enroll in college. We also know how difficult it is for adult students to balance work, education, and family life" (p. 15). Bee and Bjorklund (2000) claim that conflict occurs as one is attempting to manage the demands of school, family, and job. They write, "There are not enough hours in the day to fulfill the expectations of all three roles" (p. 48). Ed expressed what his life was like as obligations from other life roles competed for his time.

About the time I started seriously working on the degree, I changed jobs. Not only jobs, I changed careers. I had just bought a new home and moved to Knoxville. I had a new job, new school, and to top it off, we had lived here two months and my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a double mastectomy. I was on a learning curve almost vertical with my job, with my career change. So, it was tough. I had so much going on.

For returning students, there is often an "ongoing shifting of time and attention and continuous prioritizing to accommodate simultaneous role expectations" (Widoff, 1999, p. 18), as they face responsibilities and activities that compete for a piece of their twenty-four hour day. The experiences of Filbert, Sagan, and Ed lend support to Dill and Henley's (1998) findings that

while nontraditional students report less school-related stress than their traditional counterparts, they do report stresses that seem to be unique to mature learners (for example family obligations). Although competing demands from the student role's interaction with family obligations were perceived as stressful by Filbert, Sagan, and Ed, like Mack and Art, the men were not deterred from continuing with their academic studies.

Stress Related To Work Demands

In addition to relationships and family obligations that can contribute to psychological stress, the demands placed on individuals by occupational responsibilities can be a contributing factor to the psychological stress experienced while engaged in adult education. Sidney was one participant who spoke to the conflict that arises when one tries to merge the world of work with the world of school.

The most stress with coming back to school – it's not so much the school and the work with school but trying to fit it in with trying to be a full time employee. It would be nice if I could go to school full time and not have to work, but because I do have to work, then, that's one of my biggest stresses. I work at least a 10 hour day, normal, but then I'm on call all the time. I get called at one in the morning, two, three, all hours.

Sidney's desire to succeed in school was evident as he talked about wanting to work hard for the "good grade". For Sidney, the stress associated with returning

to college seemed to be most apparent when the conflict between work and school placed his desired success in jeopardy. He described it as follows:

You know, it's not really in the classroom. If I had any stress to do with going back to college, it would be having to do with being a full time worker and then, trying to keep up with college. If I can't study and I do bad on the test then I build up that stress. That's when I get really aggravated or stressed out is if I am trying – or if its trouble to get a homework assignment. You got the call-ins and you can't work on it as much or turn it in as much as you would like.

Others also spoke to the tension that exists when mature learners are attempting to meet the demands of school and work simultaneously. Just as relationship and family obligations can vie for the time of the adult learner, the role of worker presents sometimes an even greater challenge. Ed talked about it in this manner:

There was too much to do at the same time. With the job, the family, and I travel some with my job and it's usually on short notice and it was really – that was really stressful. And I think it was difficult just because of the workload. The time factor just got too limiting. I get called out of town twice a semester on average and that takes its toll. You simply take your schoolwork with you.

Ed goes on to describe what it is like when the demands of school and the demands of work do not easily coexist.

The workload can be overwhelming. There was just a tremendous amount of projects to be completed in that class and most of them were groups which always lends a degree of difficulty – just all the coordination and planning between six different people – and when – my traveling, you know. So, I just try to do as much as I can by email and phone, taking my books with me and studying on the road. It just gets to be stressful because of the workload.

Chartrand (1990) writes that nontraditional learners must “deal with the difficulties of being committed to the student role while simultaneously being committed to other important life roles” (p. 65). As nontraditional students attempt to meet the demands of various life roles they frequently have less energy and time for what is required by the student role. In her study of 179 undergraduate students, Chartrand (1990) proposed that “self-evaluation and commitment to the student role both had a direct effect on student role congruence, which in turn had a direct effect on academic performance and personal distress” (p. 65).

Chartrand (1990) hypothesized that when students evaluate the student role positively and perceive themselves to be committed to that role, they are more likely to perceive themselves as good students (that is, student role congruence). Likewise, the more one perceives the self as a good student, the higher the GPA will be and the less distress will be reported. While the prediction regarding GPA was substantiated by the data, the effect of

commitment on personal distress was positive, which was the opposite of what was predicted. Chartrand (1990) concludes that “the unexpected positive relation between commitment and personal distress is a bit perplexing in that it suggests that commitment to the student role contributes to personal distress” (p. 71).

While findings from the current study lend support to Chartrand's (1990) data regarding GPA, the stress described by participants was not reportedly related to their commitment to the student role. Rather, they seemed to be able to recognize the psychological stress in their lives without it controlling their engagement in collegiate coursework.

Summary

The stress encountered by adult learners has often been linked to the tension created when various roles compete in the lives of the students: a notion supported by the men interviewed for this study. As Dill and Henley (1998) found when they investigated events reported as stressful by traditional and nontraditional students, the stress reported by men in the current study did not emanate so much from the coursework in which they were involved as it did from issues external to classroom. They spoke to engagement in academic studies during a time of stress that was personal in nature while others spoke of stress

related to their role as worker. Still others described the stress created as they tried to meet family obligations and engage in collegiate coursework.

The descriptions given by the participants in the current study support Widoff's (1999) contention that the demands reported by returning male college students resonate with those reported by reentry women students. They face similar situations as family needs and obligations compete for their time and energy. Demands of work sometimes conflict with demands of their academic studies. The participants described personal struggles that affected performance and confidence in the academic arena.

In addition to descriptions that provided insight into the experience of psychological stress while engaged in academic studies, the men in this study also shared perspectives on academic coursework. The chapter to follow will discuss findings regarding perspectives on academic coursework; in particular, the perceived difference from earlier self with regard to engagement in academic coursework, and perceptions of formal learning as understanding.

CHAPTER FOUR

Perspectives On Academic Coursework

As I listened to the men in this study describe their experiences related to the stress that was a part of their lives at the time they were engaged in academic studies, a picture of their perspectives on academic coursework began to emerge. Seven of the eight men interviewed for this study had some prior experience with college. Over time, the majority of the participants who described earlier attempts at college perceived that they had changed with regard to their approach to the academic classroom. They now considered themselves to be more interested and more focused than they had been when enrolled in college during their late teens and early twenties. This finding supports Dill and Henley's (1998) supposition that perhaps returning to school after a time off "may indicate that the years out of school have put a new perspective on the classroom experience" (p. 30).

In addition to the perceived change in self over time with regard to their approach to academic studies, the majority of the men in this study spoke to a change in the way they perceived the learning that occurred while engaged in academic coursework. Now they reportedly viewed learning as understanding – not just memorization of facts provided by a textbook or the course instructor. To view learning as understanding seemed to assign a meaning to the current classroom experience that was different from how their earlier involvement in

academic coursework was perceived: it appeared to provide a deeper meaning to their current engagement in collegiate studies. McClusky's (1963) theoretical perspective regarding the relationship of load to power and margin seemed to contribute to an understanding of resiliency (that is, power) among participants as they engaged in academic studies during a time of perceived psychological stress. As the men spoke of a desire to understand what was being taught in the classroom and what they were reading in their textbooks, it seemed to add a depth to their studies that they claim was missing in their prior attempts at college studies. This chapter will address both the perceived difference in self with regard to academic coursework as well as the participants' conception of learning as understanding.

Difference From Earlier Self

Knowles (1989) suggests four characteristics present in the adult learner that are presumed to be different from what is seen in younger learners. They are: a change in self-concept toward increasing self-directedness; accumulated experience making the learner a rich, learning resource with a widening base for relating new learning; readiness to learn driven by a need prescribed by social roles; and a problem-centered orientation to learning. While the current study is not designed to explore andragogical assumptions about adult learners, the responses of the men interviewed appear to add support to Knowles' (1989)

propositions regarding the mature learner's readiness to learn and entry into learning from a perceived need. For purposes of the current study, readiness to learn and learning from a perceived need were conceptualized as readiness for, and engagement in, formal learning.

As participants talked about their decision to reenter college, seven of the eight spoke to earlier experiences with academic studies. Five of the seven said they had attempted college in their twenties but did not complete their studies for various reasons. For Seke, his earlier experience with college seemed to have been one of trial and error: a time which he described as difficult.

I started way back in '69 – started out in engineering. A couple of years of that until my third year where it really got difficult and I just didn't know what they wanted me to do. At any rate, I switched over to something else and didn't want to do that either. I just couldn't get into school and dropped – basically kind of gave up on that – pursuing other things – riding my bicycle more than I should have. Just generally a distracted youth that didn't have a fair direction.

In comparing his earlier self to how he perceives himself now, Seke indicates that he has changed.

I say bicycles distracted me but youth, in general – discovering girls and things like that, too. All that can be distractions in your teens and twenties. I just didn't have the discipline and the maturity to know what studying was about. I didn't have the clearly defined goals like I do now.

Sagan also spoke to what he termed a “bad” time in college when he was younger. As he described his prior experience with college he indicates:

Actually, I started college in '69. I didn't graduate until '76 which gives you an idea of my mindset at the time. I took a lot of time off. It was a bad time to be in college at least for me. I think I never really applied myself fully and conscientiously. I was a B minus student. I graduated with a 2.75. And being the typical student my mind wasn't completely on my work.

Now, however, Sagan speaks of involvement in academic coursework with an eagerness in his voice, which he terms as a “passion.”

I didn't have the passion then like I do now. Now, it's like, I was in school and all of a sudden not only did I want to learn but the material was incredibly interesting all of a sudden. I was motivated to get 100's. I think that probably had I applied myself correctly when I was in college the first time, I probably could have gotten all A's. I'm thinking has school gotten easier or did I just not do it right the first time around.

For Filbert, his earlier experience with college was also a time of difficulty. He perceived himself to have been ill-prepared for academic work when he first attempted collegiate studies, and apparently was not interested in acquiring the basic skills needed for academic survival:

I graduated from high school in '71 and went to Southeastland on again, off again, way into, I believe, early '75. However, I had no business in

school at that time and my grades clearly reflected I hadn't received college education training. For all purposes I was run through to fill the bill and had to learn the most basic things in college and quite frankly I was not interested in it. I probably majored in bridge down at the [name of a restaurant on the campus of Southeastland]. After being on academic probation, I pretty much just drifted away and took up just working full time here and there.

Unlike Sagan, however, Filbert does not appear to have found a passion for involvement in academic studies upon his return to the academic arena. Rather he speaks of a very calculating approach in order to achieve his goal of attaining an undergraduate degree and then moving onto graduate school.

Well, I do certain things very systematically and deliberately. One, I know I'm going to be weak on certain levels of work so I try to capitalize on what I see as my successes. I always choose my instructors very carefully. I'm very calculating about it. You get your successes where you are good so I aim that way very carefully.

Even those who had not attempted college right out of high school talked of not being ready for college when they were younger (that is, right out of high school).

Vincent: I was just in a hurry, I was in a hurry to grow up, I was in a hurry to get out of my house and I went, at seventeen I had my parents to sign the papers so I could go in the military.

Sidney: Personally, I don't think I would've done good in college when I was younger. I would've been one of them party animal kids that would've just got by.

Although apparently interested in college, Ed found himself unable to work full-time and go to school at the same time; thereby, deterring him.

You know when I was eighteen years old, nineteen years old and trying to go to school and of course, at that time I wasn't making a lot of money and it was just really hard. Finally, I just knew that I couldn't do both. I had to work and so I quit.

The accounts of the current study participants' experience with prior schooling resonate with what has been found in other studies of adult male reentry students. Johnson's (1993) study, in part, examined reasons that males return to the academic educational arena as well as what they perceived to be deterrents to their participation. While some men in her study did not attend college or dropped out when younger due to decreased motivation or lack of interest, others cited "situation deterrents (lack of money, having had to work, and family responsibilities" (p. 190).

