FROM AN ADULT VIEWPOINT:  
THE TRANSITION FROM NON-STUDENT TO STUDENT STATUS  

by

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(ABSTRACT)

This study focused on the transition process of adult undergraduate students as they progressed from non-student to student status at a large state-supported university. This study focused on the factors of transition as described in the Transition Framework developed by Nancy K. Schlossberg. Schlossberg identified three major components of the transition process: the transition, the individual, and the environment. The purpose of this study was to determine the adequacy of the Schlossberg Transition Framework in explaining the actual transition of adults from non-student to student status.

A qualitative methodology was utilized for data collection and analysis. Data collected through in-depth personal interviews led to findings which verified those constructs of Schlossberg's model that adult students identified as important to the transition process.

The Schlossberg Transition Framework proved to be an adequate tool for explaining this particular transition, although some components of the Framework were of more importance than others. Study findings indicated that
the variables characterizing the individual were the most important part of the transition process for the adults in this study. Commitment and values, ego development, outlook, and coping resources all surfaced as critical components to a successful transition. The variables characterizing the transition important to these adults were: stress, role change, trigger event, and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature. All the variables characterizing the environment; support from family, friends, and institutions were found to be important to this transition. The following formula was designed to describe characteristics of the adults in this study who had successfully become undergraduate college students: Determination + Courage + Vision = A Successful Transition.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my sons Nick and Tommy. As a single mom who was working full-time, and also being a graduate student, there were many times when my school work came before time I could have spent doing things with them. They were always understanding and never complained. Even though this project took several years to complete, they always had words of encouragement for me. Now that I have finished, they too, share in my pride of accomplishment. This degree was definitely a collaborative effort. I have been blessed with two wonderful children.

I also dedicate this paper to my mother and father. They instilled in me, from childhood, the belief that I could do anything I wanted to do. Although my father did not live to see me get this degree, I can see him and my dog Jake, up in heaven, smiling down upon me.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER PAGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Development</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age and Stage Perspectives</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Timing and Variability Perspectives</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-Event Adaptation Perspectives</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-Course Perspectives</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schlossberg's Transition Theory ........................................... 17
The Transition ........................................................................ 18
The Transition Process ............................................................ 20
Variables Characterizing the Transition .............................. 22
Variables Characterizing the Individual ............................ 24
Variables Characterizing the Environment ....................... 27
Coping Resources for Individual Transitions .............. 28
Applications of Schlossberg's Transition Theory ............ 28
Transition and Adaptation ..................................................... 33

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY....................... 36
Design of the Study ............................................................... 36
Selection Procedures .......................................................... 39
Data Collection Procedures .............................................. 41
Data Analysis ................................................................... 43

IV. FINDINGS ................................................................ 54
Biographies of Participants ................................................. 54
The Schlossberg Transition Framework ......................... 71
The Transition Process ....................................................... 72
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The chronological age of persons attending college has changed dramatically over the past 40 years. In 1950, persons outside the traditional 18-24 year old cohort constituted less than 25% of collegiate participants. Today they account for more than 40% (Shaw, 1991). *The 1991 Digest of Educational Statistics* revealed that in 1991, 2.5 million men and 3.5 million women (over age 25) enrolled in institutes of higher education. Of the men, 30% enrolled as full-time students and 70% as part-time students. The enrollment pattern for women was slightly different: 25% full-time and 75% part-time. The figures projected for 1997 show that 2.8 million men and 4 million women intend to enroll in colleges and universities.

It is important for professionals in higher education to know all they can about the adults who are coming to college in increasing numbers every year so that the services (instructional as well as non-instructional) that these students need will be available. Many colleges would not be in existence today if it were not for the financial contribution being made by the adult students.

Adult students have been the focus of many studies. We know WHO they are (Chickering & Havighurst, 1981; Cross, 1981; Smith, 1982), WHAT they want (Weissberg, Copas, Sholz & Werring, 1986; Hodgson, 1989; Terrell,
WHERE they will go to school (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Crimmins & Riddler, 1985; Epstein, 1986), WHEN they will attend college (Sewell, 1984; Aslanian, 1989), WHY they enroll (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Wolfgang & Dowling, 1981; Mohoney & Anderson 1988), but very little about "HOW."

Who are they? The adult students who are attending college are both males and females and they are attending college in increasing numbers every year. These adult students range in ages from 25 years old and upwards. Studies have identified adult undergraduate students from all walks of life, and from all parts of the country. They are a very diverse group and cannot easily be put into any one category. So many adults are now coming to college that researchers often focus their studies on a specific age group. In a study of adults in higher education who were over the age of 65, Granev (1980) found that they were generally very active people with youthful self-concepts.

What do they want? Identification of the needs of adult students has been researched extensively over the past 20 years. Everything from parking to day care to financial aid to administrative attitudes has been investigated. Research tells us that most adults already have heavy demands on their time and are not as interested in extracurricular activities as the traditional aged students. Also, research tells us that adult students may be more in need of child care than the younger students. However, it is dangerous to generalize because the needs of the adult students vary according to size, type, and location of the college or
university. Now it is not unusual to see older students on the college campus and common sense often reveals what the adult college student wants.

Where do they go to school? Most adult undergraduate students attend a college or university that is near their home. Unlike the traditional aged college student who will venture far away from home to go to school, most adults over the age of 25 have already established themselves in an area and will tend to stay there. Most of these adult students have jobs, many have families and other financial obligations, and they are unable to pick up and move as easily as the 18 year old student can. Epstein (1986) interviewed adult undergraduate students who were attending a large, state-supported university in a major city. There were several colleges and universities in the area which the adult students could have attended. The reasons they gave for choosing the specific institution in this study were: (a) affordable tuition, (b) availability of a specific program of study, (c) proximity of the university to their residences, and (d) the academic reputation of the university.

When do adult students enroll in college? There are two interesting theories about the timing of an adults' return to college. Sewell (1982) stated that, for many adults, the desire to attend college had probably been present for a long time. However, entry into college was delayed because of one or more transitory or situational barriers. Once these barriers were removed or attended to, then the adult entered college. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) proposed that
the concept of a life transition was a motivator for collegiate enrollment. When this event happened, or did not happen, dictated the decision to enter college. Whichever theory is correct, the timing of when to enter college was mediated by some external event.

Why do they return? Adults returned to school because of significant changes in their lives. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) surveyed 2,000 adult learners and found that reasons adults gave for entering a learning environment were related to changes in careers, changes in family situations, and changes in health, religion, or leisure opportunities. Mohoney and Anderson (1988) found that adult students often mentioned more than one motivating factor that helped them make the decision to return to school. Both personal self-satisfaction and career-related goals were mentioned.

How does an adult become a student? Although the who, what, where, when and why have been studied extensively, there are very few studies that deal with the "how." Of particular interest to this researcher is the issue of HOW an adult becomes a student. Not how they register, or how they decide which courses to take, but HOW the transition from non-student to student occurs.

**Need For the Study**

Transitions have been studied by researchers for many years. However, the specific transition of the adult from the role of non-student to that of student
has not been thoroughly investigated. Transitions are a major fact of adult life. Adult developmental theorists have made a life work out of studying transitions during the adult life cycle. Individuals are constantly changing. The passage from one state to another includes a transition. This is a period of disruption in the life of the adult; it is a time of change. Major transitions such as mid-life career changes, divorce, and retirement have been studied by many researchers. These transitions are often viewed as major adult transitions. However, it is not only the major transitions that affect an adult's life. Labeling transitions as major or minor is of little use, because there are many changes or transitions that occur during the course of life, and how the individual perceives the transition is the determining factor as to whether it is a major or minor change. One such transition that can greatly affect a person is the change that an individual undergoes when he or she decides to become an undergraduate student. How this transition disrupts life has important consequences not only for the individual undergoing the transition or change, but also for the educational institution where the adult is a student. A study of the adult student in transition to becoming a student has value for both. There has been little investigation into the transition process of the adult undergraduate from non-student to student status. The more that is known about this transition process the better equipped will college and universities be to help the adult who is in transition. We need to know the answers to questions such as these: What is
the nature and meaning of the experience of the transition from non-student to student status from the perspective of the adult who is undergoing this change? What are the implications of these perceptions for the content, design, and implementation of programs to assist the adult student during this period of change? For this reason, Schlossberg's transition theory and a specific model, Schlossberg's Transition Framework, was chosen to study the adult in transition. The Schlossberg transition theory attempts to uncover the meaning of the transitional process from the perspective of the adult undergoing the transition. By using this transition theory, information about the transition process itself was uncovered.

**Purpose Statement**

Therefore, it was the purpose of this study to determine the adequacy of Schlossberg's transition theory, and more specifically, the Schlossberg Transition Framework in explaining the actual transition of adults from non-student to student status.

**Research Question**

The principal question guiding this research was: How adequate is the Schlossberg Transition Framework in explaining the actual transition experiences of adults from non-student to student status?
Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study was the small number of individuals in the sample. The participants of this study numbered thirteen. They were selected by the researcher, and were all undergraduate students at a large state-supported university. They were predominately Caucasian and low to upper middle class.

Significance of the Study

The research question was both a discovery question and a verification question. First of all, it focused on the change which the adult undergoes when he or she becomes an undergraduate student. Discovery of all aspects of the transition from the actual voices of the adult students was obtained. Insight into the transition process from the perception of the individual undergoing the transition led to a discovery of what the transition really meant to these students. Secondly, the research question verified that the Schlossberg Transition Framework adequately explained the transition process of the adult students.

This study has significance at both the theoretical and practical levels. From studying the adult who is in the midst of a very personal transition, information was obtained that will contribute to the knowledge base of transition theory. This study will also add to the knowledge regarding the transitional process of adults as they became students. What this study found out about the
transition within the non-student to student context may also contribute to the understanding of transition within other developmental theories.

Practically speaking, from the information gathered through the qualitative methods of this study, the opportunity to construct instruments which will accurately assess the transition process may arise. This information will facilitate the development and implementation of programs that will help adults in their quest to become college students.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used to describe important processes in this study and are defined as follows:

**Adaptation:** A gradual change in behavior to conform to prevailing circumstances.

**Adult:** Grown up, mature in age, size and strength. A person who has reached an age set by law that qualifies him or her for full legal rights. This is generally 18 years of age. This study will focus on adult learners who are over age 25. These students are often call non-traditional students. The term adult will refer to these students.

**Status:** A position, rank or standing. In this study status refers to the subject's position or standing in school.
Transition: "Any event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and or roles within the settings of self, work, family, health, and or economics" (Schlossberg, 1984, p.43).

Organization of the Study

Chapter I is an introduction to the study of adults in transition from non-student to student status. Included in this chapter are the need for the study, a purpose statement, the research question, limitations and significance of the study, and a definition of terms.

Chapter II includes a review of the literature on adult development, a description of the Schlossberg Transition Framework, and a review of literature on transition and adaptation to transition.

Chapter III describes the research design and methodology. It includes the procedures for selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter IV contains the findings of the study. A brief biography of each of the participants in the study is included. The Schlossberg Transition Framework is broken down into its individual parts, and the relevance of each to the transition process of adult students is discussed.

Chapter V includes the summary and conclusion of the study. Recommendations for future research are included.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide a literature review in three different areas. The first section contains a review of selected literature on adult development. Schlossberg's (1981, 1984) transition theory was based on her own eclectic view of adult development; therefore, a review of the works of these theorists will aid the reader in understanding her transition theory. The second section examines the literature on Schlossberg's transition theory with the main focus on analyzing the components of the Transition Framework, which is the basis of this research. The third section is a review of the literature that deals with transitions and adaptation to transition. This information will help the reader in an understanding of the complex issue of the transition process.

Adult Development

Social scientists studying developmental patterns in adulthood often focus on answering different questions, thereby finding different answers. Very often these conceptual answers overlap or interact with each other. As a result, when studying a specific topic within adult development, such as transitions, it is possible to draw upon the answers found within many different perspectives for a complete understanding of the question in study.
Age and Stage Perspectives

Many theorists have focused their research on such questions as: Do people pass through similar experiences at similar ages? Do people's lives unfold in a predictable manner? These theorists emphasized the sequential nature of adult development and their theories are called stage theories of development.