Of the reasons for returning to college, which men in her study cited, "interest in job and career change and improvement appeared to be paramount. While mentioned by some in each age group, returning for reasons of personal interest and/or enhancement appeared to be secondary" (Johnson, 1993, p. 182). Unlike the men in her study, only two of the eight participants in the

current research specifically talked about the need for a degree in order to further their careers.

***Filbert:** My plan is I'm going to Southeastland because when I started back I realized that I could possibly get through here in five or six years and if I didn't, I could be 60 going, "do you want fries with that?" Because my health is such that I cannot do the physical labor I used to.*

***Mack:** I needed to come back to school because I had such a stressful time about not being able to work again. I knew it was going to be a lot of work but it beat the alternative which was I couldn't go back to my job doing physical labor.*

Whatever the reasons for not undertaking, or completing earlier academic studies, the men in the current study who spoke of being deterred from collegiate learning when they were younger had re-entered the academic arena to meet a need in their particular life. Knowles (1989) proposed that the adult learner enters an educational activity out of a need to solve a life problem. Dominic (1990), in his work with educational biographies, suggests that people "often enter adult education classes to repair, compensate for, or fill in the gaps of the past. They dream about the university because earlier in their lives they did not have the chance to study" (p. 206). As indicated before, Filbert and Mack were trying to cope with a current life problem (that is, inability to continue jobs that required physical labor). Sidney and Sagan best expressed reasons related to the past.

Sidney: And, maybe I'm trying to prove to myself that had I went to college a lot earlier, you know, I could've done it.

Sagan: One of my goals for a long time was to go back to school in any capacity. I just wanted to learn more. I don't think I applied myself fully and conscientiously the first time. I didn't have the passion I have now.

Although the current study was not intended to explore adult development, several adult development theorists provide a way in which to make more clear how participants viewed the change in their perspectives on academic coursework over time.

Levinson (1978), in his seminal work on adult development, proposes that during early adulthood (that is, ages 17-40), men are exploring what it means to be an adult, making choices that build a particular life structure, and “establishing the Dream in one’s life” (p. 93). The Dream is purported to form the basis for development of one’s life structure in early adulthood. Unlike participants in Levinson’s (1978) study, men in the current study who had been deterred from earlier entrance into, or completion of, college, perceived themselves to be lacking a plan, or goal in their young adult years. I think Ed best expressed this when he said:

Most of my life, just like, kind of like swimming in the ocean. It's just kind of whichever way the waves took you, the path of least resistance. I never had a master plan, never had a big goal, and so, I'm fifty-two years older and I'm working on an undergraduate.

As the men in the current study talked of not having clear direction, plans, or goals in their young adult years, they also spoke of regret at not having entered, or completed, college in their late teens or early twenties. Ed, Vincent, and Mack best expressed the sentiment shared by the men in the following ways:

Ed: *There's a part of me that wishes I had done this when I was in my 20's. I wish I had – let's see how would you say this – I wish I knew what I wanted to be when I grow up.*

Vincent: *Like why didn't I go to college right out of school. Just like nobody could tell me when I was young. But it's like, you have the hindsight thing going and I can – I'm sitting here going to school so – if only I had known then what I know now.*

Mack: *You know, I've said that quite a few times. I wish I had done this 25 years ago. I've always gone through life and I never knew what it was that I wanted.*

Sheehy's (1998) research builds on the notions of stage and task completion proposed by earlier researchers such as Levinson. However, unlike earlier theorists, she claims

Today, particularly for men under 50, the timing of marker events – finishing school, first grown-up job, marriage, parenthood, empty nest, retirement, golden years – has turned out to be unpredictable. What a man is supposed to do, and when, is not clear. (p. 3)

In interviews with 100 men from various occupational and socioeconomic groups, Sheehy (1998) elicited descriptions of the passages that men profess to travel after the age of 40; or as she terms it, the Second Adulthood. During this Second Adulthood one is afforded the opportunity to examine the self that was created in the First Adulthood, redefine that self, and “make the decades after 40 the most exciting and deeply meaningful all” (p. 22). The idea of examining one’s Second Adulthood was expressed by Ed as he described how he had changed in his perception of involvement in academic studies:

You know what was really interesting to me when I did return to school after so many years out, was the realization of how much I had changed. When I was young, I loved anything technical. I absolutely hated the humanities. I did poorly in those, had no interest whatsoever. I made it through them because I had to. When I returned, I had done almost a hundred and eighty degrees. I really loved music appreciation, art history, English. I liked English literature of all things. The technical courses that were required, they were okay. I wasn’t really enjoying them the way I was the humanities and that kind of surprised me. I asked, “what’s happened to me?”

Merriam (1999) indicates that “just getting older is too simple an explanation to account for changes in behavior, attitude, values, or self-perception” (p. 67). Likewise, when considering the biological, cultural, and psychological influences on development, “it is often difficult to separate which

factor or factors have the greater impact on development, as often they intersect in people's lives" (Clark and Cafarella, 1999, p. 6). Rather, according to Merriam (1999), one must consider changes in light of age-graded time, historical influences over time, and the social timetable. Time, therefore, serves to integrate perceived changes: She further purports that the "concept is similar to one of Knowles' (1980) assumptions underlying andragogy – that an adult's readiness to learn is closely tied to the developmental tasks and social roles of adult life" (Merriam, 1999, p. 73).

So, rather than a predictable, hierarchical developmental pattern that is superimposed upon an individual, time provides a window through which one can better understand changes that occur in "behaviors, attitudes, values, and meaning making" (Merriam, 1999, p. 73) as chronology, history, and culture interact. I think Filbert best expressed the notion of changes over time that was conveyed by the men in this study when he said:

As I look back on my life when I was twenty, I have a hard time envisioning myself as self-aware. I would muddle through. I would do things for the moment. Now, I try to at least have a plan. On the other hand, if I live another twenty years, I may look back and go, God, what an idiot.

Therefore, for the men in the current study, the passage of time had led to a change in the way they perceived themselves with regard to involvement in academic coursework. Whereas in their early adult years they perceived a lack

of readiness to engage in collegiate studies, now, at midlife, participants spoke of being ready and, in some instances, even excited about participation in higher education. They spoke of having plans and clearer goals when entering collegiate studies at this time in their lives. McClusky (1963) proposed that goals contribute to the load one carries as they can increase the internal pressure experienced by persons during the course of everyday living. However, for men in the current study, goals seemed to provide an internal resource that contributed to the power available to cope with the load carried as the result of engagement in academic studies during a time of perceived psychological stress. The ways in which the men in this study spoke of their engagement in academic coursework seemed to support Knowles (1989) supposition that "while adults are responsive to some extrinsic motivators (better jobs, promotions, salary increases, and the like), the more potent motivators are intrinsic motivators" (p. 84).

Learning As Understanding

When discussing the concept of andragogy and its contribution to understanding adult learning, Pratt (1993) writes

andragogy appears to rest on two implicit principles of learning: First, knowledge is assumed to be actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from the environment; and second, learning is an

interactive process of interpretation, integration, and transformation of one's experiential world. (Pratt, 1993, p.17)

In a study designed to investigate approaches to learning, Saljo (1979) explored differences in conceptions of learning among 90 adults who were involved in various educational experiences at the time of the study. Findings indicated that participants in this study distinguished between rote learning whereby one tries to absorb or memorize facts and learning that was described by them as understanding. In making this distinction, participants seemed to view the nature of learning as "a perspective, a point of view, an interpretation, a general principle, etc., rather than the plain 'facts'" (Saljo, 1979, p. 449).

The nature of learning as understanding was a theme that resonated with the participants in the current study. It was described in the following ways:

Seke: Memorizing is different than learning. Memorizing doesn't mean you understand what it means or how to put two different things together to make something different. Learning is understanding not just memorizing – understanding what the symbols mean and how to take two different equations, put them together and make another equation that might tell you something different in a different form. Education is learning how to learn. You learn it until you understand it and your mind can go through all the steps for learning in a matter of seconds rather than days or years. So you don't have to relearn every time, you just got to remember the memory paths.

Ed: *Learning is not just how to work something but how something works. That is the design side as well as the technical side. The key to learning is curiosity – how things work – why are we doing it this way.*

Mack: *On a test I can't write everything out about what it is I need to know. That's learning to take a test. You know more, but what does the instructor want to know on the test. How well can you let him know you understand the material. I'm beginning to see they want to know how well you can take parts A and B and C and which ones fit together. The answer to a question involves knowing about things that make up the question. For instance if you are asking why the sky is blue, you have to understand how light is reflected.*

Vincent: *Learning is comprehension, understanding, absorption where you put it to practical application. The thing becomes self-evident, real clear and evident. Schooling is being presented with the information and demonstrating a rudimentary working knowledge of it.*

For some of the men in this study, the idea of learning as understanding some concept or principle – not just rote memorization – appeared to increase the load carried as a student. As McClusky (1963) indicated, expectations and goals can create internal pressure thereby increasing the load that one carries in everyday life. However, the ability to understand what was being taught in the classroom also appeared to contribute to their feelings of satisfaction with engagement in academic coursework. This seems to support Dill and Henley's

(1998) proposition that nontraditional students report feelings of satisfaction with being back in school and attending classes more often than do their traditional counterparts. Sidney describes how the ideas of increased pressure and satisfaction with academic studies played out in his collegiate life.

Learning is understanding. It involves not only what you got right on a test but what you missed and why you missed it. I want to know if I missed it, why I missed it. Was it something stupid or was it something I didn't understand? When I'm doing homework or if it's something that I don't understand then I keep thinking about it. It'll keep me occupied until I find out why. . . .The stress associated with school or pressure in the learning environment is a lot self-imposed – my own expectations – trying to maintain a high grade point average. . . .Grades are not the driving force, the learning is. But, I want to get good grades while I'm learning.

For Seke, the notion of learning for understanding is also perceived as stressful at times. However, the satisfaction he reports from being able to accomplish understanding of a concept is described as follows:

Learning that requires reading, learning new concepts and making breakthroughs in your perception of the conception can be frustrating, overwhelming but I'm finding it doable and rewarding. The reward of going through all this is understanding. Well, I mean the reward is in the understanding.

The notion of learning as understanding can be seen in the work of Marton, Dall'Alba, and Beaty (1993). Based on the earlier work of Saljo (1979), they conducted a longitudinal study, spanning six years, in which 29 students were asked their view of learning at the end of each academic year. Respondents conceptualized learning as "(a) increasing one's knowledge, (b) memorizing and reproducing, (c) applying, (d) understanding, (e) seeing something in a different way, and (f) changing as a person" (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993, p. 277). Of particular interest to the current study is the concept of learning as understanding. It reportedly differs from the three conceptions preceding it (that is, increase in knowledge, memorization and reproduction, and application) in that they are predicated on the idea that the knowledge acquired is outside the individual "waiting to be picked up, taken in and stored" (p. 288). Beginning with the conception of learning as understanding, Marton, Dall'Alba, and Beaty (1993) claim that "the focus shifts from consumption of something to conception of something" (p. 289) whereby some meaning is gained. For Sidney, the meaning attached to understanding is seen in how he defines himself as a student. He speaks to that meaning in the following way:

I think that I'm understanding everything so far that I have taken. I haven't felt hindered or like I didn't understand it. I haven't felt stupid. I haven't felt like I couldn't comprehend it. I didn't feel like I was dragging from behind or holding up the class or anything like that.