Levinson and his associates (1978) wrote a popular best-seller called The Seasons of a Man's Life. His research focused on how men changed throughout their lifetime, based upon their chronological age. His longitudinal study of forty men, aged 35 - 45, started in 1969. He and his associates found there were age-linked developmental periods that unfolded in an orderly sequence in these men's lives. They identified specific periods of stability alternating with un-stable, or transitional periods. Levinson viewed the transitions as the bridges between the periods of the life cycle. The transitions between major developmental periods were crucial turning points in the men's lives. The distinctive periods that Levinson identified were: the Early Adult Transition, or Leaving the Family (which begins in late adolescence); Entering the Adult World (ages 22 to 28); the Age-Thirty Transition (late 20 to early 30); Settling Down (early 30 - 39 to 41); the Mid-Life Transition (ages 40 - 45); and the Entering Middle Adulthood or Restabilization (ages 45 to 50). The study of transitions was a major feature of Levinson's study.
Likewise, Erikson's (1950b) research focused on the theory that human beings pass through an invariable sequence of developmental stages. However, he postulated that these stages are NOT linked to chronological age. He believed that some people move through the stages faster than others and some people may stop at one stage and not move on to the next. Through his research he developed an eight-stage progression of ego (or identity) development. In each of these stages, there was a crucial issue that must be resolved successfully before the individual could move on to the next stage. The adult stages of his theory are: VI - Young Adult, where the issue to be resolved is intimacy vs. isolation; VII - Adulthood, generativity vs. stagnation; VIII - Late Adulthood, ego integrity vs. despair. Erickson (1950b) stated that these developmental issues were systematically related "to all the others, and they occur in sequence, but that individual make-up and the nature of society determine the rate of development of each of them" (p.130). Again, Erikson was a theorist who saw transitions as very important to adult development.

Valliant (1977) used Erickson's theory when he studied the lives of almost 300 Harvard graduates for a period of 40 years. He supported Erikson's hypothesis that the stages of the life cycle occurred in an invariant sequence. He also found that one stage of development must be mastered before the next stage could be achieved. However, he stated that the "life cycle is more than an invariant sequence of stages with single predictable outcomes" (p.373)
Gould (1978) saw adult development as a struggle for freedom from the internal constraints of childhood. Gould's theory related to Erickson's in that he saw a person progress through life in a sequential process that is not necessarily age-related. He offered six adult stages of development. His theory differed from Erickson's because he did not advocate the concept that one stage must be completed before the individual could move on to the next. Gould said that at almost any time, adults are "tinkering" with some aspect of themselves. This "tinkering" with inadequacies can be the catalyst to promote further growth. Gould claimed that adulthood is not a plateau, but a time full of transitions.

Although the Schlossberg model does not adopt the notion of age-grading, many issues identified by the age and stage theorists are implicated in Schlossberg's acknowledgment of the recurrent themes of adult development (Schlossberg, 1981, p.3).

**Individual Timing and Variability Perspectives**

Theorists in this group focus on the idea that the life cycle is more than an invariant sequence of stages. They ask questions about the meaning of time in the lives of adults. What is the meaning of life time, societal time, and historical time in adult development?

Neugarten (1979) advocated the idea that life stages are set by a biological/social clock. Her research emphasized the variability in adult lives
through generational differences and the social clock. She called this variability "individual fanning out." An example she often gave was that 10-year-olds are more similar to each other than 60-year-olds are similar to other 60-year-olds. If Neugarten's theory is correct, then social definitions of age and age-related behaviors are important considerations when studying adults in transition. Neugarten stated that much of what adults do results from the restraints put upon them by society to be "on-time" in their behaviors. Society often dictates the age at which people should take jobs, marry, have children, etc. When these events occur at that which society deems "off-time" (that is at a time different from the current societal social clock), individuals may have more trouble coping with the transitions in their lives. Neugarten found that many adults control their behavior because of the norms set by the society in which they live. Adults making the transition from non-student to student may face peers and family who view their transition as "off-time."

**Life-Event Adaptation Perspectives**

Theorists in this group suggest that life events-transitions are more important than chronological age in understanding adult development. Theoretically they are in opposition to those theories involving adult stages. These theorists ask questions about how people adapt to the inevitable transitions in their lives.
Lowenthal, Thurnher, and Chiriboga in *Four Stages of Life* (1975) identified four critical stages in the adult years: (a) early adulthood, (b) parenthood, (c) post-parenthood, and (d) retirement. Their longitudinal study involved groups of men and women in "pretransition" periods just before moving into one of these four stages. (It is important to note that Lowenthal used the term "stage" in a sense different from the use of the stage theorists.) Lowenthal and her associates found that the groups differed greatly in the stresses they faced and in their attitudes toward those stresses. However, the particular life event or transition that the individual adult faced was far more important than chronological age. For example, newlyweds of any age are engaged in similar tasks of discovery and bonding. Also, first-time parents, whether they be aged twenty, thirty, or forty, face many similar problems. In the same way, it is important to discover if adults in transition from non-student to student face the same stresses whether they be thirty, forty, or fifty.

**Life-Course Perspectives**

Researchers in this group directly oppose those who offer theories involving adult stages. Life course perspectives of development are also referred to as "life-span development," and "life-events framework." They are viewed as a perspective, not a theory. Life-span development is concerned with the developmental processes in the human life course from conception to death.
(Baltes, Reese & Lipsett, 1980). Those that advocate this position also reject the notion that childhood experiences determine the course of an individual's life. Schlossberg (1981) acknowledges that her own approach in formulating her transition theory has been eclectic; however, her general philosophy of adult development concurs with these researchers who take a life-course perspective.

Reinet (1980) has contributed much to the recent growth of the life-span movement in psychology. He said, "Life-span developmental psychology assumes nonnormative characteristics (interindividually variable), multidirectionality (directed toward various states), and interactional determinants (dependent on organism-environment interactions) are necessary to describe the process on ontogenetic behavioral change across the life span" (p.7).

Developmental psychology deals not only with behavioral changes within individuals across the life span, but also with differences between and similarities among persons in the nature of these changes. It seeks not only to describe the intra-individual changes and inter-individual differences, but also to explain how they come about (Baltes, Reese, & Nesselroade, 1977). Danish, Smyer, and Nowak (1980) stressed that life events can be viewed both as markers of development and as processes. As markers, they serve as milestones or transition points, such as retirement. Life events do not only mark
an occasional point in time, but also make up a process. As a process, this marker event must include the context of the individual's experience and the relationship between the particular marker event and other aspects of the individual's life. The perception of the individual's experience of the event is very important.

Other researchers who take this approach include Brim and Ryff (1980), and Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1974). They acknowledged the role of critical life events and how the "critical life-events framework" played an important role in individual development. If the transition faced by adults who are becoming students is viewed as a critical life event, then it is important to know as much as possible about the transition, since it is not only a marker event, but is also a process. Understanding the value of each will aid those professionals assisting the adult in transition.

**Schlossberg's Transition Theory**

In the September, 1981 issue of *The Counseling Psychologist*, Schlossberg presented her transition theory in "A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition." In 1984, she published a book titled *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with Theory*. In this book she clarified her transition theory in greater detail and presented it in the form of a Transition Framework
(Figure 1). As a theoretical model, this framework presented a comprehensive means of describing an adult in transition.

There are three major elements in Schlossberg's (1984) framework for analyzing adult transitions. These elements are: the transition; the transition process; and the coping resources of the individual in transition (the ability of the individual to adapt to the transition). Each of these three elements will be discussed, however, the major emphasis will be on the second element, the transition process, since that is the focus of this study.

The Transition

Schlossberg (1984) defined a transition as "any event or non-event that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the settings of self, work, family, health, and/or economics" (p.43). "A transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual's own perception of the change" (p.44).

Transitions need to be looked at from three dimensions: type, context, and impact. In this study, the type of transition was that of the adult becoming a student. This would probably be classified as an unanticipated transition for most adults. However, for some it may have been an anticipated transition because, as some adults in this study said in their interviews, "I always knew that one day I would go to college."
Figure 1. The Individual in Transition

The context of the transition included the setting in which the change occurred and the relationship of the person to the transition itself. This transition to student was a very personal one; however, other persons were affected as well. The setting did not only include the university where the adult attended classes, but setting included the family, the friends, the work, the health, and the economic situation of the student as well. The context of the transition is explored in greater detail when examining the transition process.

The third dimension of a transition is its impact. The degree to which the transition to student status changed the individual's life was an important factor in the transition process. Because this was a transition where a role change took place in one area (non-student to student status), it is likely that other role changes occurred. The impact of this transition to the student's relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles was a major focus of this study. These will all be discussed in the attempt to understand the transition process.

The Transition Process

This was the process that was the focus of this study. In Schlossberg's Transition Framework there are three sets of factors that influence the individual in the transition process. They are: the variables characterizing the particular transition, the variables characterizing the particular individual, and the variables characterizing the particular environment. These three sets of
variables are potential assets or liabilities, depending on the individual’s perception of the transition, his or her own self, and his or her environment. Each factor is described as an independent unit, however they work together to predict the adaptation or non-adaptation to the transition.

This model was chosen to study the adult in transition from non-student to student status because it represents a framework in which a transition, positive or negative, can be analyzed and possible interventions formulated. This framework "... attempts to depict the extraordinary complex reality that accompanies and defines the human capacity to cope with change in their lives" (Schlossberg, 1984, p.67).

In the presentation of her theory, Schlossberg described each tenet of the framework in great detail. The following is a synopsis of her comments to provide the reader with a better understanding of Schlossberg's definition of the variables important in the transition process. Each of the variables which Schlossberg defined as characteristics of the transition process will be examined thoroughly in reporting the results of this study. It was the purpose of this research to find out if this framework is applicable to studying the transition of adults from non-student to student status. The transition process involved these three factors:
Variables Characterizing the Transition

**Trigger Event.** A trigger is a specific life event that, when it occurs, makes an individual look at his or herself differently. Something specific always triggers a transition. For example, a heart attack may cause a middle-aged person to re-evaluate his or her lifestyle. However, a trigger does not have to be directly related to the transition. The death of a spouse may lead an unemployed woman to return to school. Here the trigger event is the death of her spouse, but the transition is that of becoming a student. "Transitions are the reasons for learning. Triggers set the time for learning. Both are essential" (Aslanian, 1989, p.7).

**Timing: On-time or off-time.** Neugarten (1979) has spent a considerable amount of time studying how society has determined for us which events in our lives occur "on-time" or "off-time." Even though more and more people in our society are doing things at times other than those that have been previously 'socially acceptable' (eg; having a first child at age 40), most people still use age as a defining variable for themselves. Most individuals are still concerned with being on-time or off-time, even though the concept of age irrelevancy is acknowledged by many people. Such a major event as going to college is usually linked with a certain age.

**Source: Internal or external.** Some changes come about because the individual deliberately makes a decision to embrace change, while other
changes are forced upon an individual by either circumstances or other individuals. For example, a worker may be forced to retire because of ill health. This worker will probably find retirement a more difficult transition in his or her life, as compared to the individual who retires voluntarily. The issue here is one of perceived control over one's own life. Schlossberg (1981) hypothesized that the individual adapts more easily to transition in which the source is internal.

**Role change: Gain or loss.** Transitions involve role changes. Society often defines these as role gains or losses. Role gains, as defined in societal terms, may include such things as getting married, or getting a job promotion; whereas role losses may be such things as getting a divorce or retirement. The role changes involved when an adult becomes a student can vary greatly. When "mom" becomes a student she may lose her role as family cook. She may perceive this as a role gain, while other family members may see this as a role loss. Some degree of stress always accompanies a role gain or loss.

**Duration: Permanent, temporary, uncertain.** The ease or difficulty of adaptation to change is related to whether the change is regarded as permanent or temporary. A transition that is unpleasant will be easier to accept if the individual is assured that it is of limited duration. For example, if a child is hospitalized for a temporary illness with the diagnosis of a full recovery, the parents have a difficult transition in their daily lives to face, but because it is a temporary transition they probably will be able to accept and deal with the
event. Transitions where the duration is uncertain may cause the greatest amount of stress. For example, it is very stressful for parents whose child has run away from home. The uncertainty of the duration is very difficult to accept.

**Previous experience with a transition of a similar nature.** Researchers have shown that an individual who has successfully adapted to a transition in the past, will probably be successful at adapting to another transition that is similar in nature. Conversely, the opposite may also be true.

**Degree of stress.** Schlossberg (1981, 1984) pointed out that any transition, whether it represents a gain or a loss, whether it is positive or negative in effect, causes some stress. To a certain extent, how a person perceives the change and his or her relationships with others will often affect how much stress will accompany the transition.

Variables Characterizing the Individual

**Socioeconomic status.** The measures of socioeconomic status (SES) are not always consistent, so the research trying to show the relation between adaptation to transition and SES is not always consistent. Socioeconomic differences may make a difference in the amount of stress associated with different transitions. Thus, a lower-income family may face more financial difficulties, and stress, if one of the adult wage-earners decides to go back to school.
**Sex role.** The relationships between sex role and adaptation to transition are complex. Generally speaking, men face many transitions in connection with work, and women in connection with family life. Women probably face more changes whose source is external. Schlossberg (1981, 1984) stated that more research is needed on such sex differences.