The idea of learning as understanding has been conceptualized by some theorists as engagement in learning that operates at a deeper level than what is experienced when one is learning at a more surface level approach such as memorization (Marton and Saljo, 1997; Richardson and King, 1998). In-depth level engagement with learning is described as reaching for some level of understanding of the content and its underlying structure (Marton and Saljo, 1997). Students seem to perceive “themselves as creators of knowledge who have to use their capabilities to make critical judgments, logical conclusions and come up with their own ideas” (p. 43). Students at the surface level, however, seem more interested in memorizing content so that it can be recalled at a later date such as when anticipating a test over specific course material.

While the descriptions of Seke, Vincent, and Mack cited previously seem to indicate a more in-depth level approach to learning, Filbert and Sagan appear to speak more to what might be thought of as a surface-level approach.

Filbert: Knowing the process you have to go through to get an answer may be all you need to get a passing grade. I don't have to know how the subject matter works, I just have to know the sequence of numbers to punch to get the answer. Even if it's the wrong answer, I will have attempted to follow the process. That's positive.

Sagan: I didn't understand most of what was going on in astrophysics. I just said 'I don't need to know this cause I'm auditing it plus even if I

wasn't auditing it, the instructor didn't require a working knowledge of physics.

Unlike, Filbert and Sagan, however, many adult students are more likely to approach learning from a deeper level approach. Richardson and King (1998) indicate that although adult students are presumed, by some, to be inferior to younger students in effective study skills, the opposite is actually true. According to Richardson and King (1998), prior research has shown "adult students are actually more likely than younger students to exhibit a deep approach or a meaning orientation toward their academic studies, and they are conversely less likely than younger students to adopt a surface approach or a reproducing orientation" (p. 6). Seke best expressed the difference in a surface-level and deeper-level approach when he suggested:

There are different types of learning. Some learning is a matter of doing. Some learning is just memorizing facts or formulas and trying to make problems fit the formula and come up with the right answer. Other learning requires reading, learning new concepts and trying to make breakthroughs in your perception of the concept.

For the majority of the men in the current study, the experience of formal learning was conceptualized as learning at a deeper-level whereby learning was conceptualized as understanding: going beyond facts and details to be taken in and memorized. Learning in a formal academic classroom, for most of the

participants in this study, meant operating at a deeper level to where one's conception of some thing is changed.

Summary

Although adult learning is a frequently addressed topic in the adult education literature, there is no one explanation for how it is that learning occurs when individuals are engaged in academic coursework. While participants in the current study gave no clear definition of what it means to learn in adulthood, certain perspectives emerged as they talked about their experience with academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress.

Perspectives associated with academic studies were conceptualized as a difference from earlier self with regard to academic studies and learning as understanding.

Men in this study spoke to not being ready for academic coursework in their late teens or early twenties due to lack of a plan or goal. Although a clear plan or goal was not evident in the early lives of the participants of this study, with the passage of time, each had returned to the academic arena for reasons specific to the individual man. The reasons they indicated appear to be congruent with Knowles (1989) propositions regarding the characteristics of adult learners: particularly in regard to readiness to learn and entry into learning from a perceived need. The concept of change over time, as opposed to a predictable,

hierarchical development pattern, provides a way to view the changes that were reported by the participants in the current study. As Merriam (1999) indicates, mere aging is too simplistic an explanation for the changes in self-perception, behavior, values, and attitudes that are observed. Rather, it is time that integrates changes perceived and thus provides a window through which those changes can be better understood.

As the men in this study talked about the experience of formal learning, the majority conceived of learning as understanding. It was more than just memorizing facts, it came to mean the taking of facts and other discrete items of knowledge, attaching meaning to the symbols used to represent those items, then putting the information together in a way that is different from the original item: namely, construction of knowledge. They differentiated between situations where memorization of material was all that was required (that is, use of a surface level approach to learning), and times when a change in perception of a concept was warranted (that is, use of a deeper level approach to learning).

Whether the approach to learning utilized by a particular participant in the current study was at the surface or in-depth level, the approach seemed to fit a perceived need of the participant. The men in this study reported perceptions similar to the adults interviewed by Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000) – namely, prior life experience, maturity, and the ability to self-monitor enabled them to employ strategies that could maximize the chance for success both in learning and in college.

Using self-regulating strategies described by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) as a frame of reference, the next chapter will discuss the strategies most frequently used by the men to facilitate their engagement in academic coursework and maximize their potential for success in the academic arena. Strategies utilized by the men seemed to have been activated in an attempt to regulate the learning environment to some extent so as not to add to the stress they were experiencing while engaged in academic coursework.

CHAPTER FIVE

Strategies Utilized To Facilitate Engagement In Academic Coursework

As was discussed in Chapter Four, participants in the current study returned to the academic arena for a variety of reasons. Once engaged in academic coursework, participants utilized differing approaches to the formal learning in which they were involved. Whether they employed rote memorization or desired to understand a concept at a deeper level, men in the current study chose tactics that enabled them to maximize the potential for success in current and future courses while not adding to the psychological stress they were experiencing. They activated strategies designed to help with navigation through their academic coursework.

To think in terms of McClusky's (1963) theory of power-load-margin, initiation of academic coursework presented new demands with which participants interviewed for this study had to contend. Through activation of various strategies the men were afforded the opportunity to increase the power needed to cope with the demands imposed by engagement in academic coursework. This chapter addresses the strategies described most often by study participants as they engaged in academic studies.

Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000) examined "(a) how adults define success in college and successful college outcomes, and (b) adults' notions of how they are able to achieve successful outcomes as well as

their identification of any barriers that prevent them from succeeding” (Donaldson, et al, 2000, p. 4). The learning experiences of 13 reentry, undergraduate adult students were explored via in-depth interviews. Participants in the Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000) study indicated that prior life experience and maturity enabled them to make competent decisions about what they wanted to learn and how best to learn it. Study participants were considered to be better prepared and to “have a more realistic view of what was important about college and what knowledge to learn for its future utility” (p. 6), which reportedly helped them to be successful.

Individuals interviewed by Donaldson, et al. (2000) combined study strategies with an ability to monitor the contexts in which the strategies were employed. In this way the participants were reportedly able to demonstrate “a knowledge of themselves as learners who were aware of the consequences of their actions and learning strategies and the barriers and limits to the learning and success” (p. 7). Filbert seemed to express this notion best by the following insight:

I do not consider myself to be a particularly good student. I'm not the best at studying – partly bad management on my part. My expectations of my own performance are phenomenally low. I sucked as a student from the second grade on. I'm not necessarily an ideal student but I'm doing damn fine by my standards. I try to make school work for me however I need to. I try to make up for deficiencies with things that I'm good at.

Conti and Kolody (1995) write, "regardless of the type of setting, learners use various strategies to accomplish their learning needs" (p. 77). Stouch (1993) claims that, through experience, learners have acquired an array of approaches that they use to attain concepts and skills encountered when learning something new. Through exploration into the various strategies utilized by participants in the current study, even more can be understood about how undergraduate reentry male college students navigate through their academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress. Although no prevalent single strategy emerged, many of the activities described seemed to naturally collapse into what can be categorized as strategies that were self-regulatory in nature. In addition to the self-regulatory strategies, several participants talked of the ability to compartmentalize life demands as they engaged in academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress. According to Merriam-Webster On-Line (2004), compartmentalization allows for separate categories, divisions, or sections isolated from each other.

Self-Regulation

According to Spitzer (2000), self-regulation by a learner involves controlling resources such as study environment or time, controlling motivational beliefs and affective reactions to the environment, and controlling "of cognitive learning strategies, such as organizing, rehearsing, and deep processing" (p. 2).

Other researchers (Zimmerman, 1986) claim that learners who are self-regulators activate, adjust, and sustain learning practices via various mechanisms such as planning, organizing, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating. Although, at first glance, Zimmerman's (1986) view of self-regulation may appear similar, in description, to the concept of self-directed learning, they are not synonymous.

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) propose that the most widely accepted view of self-directed learning, in the professional literature, is one wherein the learner is primarily responsible for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of engagement in learning. This view certainly resembles what Zimmerman (1986) describes as self-regulation. However, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) suggest that "within the context of learning, it is the ability and/or willingness of individuals to take control of their own learning that determines their potential for self-direction" (p. 26). Young (1996) provides support for Brockett's and Hiemstra's (1991) belief regarding the personal responsibility component of self-direction in learning when he writes "learners have the ability (although not necessarily the willingness) to control their behavior by applying cognitive metacognitive, and behavioral learning strategies" (Young, 1996, p. 18).

In a study designed to develop and investigate the use of self-regulation strategies by high school students in various learning contexts, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) asked participants to choose from 14 classes of self-regulating behaviors those methods that they used to study, participate in class,

and complete assignments. Forty students from the advanced achievement track and 40 from lower achievement tracks were randomly selected. In addition to the two purposes just mentioned, a third study goal was to “determine the relationship between students’ reported use of these strategies and an omnibus measure of scholastic accomplishment: their achievement track in school” (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1986, p. 616). The classes of self-regulation strategies were developed by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) on the basis of existing literature. The strategies were categorized as follows: goal-setting and planning; organizing and transforming; rehearsing and memorizing; seeking information; environmental structuring; reviewing records; self-evaluation; keeping records and monitoring; self-consequences; seeking social assistance; and a category signified as “other”.

A few participants in the current study described self-regulating strategies that could be defined as review of records. Review of records is a group of three strategies that involve “statements indicating student-initiated efforts to re-read *tests* (12), *notes* (13), or *textbooks* (14) to prepare for class or further testing” (Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1986, p. 618). In describing how they studied for subject matter examinations, some of the men I interviewed talked of reviewing their notes, scanning the textbook, and looking back over prior projects on the subject matter. Although each had a slightly different way of preparing for a test, Ed, Sagan, and Sidney described how they use the self-regulating

strategy of reviewing records to facilitate their formal learning and maximize their potential for success.

Ed: We would have a study guide and a list of topics we should be familiar with. I just scanned the text, scanned the lecture notes, and the work that I had done in my projects related to those topics. So the parts that I didn't know, I'd just look at them again.

Sagan: Well, first of all I went to every class and listened intently and took thorough notes. I read. . .I did the assigned readings carefully and did underlining. Now for the first exam, I practically memorized my class notes and went back and read all my underlining and I was over-prepared.

Sidney: I just read my notes. I took good notes in class. I'd read my notes prior to the test. I'd go through them and look at them again. I kind of make my own mental notes. I'll make acronyms out of memorization type things so that I can key in on it and try to remember it and that helps. It's kind of my own mental thing.

Self-evaluation strategies, which are described by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) as "statements indicating student-initiated evaluations of the quality or progress of their work" (p. 618) were utilized by two of the men in this study. Ed described how he perceived his learning outcome for a test development class.

Well, actually, in fact I may. . .there's one I may redo [be]cause, for a couple of reasons I don't really think I got everything out of the class that I

could. You know, I got a good grade in that class, but I think I could learn more. It's on test development. So I think. . .and I do a lot of that in my job, write a lot of tests. So, I think I could do better by it. I may redo that class.

Later in the interview, Ed spoke to re-taking classes where content has changed since he first took the course.

And, there are some classes like some of the classes in HR that teach you to use classroom tools in your presentation skills and that changes. When I went through that class we were learning how to make 35 millimeter slides and use overhead projectors and now, what it is, it's all we-based, Power Point based, streaming videos. I don't know any of that. I mean I have Power Point, I do a lot of Power Point, but other than that I don't know how to use web-based presentations in the classroom. I don't know how to do streaming videos, streaming audios in the classroom.

Sagan's life changed after the first two semesters at Southeastland. His girlfriend had become pregnant and his aging father was ill. After evaluating his potential for future academic success in light of these two stress events, Sagan made a decision to audit classes. He described that decision in the following manner:

Sagan: *At that point and time I was emotionally a wreck. I was preoccupied and didn't really want to take on the burden of a class for a grade so auditing was the perfect solution because it kept me in the*

university. I was still able to learn, but I didn't have to go home and read for an hour or two every night ten study extensively for an exam. And, I wouldn't have been happy with a C.

While reviewing records and self-evaluation strategies were not described by enough participants to warrant inclusion as a theme of this study, other self-regulatory strategies were more common. In accordance with self-regulating strategies described by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986), the strategies most commonly employed by the men in this study were goal-setting and planning and seeking social assistance.

Goal-Setting and Planning

In Zimmerman's and Martinez-Pon's (1986) study, the goal-setting and planning self-regulated learning strategy was expressed by "statements indicating student setting of education goals or sub-goals and planning for sequencing, timing and completing activities related to those goals" (p. 618). As described in Chapter Two of this document, the men in this study came to the academic learning environment based on differing needs and although particular learning aims varied, they shared the common goal to be involved in academic study at the university level. Some of the men interviewed also seemed to share several sub-goals that provided ways to successfully achieve their primary goal. Examples of the sub-goals that the men addressed were successful completion of a particular course, preparing for a future course perceived to be potentially

problematic and not adding to the stress they were experiencing. When asked how he managed to learn in the face of the struggles he had encountered since returning to school, Sagan's response typified the way in which several other participants talked about their experience with academic coursework and the psychological stress they were experiencing.

Sagan: I just kept focused on my goal to remain in the university whatever it took and to learn more. The grade was unimportant. What was important was to see how I would do, how I would react and how I would perform. So, I didn't care. . .audit the grade. . .I wanted to see. . .I wanted to apply myself and see how it worked out so I could use that as a barometer for any future classes I would take.

In light of the primary goal to remain in academic studies at the university level, five of the eight men interviewed spoke of controlling the number and/or kinds of classes in which they enrolled. This self-regulating strategy seemed to have a two-fold purpose: to maximize the opportunity for success in the class for which they were registered and to minimize the potential for additional psychological stress. Ed, Sidney, Mack, and Filbert speak to use of this particular self-regulating strategy.

Ed: People are amazed that you're working, you have a family and you're carrying a 4.0 average. Say, well, yeah, there's a big trick, you just do one class at a time. You know anybody can do that. If you're carrying twelve or sixteen hours and trying to carry a high grade point average,

you've to a big challenge cut out for you. But one or two classes at a time ain't much to carry a high average because you can do the work. You have time to do the work and do a good job at the work, a thorough job.

Sidney: *I find that by taking one class I'm able to, at least, keep what I consider to be a half-way decent average. And so, if I take more than one class then I would not be able to do that, not with the job that I have. I like knowing things. I'm trying to pick things that I think that I would like. Like this past spring, I'm in Economics 201. But, you know, I kind of find it interesting.*

Mack: *Because of my physical condition, I can only take one or two classes at a time. When I had trouble with the Spanish class, I just took it and that's all. That's all I had to worry about. I knew if I didn't do that I was lost.*

While not limiting the classes he takes, Filbert, like Sidney, registers for classes he enjoys as well as ones he needs. His ability to plan for courses he likes seems to help him find a reason to remain in school and accomplish his primary goal of an undergraduate degree. He describes his current semester in this way:

Filbert: *And the classes, I don't take them capriciously, at least not most of the time. I take the classes I need. I always try and take at least one fun class a semester to keep me happy. I would prefer to. This semester, I'm taking medieval philosophy. . .not an easy course, but it's a fun one. And, what the art department calls life drawing, what I call nudey art. And*

those get me up and keep me in school. I'm taking a political science upper course called international political relations where I can run my mouth and have fun. And an upper level course, history of Africa. That's a tough course. That's my. . .it's not my nemesis, but I've done very well up to now.

In addition to controlling the numbers and kinds of courses in which they enroll, the men in this study also planned for future courses. When the men determined that a future course might prove problematic because of a perceived gap in knowledge or skill (for example, a perceived lack of math skills), they sought out, and participated in classes that would help them be better prepared for that course. For some of the participants, it meant going off campus to other sites to get what they determined to be needed in order to do well in the future course. Comments shared by participants in this study include the following:

Seke: *[The] first junior level class I took was extremely stressful but then I wasn't mathematically prepared and it convinced me to go back and take all my sophomore math again. . .it was very useful to take the basic math courses that were required again and it made a lot of difference.*

Art: *I took a trip to New York immediately after spring semester of my sophomore year just so I could prepare myself to go on in art. . .visiting galleries and museums to get my mind set and try to find some influences that would help me find what I wanted to paint.*

Sidney: That's where I anticipate I will probably get some more stressful level, I guess is when I get into the math. I laid off one semester here. I didn't get any credit for it, but they got the evening school at the local high school and I took a math class there. You know, in other words, I went back to high school and learned some of the algebra there. . . I plan to take the Algebra 110, hopefully summer here.

The ability of the men in this study to limit the number of courses as well as plan for future courses, enabled them to actively influence their primary goal of being engaged in academic study at the university level. These strategies also allowed them to address the sub-goal of doing well in individual courses without adding to the psychological stress they were experiencing.

Seeking Social Assistance

Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000) write that "adults oftentimes have limited involvement with the college environment and thus may compensate for their lack of time for conventional campus involvement through their class-related learning and the relationships they develop with faculty and other students" (p. 3). Responses from individuals in Widoff's (1999) study of undergraduate, adult male, students, "illustrated the fact that many study participants did not see their student role played out in isolation. For some students, a network of peers and social friends provided them with welcome encouragement and, at times, practical assistance" (p. 20). It seems, then, that

the use of a social support network can help learners to be successful in their academic pursuits while, at times, serve as a buffer for the psychological stress they are experiencing.

In their study of self-regulated strategy use by students, Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) determined students to be seeking social assistance when they (that is, the students) made “statements indicating student-initiated efforts to solicit help” (p. 618). Findings of their research revealed that “high achievers were distinguished particularly by their use of teachers and peers as sources of social support” (p. 625). The use of assistance from others was a frequently reported strategy of the men in the current study and was described by Art as follows:

Art: I found that you associate yourself with the students who seem to be grasping it well and get a little feedback from them. Talk to the professor and make sure your questions are answered

For a majority of participants, the professor/instructor was seen as the primary source for obtaining assistance when they had questions or concerns related to subject content. The “adult education literature has placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of establishing an appropriate “adult” teacher-learner relationship” (Tennant and Pogson, 1995, p.171) in which an egalitarian, participative relationship is desirable. However, “some adults are highly dependent on a teacher for structure” (Merriam, 2001, p. 5) and “expect guidance and support from teachers” (Tennant and Pogson, 1995, p. 178).

Examples of ways in which participants spoke to the significance of the professor/instructor in the teaching-learning environment were expressed in the following interchanges.

Vincent: *I'm almost ashamed to admit it but once I know a teacher's or professor's teaching pattern, how they're teaching, what they're looking for, how they set up their exams, if I know how to get by in the course that's the way I go*

Filbert: *Well, I do things very systematically and deliberately. I always choose my instructors very carefully. I want them to know when I do have problems understanding what they're teaching but I'm trying hard to get it. I'm cooperative, I sit up front, I'm attentive and that's when I'm doing everything right.*

Seke: *The professors have been more than willing to take the time to help you out, some of them more than others. Some of them you felt compelled to go to more than others. . . You just have to find the right people. I feel like I'm doing that. It's not easy*

Sagan seemed to share this view of the importance attached to the professor/instructor role in the classroom environment. While not discounting the use of peers (that is, other students), he placed importance on the professor/instructor role as the locus for information. When asked if he used other students when he had questions or concerns about a particular class, Sagan responded:

Sagan: Basically in the past, in the distant past, when I used other students it was because I knew them or lived the same dorm. Now being an adult student, living off campus, basically I don't have too much opportunity to interact with them on that level. If I needed to know something now, I'd probably use the instructor as my primary resource, even if I couldn't get the information from him, he would direct me to the appropriate source.

Similar to what is described by Kasworm (2003) as the entry knowledge voice, Ed places the student in a passive, recipient role. He conveys a picture of the professor/instructor as one who is the source of "what knowledge should be known and assessed, what should be in a curriculum, and how it should be learned" (Kasworm, 2003, p. 90).

Ed: Good instructors will tell you up front what they are going to talk about and the main things to look for. They'll refresh you at the end of the lecture as to what you should have gotten from this lecture. Teachers give students the knowledge then show them how to use it.

When talking about his view of the importance of grades in the teaching/learning situation, Sidney also places the teacher as the locus for information that students need to know. The grade is simply seen as the tool that allows the teacher to know that what has been taught was actually received. Sidney reveals:

Sidney: I guess by having the grade, it's a way of measuring what you learned and what the teacher taught. . . .If you didn't have tests, and if you didn't have grades of some type, I don't know how I would measure what I learned. I don't know how the teacher would put stuff out and teach it without giving you some sort of an indicator. You've got to have some sort of indicator so that you know that what the teacher's teaching is getting back. The teacher has to give feedback so that he or she knows their teaching – that people are receiving that information and how well they're receiving it.

Regardless whether peers or instructors were the source of assistance, the majority of participants in this study spoke to the need to find people who could help them when they did not know what to do. Perhaps Mack best expressed the overall sentiment of the men in this study when he said

The biggest thing for me was the realization that I needed help. I sought out those things and people that could help me. I asked for help. I was getting over trying to do it on my own. I had learned to ask for help when I was in AA so when I got here I said to myself "okay, surely somebody, somewhere must know what I need to know". I took little workshops on how to study, went to EAP program here on campus, took a self-improvement workshop. Anything to help me feel more a part of it and not so out of touch.

Compartmentalization

Although not identified as a self-regulating strategy by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986), compartmentalization was a tactic employed by several of the men in the current study. Ed spoke of being able to compartmentalize as he dealt with the stress of a wife ill with cancer, the demands of his job, and the requirements of the academic arena. This is how he described the strategies he utilized to manage school with the other things that were going on his life at that time:

Yeah, I carried one class during that time. I was registered. I thought I'll just stick it out. But I talked to the professor and explained to him what was happening with the illness and hoped that he could work with me, you know, I may have to miss some classes but that I would do the work. He was very understanding, very supportive.

You know you have to compartmentalize. When I was at work, I was at work. When I was at school, I was at school. When I was at the hospital, I was at the hospital. When I was at home, I was at home. And, you just had to do that. Just keep everything in that box that belongs in that box because if it gets out of that box into the other boxes then you got a real mess. So you have to keep things compartmentalized. It's hard to do.

Sidney would turn off his pager while in class because he had determined that he could take care of whatever it was at work when he got out of class, even if it meant staying up all night.

Generally when I leave work, I turn my phone off. They know I'm in class. If I had it on I couldn't pay attention in class. I sit in class, I like to pay attention to what's going on and listening. If I know I got a problem at work, it's hard to do it. It's hard to get my mind off of that because I'm thinking about it. I mean, that would be stressful. I'll turn it back on after class and I may have to go back to work, whatever it takes, it takes.

Art talked about the ability to prioritize and just do whatever was most important at the time, knowing that he would have to play catch-up with his studies at a later time.

You always have responsibilities that have to be met outside of school and you have to just prioritize and sometimes it conflicts. You have to choose which is more important and complete that task, or tasks, and sometimes it just puts you behind and you have to play catch up. And that's basically what I do sometimes, play catch up.

For Ed, Sidney and Art, compartmentalization apparently provided the ability to focus their attention on academics while engaged in the classroom. By use of compartmentalization as well as self-regulating strategies such as goal-setting and planning and seeking social assistance, the men in this study were able to

maximize their potential for success in academic coursework while not adding to the psychological stress they were experiencing.