**Age and life stage.** Many adult developmental theorists agree that chronological age is relatively unimportant compared to biological age, psychological age, social age, and functional age. Schlossberg (1984) believed that instead of chronological age, life stage may be a more useful concept when studying transitions. Some research (Chiriboga & Gigy, 1975; Lieberman, 1975; Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1975) indicated that the processes for adequate coping may be life-stage specific. Younger people may thrive better on stress than lack of it; whereas, those in middle age often face more negative than positive stresses and tend to be overwhelmed by them. Older adults may only face a few major stresses, but it is very difficult to predict how they will handle them. Cognitive and physical resources are a major factor in the handling of stress among older adults.

**State of health.** Schlossberg (1981, 1984) stated that an individual's state of health does affect his or her ability to adapt to a transition. One major reason is that ill health in itself is a transition and a source of stress. How an adult
perceives his or her own health is very important. This outlook on life will affect the way an individual handles a major transition.

**Ego development.** An understanding of the construct of ego development helps us understand the 'frame of reference' through which the adult student views his or her own transition.

**Personality.** Personality is defined in many different ways. Schlossberg (1984) cited research by Beeson and Lowenthal (1975), who identified four personality types by analyzing individual's different reactions to stress. She notes that the personality types "challenged" and "lucky" are those who may successfully handle the stress that accompany transitions. Those identified as "self-defeating" and "overwhelmed" may not be able to handle the stress of a transition.

**Outlook.** How a person views life will have an influence on the way change is viewed. This outlook on life is a result of the complex interplay of various factors.

**Commitments and values.** An individuals' basic values and beliefs are definitely a factor in his or her ability to adapt to transition. An adult student with a strong commitment to finish college may adapt more easily to becoming a student than an adult who is not too sure of why he or she is returning to school.
Variables Characterizing the Environment

Schlossberg (1984) stated that interpersonal support is essential to successful adaptation to transition. Her framework specified four different types of interpersonal support sources.

**Intimate relationships.** Relationships that involve the sharing of confidences are an important resource during stressful transitions. Sometimes the mere fact that one has had an intimate relationship in the past is enough to sustain them through a present difficult life transition.

**Family unit.** Sociologists have studied the effect of the family unit for many years. Schlossberg (1984) cited several research studies (Hill, 1965; Lowenthal & Chiriboga, 1975; Levine, 1976), that showed that those individuals who had positive feelings toward members of their families did better under stress during transitions than those who perceived their family as unsupportive.

**Network of friends.** Like the family, one's friends can be a major support system. The stability of social support can add to an individual's feeling of well-being. This in turn can be a major factor when going through a major transition.

**Institutional supports.** Schlossberg (1984) defined institutional supports as that which are found in 'institutions'-- religious institutions, political groups, work settings, social welfare, or community support groups. In addition, various other more or less formal outside agencies are often places to which an individual can turn for help. Over the past several years, support groups such as
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) have received wide recognition as helpful to those whom they serve. Some colleges and universities have started support groups such as Students Over Traditional Age (SOTA) for their older students. Today, it is considered by many to be "in" if one belongs to a specialized support group.

**Coping Resources for Individual Transitions**

An assessment of coping resources, or the individual's ability to adapt to transition is the third major part of Schlossberg's (1984) Transition Framework. Individuals in transition appraise the transition process in their own terms. The coping resources employed by an individual in transition are an outgrowth of the three variables which characterize the transition process: the transition, the individual, and the environment. Individuals determine both assets and liabilities within their own transition process. The coping responses chosen (or not chosen) are a result of how the individual sees the balance of assets and liabilities. Adaptation to transition occurs when the individual in the transition process can keep the balance on the 'plus' side.

**Applications of Schlossberg's Transition Theory**

This framework has been applied to such transitions as high school teacher to high school administrator (Diederich, 1988). In this study, Diederich's goal
was to identify significant issues, conflicts, and experiences which occurred during the transition process of first-year administrators, as they underwent the transition from teacher to administrator. The Schlossberg framework for describing adult transitions was employed. Using a qualitative approach, she interviewed first-time school administrators before they started their new position, mid-way during the school year, and finally at the end of the academic year. She was able to identify 20 tasks necessary for a successful transition from teacher to administrator. Diederich proposed a support program sponsored by a college or university to support the transition of entry-year principals and assistant principals.

Pearson and Petipas (1990) studied common anticipated and unanticipated transitions faced by athletes, such as injury, retirement, and not making the team. Using the Schlossberg model, they sought to find out what there is about the structure of the transition the athletes face that may cause difficulty. The personal characteristics of the athletes themselves, and the physical and social contexts within which the transitions were made were important aspects of their study. They were able to identify items from each of the three areas addressed by the Schlossberg model, that might help in identifying athletes who are at risk of becoming dysfunctional. They described two successful prevention programs that helped athletes make successful transitions to non-sport roles.
Another study involving athletes was done by Swain (1991), who studied 10 athletes who had voluntarily withdrawn from sports. Swain used Schlossberg's Transition Framework to account for diversity in the experience of transitions. In-depth interviews were conducted with the athletes to obtain personal histories which were then examined for diversity and commonality of experience. Swain came up with a synthesized description of career-change experience that reflected the shifts in focus within the common experience. This research supported Schlossberg's theory that the transition is not simply an event, but a process.

The purpose of a study by Hansen (1986) was to explore transitional periods of adults, with a focus on adaptation experienced in early and middle adulthood. He studied adults who experienced difficulties in transforming life cycle transitions into positive experiences. Using the Schlossberg model, Hansen limited the scope of his study to that part of the model concerned with personal characteristics of the individual in transition. Using the PERI Life Events Rating Scale, the Adjective Check List (ACL), and the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) he found that no personality could be generated to depict people who had adaptation difficulty in transition.

Ladd (1992) used Schlossberg's transition framework in her study assessing the transition to parenthood, and how men and women cope. She studied selected variables of the Schlossberg framework: the situation, support,
and sense of self. From information obtained through questionnaires, recommendations were made for the development of parenting programs for men and women.

From these studies, support for the utility of this theoretical framework has been obtained. Hopefully, this study has provided further support to the research applicability of this theoretical framework when studying adults in transition from non-student to student status.

**Transition and Adaptation**

Transitions are frequently studied by social scientists, psychologists, and educators. The literature contains numerous references to such things as transition from pre-school to kindergarten, transition to parenthood, school-to-work transition, adolescents in transition, and transition after divorce. These obvious life changes are the ones that are most frequently studied. Few studies however, focus on the adaptation to transition, specifically within the educational setting.

Schlossberg (1984) strongly emphasized that, in her model, the transition is not so much a matter of change, as it is of the individual's perception of the change. The transition is defined by the individual. In adult development literature Levinson (1978) used the term transition to mean "turning points between stable periods" (p.49). Certainly this could be a description applicable
to the adult who becomes a student, although it may happen at times different than those recognized by Levinson. Parks (1983) undertook a project to determine the extent to which formal educational programs facilitated the life cycle transitions of adult students. He sent questionnaires to students enrolled in a large, metropolitan community college who were experiencing either an early adult, mid-life, or late adult transition. The findings showed that the educational programs did not facilitate the adult students' life cycle transitions to an equal degree nor do they facilitate the same types of developmental tasks associated with each transition period. He suggested that colleges and universities modify their educational programs in order to accommodate needs of students experiencing a life cycle transition. Chickering and Havighurst (1981) and Cross (1981) suggested that institutes of higher learning must be aware of the transitions experienced by adults and that helping individuals meet the developmental tasks associated with transitions should be a major goal.

Ross (1988) investigated the developmental forces that influenced women's decisions to return to college. She used a qualitative approach, with interviews, and also employed the quantitative approach by using questionnaires. One of the major conclusions of this study was that the women did not support the theory of life reassessment specifically occurring during age-related transitional periods. However, a perception of transition was common among returning women across all the age groups studied. Ross' study supports the premise
that transitions are an important aspect in the lives of adult students, and need to be studied as such.

One of the most comprehensive studies involving transitions and learning was undertaken by the College Board. Aslanian and Brickell (1980) interviewed 2,000 adult Americans in all parts of the country. They did not limit the definition of learning to formal learning in educational institutions, but considered such things as church study groups and self-teaching as learning experiences. They found that 83% of the adults were learning because of some change in their life. It was interesting to note, however, that 17% of adult learners mentioned reasons such as needing to be with other adults, wanting to stay mentally alert, and filling leisure time as their reasons for learning. Those adults who cited a transition in their lives as a reason for learning were able to point to a specific event that triggered the decision. More than 90% of the reasons stated for learning were in the areas of family and career.

Kasworm (1990) did an extensive review of past research on adult undergraduates in higher education. She identified 345 articles, books, papers and research reports on adult undergraduate students, written from 1940 - 1986. She selected 96 documents for her literature review. Her analysis of these research studies was divided into five domains.
Pertinent to this research study was the domain she called Image of Student Entry and Adaptation. The 22 articles in that domain focused on identifying those factors which influenced adult learners in their entry and successful adaptation to the collegiate environment. The actual adaptation to the transition of becoming a student was not studied in any of the research studies identified by Kasworm. The adaptation to the undergraduate environment was a major focus of many studies.

In the domain of Image of Psychosocial Development, the researchers often focused on specific influences of role commitments and conflicts upon the adult student role. "Underlying these research studies was the assumption that the student role was a major transition for adult students and for their spouse and family" (Kasworm, 1990, p.361). Several studies reported that there was more significant role conflict among female students than among male students. According to Kasworm (1990), future research studies need to take different approaches to studying adult students. She stated:

"There are several promising areas of new research investigations in this area. These research activities are considering adult undergraduates from lifespan perspectives, from theoretical frameworks based in adult development or related psychosocial theories, or from a critical science theory role concerning human agency." (p.364)
This study of the transition faced by adults when becoming students meets the criteria established by Kasworm and the results of this study add to the knowledge base of what we already know about adult learners.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Chapters I and II have identified the problem as well as the model which was chosen to study the transition process of adults as they became undergraduate students at a large state-supported university. This third chapter will present a rationale for choosing a qualitative method of inquiry, and describe the procedures of sample selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the adequacy of the Schlossberg Transition Framework in explaining the actual transition of adults from non-student to student status. To make this determination, it was necessary that the research design allow access to the feelings, experiences, recollections, and perceptions of those individuals in the transitional process. The method needed to allow the researcher to investigate the adult’s perspective of the transition. Schlossberg (1981) identified this factor as a major step in understanding transition; consequently, choosing the right approach was of the utmost importance. Also important to this study was a knowledge of the characteristics of the individual in transition as well as of the pre-transition and post-transition environments. A research design that allowed the investigator to
gather this descriptive information and that of the adult's perception of the transition was essential to a complete understanding of the Schlossberg Transition Framework.

A qualitative research design that was both descriptive and interpretive was best suited for this study since its goal was to derive meaning from experience. Qualitative researchers proceed on the basis of theoretical assumptions: "that meaning and process are crucial in understanding human behavior, that descriptive data is what is important to collect, and that analysis is best done inductively" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.55). By collecting descriptive data from the adults in this study, the researcher began to come to an understanding of the transition process.

Quantitative methods could also be used to study the Schlossberg Transition Framework. Questionnaires could be developed to identify the variables characterizing the transition as well as the variables characterizing the environment. Well established instruments are available that could be used to assess the variables that characterize the individual, such as personality, ego development, values, and state of health. Quantitative analysis could provide a well-rounded description of the transition process.

However, there is more to this study than just describing the transition process. Unveiling the reasons behind the meaning and process of the transition experience were fundamental to the analysis of the Schlossberg
Framework. Because these reasons are often elusive, a phenomenological approach was necessary for an understanding of the transition process. Phenomenological researchers ask the question of what is the nature or meaning of something. Schlossberg identified this as a crucial point in her framework. As Van Manen (1990) so adequately put it, "Phenomenology asks, "What is this or that kind of experience like?"" (p.9); "Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures of lived experience" (p.10).

As a human science, phenomenology allows us to investigate the human world as we find it. Human science studies human beings where ever they might be, doing whatever it is they do in everyday life. This study chose a particular situation, the transition from non-student to student status, which for purpose of analysis, description, and interpretation, functioned as a focal point. From this focal point the researcher discovered the meanings that were imbedded in the situation. From information gathered through the interviews with the adult students who participated in this study, the researcher was able to identify what the transition experience was really like for those who recently went through the transition process. This first-hand account of lived experience was essential to fully understand the phenomena of transition. The information gathered through the interviews was crucial to allow the researcher to interpret
the various aspects of these lived experiences in the attempt to determine the meaning embodied in them.

In a telephone conversation with Nancy K. Schlossberg, she suggested to the researcher that the best way to study her Transition Framework in its entirety was to use a qualitative approach. She agreed that the interview format was an appropriate way to obtain the information needed to analyze the transition process. Although she advocated the use of quantitative methods when studying an isolated part of the transition process, she strongly recommended a qualitative approach for this research project. To this end, a qualitative method was chosen by the researcher as the preferred way to obtain the information necessary to study this complex topic. From the identification of categories and related properties that emerged from the data, this study described how the adult student made the transition from non-student to student status and how adequately the Schlossberg framework described this transition.

Selection Procedure

The selection of informants followed guidelines set up by Glaser and Strauss (1967), who suggested that researchers select any individual "that will help generate, to the fullest extent, as many properties of the (analytical) categories as possible, and that will help relate categories to each other and to their properties" (p.49). The investigation of the transitional process of adult
students dictated that the researcher choose adults who had entered an institute of higher education either for the first time or after an absence of several years. These adults, enrolled in an undergraduate program at a large (28,000), state-supported university, were completing their first, second, or third quarter of college studies. Above all, these adults had made the transition from non-student to student, yet the transition was new enough to them so that they could reflect on the process.

At the beginning of the study, colleagues and university professors were informed of the need for subjects over age 30 who were undergraduate students at a local university. For the purpose of this study, the adult students were pursuing their first undergraduate degree. These adult students could be enrolled either full-time or part-time. Thirteen adult undergraduate students participated in this research project, ten females and three males. The number of subjects had not been predetermined, but was decided upon as the study progressed. After the ninth interview the researcher saw that no new information regarding the transition process was being obtained from the participants. The tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth interviews added substance to the categories that had already emerged, but they did not generate any new information. After the thirteenth subject was interviewed and the interview was analyzed, the researcher decided that saturation of the data had been reached. There were no more interviews after that point. Sufficient
evidence regarding the transition process of adult students from non-student to
student status had been obtained so that a decision of whether or not the
Schlossberg Transition Framework adequately described this transition could
be reached.

It is interesting to note how subjects came to the study. University professors
recommended students for this study. One university professor brought his
elementary education class to the researcher's school to do some practice
teaching, and several subjects were identified among his students. Another
university professor suggested that her secretary would be willing to be
interviewed. A parent of two children at the researcher's school was also part
of this study. A co-worker of the researcher, who was also an adjunct university
professor, recommended not only her husband who was an undergraduate
student but also several students who were in her evening class. And finally, a
teaching assistant who worked in an After School Program with the researcher
volunteered to be a part of this study. Every person who was contacted and
asked to be interviewed graciously accepted. A demographic chart of the
participants in this study is included in Appendix C.

Data Collection Procedures

Before collecting the actual data for this research, a pilot interview was
conducted with a 42-year-old woman who had just returned to school to seek a
degree in business. She had graduated from a vocational-technical school twenty years ago and was enrolled in her first college course since that time. After this initial interview, the researcher made revisions in question sequence and/or wording prior to conducting of the formal interviews with study participants.

The next step was to contact individuals and ask them to be a part of this study. After providing the participants with information about the study's purpose, the researcher told each individual that there would be a commitment of at least one hour for the interview. At that time, the interview was scheduled at a place convenient for the participant. Several interviews took place on the university campus where the participant was attending classes and some at the school where the researcher was employed; two adult students asked to be interviewed at their own homes.

At the interview session the researcher again informed the participants of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their identity, and the confidentiality of the information received. The researcher explained that the interview would be taped, with the transcription employing a fictitious name. Apparently this concept sounded rather strange to the adult students in this study because all of them laughed at that remark and said it was all right to use their real names. The participants were told that when the dissertation process was completed the tapes would be erased.
The researcher used an interview guide during the interviews to insure the gathering of information about the three variables that are a part of the transition process: the individual, the transition itself, and the environment. This interview guide appears in Appendix B.

Each interview usually took longer than one hour because the discussions became very involved. These conversations were often the first time the individual had the opportunity to talk about the transition process and what it was like to be an adult student on a campus where 95% of the undergraduate students are of traditional college student age (18-22). The interviews ended with the researcher giving the adult student a journal, asking them to record anything that they wished they had mentioned during the interview, any questions that they might have for the researcher, or any additional thoughts they might have about the transition process. The researcher obtained the telephone numbers of the participants and asked if they could be contacted in one week to talk about the interview. In addition, the researcher made arrangements to collect the journals.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the multitude of collected data. To thoroughly analyze the data, the researcher took several steps as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1982). The first step involved
the organization of the data. Immediately after each interview session, the researcher listened to the audio tape of the session and transcribed the tape, although not verbatim. The edited transcripts left out the many repetitive phrases as well as unnecessary or dragged-out sentences. As the researcher transcribed the tapes, she coded the statements to the exact counter on the tape to make the entire passage easy to locate. Each interview was also numbered in chronological order and printed with wide margins on each side of the paper.

The second step was to read through the data and develop a preliminary list of coding categories. As the transcripts were read, the researcher underlined any statement that identified the variables in the transition process proposed by Schlossberg. These variables had to be identified since the purpose of this study was to test the adequacy of the Schlossberg Framework in describing the transition process of the adult students. Also underlined were any statements that did not fit into any of the established categories but were related to the meaning of the transition experience for the adult student. The researcher read the transcripts several times to be sure that statements of importance to this study had not been missed. To provide an example of step two of the data analysis, a portion of an interview conducted for this study is presented. Statements that suggest emerging categories are underlined.

The following is an excerpt from the researcher's interview with Tom. Tom is 33 years old, and was a junior in college majoring in Health and Physical
Education. He had been in the Marine Corps for 13 years before returning to school. He was married and had no children. He and his wife lived in married student housing on the university campus. His wife was employed as an assistant manager of a large discount grocery/warehouse store in the town where they lived. Tom's college expenses were covered by the G.I. Bill.

Pat: (349) Tell me what effect this transition has had on your life.

Tom: (353) The first quarter we really didn't have too much time to think about it. Everything was new. . . . Since after that first quarter, I still feel like at times that I should be out there working and doing something. Even though I know that what I am doing down the road it will be worth everything. This little apartment, my wife, she can't stand it. . . . she has been super supportive, but she misses her washer and dryer. . . . we wish we could have us an 'ole dog. It seems like half the time I am on top of the world because I know this is not the real world, but at the same time the other half of me will be really glad when this is over so I can get out there and start teaching and coaching. (399) I really want to go ahead and pursue my masters. I know my wife would support me like a son of a gun, but I think, good gracious that's another year or maybe two in this little place - would that be fair on her? Would it be in my best intentions to go ahead and do that?

While reading and underlining statements, the researcher began to develop a preliminary list of coding categories. These categories were listed on a separate sheet of paper. Categories that emerged from the data were: affect, commitment to self, confirmation of self, coping skills, family enmeshment,
financial situation, future outlook, physical setting, previous experience with a transition of a similar nature, problem solving, role change, self-knowledge, source, stress, support from family, support from friends, support from university, trigger event, and values.

The third step in organizing and analyzing the data was to go through the data and mark each underlined statement with the appropriate coding category. After the ninth interview in this study, it was observed that no new categories were emerging from the data. Each of the interviews was analyzed again and the categories were identified in the margins of the transcripts adjacent to the statement. All categories suggested by Schlossberg's Framework were written in the left-hand margin. Categories that emerged that were not identified specifically by the framework were written in the right-hand margin. The researcher was not limited by this preliminary list of coding categories, but was always open to the emergence of new categories. Categories were verified by another qualitative researcher who helped the researcher in the analysis of the first four interviews.

Very often a qualitative researcher will assign numbers to the coding categories and then when the data are read again, he or she will place the appropriate number next to the units of data. However, since most of the categories identified in this research project were named in one or two words
(e.g., stress, support) this researcher did not assign numbers, but used words to identify the categories. The following example is again from the interview with Tom. Here the coding categories are identified in the margins. Some of the data overlap and particular units of data fit into more than one category.

Pat: (349) Tell me what affect this transition has had on your life.

Tom: (353) The first quarter we really didn't have too much affect time to think about it. Everything was new. . . . Since role-change after that first quarter, I still feel like at times that I should be out there working and doing something. values Even though I know that what I am doing down the road it will be worth everything. This little apartment, future my wife, she can't stand it. . . . she has been super stress support supportive, but she misses her washer and dryer. . . . we wish we could have us an 'ole dog. It seems like half the time I am on top of the world because I know self-knowledge this is not the real world, but at the same time the other half of me will be really glad when this is over so I can get out there and start teaching and coaching. (399) stress I really want to go ahead and pursue my masters. I commitment know my wife would support me like a son of a gun, but I think, good gracious that's another year or maybe two in this little place - would that be fair on her? support family Would it be in my best intentions to go ahead and do that?

The fourth step involved sorting the data. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Merriam (1988) identified a method called "cut-up-and-put-in-folders." In this method, all the categories are numbered and there is a file folder for each category (e.g., Stress = #1, Support = #2). Each statement in the transcribed interviews is also coded with the category numbers as well as with an interview
identification number. The transcriptions are cut up and the coded sections
placed into the file folders labeled and numbered by category. When the
sorting process concludes, the researcher takes the folders out and carefully
looks over each one's content. Merriam (1988) suggested that this is the best
method to get a "true feel" for the data. By looking at the data in a particular
folder, the researcher may see what patterns or themes appear. Different ways
of putting concepts together may arise.

For this research project, a modified, computerized version of the cut-up-
and-put-in-folders was invented. Although the concepts are basically the same,
this version utilized the computer to speed up the process of sorting the data.
As mentioned before, each category was listed by name. Instead of creating a
file folder for each coding category, a space on the computer was created for
each coding category. The interviews were analyzed one at a time. All the
categories were listed in bold type and every coded statement in the interview
was put under a corresponding heading. Some categories ended up with many
statements under them, others had only a few. When the researcher put each
underlined interview statement in the proper category, each statement was
coded with the interview number and the number on the audio tape. The
following is an example of how the analysis was done with the excerpt from the
interview with Tom. (Tom was interview #7 in this study.)
ANALYSIS - INTERVIEW WITH TOM

AFFECT
The first semester we really didn't have too much time to think about it. (#7 - 353)

COMMITMENT TO SELF
I really want to go ahead and pursue my masters. (#7 - 353)

FAMILY ENMESHMENT
I really want to go ahead and pursue my masters. I know my wife would support me like a son of a gun, but I think, good gracious, that's another year or maybe two in this little place - would that be fair on her? (#7 - 399)

FUTURE
I know that what I am doing down the road it will be worth everything. (#7 - 353)

ROLE CHANGE
I still feel like at times that I should be out there working and doing something. (#7 - 353)

SELF KNOWLEDGE
It seems like half the time I am on top of the world, because I know this is not the real world, but at the same time the other half of me will be really glad when this is over so I can get out there and start teaching and coaching. (#7 - 353)

STRESS
This little apartment, my wife, she can't stand it. . . (#7 - 353)

The other half of me will be really glad when this is over so I can get out there and start teaching and coaching. (#7 - 353)

SUPPORT
She (wife) has been super supportive. (#7 - 353)

I know my wife would support me like a son of a gun . . . (#7 - 399)

VALUES
I know that what I am doing down the road it will be worth everything. (#7 - 353)
This process was repeated for each completed interview. Therefore, each interview had its own analysis done by coding categories. At a glance, the researcher could see all the statements made by an individual related to a particular category.

The sorting process concluded using the computer generated analysis of each interview. The researcher had interviewed 13 adult students for this study, therefore she had 13 completed interview analyses. The next step was to combine the information from all the interviews. Using the printed individual interview analyses, the researcher cut out each individual category with its statements. This was done for each of the 13 interview analyses, and the coding categories were grouped together. In this way, all the statements in a category could be viewed and analyzed at one time. For example, all categories named STRESS were put together. The researcher then saw all the statements made about stress from all the participants.

The Schlossberg Transition Framework identified three important aspects of the transition process: variables characterizing the transition, variables characterizing the individual, and variables characterizing the environment. Therefore, for the analysis to continue it was necessary to put the categories obtained from the interview analyses under one of these three headings. Poster boards were obtained and all the categories and statements relating to the variables characterizing the transition were grouped together on one (or
more) poster boards. In this way the researcher could look at the category STRESS, for example, and see all the statements about stress made by all the participants, with the data displayed in visual form. It took three large poster boards to hold the information for the variables characterizing the individual and two poster boards each to hold the information about the variables characterizing the transition and the environment. Significant themes and issues emerged through the presentation of the quotations of the participants.