Summary

Participants in this study employed a variety of strategies that enabled them to navigate through academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress. The reported strategies were intentionally activated and designed to maximize the participants' ability to achieve academic goals while not adding to the stress they were experiencing. Donaldson and Graham (1999) write "through life experiences and their previous successes and failures, adults have developed metacognitive skills that allow them to monitor their learning approaches, study habits, motivation levels, and personal resources" (p. 32).

The most frequently used self-regulating strategies were goal-setting and planning and seeking social assistance. The primary goal of remaining in academic coursework at the university level provided a general direction in which to travel while the more specific sub-goals provided avenues by which to reach the primary goal. Examples of more specific sub-goals were completion of a particular course, preparing for future courses perceived to potentially be problematic, and not adding to the stress they were currently experiencing. Limiting the number of courses enrolled in for a given semester as well as repeating previous coursework in a content area perceived to be potentially

problematic in the future were but two of the ways the men in this study sought to realize their academic goals.

Seeking social assistance provided the men in this study with the support needed in order to realize their primary goal and its specific sub-goals.

Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, and Bradley (2000) write that mature students “engage their colleagues in class, look for support from friends, co-workers, and instructors and use time with classroom peers to discuss class content and seek better understanding of the material” (p. 8). Some participants in this study sought social assistance from other students (that is, Art) or took advantage of services offered by Southeastland to assist students in their adjustment to the academic arena (that is, Mack). For the majority of the men interviewed, however, the professor/instructor was the primary source of support for questions or concerns related to academic studies.

Although not a self-regulating strategy described by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986), several participants in this study used compartmentalization as a way to focus on their academic learning when needed. As with the other strategies employed, compartmentalization seemed to afford them the opportunity to maximize their potential for academic success while not adding to the psychological stress that they were experiencing.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five have presented the data obtained from semi-structured interviews with the eight participants in this study as well as relevant literature. In the next, and final chapter, I will summarize findings from

this study, discuss implications based on the findings and make recommendations pertinent to further research and practice.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

While it is difficult to determine the number of adults engaged in academic coursework at any given point in time, the number of adults involved in organized, formal adult education has increased over the years (Merriam and Brockett, 1997; Dill and Henley, 1998). These adults tend to be past the “typical” college age for students and are frequently categorized as “nontraditional” students. Much of the literature regarding nontraditional students has focused on the experiences of returning women (Home, 1995; Pirnot, 1987; Droegkamp and Taylor, 1995; Flannery and Hayes, 1995; Home, 1998). However, little has been done to explore the issues and concerns of men who return to academia in their adult years (Dill and Henley, 1998; Widoff, 1999).

Stress is reported to be the most severe of all the major barriers faced by adults returning to college after an interruption in their schooling (Flannery, 1985), although little research has been conducted concerning this problem (Dill and Henley, 1998). Men and women vary not only in the sort of events or predicaments they define as stressful, but also in how they cope with stress-producing situations (Eisler and Skidmore, 1987; Eisler, Skidmore, and Ward, 1988). Therefore, the experiences of women returning to the college classroom cannot necessarily be claimed as the experiences of adult men. If theorists and practitioners of adult education are to discover the most appropriate ways to

better serve adult learners, it is crucial to examine the experience of academic coursework, especially from the learner's perspective.

Summary of the Study

This study was designed to add to the limited information that currently exists regarding engagement in academic coursework by nontraditional, male, reentry college students. More specifically, the purpose was to understand the experiences of nontraditional, reentry, collegiate men who report psychological stress at some time during their coursework. The research question that served as the basic guide for inquiry was: How do undergraduate reentry collegiate males navigate through academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress?

Utilizing a semi-structured interview technique, eight Caucasian male students between 43 and 52 years of age were interviewed in February and March of 2001. The men had been enrolled on a part-time basis (that is, carrying one or two classes a semester) for at least two academic years. Chapter Two described the study site, participants, research method, process, and procedures related to data collection and analysis. As I listened to and analyzed the ways in which these men talked about their experiences with academic studies during times of perceived stress, the data seemed to naturally subdivide into three overarching categories. The categories were conceptualized

as: 1) the occurrence of stress while engaged in academic coursework; 2) perspectives on academic coursework; and 3) strategies utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework.

Upon continued exploration and analysis of overarching themes further subdivisions were noted. When speaking to the occurrence of stress while engaged in academic coursework, participants described stress of a personal nature, stress related to relationships and/or family obligations, and stress related to work demands. As men in the current study discussed their own perspectives on academic coursework, viewpoints related to change over time with regard to academic studies, and the conception of learning as understanding emerged from the conversations. In the descriptions of strategies utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework, tactics that were self-regulatory in nature surfaced. The first of these was goal-setting and planning whereby the men planned for the sequence, time, and completion of activities related to educational goals. A second commonly employed strategy was seeking social assistance, which meant initiating requests for help from others. In addition to the strategies described above, several of the men also indicated an ability to compartmentalize in order to attend to the task at hand (for example, completion of assignments, concentration in the classroom) during engagement in academic coursework.

Analysis of data related to each of these themes and their specific sub-categories were discussed in Chapter Three (The Occurrence of Stress While

Engaged in Coursework), Chapter Four (Perspectives on Academic Coursework), and Chapter Five (Strategies Utilized To Facilitate Engagement in Academic Coursework). In this final chapter, I will summarize the findings of the study in relation to the research question posed in Chapter One.

How Do Undergraduate Reentry Collegiate Males Navigate Through Academic Coursework, Especially During Times Of Perceived Psychological Stress?

Findings revealed three major themes with regard to how reentry undergraduate males navigate through academic coursework during times of perceived psychological stress. First, the men in this study spoke about stress that was triggered not so much by the demands of the academic arena but by personal struggles, relationship and/or family obligations, and work demands. Second, when discussing strategies utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework, a majority of participants spoke of goal setting/planning and seeking social assistance in an attempt to regulate the academic environment to some extent. In addition to these self-regulatory tactics, some of the men were able to compartmentalize the demands of their lives and concentrate on whichever demand required attention at a particular time. Third, additional insights shared by those participating in this study related to perceptions on academic coursework – specifically the difference in self over time with regard to academic coursework and a view that now perceived of learning as understanding.

Perceived Stress During Engagement in Academic Coursework

The majority of men in this study described lives filled with psychological stress: most of it present long before they made the decision to reenter school. Art lived with post-traumatic stress syndrome that made him unable to function at times. Mack reportedly had memory problems as the result of complications following a liver transplant. Sagan received disability payments for what he termed "years of mental illness". The way in which Filbert spoke about his physical, emotional, and family problems created a picture of one who would have difficulty remembering a day that was not psychologically stressful. Vincent and Mack had each lived through years of substance abuse although now active members of Alcoholics Anonymous and trying to maintain sobriety. Therefore, perceived psychological stress was not a phenomenon that occurred just in relation to academic coursework; it was part of their daily lived experience. Although Seke, Sidney, and Ed described more of what could be termed episodic periods of psychological stress during their academic experience, they shared a common theme with the other participants. The common theme that ran through all participant interviews was that the perceived psychological stress did not emanate so much from the classroom experience as it did from struggles of a personal nature, relationships and/or family obligations, and/or work demands.

The nature of the stress during engagement in academic studies. As has been reported in the literature on reentry women (Senter & Senter, 1998;

Homes, 1995), the stress encountered by female adult learners has often been linked to the tension created when various roles compete in the lives of the students. Seven of the eight individuals in the current study spoke directly to stresses encountered as they tried to meet the expectations of the various roles that comprise their lived experience of student, worker, son, father, social being, and/or husband. Although studies (for example, Home, 1997) suggest that women have higher role demands, there is other evidence (such as Widoff, 1999) to indicate that men and women alike face responsibilities and activities that compete for a piece of their twenty-four hour day.

For some participants, the stress while engaged in academic coursework was of a personal nature. Art struggled with the symptomatology of PTSD and the side effects of the medication used to treat it, which interfered with his drive to accomplish tasks and his ability to remain alert in class. Mack spoke to decreased confidence in his academic adequacy due to concerns about his inability to remember well. Three individuals (Ed, Sagan, and Filbert) described competing demands of school and family life that created times of perceived stress while they were engaged in academic studies: competing demands that sometimes required adjustment in the academic environment such as missing classes and/or asking for extension on assignments. Sidney spoke of lacking the time to complete school assignments the way he would have liked due to job demands. Still one other person (Vincent) talked of an overall lack of time

management skills leading to procrastination in completing assignments and readings that perpetuated existing difficulties with self-worth.

The accounts of men in this study related to time management resonates with Cross' (1981) contention that lack of time creates a situational barrier to participation in adult education, and Widoff's (1999) assertion that lack of time requires continual shifting of attention, time, and priorities to accommodate simultaneous demands. However, unlike Cross' (1981) contention, the lack of time did not appear to be a major obstacle to the men in this study. Though the student role often conflicted with family interests/needs or work demands, the men remained committed to their pursuit of academic studies and developed ways of addressing whatever the most salient need was at a given time.

Engagement in academic studies as a stress reliever. Three of eight men in this study indicated that engagement in academic studies was actually a stress reliever for them – particularly being present in class. Although not reported by a majority of participants, it seemed to be an important finding since several authors have suggested a connection between stress and the classroom experience.

McClary (1990) suggests that the “ability to cope with frustration, pressure, conflict, and positive and negative life events (including environmental conditions) is often an important aspect of their [returning adult students] success and reported satisfaction” (p. 66). Ferro (1993) proposes that “the emotional response of the individual to a specific situation plays a determining

role in that person's cognitive functioning – either to fight, resist, or avoid the learning situation or to be open to new opportunities" (Ferro, 1993, p. 32). According to Hiemstra (1993), instructors can unwittingly create a learning environment that may dishearten or frustrate a student thus increasing the learner's load.

The men in the current study, however, perceived themselves to be successful and satisfied with involvement in academic coursework despite the stressful demands of day to day life. While stressful events were reported (for example, completion of necessary administrative paperwork or a perceived lack of content knowledge for some academic courses), the majority of the men talked about their engagement in academic coursework as rewarding. For some participants the reward was in the ability to explore things of interest to them personally. Other men in this study anticipated future benefits as the result of obtaining an undergraduate degree.

The notion that engagement in academic coursework can be viewed as a stress reliever by adult students lends support to findings by Dill and Henley (1998): namely that nontraditional students perceive reentry to school and doing homework as more desirable than their traditional counterparts. There are not enough data from the current study to suggest, as Dill and Henley (1998) have, that those interviewed "may have cushioned themselves from stressful academic events by gaining high self-appraisal in other roles" (p. 30). However, the current study does support Dill and Henley's (1998) finding that "the events of returning

to school after time off and attending class were viewed as more desirable by the nontraditional students” (Dill & Henley, p. 28).

Summary of perceived stress during engagement in academic coursework. When considering the experiences of undergraduate reentry collegiate males during times of perceived psychological stress, data from the current study suggest a need to look outside the academic classroom for events that trigger the stress experience. The stress described by the participants in this study emanated not so much from the classroom as from the personal struggles, relationships and/ or family obligations, and work demands that competed with academic requirements for the participants' time. Other than an occasional reference to content material that was considered as stressful due to a supposed knowledge gap (for example, math) or perceived issues with other students in a particular class, the classroom appeared to be thought of as a stress reliever by some. So, it would seem that although men in this particular study were experiencing psychological stress while engaged in academic coursework, it does not appear to have had a deleterious effect on their academic studies.