The other data than needed to be analyzed were the journal entries made by the adult students. Triangulation is using multiple methods of collecting data and it was hoped that these journal entries would provide another method of insuring internal validity for this study. However, none of the students had recorded any journal entries. Several reasons were given by the adult students as to why they had not written anything in the journals. "I really didn't have anything more to tell you," was the most frequent answer; but other statements were, "I just forgot about it," and "I just didn't have the time to sit down and write anything." The researcher had hoped that the interviews questions were thorough and complete, however this is difficult to ascertain without having any journal entries to examine.

Two students made comments to the researcher when they were contacted by telephone, and these comments were recorded directly on the interview sheet. These comments were then made a part of the interview transcript, with
the notation that they were comments made during a telephone follow-up conversation, not directly a part of the interview.

The next step was to draw conclusions from the collected data. The process of drawing conclusions began early in the study. The constant comparative method of data collection and analysis, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was employed in this study. Formal analysis began early in the study and continued until the end of data collection. When all the categories were identified, and the comments of the adult students were listed under each category, then the researcher re-read the comments specific to each category. Since all the comments were presented on a poster board, it was very easy to "see" the voices of the adult students. The conclusions drawn that were relevant to each category, and also related to the transition process in the Schlossberg Transition Framework, were actually described through the comments made by the adult students. They spoke clearly and frankly about their personal experiences with the transition. The researcher looked at the majority of the comments which related to tenets of the Transition Framework. Those factors of importance to the adults who experienced the transition were easily identified. From the summary of comments about each category, the researcher then verified whether or not the specific tenet of the Schlossberg Transition Framework was relevant to the actual transition as described by the adults in this study. The researcher noted the intensity and frequency of each
comment made by the adult students. The researcher was then able to put the variables of the Transition Framework in an order of importance for this specific transition.

This final process of drawing conclusions will be described in great detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The stories of the adult students interviewed for this study provided the means to analyze the variables of the transition process as suggested by Schlossberg. To fully understand these students' voices, it was necessary to know a little about each one of them. The following is a brief description of each of the 13 adult students that gave their very personal thoughts and feelings for the purpose of helping the researcher to understand the transition process that they were going through.

Biographies of Participants

Mary

The first person to be interviewed was Mary. This interview took place in November, 1992. For her interview, Mary came to the school where the researcher was employed. She visited the elementary school often; she had been employed there as a teacher's aide at one time. Mary was 40 years old, she was 5'2" tall and weighed about 100 pounds. She was extremely neat in appearance.

Mary had some college experience when she was younger, but had not been to school for many years. In the Spring of 1992, Mary attended night school at the university. She did this while still working full-time. During that
spring, Mary and her husband separated and a divorce was pending in mid-1993. In the Fall of 1992, Mary quit her job as a teacher's aide and became a full-time student majoring in early childhood education. She was a junior. It was very important to her to be able to go to college in the day time so she could still be with her children in the evening. Her commitment to her children was very strong. She had a daughter in high school and a son in middle school.

The enthusiasm Mary had for her educational experiences was overwhelming. She truly loved what she was doing. Her insights into her own transitional process were a fine addition to this study. She spoke freely for about two hours. There was a wealth of information to be analyzed from this first interview. This interview was a excellent starting point from which the researcher began to identify the emerging coding categories.

Jan

Several adult students came to the attention of the researcher because they were students in a university elementary school physical education class and were doing some practice teaching at the school where the researcher was employed. Four of these students agreed to be interviewed and seemed to be pleased that someone was interested in their thoughts, opinions, and concerns about becoming an adult student.
The first student from the university class to be interviewed was Jan. She was about 5'3", weighed 115 pounds, and had medium length brown hair. She dressed conservatively, in a blue skirt and a plain white blouse. She was very quiet and spoke in a soft voice.

Several years ago, Jan had attended college for one year before she got married. While married, she completed her second year and then quit school when she became pregnant. For 13 years she stayed home and was a full-time mother. Now that her 3 children were in school and her husband had a good job as a fireman, she decided to return to college to finish her education. She also was a junior majoring in early childhood education and wanted to be a kindergarten teacher. She attended college during the day as a full-time student. Jan lived several miles away from the university and had to commute about 1 hour each way.

It was hard at the beginning of the interview to get Jan to open up. She seemed to be a very private person. After a while perhaps a more trusting relationship was established because she was able to provide the researcher with excellent information about the transition process. Jan had a lot to say about how she valued education and her commitment to make a difference in the world.
Becky

Becky was in the same university class that Jan was in. She came to the elementary school before her class one day and she and the researcher sat in a seldom used teacher's lounge for the interview. Becky was probably 5'9" tall, a little overweight, and had a very commanding appearance. She was dressed in jeans and a sweater. She was of Hispanic origin, although both of her parents were born in the United States. Becky was very enthusiastic while teaching and the children loved her.

Becky had just transferred to the university and was attending classes in the day as a full-time student. She had previously attended a nearby community college. Becky was married and her husband owned and worked in his own small excavating business. Apparently he did very hard manual labor because Becky said he had a difficult time understanding that her studying was also work. They had a son in middle-school and a son who just started elementary school who had been diagnosed with a learning disability. Becky was very concerned about her youngest child, and it was important to her that she be home every day to meet the school bus.

It was very interesting talking to Becky because she had worked in many different jobs all her married life. Such things as secretary, accountant, fast food chain manager, and paralegal. She never stayed for more than a few years with any one job because she said they all got boring. It was while working as a
secretary for a stock broker that she made the decision to return to school. Apparently he was much younger that she was and he had a wife who was a teacher. Becky said she thought to herself, "If they can be so young and go to college and get a degree so can I." So she decided to enter college, earn her degree and become a teacher. She thought that teaching would be a "challenging career" rather than a "boring job." She also had recently started to look at herself more seriously, and when she looked at her life and job history, she realized that she needed a job where she felt she could make a difference.

Becky was extremely proud of herself. Several times during the interview she mentioned her 3.69 g.p.a.. She loved to talk, especially about herself and her accomplishments. She had a great vision of what is ahead in her future.

**Betty**

Betty was a young woman who was a secretary at the university. She was 30 years old and single. She had never been married. She was about 5'5" tall, average weight and had very short brown hair. She was dressed in a casual skirt and blouse. Both of her parents were teachers, but apparently they never pushed her to obtain a college degree. She had gone to a community college in the southern part of the state to a school where she could major in wildlife management. She thought she would be able to get a job in a zoo with just a two-year degree. She found out later that the type of job she wanted required a
four-year degree. She moved back to her hometown, lived at home for a while and sought a job where she did not have to work too hard and would be able to continue with her education in wildlife management at the local university. After working and saving her money for a few years she moved out to an apartment of her own. It took her a year more to save enough money to be able to return to school. She was a full-time student for one semester and decided she really could not live on what she was making just working part-time, so she became a full-time employee and a part-time student. She was a junior. She received a lot of support from those with whom she worked. She still had a vision of herself working in a zoo.

Lynn

Lynn was the parent of two of the children who attended the school where the researcher was employed. When approached about being interviewed for this research study, she was very excited about being able to tell someone her story. She came to the school early on a day when she was going to pick up her children. This was at a time when the university was in their winter quarter final exam schedule, so she had some extra time.

Lynn was married, and was in her mid-thirties. She was of average height and weight, had long dark hair and wore wire-rimmed glasses. She dressed in what might be called the hippie style. She was very animated and would talk to
anybody. Her manner of dealing with others was very courteous and she was appreciative of all that the teachers and administrators did for her children. She was very generous of her time, volunteering several hours a week at the school.

Lynn was absolutely consumed with being a full-time mother. Her youngest child was in kindergarten and she finally felt that she had time to do some things for herself. She was enrolled part-time in day school at the university. She thought she was probably a sophomore; however, this was not something she really even cared about. She was majoring in anthropology and had also become interested in the women's studies program. She was studying anthropology solely because it was something she loved. She was not going to seek a job as an anthropologist, nor did she want to teach anthropology. She mentioned that she frequently had to defend herself on this point. Lynn was extremely generous in sharing her thoughts and feelings throughout the interview. She was genuinely concerned with helping the researcher find out all she could about the transition process.

Victor

Interview number 6 was with the first male subject, Victor. Victor's name was given to the researcher by a university professor who had him as a student in her evening class. When contacted by telephone, he was very willing to meet with the researcher on the university campus to be interviewed.
Victor worked in the construction business. He had done construction work in high school, and after he finished one year of college at a major university on the east coast, his family moved to the south. He moved with his family, and instead of continuing with his college education by enrolling in a different school he took a job with a construction company. He was 29 years old, single, had long wavy black hair and dressed in clothes that were very fashionable. He had never been married. He was very confident of himself, and you could tell that he was quite proud to be a university student. He loved talking about his life and his experiences of becoming a university student.

Victor was majoring in political science, and he was a sophomore. He said he had always been interested in politics and history, and even when he was not enrolled in school he would read the latest books and magazines on the subject. He would like one day to be a teacher either at the middle school or high school level. Since he associated with non-traditional male students his age, he had many amusing anecdotes to relate about his educational and work experiences. One of his most memorable comments was that he said older adults and university professors call his age group "non-traditional" students, but they call themselves "dysfunctional" students.
Tom

A physical education professor recommended Tom to the researcher. Tom was majoring in health and physical education, and he was a sophomore. When contacted, Tom invited the researcher over to his apartment in married student housing to conduct the interview. Tom was 33 years old and was married but had no children. Tom's wife was also a student for a short while, but she dropped out of the nursing program. He said that they did not realize how competitive the nursing program was when they enrolled at this university.

Tom had been in the Marine Corps for 13 years before deciding to come back to school. He was very unhappy with the military during his last few years in the service. He said he had no real marketable skills other than those which would get him a job at a minimal salary. Since he had always wanted to be a physical education teacher and coach and had the opportunity for the G.I. Bill to pay his college expenses he decided to take advantage of it. He had no previous college experience. He started out in night school because his high school grades were so poor. After a quarter of doing well in night school he was admitted to day school and he seemed very happy there. He knew that there was a long road ahead, but he could clearly see what he would be doing when he graduated. In fact, he could even visualize the house in which he would someday live.
Tom was a big man, he was about 5'10" tall and weighed about 200 pounds. He had short blonde hair and dressed in a very casual style. He was very conscientious and wanted to assist the researcher in any way he could. He deliberated long and hard over every question that was asked. He used a lot of southern slang and at times it was difficult to understand what he was saying. It was interesting to hear the perspective of this transition from a full-time male undergraduate student.

Crystal

Crystal was the only African-American that was interviewed for this study. She was the youngest of 11 children and grew up in a very poor family in a small town in the south. She said she was fortunate to have some help in high school and she did get a scholarship to go to a two year college to become a dental hygienist. She had one brother who also went to college. She spoke freely of her family and said that none of her nieces and nephews were going to college and that most of her brothers and sisters saw no need for higher education. She really was not sure why her mother encouraged her to move away and go to college when she was 18 years old. She had a few very touching stories to tell about how homesick she was for her family when she first moved away.
Crystal was 32 years old but looked about 24. She was slim and dressed just like the college students. She was married and had no children. Her husband was an educator and several members in his family were also educators. She received support from him and his family in her pursuit of her college degree and teaching credential.

Crystal had become dissatisfied with her job as a dental hygienist so she decided that she probably needed to go back to school. She did not know if she would be able to handle the responsibilities of school again, so she started off taking a class in night school. It was a wonderful experience so she decided to quit her job and become a full-time student. She was very happy in her role as a student and believed that this transition was coming at a good time in her life. She too had a clear picture in her mind of what she would be doing when she finished. She would be an elementary school teacher.

Claire

The researcher met Claire at another elementary school where they both worked in an after school program. Claire agreed willingly to be interviewed. They both stayed after work one day and sat in the conference room of the school and talked. Claire was 35 years old, of average height and weight, and had short, curly, auburn hair. She had just gotten off work, so she was dressed
in casual style dress. She was very friendly and outgoing, and it was easy to talk to her.

Claire was in the midst of other transitions in her life. She was married and had two daughters in high school. However, about six months ago her husband left her and declared that he did not want to be married any more. He had just finished his doctorate at the university, had a good job, and decided that he needed to, as she so apply put it, "find himself." There was nothing more to it than that, but she decided that she needed to do something for herself too. This something was going back to school. She was enrolled in her very first class when the interview took place. Although she had some previous college experience, it was a long time ago, before she was married and had her children. She was very pleased with herself and her return to school to finish her degree. Her story of transition was full of insights. She had a unique ability to analyze her actions and to make her story very real; at times it was very happy and at times it was very sad. Since she had worked at this particular school as a teacher's aide for several years, she had a wonderful support system. She was very excited about the possibility that in a few years she could very well be a teacher at the school, instead of a teacher's aide.
Janet

Janet was also a student in the elementary school physical education methods class that came to the school where the researcher was employed; however, Janet took the class during the spring quarter. Janet was as willing as all the other adult students to take the time to talk to the researcher. Janet had a very sunny disposition. She was 36 years old, but looked like she was in her mid-twenties. She was about 5'1" and was probably a little overweight. She wore glasses and had short blonde hair. She dressed in jeans and an oversized shirt. She lived in the country, in a small community about 25 miles outside of town. She was extremely religious and family oriented. Her in-laws lived next door, and her husband's brother lived on the other side of her. Her interview was full of anecdotes involving all the relatives. She did not have a good command of the English language. For example, she never used the word doesn't, but always said "don't" when the correct word was doesn't. Janet was married when she was 15 years old and had recently celebrated her twentieth wedding anniversary. She had one son, a 13 year-old middle school student. He husband worked for the State Department of Transportation.

Janet started school as a brand new freshman, and she was majoring in early childhood education. It was very obvious that she really loved what she was doing. She had an extremely positive attitude. She was committed to making a contribution to the field of education. It might have been her strong
religious convictions, but she was sure that it was her mission in life to make a
difference for children, even if she touched the life of just one child. At times
Janet seemed a bit naive, but then at other times she did not. She said she
could not wait until she gets out and has her own classroom full of students.
She really had vision because she was already buying things for the classroom
she would have one day.

Sharon

Sharon was the only divorced person interviewed for this study. She was 46
years old and had been divorced for 3 years. Sharon was 5'3" tall and weighed
about 160 pounds. She had bright red hair and dressed in very colorful clothes.
She loved to talk and talked easily about almost anything. She was one of 8
children growing up in very Catholic home in Ohio. She had lived in her
present home for 20 years. Her oldest son was in the Air Force, she had a
daughter in college, and her 16 and 17 year old sons had both dropped out of
high school.

Sharon never attended college. Right after high school she went to what
was then called a Radiology school. She did not receive any college credit for
her courses there; however, after two years she was qualified to be an x-ray
technician. She was employed at a local hospital on a part-time basis when
she was married and her children were in school. She said she now worked at the hospital as an x-ray technician on a full-time basis.

Sharon expressed that she had always wanted to go to college, but her husband did not want her to further her education. He felt she had a career and should be satisfied with it. Indeed she was satisfied with her career, but she felt she was capable of more. Although she was uncertain of what exactly she wanted to do with her college degree, she talked of things like accounting, art therapy, or something in the health education area. She did not seem unlike the 19 year old freshman who would be exploring many options. She was enrolled in night school, taking her second course. The class met twice a week.

Sharon spoke freely about the transition process. The strong commitment she had made to herself to get a college degree was evident throughout the interview.

**Annette**

The oldest person to be a participant in this study was Annette. She also was a member of the university physical education class that came to the researcher's school during the spring quarter. Annette was 56 years old. She was a widow, with two children. Both of her daughters had graduated from college. They were both married and had children. Annette was very proud of her grandchildren.
Annette was very thin and tall. Her hair was blonde, and it was long and curly. She was dressed in casual slacks with a matching top. Like many of the other participants in this study, she was very talkative and enjoyed relating her experiences of being a student. There were not many undergraduate students in her age-group and she seemed to love all the attention she received from people at the university.

Annette got married when she was young, and never thought about going to college. She raised her two children practically by herself since her husband traveled a lot with his business. When the girls got into middle school she decided to go back to school to become a teacher. She took several courses at a nearby community college, but had to quit when her husband became ill. He died about 4 years ago and she decided to return to school. It took her a few years to really get there, but now she was a junior in college and looked forward to the day when she would be a first grade teacher.

Jim

Jim was the husband of a university professor, and was recommended to the researcher by a mutual acquaintance. Jim was a policeman, and had been employed as a policeman for over 25 years. At present, he was on a leave of absence from the police force so that he could finish his college education. He was a very large man and presented himself as an authority figure. He was
about 52 years old. He was dressed in jeans and a tee shirt. He was previously divorced, and was now in his fourth year of his second marriage. He had two grown children from his first marriage, and his present wife had three children in college.

As he got older, Jim got tired of the rigorous schedule of being on the police force. He was responsible for many of the new recruits and frequently had to be with them on their night shifts. His wife really hated it when he was gone at night. Since he had already completed almost 3 years of college when he was younger, she encouraged him to go find out what he needed to graduate and get his teaching degree. He had always thought he might like to be a teacher. He enjoyed working with teen-agers. It turned out he did not need very many courses to complete a degree in mathematics and get his teaching credential so that he could teach at either the middle or high school level.

Jim loved being back in school. He loved all the attention he was receiving as a male student. This quarter he was attending classes on a full-time basis and he was a senior. He was glad he had a leave of absence from the police force so that if he was unable to get a job in a school near the town where he lived he could always fall back into his old job. He was not willing to move away since his wife had an excellent job and they had just purchased a beautiful new home.
It was not easy talking to Jim. He had a hard time expressing any kinds of emotions about his decision to return to school. Everything was just a matter of fact. He looked forward to being a teacher, and could visualize himself in a classroom setting with a group of 12 year olds. He was very dedicated to the mission of providing the best possible instruction for our youth.

Knowing something about each of the participants in this study is an important factor for the analysis of the statements made by the adult students. Now that each of the participants in this study has been introduced, the next step will be to analyze the Schlossberg Framework using the actual statements made by these adult students to describe their transition process. Table 1, listing the demographic data of the participants appears in Appendix C.

The Schlossberg Transition Framework

The Schlossberg Transition Framework proved to be adequate in containing all the factors important to the transition process as identified by the adult students in this study. The second purpose of this chapter is to break down the Transition Framework into its individual parts and to show the relevance of each part to the transition process of adult students. The variables characterizing the transition, the variables characterizing the individual, and the variables characterizing the environment will all be discussed.
The Transition Process

Variables Characterizing the Transition

Schlossberg listed 7 variables that were important factors in making a successful transition. They were: trigger event, timing, source, role change, duration, previous experience with a transition of a similar nature, and stress. These are all related to the actual transition itself. Each factor was addressed in the interviews and the relevance of each to the transition process is discussed here. Some of these variables were more pertinent to this study than others. Direct quotes from the participants will be given in order to show the importance of their voices in the analysis of the Schlossberg Transition Framework.

Trigger Event. A trigger was something specific that happened which made the individuals look at themselves and their lives differently. Trigger events varied among the participants, as one might expect. Two of the men in the study were back at school because they wanted to change careers. Both had a little help from their spouses in making their decisions. They said:

"I wasn't really having a lot of fun (in the Marine Corps), it just wasn't a lot of fun anymore. I thought about doing this college thing for the last 10 or 15 years. . . . And also, when my wife was younger she had a lot of college credits and she was going to pursue the nursing program here."

"I had been a policeman for a long time. My wife didn't like me being gone every evening. She's a teacher and I'd always wanted to be a teacher. So now I'm going to be a teacher too."
Victor also wanted a career change. He was a construction worker, but as he got older he saw the need to find another way to make a living.

"I went back to being a full-time carpenter. That went on for a number of years and then when that looked like it was going to be what I was doing for the rest of my life I became pretty discouraged. As the work slowed down and the corporate environment of construction and all that seemed unfriendly, I decided to go back to school."

Crystal also was unhappy with her job as a dental hygienist. Like Victor, she could not imagine herself doing this same job all her life.

"I think I wanted to change careers. I wanted to experience something different. I can't see myself doing the job I am doing at a certain age. And I thought, well if I need to make a change, I need to start on it."

Many of the women in this study expressed that their trigger event was one related to their family situation. They said:

"When my youngest child started to school full-time I started thinking about it really seriously."

"I just felt that he (son) was getting to the point where he didn't need me so much and I didn't feel needed."

"The separation forced me to think a lot of different things. One of them was - what am I going to do?"

"A pending divorce. That was the trigger."

Sometimes the transition was triggered by something that happened to someone close to the individual. A secretary who was also a part-time student related a very personal reason that triggered her to return to school.
"A friend of mine committed suicide, and I'm not sure if that had anything to do with it but I think it did. It caused me to start looking at my life and just life itself. And instead of procrastinating I decided to do something. And so that triggered me to go back to school."

And finally, the inevitable biological clock that was ticking away was the trigger event for one of the adult students. She was not happy with her job, and as she analyzed her situation she thought:

"The guy I worked for was real young and having a degree and his wife having a degree, and I was like, you know, I've always wanted to do that, I could at least try. If I can't cut school, well that's my answer."

The reasons that the adults in this study gave for returning to school closely parallel the findings of Aslanian and Brickell (1980) who found that more than 90% of the reasons given by adults who had returned to school were in the areas of family and career.

**Timing.** Neugarten (1979) stated that most adults still have built-in social clocks by which they judge whether they are "on-time" or "off-time" with respect to the events in their lives. The adults in this study perceived themselves as being off-time in their pursuit of a college degree, but they did not think of it as being either good or bad timing. In fact, many adult students thought that the timing of returning to school came at a very appropriate time for them personally. Many knew that as young adults they would not have made the transition to student status and have been as successful as they are now. Several of them had this to say about timing:
"I think it means a lot more to me. Classes mean a lot more. I take my classes a lot more seriously. . . . I'm taking courses that I want to take and I take courses that I actually need for my degree. Whereas before I was taking classes that were set in stone. I feel like I have a little more control over what I'm up to right now."

"I think I am more responsible. Going back to school myself and being a student just makes me think more about me... When I was at (previous college as an 18 year old) I wasn't like that, I didn't care if I made a grade or not."

"I like it this way a lot better because I appreciate learning a lot more than I did when I was 18 and 19. I think you take it for granted. I appreciate it a lot more because also it helps me to stay in touch."

**Source.** For all the adults interviewed for this study the source of their transition was internal. Each one made a deliberate decision to return to school, no one or no circumstance forced them to do so. Schlossberg (1984) said that when the source of the transition is internal the person perceives himself or herself as having control over the situation. This was an important factor in adapting to transition. Some of the statements about the source of this decision were:

"I have spent the last 15 years of my life being an aide, or being in a helping capacity one way or another when I knew that I was better than that, and I quit school a long time ago and I decided it was time to go back."

"I studied political science, political science had always been a passion of mine. Even when I was working as a carpenter, I cruised bookstores, still went to the library, still kept up with politics and all that stuff. I decided to go back and take a history class... and I liked it a lot... And then it just snowballed. It seemed like the logical thing to do was to get a degree."
"Once my youngest child got into school I really - there wasn't enough for me to do at home while they were in school. I was working part-time, but it still wasn't enough. I wanted more. . . ."

"I had thought about it and I kept thinking well, you've been talking about his for eight years. When I said I wanted to go back to school he (former husband) always had reasons why I shouldn't. Now I'm divorced and all that was removed. . . . I thought well, there's no more barricades, there's no more reasons for me not to do what I've always wanted to do."

**Role Change.** The act of becoming a student caused many different role changes. Sometimes the role changes were positive, sometimes negative, and sometimes they were neutral. Even though the students in this study described that they really looked forward to starting college, the actual event was very stressful for many of them because as adults they found themselves in between roles. For example, the role of wife and mother, and now the role of student too. Since this new role as student was perceived as a gain and as a positive experience, the adult students in this study seemed to adapt quickly to the role of student.

Regarding the role of student and relating to the younger, or traditional aged university students, they had this to say:

"I am the oldest in all my classes this quarter. The 'younguns' look to me with respect. They - I'm not really included in their extra curricular activities. But that doesn't bother me because I have my own life."

"They just treat me like any other student. That's what I wanted. I didn't want to be different. Just a normal student."
Most of the role changes described by the adult students involved concerns over their roles in their own families. Most of these were positive, at least from their own perspective.

"My role as wife pretty much stayed the same because my husband has always been supportive of me going to school."

"They (husband and son) have taken over everything except cooking the meals."

"Now it's not just me that does the stuff in the house. Before I felt like I had to."

"We (children and herself) are all students now."

A few students expressed negative or confused opinions about their changing roles within the family.

"I'd feel badly for him (husband) because I know it's easier to have two parents there at the children's bedtime. I felt guilty . . . He's never had any problem with it, it's me having a problem worrying about him. But finally I think I've gotten beyond that."

"Sometimes I feel like I should be out working or something. I sit at home and play Mr. House-husband while my wife works. I don't work at all."