Strategies Utilized to Navigate Academic Coursework

As the men in the current study described how they managed to navigate academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress, they talked of strategies that were intentionally activated and designed to maximize

their ability to achieve academic goals while not adding to the stress they were experiencing. Although participants had reentered college based on differing needs, they shared the common goal to be involved in academic study at the university level. However, beyond this, educational goals tended to be participant specific or shared by, at the most, two individuals. For example, Sagan claimed he just wanted to learn. Ed described a desire to utilize what he was learning in order to be better at his job. Sidney hoped his degree would enable him to teach at a technical school someday. Mack and Filbert anticipated that an undergraduate degree would open doors to employment better suited to their physical limitations.

In an attempt to realize the shared, common educational goal as well as participant-specific goals, two self-regulatory strategies were frequently employed. The self-regulatory goals most often indicated by men in this study were: 1) goal-setting and planning; and 2) seeking social assistance from others. These particular strategies are described by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) as two of the self-regulatory strategies used by learners to activate, adjust, and sustain learning practices. Although not indicated by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) as a self-regulatory strategy, a third tactic reported by three of the eight participants in the current study was compartmentalization.

Goal-setting and planning. Five of the eight men interviewed spoke of limiting the number of classes in which they enrolled. By doing so, they believed they were creating a plan designed not only to minimize the potential for

additional stress but also to maximize their chance at academic success. The men indicated that by taking only one or two classes at any given time, they would have time to do the work required and do a good job. In addition to limiting the number of courses taken during a given semester, participants also formulated a plan when they expected that a future course might prove problematic because of a perceived gap in knowledge (for example, a perceived lack of math skill). They sought out and participated in classes that would help them be better prepared for that course. For some participants this meant going off campus to other sites in order to get what they determined to be needed in order to do well in the future course. Two of the participants spoke of dropping a class when it became apparent they could not succeed, only to pick it up at a later time. Whether proactive, or reactive, the men in the current study were able to plan strategies that would help them realize their academic goals as well as not add to the psychological stress they were experiencing.

To think in terms of McClusky's (1963) theory of power-load-margin, initiation of academic coursework presented additional life demands with which participants interviewed for this study had to contend. These additional demands, according to McClusky (1963), would be presumed to change the load carried by the respective individual thus altering the margin available to him. The approach utilized by the men to limit the number of courses and/or plan for future academic requirements conceivably afforded them an opportunity to meet those

academic demands without depleting the margin (that is, reserve) available to meet the additional life responsibilities.

Seeking social assistance. In addition to goal setting and planning, the use of assistance from others was a frequently reported strategy used by men in the current study. According to Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986), the self-regulatory learning strategy categorized as seeking social assistance involves student-initiated requests for help from others (for example, peers and teachers).

For five of the eight participants, the professor/instructor of the class was seen as the primary source for obtaining assistance when they were faced with questions or concerns related to subject content. Although the majority of participants spoke to the need to find people who could help them when they did not know what to do, very rarely were other students mentioned as a source of help. Only two of the men in the current study spoke to the use of study groups at times during their coursework, although one participant indicated a desire to study with others but described unwillingness on the part of other students to be involved with him in study activities.

Since several of the men described themselves as uncomfortable in social situations, the lack of dependence on other students for help could be a reflection of the particular participant's reluctance to seek help from others in the course. Although not mentioned often enough to be considered a theme in the present study, two of the men spoke to being conscious of the age difference between themselves and their classmates. For these two men, it seemed to

create a perceived barrier to their interaction with younger students, and although they shared classroom time and, sometimes, assignment activities with these younger students, they did not appear to perceive themselves as being peers of younger class members. They reported unsuccessful attempts to interact and socialize with younger classmates.

However, given the preponderance with which the men in this study considered the instructor to be the source of answers to questions about their academic studies, I believe it is more likely the participants were “highly dependent on a teacher for structure” (Merriam, 2001, p. 5). The course instructor seemed to be perceived as the one to let the participant know what needed to be learned and how to go about learning it: the one who knew what he (that is, the participant) needed to know.

Compartmentalization. Although not identified as a self-regulating strategy by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986), several of the men in the current study spoke to their ability to compartmentalize tasks and responsibilities. They spoke of being able to separate the demands of their lives and concentrate on whichever demand required attention at a particular time. It was as if they were able to turn a switch in their minds that blocked out everything else except what they were attending to at the time. This reportedly allowed participants to focus their attention on academics while engaged in the classroom, even though other life demands (for example, work demands, family needs) were also present. They indicated via compartmentalization, they were able to concentrate

on the learning tasks at hand and not be thinking about what was happening at home or in the workplace that needed their attention.

Summary of strategies utilized to navigate academic coursework. For the men involved in this study, without initiation of self-regulatory strategies and the ability to compartmentalize, it is possible that they would not have had the margin necessary for continued participation in academic studies. In McClusky's (1963) power-load-margin theory, increase in load without sufficient power creates a situation in which there is insufficient surplus (that is, margin) with which to meet life's demands. The strategies activated by participants provided both the external and internal resources (that is, power) necessary for maintenance of the margin essential to meeting the increase in load created by returning to the academic arena. By limiting coursework, planning for future courses that might be problematic, seeking assistance from instructors or friends, and compartmentalizing tasks and responsibilities, the men were able to meet the demands of the student role as well as the other roles in which they were engaged.

Although not an emergent theme, three participants spoke to their ability to focus on school when in the classroom thereby leaving work or family stresses outside the doors (that is, compartmentalize demands). For those participants reporting compartmentalization as a strategy utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework, it seemed to serve a dual function. Reportedly, it not only allowed them to attend to the learning tasks at hand while in class or when

studying for a particular class, but it also allowed time away from the stress they were experiencing while involved in academic studies. The ability to compartmentalize seemed to allow for brief periods of time where the demands that were perceived as stressful in their lives could be placed in the background: put on hold, as it were.

Therefore, to answer the question of how undergraduate, reentry male students navigate academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress, one must look to the strategies they employ. The strategies utilized by men in this study allowed them to exert some control over engagement in academic coursework while not adding to the psychological stress being experienced.

Additional Insights

Although the current study was designed to explore how it is that reentry undergraduate males navigate academic coursework during times of perceived psychological stress, during the analysis of data perceptions regarding academic coursework itself surfaced. Chapter Four described how participants perceived academic coursework differently now than they had in their early twenties. It also indicated how formal learning, for several of them, had come to be defined as understanding. These two observations are discussed more fully in the following pages.

Difference from earlier self with regard to academic coursework. Those who had attempted college directly out of high school spoke of not being ready for various reasons (for example, inability to concentrate on studies, distraction with social activities, not being interested, lack of money). Even those who had not attempted college right out of high school talked of not being ready in their younger years as they wanted to get out into the world, out away from home. Unlike earlier attempts at university studies, they now perceived themselves to be wiser, more mature, more focused, and having a plan or goal that was lacking in their younger years: a change that they attribute to being more successful in formal learning this time around.

This concept of change over time seems to support Merriam's (1999) proposition that time provides a window through which one can better understand changes that occur in "behaviors, attitudes, values, and meaning making" (p. 73). For men in the current study, the passage of time had led to a change in the way they perceived themselves in relation to academic studies. In their earlier years formal learning was not the most salient priority on which they focused. Now, at midlife, they conveyed a sense of not only being ready but, in some instances, even excited about participation in higher education. Unlike the experience of their young adulthood years, where academic studies were undertaken with no clear plan or goal in mind, the men in this study now seemed to have clarity of purpose as they engaged in academic coursework. Although

that purpose differed among individuals, each man was intent on remaining in university studies and, for most, completion of an undergraduate degree.

As McClusky (1963) proposed in his power-load-margin theory, the men in the current study had developed a bank of acquired skills and experiences that contributed to their resiliency when engaged in academic coursework. For some, prior success with academic coursework provided a frame of reference so that they were better prepared for the current experience. For others, as physical abilities declined and they could no longer engage in manual labor, an undergraduate degree was perceived to be an avenue to more palatable employment options. Still one other participant believed that engagement in university studies at this particular time was a spiritual calling: a direction of God, as it were. Whatever the individual reasons for reentry into the university, academic coursework seemed to be viewed as more important now than when they were younger. It provided a means to achieve something meaningful to them at this time in their lives: whether it was the sheer enjoyment of learning or the attainment of an undergraduate degree.

This attitude toward engagement in academic studies supports Dill and Henley's (1998) findings that the increase in the nontraditional student's eagerness to learn "may indicate that the years out of school have put a new perspective on the classroom experience" (p. 30). For the majority of men in this study, engagement in academic coursework in their younger years seemed to be part of an expectation that collegiate studies were the next logical step after

leaving high school. Formal learning, at that time, seemed to hold no interest for most of the men interviewed other than getting the grade necessary to pass the course so they could move on to the next course. As has been indicated earlier, they reported no clear plan or direction. For those who had attempted academic studies in their young adulthood, engagement in academic coursework seemed to hold no real relevance to their lived experience other than the sense that they ought to obtain a college degree.

Now, however, the ways in which the men spoke of engagement in academic coursework indicated a commitment that was reportedly not evident in young adulthood. They spoke of regret at not having been more committed to academic studies when younger implying that completion of collegiate studies as a young adult may have given a focus to life that was reportedly absent then. When speaking about current engagement in academic studies, participants did not seem to perceive university studies as an obligation but, rather, a desired, wanted experience. For most of those interviewed, engagement in university level coursework was reportedly an enjoyable experience. As was expressed by some men in this study, engagement in collegiate studies had actually provided periodic relief from the stress that they were experiencing.

In addition to the possible stress relief aspect of classroom attendance, engagement in academic studies seemed to provide an avenue for the men to better understand life events or a particular subject matter somewhat differently than they had prior to their current engagement in collegiate coursework. Some

men were afforded the opportunity to answer questions of reported importance to them that had been left unanswered by self-study of a particular subject matter. Others proposed that what they were learning in the classroom enabled them to understand life situations and relationships encountered outside the classroom in a different way. Still others indicated that their current success with academic studies resolved doubts they had about their ability to accomplish college level coursework.

Therefore, findings from the current study suggest that as Dill and Henley (1998) propose, the years since a previous encounter with school had led participants in this study to view the formal learning experience somewhat differently. They now had some notion of what to expect from the academic arena as well as what they wanted to gain from engagement in collegiate coursework. Over time, a focus to their pursuit of collegiate studies had developed: a focus that was reportedly lacking in their younger years.

Learning as understanding. In addition to the change in self over time with regard to academic coursework, the nature of formal learning had taken on new meaning for the men in this study. Several men spoke to a view of learning that now went beyond just memorizing course information to one in which they attempted to come to some level of understanding about the subject matter of the course. Some spoke of trying to understand what was being taught so that it became self-evident and clear to them. For other participants in this study,

formal learning reportedly came to mean understanding course content in a different way over time.

According to Richardson and King (1998), formal learning as understanding is a characteristic of adult students that represents a deeper level of engagement with coursework than rote memorization, which is a more surface level approach to learning. Marton, Dall'Alba, and Beaty (1993) propose that learners, at the deeper level, shift their focus from "consumption of something to conception of something" (p. 289). Although taking in of information (that is, consumption of something) was part of the academic experience for the men in this study, the desire to understand what was being taught (that is, the conception of something) was reported to be more important for the majority.

The ability to conceptualize what was being presented in a course and understand it in their own way seemed to contribute to participants' satisfaction with engagement in academic coursework. As Dill and Henley (1998) reported from their research, "returning to school after time off and attending class were viewed as more desirable by the nontraditional students than by the traditional students" (p. 28). The sense that men in this study conveyed was that the desire to understand what was being taught in a given course provided the reward for what they were undergoing: namely, the addition of the student role to existing life demands.