Confusion in general often accompanied a role change. Victor, the carpenter said he frequently asked himself: "Am I carpenter or am I a student?" Victor also expressed concern over his role at work. He found that his new role as student was not well accepted by his co-workers.
"It's impossible for them to take me seriously as a carpenter if they know that I was going to school because they perceive that as me attempting to better my life so I won't have to be doing what I am doing at the time for the rest of my life. No matter how often do you try to explain to them that you love what you are doing right now - but they perceive it as you wanting to do something else besides what it is you are doing right now. Especially since most of them are in a situation where there is no way they could do anything else. So it can cause a strain between me and my fellow workers. It's not something I bring up."

Crystal also found that the people she worked with did not understand her desire to further her education, and this in turn caused her role at work to change.

"I pulled away from the people at work. They felt I was really anti-social. But I was just studying. And then when people saw me studying, they - a lot of people just don't understand. A lot of people think it's silly. . . . After that I never told them that I was in school. When they first found out I thought everybody would be really supportive at work, and they weren't. So then I never told them anymore what I was doing."

However, a woman in this study who worked as a para-professional in a school setting found quite the opposite. Her role as a student was well received by her co-workers. One might expect this to be the case since most of the people with whom she worked were college educated.

"I enjoy what I am doing now, I feel comfortable with what I do. . . . I like the atmosphere here, good support systems around you, and it's there and it just feels good."

Schlossberg (1984) said that all role changes involve some kind of stress, and this was certainly the case for many of the adults in this study. Stress will be
discussed in another portion of this paper, and some of the statements about stress made by the adult students also related to the stresses that accompany role changes.

Duration. This was the variable which affected the ease or difficulty of assimilating the transition. Obviously this return to school was not a permanent transition. The duration could be uncertain and this could be a stressful situation. The students interviewed in this study who were part-time students were not quite as certain of their graduation dates as were those who were full-time students. However, the transition itself was viewed by all adult students as one of a temporary duration, and all did have a vision of the future.

"I know that eventually I will get a degree, without a doubt."

"I felt like there is something out there that is meant for me to do. I really feel that right now I am going in that direction... I just can't wait to get down and out there."

"There is a definite end to what I am doing and a positive end."

"I will graduate, and I will walk and wear a gown and have a party with a cake with a cap and gown. Absolutely. I want all that."

These adult students looked forward to the conclusion of their college experience. They could see that there was an end in sight.

Previous Experience with a Similar Transition. This was an interesting factor in this particular study. Schlossberg (1984) said that:
Experts agree that the individual who has successfully weathered a particular kind of transition in the past will probably be successful at assimilating another transition of a similar nature. . . . Conversely, the person who has been defeated by a situation may become more vulnerable and less able to cope in the future. Past experiences to some extent determine the person's mental set, and if that past experience was unfavorable, then the mental set may be something of a self-confirming prophecy. (p.76)

The results of this study showed that even those who admitted to having been to college before and doing very poorly, were doing just fine now. They had at least made a successful transition to college. Whether or not their grades would continue to be good enough for them to continue is unknown. Many of these students mentioned their g.p.a. during the interview sessions. Two of the women who had attended college when they were younger and had not been successful, had wonderful stories to tell.

"I think in high school I went for socialization! I had a real good time. And I was accepted into college and went to college and met my husband and thought this is kind of cinchy. I did not apply myself, I had a good time. It was the first time I had been away from home and I went crazy. I had a wonderful time and flunked out."
"I was from the north east and I went to college in Florida. It was wonderful. I partied all the time. I met my husband there and I sure had fun. I had no idea that I needed to study. We went to parties all the time. I was getting really bad grades so I just quit at the end of my freshman year. My parents were pretty behind back then. They didn't know that I was screwing around. It's just the way kids and parents are."

Many of the adults had previously attended a vocational-technical school or a community college; however, they really did not speak favorably or unfavorably of their experiences. It was just stated as a previous experience.

"I got married at 18 and moved away . . . there I went to school . . . just for secretarial and stuff like that . . . that was at a vo-tech."

"I went to vocational school for nursery school. I took a lot of courses and got a certificate."

"I had been out of school 10, maybe 12 years. I have a license to be a dental hygienist."

"I got an associate degree. It was a two year college."

A few of the adults had attended a college or university when they were younger and had done well. Their experiences were similar to those who had attended the two year educational programs.

"I went two years before I had any children."

"Well, I had taken one or two courses, but never a full-time thing."

"Immediately after high school I did finish a year at --------- University. And that was the end of that. . . . the expenses were too much."
Only one woman mentioned adult continuing education, non-credit courses as her previous experience with a transition of a similar nature:

"I've taken a lot of non-credit courses over the years at the university, but I've never taken anything for credit... I took a creative writing class... it made me aware of the fact that I could learn. I could absolutely learn."

Finally, there were a few students who had no previous experience with any kind of formal education after high school. They said:

"I hadn't done anything until I decided to do this!"

"I had never taken any correspondence courses or anything. I had some training through work. Every company would have a training when you moved from entry level to up a little bit."

All of the adults in this study thought they were doing very well in school. Although many expressed that they were glad that they had had previous educational experiences, it really did not seem to make a difference in how they perceived their success at what they were doing right now. Some said that they did not think they would have been able to go back to school if they had not already been successful at it once before. Yet those who had unsuccessful experiences before and those who had no previous experience were able to plunge right in there and be successful. A previous successful experience with a transition of a similar nature might be important to a few individuals, but as shown in this study, it was not a prerequisite to a successful transition in this situation.
Stress. All of the adult students mentioned stress and stressful situations as a part of returning to school. The transition process of becoming a student stimulated stresses in other areas also. How stressful this particular event was to each individual varied. A lot depended upon what was going on in their lives at that time. Some of the stressful situations that the adults mentioned only lasted a short time, others lasted much longer. Words that students used to express their stressful feelings included: overwhelmed, scared, terrified, apprehensive, worried, nervous, hysterical, terrible and exciting. General feelings of being "scared" were expressed by almost all of the adults interviewed in this study. Some of them had vivid memories of the very first class that they went to. They said:

"So I get very, very scared that first day of classes. Overwhelmed, terrified."

"... and the first step was VERY difficult. Very difficult and scary to put my foot in that door to go to class."

"I can still remember it, it was English 101. A lot of apprehension, being scared, very exciting also at the same time."

"It was kind of intimidating walking in there and not knowing what to expect."

"Stress is real. I didn't know that until all this. It's really strange. There are so many emotions that come out."

"I love it. Of course I was scared to death the first quarter."
"When you walk into that first class and you're kind of confused and nervous. Just walking in there and sitting down and assessing everybody and you're thinking - oh my god, there is no way, what am I doing here? I remember thinking, what have I done? Maybe I should just get up and leave before I die."

"I was VERY SCARED about taking math. So that was a big adjustment."

"This transition from night school to day school has been the scariest. I've had so many people say that classes are easier at night. . . so here I am TERRIFIED to go in the day. Because what happens if they're right?"

It was interesting to note that some very minor logistical problems caused several adults to worry quite a bit. As they told this part of their story most of them laughed about how much they worried over rather insignificant problems.

"I was more worried about parking and finding the building that I needed to go to than anything else."

"I was apprehensive at first about going back, about being older and going back. . . . I had to get used to the bus line."

"Even after I applied . . . well, for two quarters I didn't go. It took a lot of courage to come back over here and say - can I register now?"

"I was terrified of working the bus system."

"I think my biggest fear over here was riding the bus. I was really afraid. I was like really panicked."

"I had this big fear, like I was in a big city and I would get lost."

"One of our books didn't come in until the fifth week of the quarter and we had to read 250 pages. . . I was just stressed out, it was like just so stressful."
Acceptance by and the ability to keep up with the traditional aged college students worried some of the adults. They said:

"I was so nervous. Really, I was - oh, it was like your worst nightmare. I was too worried about how the regular students would accept me, would I be shunned, you know, for being older?"

"I guess I was a little worried about making friends. I always feel that I'm the oldest person in the class. And I was worried about how the young girls would take to me."

"I don't try to be one of the crowd, but I don't try to be Mr. Joe Adult or anything... I still feel a little funny sometimes sitting in class, especially since I've been taking day classes."

"... the students, they seemed more relaxed being in classes, whereas I had to readjust to taking notes and just the professors themselves."

Family concerns were expressed by Janet and Lynn, both of whom have young children in school.

"I was so worried, am I going to be able to do it, is this going to cause problems in my family, am I going to be able to give my son the attention he still needs, am I going to be there for him when he needs me?"

"The only thing I constantly worry about is if the kids are going to get sick... They couldn't contact me or I'd just be missing class, like a final."

As expected from their other comments about their work experiences, Crystal, the dental hygienist and Victor, the construction worker, both brought up work as possible stressful situations.

"It (being a student) can cause a strain between me and my fellow workers. It's not something I bring up."
"I pulled away from the people at work. They felt I was really anti-social... a lot of people just don't understand. A lot of people think it's silly... They would say - why do you want to torture yourself, and thing like that."

Stressors and stress varied from individual to individual. However, many of these adult students expressed the same kinds of stressful situations, probably because they were all experiencing the same transition. They were all becoming students and many of the situations that they were encountering for the very first time were perplexing to them. Just as their stressful situations varied, so did their methods of coping with stress. Coping responses will be addressed under the variables characterizing the individual.

Thus, an analysis of the variables characterizing the transition points out that all of the variables had some relevance to the transition process of these adult undergraduate students. Table 2, Variables of the Transition, appears in Appendix C.

Variables Characterizing the Individual

Understanding the individual was crucial to understanding the transitional process. How the individual interacted with the variables characterizing the transition and the variables characterizing the environment were of utmost importance in understanding this transitional event. Schlossberg (1964) listed these variables characterizing the individual as being important in the transition process. They were: socioeconomic status, sex role, age and
life stage, state of health, ego development, personality, outlook and commitments and values. Each factor was addressed and the relevance of each to the transition process is discussed. Again, the discussion of each variable will include the voices of the adult students who have shared their experiences of this unique transition.

**Socioeconomic Status.** Socioeconomic status is often measured by income, occupation, education or some combination of the three. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used only financial situation as a general framework for assessing socioeconomic status. In this particular transition, the researcher was mainly concerned with how the transition of becoming a student had affected the individual or the family's economic status. Value orientation and cultural norms also played a part in the individual's assessment of their own economic status.

All of the adult students that participated in this study would probably be classified in the low to average middle class income status. None of them received welfare or any federal assistance for their families and/or children. Most lived in their own homes, or rented apartments in well-established parts of town.

Only a few of the students expressed that there was very little or no financial difficulty in their lives as a result of them returning to school. One of those comments came from Tom, the ex-Marine:
"I still fell under the old G.I. Bill. That pays for everything and still gives me a few dollars in my pocket."

Two of the married women had husbands with good jobs. They said this regarding the financial costs of their college education:

"I decided to go as long as I could and then if I needed the financial aid, I really felt like I wouldn't have any problem getting it."

"We pretty much do on my husband's salary anything we want. We have everything we need."

The two people in this study that had never been married expressed concern over the financial aspect of higher education.

"When I first moved here, I just had to face up to the fact that I wasn't going to be able to be a full-time student, probably never again. Those days were over."

"I have to save all quarter to afford the next quarter. I live a lot on credit."

"The finances worried me. I get a grant for part of it, and a scholarship for part. The rest is a loan, and I worried about that, how that would work. It's done real well so far."

As might be expected, the two women in the study who were separated from their husbands were concerned greatly over their own financial situations. Part of this concern was because they were not yet divorced and their personal financial resources were in limbo.

"The first thing you think about is money. It is extremely expensive to go to school. . . . Just the money, that was the main problem I had."
"We don't have the extra money we used to have and they (children) kind of hate that because I don't give allowance anymore. They have to earn it."

Lynn, who had two young children, felt the financial strains of returning to school. Her husband had a good job as an engineer, but he was just beginning his career. She made the following comments:

"And that's why I take one class a quarter because right now we just can't pay. I hate the thought, I mean we're paying off his school loans still."

"I'm probably spending $900 a year if you add up all the quarters and the books and the gas. And we just do without a lot of stuff . . . We just got a second car. For six years we've had one car . . . We never go out. We go out to dinner maybe twice a year."

Only one of the adult students received financial assistance from an agency outside the university. Sharon, who was employed at a local hospital received some money from the hospital's employee assistance fund.

"At work they offer us to bring in your grades and we'll help you with the next class. And I think they pay fifty percent. . . . they will probably help me out in my core curriculum."

All of the adult students found a way to make their dream of a college education come true. For those who had financial problems, perhaps they were good problem solvers and figured out a solution to their problem. It appeared that this was a stressful situation for many of the students, but not an overwhelming one. Each one was able to come up with a solution. This is just another example of the determination that each person had to reach his or her personal goals.
Sex role. Schlossberg (1984) stated that the relationship between sex and the transition process was complex. She cited several research articles that showed that men and women responded differently to the same situation. For example, she said that the sources of transitions varied for men and women. The transitions that men faced were usually connected with work; whereas, women underwent transitions connected with family life. Women's transitions often started with someone else.