Summary of additional insights. When engaged in academic studies in young adulthood, consumption of facts and information in order to obtain a

passing grade seemed to play a prominent role in the collegiate experience. The way in which the men described prior academic experiences did not convey a desire to understand what was being studied at that time. Rather, they talked about being easily distracted and lacking the full concentration necessary to successful engagement in academic coursework. Now however, for the majority of participants in this study, the desire to understand course content reportedly provided the reward for the decision to engage in academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological stress.

Over time, therefore, the men in this study perceived that not only had they changed with regard to how academic studies were viewed, but also perceptions of formal learning had changed. Academic learning, for most of the men interviewed, now took on a deeper meaning as they attempted to understand what was being taught.

Recommendations

The findings reported and discussed in this dissertation can be said to be a springboard for further study and improved practice. This study is a beginning from which to go further: a starting point from which to continue an investigation of engagement in academic coursework during a time of perceived psychological for the reentry collegiate male student. Based on the findings of this study there are several recommendations for the areas of theory, research and practice.

Recommendations for Theory and Research

As was discussed in Chapters One and Three, little work has been done with regard to engagement in academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress. Even less has been explored concerning the experiences of reentry adult male learners. As was indicated earlier, it has been proposed that female students returning to academic studies experience greater stress than do returning males. However, the responses of the men in the current study have helped shed new light on that assumption. It has shown that men also encounter stress of a personal nature, stress related to relationships and/or family obligations, and stress related to work demands during times of engagement in academic coursework. Theories that speak to the types of stressors experienced by reentry adult male learners need to be developed. As Dill and Henley (1998) discovered, the tools currently used to unveil stressors do not always include items related to the various roles that adult learners fill. There needs to be further investigation into the various roles that men assume, especially how the demands created by those roles interact with academic studies during times of perceived psychological stress.

Psychological stress was described as an ever present experience in the lives of the majority of the men in this study. It is likely that adult learners, at any given time, are also experiencing stress since “most of the adult learners are also full-time workers, family members, and members of religious, social, and civic organizations” (McClary, 1990, p. 66). However, as several of the

participants in the current study indicated, engagement in academic coursework was a stress reliever at times. More needs to be known about the mediating effects of engagement in academic coursework on psychological stress as well as how stress enhances or inhibits one's involvement in collegiate studies. What is it about engagement in academic coursework that helps relieve stress for some individuals? Do men experience the mediating effects of engagement in collegiate studies differently from women?

Exploration into self-regulating strategies utilized to facilitate engagement in academic coursework is an important direction for future inquiry. The participants in this study described the use of self-regulating strategies (that is, goal setting/planning and seeking social assistance) throughout their experience with collegiate coursework. Although seemingly reliant on the professor as the primary source of answers to questions regarding academic course content, men in this study frequently initiated strategies designed to regulate the formal learning environment. It is thought that these strategies were activated in order to maximize the potential for success while not adding to the psychological stress being experienced by the men. Are certain self-regulating strategies gender specific? Is there an association between use of self-regulating strategies and the ability to be self-directed in learning? Is there an association between self-regulation and one's ability to participate in collaborative learning? These are but a few of the questions that need to be explored further with regard to the use self-regulating strategies by adult learners.

In addition to self-regulatory strategies, participants spoke about the ability to compartmentalize tasks, responsibilities, and/or demands: a capability that allowed for attention to whatever was perceived as the greatest demand at the time. In describing this phenomenon, it was as if the men were opening and closing doors to the various demands that comprised their lives. By opening and closing doors to the various role demands encountered, participants seemed to perceive that personal, familial, work, and/or school demands could be managed satisfactorily. Further research into the ability to compartmentalize needs to be undertaken. Is the ability to compartmentalize tasks, responsibilities, and/or demands gender specific? Does the ability to compartmentalize demands have a mediating effect on perceived stress?

Further work needs to occur with regard to surface level approaches to formal learning versus deeper level approaches. Several participants in this study indicated that while they were now attempting to understand (that is, conceptualize) what was being taught in the academic classroom, sometimes a more surface level approach (that is, consumption of what is being taught) was also acceptable. In what learning contexts do adult learners move back and forth between these two approaches? Do men tend to use one type of approach more than the other? How are surface level and deeper level approaches associated with the various adult learning theories?

Recommendations for Practice

Adult education practitioners need to be cognizant of the multiplicity of roles that make up their students' lives: student is but one of those roles. Recognition of the psychological stress experienced by persons with multiple role obligations should lead to program design and structure that maintains the rigor necessary to the academic environment but allows for the freedom needed by adult learners to meet the demands of that rigor.

Professors, or instructors, in adult education programs can assist with research into self-regulating strategies by gathering accurate data regarding the strategies adult students activate and under what circumstances those strategies are activated. Practitioners can change instructional techniques to take into account those learners who operate with a surface level approach to formal learning rather than a deeper level approach. Those individuals involved in direct instruction need to question the assumption that all adult learners desire a participative, collegial relationship with the instructor: some learners desire an instructor-driven classroom structure. Adult education theorists and researchers need to make more of an effort to include the experiences of men in their theory development and research work.

Finally, adult educators must consider their ethical obligation to the student who may be experiencing psychological stress while engaged in academic studies. Psychological stress can serve as a stimulant to the learner: making one more productive, more energized. However, the stress encountered

when one is attempting to juggle multiple obligations and responsibilities in addition to the requirements of academic coursework can overwhelm an individual. Are we, as educators, obligated to be cognizant of a learner's stress level and if so, what is our duty to that person? How should our knowledge of the student's psychological stress level influence what we do in the classroom?

Concluding Thoughts

As was indicated in Chapter One, very little is known about how undergraduate reentry collegiate males navigate through academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress. The current study attempted to add to the limited knowledge that currently exists, and set the stage for further exploration into this phenomenon.

The psychological stress described by participants in this study did not reportedly emanate so much from engagement in academic coursework as it did from the various relationships and responsibilities (that is, life demands) that were part of the men's lived experience outside the college classroom. Implications from prior research (for example, Home, 1997) suggest that women returning to college have higher roles demands than do returning male students. Other studies (for example, Widoff, 1999) suggest that men face similar demands as they reenter the collegiate arena. Men interviewed for the current study actually reported responsibilities and activities similar in nature to those

encountered by women. Interviewees indicated day to day lives comprised of multiple demands (for example, parent, worker, caregiver). Though the student role often conflicted with family interest/needs or work demands, the men in this study reported continued commitment to being engaged in collegiate coursework. Unlike Hiemstra's (1993) claim that "an instructor can unknowingly generate excess load for a learner" (p. 43), findings from this study seem to indicate that very little stress is perceived as directly related to classroom demands. On the contrary, for some men in this study involvement in collegiate studies was actually a stress reliever as it provided a time away from the stressful demands of other life roles.

Participants in this study spoke about activating strategies designed to maximize their ability to be successful in collegiate studies while not adding to the stress being experienced. The strategies most frequently mentioned were self-regulatory in nature. By limiting coursework, planning for future courses that might be problematic, and seeking assistance from instructors or friends who had a particular expertise perceived as needed, the men in this study were able to maintain the margin necessary to meet not only collegiate demands but other life demands as well.

Additional insights derived from the data analysis revealed that participants perceived themselves as different over time with regard to engagement in formal learning. The men now perceived themselves as ready for collegiate studies with a desire and a plan that was not readily apparent

during their young adult years. In addition to a perceived change in self over the years with regard to academic coursework, the nature of learning had taken on new meaning over time. Several participants spoke about a view of formal learning that now went beyond just memorizing (that is, a surface level approach to learning) to a deeper level whereby there was a desire to understand what was being read and/or taught in the classroom. Even the men in the current study who did not speak directly to learning as understanding, implied that their use of what might be interpreted as a surface level approach was deliberate in nature: an act of volition.

As adult educators strive to create learner-centered educational opportunities, engagement in academic coursework, especially during times of perceived psychological stress needs to be explored. Theory development pertinent to this phenomenon can aid in establishing practice patterns that foster a learner-centered adult education environment. Information regarding the mediating effects of engagement in collegiate studies on psychological stress as well as how stress enhances or inhibits involvement in academic coursework can aid adult education practitioners as they create learner-centered opportunities.

Other areas for exploration may also prove useful to the theory and practice of adult education. Knowledge regarding the use of self-regulating strategies by adult learners, surface level versus deeper level approaches to formal learning, and the ethical obligations to learners who experience

psychological stress while engaged in academic coursework can provide adult education theorists and practitioners with a base from which to move forward.

Practitioners need to be cognizant of the multiplicity of roles that men fill and work toward a program design and structure that maintains the rigor necessary for academic work but provides the freedom needed by male students to meet the demands of that rigor. Adult education professionals can assist with research into self-regulating strategies by gathering accurate data indicating the strategies adult male students activate and what precipitates activation of a particular strategy. Practitioners, theorists, and researchers all need to be more cognizant of the way in which adult, reentry, male student perceive their collegiate experience especially when experiencing psychological stress.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Ashar, H. & Skenes, R. (1993). Can Tinto's student departure model be applied to nontraditional students? *Adult Education Quarterly*, 43(2), 90-100.
- Bee, H.L. & Bjorklund, B.R. (2000). *The journey of adulthood*. (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bogdan, R.C. & Biklen, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods*. (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brockett, R.G. & Hiemstra, R. (1991). *Self-direction in adult learning: Perspectives on theory, research & practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Brookfield, S. (1992). Why can't I get this right? Myths and realities in facilitating adult learning. *Adult Learning*, 3(6), 12-15
- Brookfield, S. (1984). Self-directed adult learning: A critical paradigm. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 59-71.
- Chartrand, J.M. (1990). A causal analysis to predict the personal and academic adjustment of nontraditional students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 37(1), 65-73.
- Clark, M.C. & Caffarella, R.S. (1999). Theorizing adult development. In M.C. Clark & R.S. Caffarella (Vol. ed.) *An update on adult development theory: New ways of thinking about the life course: Number 84. New directions for adult and continuing education* (Winter, pp. 3-7). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Conti, G.J. & Kolody, R. (1995). The use of learning strategies: An international perspective. *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, 77-82.*
- Cross, K.P. (1981). *Adults as learners.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Darkenwald, G.G. & Novak, R.J. (1997). Classroom age composition and academic achievement in college. *Adult Education Quarterly, 47(2),* 108-116.
- Day, M. & James, J. (1984, October). *An inquiry into a co-operative diagnostic tool based on McClusky's theory of margin to facilitate adult educational brokerage services.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association, Jackson Hole, Wy.
- Dill, P.L. & Henley, T.B. (1998). Stressors of college: A comparison of traditional and nontraditional students. *Journal of Psychology, 132(1),* 25-32.
- Dominice, P.F. (1990). Composing Education Biographies: Group reflection through life histories. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide To Transformative and Emancipatory Learning* (pp. 194-212). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Donaldson, J.F. & Graham, S. (1999). A model of college outcomes for adults. *Adult Education Quarterly, 50(1),* 24-40.

Donaldson, J.F., Graham, S.W., Martindill, W., & Bradley, S. (2000). Adult undergraduate students: How do they define their experiences and their successes? *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 48(2), 2-11.

Doyle, J.A. (1995). *The male experience*. Madison: Brown & Benchmark.

Droegkamp, J. & Taylor, K. (1995). Prior learning assessment, critical self-reflection, and reentry women's development. In K. Taylor and C. Marienau (Vol. eds.). *Learning environments for women's adult development: Bridges toward change: Number 65. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* (Spring, pp. 29-36). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Eisler, R. & Skidmore, J. (1987). Masculine gender role stress: Scale development and component factors in the appraisal of stressful events. *Behavior Modification*, 11, 123-136.

Eisler, R. , Skidmore, J. & Ward, C. (1988). Masculine gender roles stress: Predictor of anger, anxiety, and health risk behaviors. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 52, 133-141.

Fairchild, E.E. (2003). Multiple roles of adult learners. *New Directions for Student Services*, 102 (Summer), 11-16

Ferro, T.R. (1993). The influence of affective processing in education and training. In D.D. Flannery (Vol. ed.), *Applying cognitive learning theory to adult learning: Number 59. New Directions For Adult And Continuing Education* (Fall, pp. 25-33). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Flannery, D.D. (1985). Adult returning students: Barriers to learning persistence and withdrawal. *Proceedings of the Annual Midwest Research-to-Practice conference in Adult and Continuing Education*, 78-82.
- Flannery, D.D. & Hayes, E. (1995). Adult women's learning in higher education: A critical review of the literature. *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference*. Edmonton: Alberta, 115-120.
- Hiemstra, R. (1993). Three underdeveloped models for adult learning. In S.B. Merriam (Vol. ed.), *Update on Adult Learning Theory: Number 57. New Directions For Adult And Continuing Education* (Spring, pp. 37-46). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Home, A.M. (1998). Predicting role conflict, overload and contagion in adult women university students with families and jobs. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(2), 85-97.
- Home, A.M. (1997). Learning the hard way: Role strain, stress, role demands, and support in multiple-role women students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33, 335-46.
- Home, A. (1995). Do universities support multiple role women students? *Proceedings of the 36th Annual Adult Education Research Conference*. Edmonton: University of Alberta, 183-186.
- Jeffreys, M.R. (1998). Predicting nontraditional student retention and academic achievement. *Nurse Educator*, 23(1), 42-48.

- Johnson, S.B. (1993). *Going back to school: Characteristics, motivations, deterrents, and needs of adult male reentry students at a community college*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Miami, Coral Gables.
- Kasworm, C. (2003). Adult meaning making in the undergraduate classroom. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(2), 81-98.
- Knowles, M. (1989). *The making of an adult education: An autobiographical journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Knowles, M. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*. Chicago, IL: Follett
- Levinson, D. J. (1978). *Seasons of a man's life*. New York: Ballantine.
- Main, K. (1979). The power-load-margin formula of Howard Y. McClusky as the basis for a model of teaching. *Adult Education*, 30(1), 19-33.
- Marshal, C. & Rossman, G.B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
- Marton, F., Dall'Alba, G., & Beaty, E. (1993). Conceptions of learning. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 19, 277-299.
- Marton, F. & Saljo, R. (1997). Approaches to learning. In F. Marton, D. Hounsell, N. Entwistle (Eds.) *The experience of learning: Implications for teaching and studying in higher education* (pp. 39-58). Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press.

- McClary, S.A. (1990). Stress, coping, and adult education. In M.H. Rossman & M.E. Rossman (Vol. eds.). *Applying adult development strategies: Number 45. New directions for adult and continuing education* (Spring, pp. 65-75). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- McClusky, H.Y. (1963). Course of the adult lifespan. In W.C. Hallenbeck, (Ed.), *Psychology Of Adults* (pp. 10-19). Washington, D.C.: Adult Education Association of the U.S.A.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview* (Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Vol. 13). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Merriam S.B. (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. In S.B. Merriam (Vol. Ed). *The new update on adult learning theory: Number 89. New Directions For Adult and Continuing Education*. (Spring, pp. 3-13). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S.B. (1999). Time as the integrative factor. In M.C. Clark & R.S. Caffarella (Vol. Eds.). *An update on adult development theory: New ways of thinking about the life course: Number 84. New directions for adult and continuing education* (Winter, pp. 67-75). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. & Caffarella, R. S. (1999). Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide. (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S.B. & Brockett, R.G. (1997). The profession and practice of adult education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Merriam, S.B., Mott, V., & Lee, M. (1996). Learning that comes from the negative interpretation of life experiences. *Proceedings of the 37th Annual Adult Education Research Conference*, May, 1996, 222-227.
- Merriam-Webster On-Line (2004). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.
- Pearlin, L.I. (1989). The sociological study of stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 30(3), 241-256.
- Pirnot, K.A. (1987). Reentry women: A longitudinal study of persistence in nontraditional students. *Journal of the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors*, 50(3), 20-26.
- Pratt, D. D. (1993). Andragogy after twenty-five years. In S.B. Merriam (Vol. ed.). *Update on Adult Learning Theory: Number 57. New Directions For Adult And Continuing Education*, (Spring, 25-35). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- QSR NUD*IST User Guide (2nd Ed.). (1997). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Richardson, J.T.E. & King, E. (1998). Adult students in higher education: Burden or boon? *The Journal of Higher Education*, 69(Jan.-Feb.), 65-88.
- Saljo, R. (1979). Learning about learning. *Higher Education*, 8(4), 443-452.
- Senter, M.S. & Senter, R. (1998). A comparative study of traditional and nontraditional students' identities. *NASPA Journal*, 35(4), 270-80.
- Sheehy, G. (1998). *Understanding men's passages: Discovering the new map of men's lives*. New York: Random House.

- Spitzer, T.M. (2000). Predictors of college success: A comparison of traditional and nontraditional age students. *NASPA Journal*, 38(1), 82-98.
- Stouch, C.A. (1993). What instructors need to know about learning how to learn. In D.D Flannery (Vol. Ed.), *Applying cognitive learning theory to adult learning: Number 59*. New directions for adult and continuing education (Fall, pp. 59-67). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tennant, M. & Pogson, P. (1995). *Learning and change in the adult years*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Umberson, D., Chen, M. D., House, J.S., Hopkins, K. & Slaten, E. (1996). The effect of social relationships on psychological well-being: Are men and women really so different? *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 837-855.
- Widoff, J.C. (1999). The adult male undergraduate student experience: Real men do return to school. *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 47(2), 15-24.
- Yarbrough, D.W. & Schaffer, J.L. (1990). A comparison of school-related anxiety experienced by nontraditional versus traditional students. *College Student Journal*, 24(1), 81-90.
- Young, J.D. (1996). The effect of self-regulated learning strategies on performance in learner controlled computer-based instruction. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 44(2), 17-27.

Zimmerman, B.J. (1986). Becoming a self-regulated learner: Which are the key subprocesses? *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 11*(4), 307-313.

Zimmerman, B.J. & Martinez-Pons, M. (1986). Development of a structured interview for assessing student use of self-regulated learning strategies. *American Educational Research Journal, 23*(4), 614-628.

SOUTHPORT

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter Of Invitation To Participate

Dear Fellow Student:

I would like to invite you to be part of a group being considered for participation in a very important study concerning the experiences of men who have entered the university after having been out of school for a while. Many of the research studies concerning reentry students have focused on women: particularly, the stress associated with trying to accommodate the role of student along with their other roles. However, the academic literature is sorely lacking in information about adult men who reenter college. As you know, men and women perceive, and react to, their life experiences in different ways. Therefore, it can be a problem to use the experiences of women to determine what all reentry students need in the way of resources and support while engaged in their coursework.

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of reentry, collegiate men who report the occurrence of psychological stress at some time during their coursework. The emphasis will be on how it is that men negotiate through coursework, especially during times of stress.

The study is qualitative in nature and will use interviewing as the primary method of collecting data. If selected for participation in the study, your interview would be audiotaped and last approximately 1 – 1 1/2 hours. An opportunity to read your transcript and make any corrections, additions, or deletions you desire will be provided. All tapes and documents pertaining to the study will identify you only by a pseudonym of your choice thus assuring your anonymity. Your pseudonym will not appear on the written consent form signed by you. In this way, any connection between your real name and the pseudonym you have chosen can be virtually eliminated.

A verbal and written explanation of the research project will be provided prior to beginning any interviews. We will discuss the purpose of the research and your rights with regard to participation. You will be afforded the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns about your participation. Details about confidentiality, the interview process, use of audiotape, and dissemination of data will be clarified. You have the right to withdraw your participation at anytime during the data collection phase of the study.

Enclosed is a self-addressed, stamped envelope, by which you can reply. If you have any questions or just want to discuss the project before replying, please feel free to contact me by phone at (865) 577-1781 or by email at *granny@utk.edu*. I will return your call or email at the earliest possible time. Thank you for considering this project. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Elaine W. Anderson
Ph.D. Student, College of Education

APPENDIX B

Willingness To Be Contacted Form

YES, I AM WILLING FOR YOU TO CONTACT ME REGARDING YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT.

_____ (Signature)

THE BEST TIME TO REACH ME IS BETWEEN THE HOURS OF:

_____ & _____ A.M. OR _____ & _____ P.M.

I CAN BEST BE REACHED BY: PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR WILLINGNESS TO BE CONTACTED

APPENDIX C

Follow-up Participation Letter

JUST A REMINDER

If you have considered participation in the research study designed to explore The Experience Of Re-entry College Men Who Encounter Some Type Of Stress During Their Coursework, there is still time. Perhaps you have just not had the time to respond to my initial letter of 2/3/01, and thought maybe it was too late. We still have time to talk. An interview can be arranged at a location and time convenient for you. The men I have interviewed thus far have proven very helpful in providing data as to what it is like for older, male students returning to the collegiate environment. More is needed, however. Please consider participating.

If you would be willing to be contacted regarding participation in this study, please:

- 1. Fill out the form at the bottom of this page*
- 2. Tear it off*
- 3. Return it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope enclosed.*

This will be the last letter you will receive regarding the study. If you do not respond, I will assume you are not interested. Please contact me by phone, email, or pager if you have questions or concerns regarding participation.

*Elaine W. Anderson
PO Box 190
Seymour, TN 37865
(865) 577-1781*

Email: HYPERLINK <mailto:granny@utk.edu> granny@utk.edu

Pager: (865) 544-8700 Pager ID #: 1311

YES, I AM WILLING FOR YOU TO CONTACT ME REGARDING YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT.

(Signature)

THE BEST TIME TO REACH ME IS BETWEEN THE HOURS OF:

_____ & _____ A.M. OR _____ & _____ P.M.

I CAN BEST BE REACHED BY: PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR WILLINGNESS TO BE CONTACTED

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

FOR JUST A MOMENT THINK ABOUT THE COURSEWORK YOU HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN SINCE YOUR RETURN TO COLLEGE.

NOW, THINK ABOUT A TIME DURING THAT COURSEWORK WHEN YOU PERCEIVED YOURSELF TO HAVE EXPERIENCED PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AND TELL ME ABOUT IT.

Interview Prompts To Be Used If Needed:

1. How would you describe yourself during this time?
2. What all was going in your life at this particular time?
3. How did others influence you during this time in your life?
4. Describe, in as much detail as you can remember, what you were trying to learn during this period of time.
5. Describe, in as much detail as you can remember, the psychological stress you were experiencing during this time.

VITA

Elaine West Anderson was born in Knoxville, TN on July 1, 1947. She was raised in Knoxville. Following grade school at Perkins Elementary School and junior high school at Tyson Junior High, she graduated from West High School in 1965. From there, she obtained a Nursing Diploma from the University of Tennessee Hospital School of Nursing, Knoxville. Her undergraduate work was completed in 1983 with a B.S. in Industrial Education after which she completed a M.S. in Technological and Adult Education in 1991. She completed a Ph.D. in Education in May, 2004.

Elaine worked as a professional nurse for approximately 30 years. Her experience as a nurse offered varied opportunities in direct patient care as well as staff development and management. She is currently employed as a Research Associate at the Institute for Assessment and Evaluation located within the College of Education, Health and Human Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville campus.

5996 2951 38
06/23/04 MRB