Gender did not seem a factor in the ability of the participants in this study to adapt to the transition of becoming a student. Certainly there were some differences in what the men and women told about their transition, but it was difficult to make any overall generalizations. There were women in this study who were the head of the family and had the daily responsibilities of taking care of the children. There were no men in this study in a similar situation. Two of the men had no children, and one man had children who were already adults. It was difficult to make an assessment of the pros and cons of this transition process based on gender. Men and women in this study all expressed similar problems and concerns as well as joys of accomplishment. In other transitions this gender difference may be of greater importance.

Age and Life Stage. The majority of the participants in this study were in their late thirties to early forties. At this time in their lives there were often a lot of other things going on. From this study we saw that several people were
experiencing troubles within their marriages. Others were still seeking their soul-mate, and were wondering what the future might hold for them. Some adult students were still parenting young children while others were facing the empty nest syndrome.

Yet all of these adults had, for some reason, decided it was time to do something for themselves, so they became college students. Each had his or her own reasons for this major life change, and these were probably related to the specific life stage where they presently found themselves. The participants in this study were at a variety of life stages. In other words, this transition to become a student occurred at various life stages. In this research study, life stage was not a predictor of when and adult chose to become a college student.

**State of health.** Schlossberg (1981) stated that an individual's state of health definitely affected his or her ability to assimilate a transition. All of the adult students in this study reported that they were in good health. Good health facilitated their ability to adapt to a major transition. None of the participants in this study reported that personal health hindered their ability to become college students. All enjoyed good health and were able to participate in extra-curricular activities just like the traditional-age college students.

**Ego Development.** The frame of reference by which people approach the same situation will vary greatly. Loevinger (1976) used the term ego
development to describe the process of coming up with a frame of reference that differentiated the way people reacted to the world. She described a developmental sequence that ranged from impulsive and self-protective, through conformist, individualistic, autonomous and finally integrated. Where a person was in this sequence, determined his or her frame of reference for experiencing all aspects of life. Certainly this affected the way the individual perceived and had the ability to handle a major transition.

Without extensive testing it would be difficult to make judgments about the ego development of the participants in this study. However, they all had comments to make about themselves personally which seemed to have a bearing on how they handled, or thought of, the transition. These personal comments were often enlightening and gave the researcher an insight into the adult student's point of reference. Many of the comments were about personal feelings and they displayed a growth in self knowledge. Most of the adult students were amazed at how much they had learned about themselves through this transitional process. They shared these statements:

"I enjoy what I am doing now. I feel comfortable with what I do."

"I just felt real good about going after I took that first class."

"It feels so good to find out that you are ok. For such a long, long, time I didn't feel ok. even though I've always been happy in life."
"Getting good grades makes me feel good. I like me. I didn't like me a whole lot before, but I like me now."

"Actually, I think I'm happier."

"I knew exactly what I wanted to go to school to be. When I got accepted I felt like I was on the right track. I have, I just seem happier."

"There aren't too many 35 year olds who want to be a coach and teach. So I'm kind of proud of it."

"For the first time I'm in the foreground. I don't know where he (husband) is, and that doesn't matter. It's something I feel real comfortable with. I know exactly what I want...it's taking care of yourself."

The fact that they finally "grew up" was revealed by several students.

"I think it took me a long time to mature."

"I'm old enough now that I can do what I want."

"I have always thought it a detriment that I am interested in a lot of different things, because I thought what is the matter with me? I can't focus on where I want to go because I am interested in biology and sciences and English and history - just everything. And taking the personality test it said this person would major in liberal arts if they could...So I just changed my thinking and I grew up, and said it's ok. if I like anthropology. I don't have to focus on one thing yet."

**Personality.** Personality is a rather ambiguous term, and Schlossberg (1984) was very vague in describing the importance of personality to the individual in transition. There are many different personality tests available if a researcher were interested in an assessment of personality type of the subjects in his or her study.
Since personality was not a major focus of this study, no personality tests were given to the adult students. It was difficult to come to any conclusions about personality based on one 90-minute interview. All that can be said is that all of the adults interviewed for this study appeared to be normal, regular people. No one displayed abnormal behaviors during the interview session. All seemed to be "nice" people, telling an interesting story about themselves. The researcher would like to think it was an honest and truthful story.

**Outlook.** How a person looks at life is a very complex interplay of many factors. In this study all of the adult students had a wonderful outlook on their transitional experience of becoming a student. Since the source of this transition was internal for all of the participants, perhaps they saw themselves as in control of the situation. All of them gained in self-esteem due to returning to school, so this too, would color their outlook on life. These are a few of the comments made during the interviews about the individuals outlook on life:

"Now I can, before I never dreamed about doing things, and now I can sit there and daydream about in so many quarters I can be doing something else. Just the hope of it, the possibility of doing something else makes me happy."

"I just can't wait to get down and out there."

"I feel like, you know how you reach your goals? Mine's just right there now, I can almost touch it."

"There is a definite end to what I am doing and a positive end."
A positive outlook was expressed by all of these students. They definitely saw the many wonderful possibilities that lie ahead of them once they obtained their college degree. Optimism, or hope, pervaded all of these interviews.

**Commitment and Values.** An individual's basic value and beliefs were a factor in his or her ability to adapt to transitions. The adults in this study expressed many different values that were important to them in relation to this transition from non-student to student status. The leading question to get them to talk about their values was, "Describe how your values influence your decisions." Everyone commented about their values and this decision to become a student. They seemed very focused on "why" they had made this decision. Some adults recalled that they had finally found their purpose in life. They shared these very personal thoughts:

"I feel like I am fulfilling the purpose I'm put here for, this just may be my purpose, to be there for some child or something."

"Now I think about what can I contribute? I haven't always been that way."

Closely related to those comments about purpose were those comments about wanting to help, or to make a difference.

"I value helping people. And I wanted to get into some type of helping profession, but not the medical profession."

"I think at a point when you look back over your life, if you look at your career you figured you've done something to maybe help somebody, or did something I mean REALLY to help somebody, to make a difference, then you'll feel really good about what you've done."
"I always enjoyed working with younger people. Maybe trying to, not trying so much to throw my values, well I guess we are in a way, because anything that you believe in, when you teach somebody else I guess if you're worth your salt you would try to have it rub off a little bit on them."

Several people spoke about the high value they placed on education.

"I value education and I value learning. I not only value my learning, but I value children's learning. I think it is very important."

"Right now my schooling is more important to anybody, to all of us."

And finally, the discussion about values would not be complete if we did not hear the voices of the mothers in this study.

"I always wanted to be a mom and stay at home. I don't regret one minute of that."

"We don't particularly believe in day care for the children. I know that's sacrilegious... he would say, if you need to go to work because you are going crazy, then I'll stay home. He felt that one of the parents should stay home, so that wasn't just me feeling that way."

"I am not sorry one bit that I stayed home with my children for over 12 years. Because I think I gave them something that can't be taken away. I hope I did anyway."

Commitment to a goal or purpose was an important factor in adapting to transitions such as this one. Commitments change over one's lifespan. A strong commitment to doing something for themselves and getting an education were expressed by all of the adults in this study. A strong commitment to this cause was probably necessary for this successful transition to take place.

Some of the adults spoke in terms of a commitment to themselves. They said:
"I knew that I had to do this if I wanted to accomplish what I wanted to get out of life."

"I know that eventually I will get a degree, without a doubt."

"I'm finally getting the courage to say I can do what I want. I'm not worried about a job and the heck with everybody else saying - What are you going to do with an anthropology degree?"

Although many other adults also spoke of a commitment to themselves, they frequently spoke of this commitment in terms of their schooling.

"I knew that I had to go back to school. I had no choice, I had to go to school. And to me that was no choice. And I just had to work out the other details, and I have to be a mom. So I worked it out."

"I really want to get my degree. I mean if I ever died and didn't have my degree I would be heart-broken."

"I knew that one day I would really do it. And we just decided, I was 33 at the time, we decided that if I was going to do it, now was the time to do it."

"There is a definite end to what I am doing and a positive end. I love school. I didn't like it before, but I absolutely love it and I wouldn't do anything else with my life right now."

"You have to want it. You know, you have to want it, need it, you eat it and you sleep that desire. And it doesn't matter what happens at school to get in your way. You can always overcome it."

"When we moved here . . . I went out within a 2 week period of being here to get my drivers license so I could prove that I was here for a year so I could get in-state tuition. So I was really thinking ahead."
"I feel committed now. I feel a commitment to go ahead with it - I mean I know the max. will probably be ten hours a quarter. It will take me longer to get a degree than even my daughter. But I'm committed to go ahead with it."

Commitment to themselves and their values and goals was a major factor for the adult students in their ability to withstand the demands made upon them during this exciting transition. All of them could easily speak about their commitments and values.

**Coping Resources.** This transition was filled with the unexpected. Effective coping responses were important to each individual undergoing this major transition. When writing about coping resources, Schlossberg (1984) used two definitions. One definition was from Pearlin and Schooler (1978): "By coping we refer to the things people do to avoid being harmed by life strains" (p.1). The other definition was from George and Siegler (1981): "We will define coping as the overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations. . . ." (p.37).

The adults in this study revealed many different coping strategies. The methods most often described by these students were methods that helped them minimize their individual distresses. They told about these coping strategies used to deal with stress:

"I go play with the neighbor's kids! No lie. I tell my husband I can't handle it no more and I go next door. . . . it's just something to totally get away from anything that has to do with school. . . . I can go down there and feel like, I can almost feel, it's like a tight-rope, I can feel it unwinding."
"I walk. I usually walk about 4 miles almost every night. And that is a big stress reliever for me. It clears my head, hopefully of the cobwebs. I walk at night because it is peaceful and very quiet. I walk by myself."

"If it gets too much, I just get up and leave it."

"I call my mother! ... I called my mother and told her what I would be doing the first day of classes. ... I mean you can't tell other grown-ups that you're crying and you're scared. It just sounds so stupid."

"Exercise. Absolutely. I used to drink in the Marine Corps but I found out that that sure didn't cure nothing. ... I like to jog ... I give myself little pep talk, breathe in and out, that's my relaxing techniques. Mainly just talking to myself."

"I'll look at my husband and say - I'm going shopping, I'll see you later!"

"One of our books didn't come in until the fifth week of the quarter and we had to read 250 pages. ... there was no way to relieve that tension but bust. My husband said - read. Just read. Stop complaining and read. That was the only thing you could do. Read and underscore."

"Well, when I went home I went for a long walk ... I took about a 2 hour walk and that calmed me down ... you just have to have an outlet you have to do something you are used to doing to relieve stress. And it was walking with me, and it helped a lot."

"I felt very comfortable asking students if I needed to know where something is or need to know how to do something. I felt real comfortable asking them - they've always been glad to share that information."

The skills used to cope with stress varied as much as the individuals in this study. Some of these adult students were very creative in their choices of coping responses.
As was shown before with the variables characterizing the transition, the importance of the individual characteristics to the transition process again was well documented. Schlossberg has identified those variables which are important to the transition process. Table 3, the variables characterizing the individual, appears in Appendix C.

Variables Characterizing the Environment

Environment here referred to the conditions that surrounded the individual. Social support including intimate relationships, the family unit, network of friends, and institutional supports all needed to be understood in coming to an understanding of the transition process.

Intimate Relationships. The adult students who spoke of intimate relationships all referred to their spouses. Several women in the study spoke of the support they received from their husbands; however, many of them "just knew" that he supported them. They said that their husbands never verbally told them of their support.

"I don't know how to say my husband encourages me, he's just really there - totally."

"My husband, I know he has really supported me in a lot of ways like when my children got off on early release, he got off work early so he could be there when they got off the bus... just knowing he is willing to do that. He doesn't say much but he just does all those little things. I know he is proud that I am doing something constructive."
"A lot of people told me that would cause trouble between us, that men don't like a woman having a better education. He doesn't seem to mind. He says - I'm not going to hold you back if that's what you want, and it's different from what I want."

"My former husband's been very understanding of the problems. He's paying most of my support right now so that I can finish school."

"My husband doesn't see school as work... he has his own business but he doesn't realize how much time you have to put into school work. It's like a full time job. When he leaves, he does not realize what I have done all day. He doesn't SEE it. I mean he sees books about and papers... but he does not see the whole of it. He still thinks I've "got it made" so to speak... It's like since he does manual labor he works harder. He does not see that mental labor is tiring... He has been real supportive though, he has taken over helping the children with their homework. He wants to move to some little town in ------- and let me teach in a one room schoolhouse and him own the local bait shop and fish all day!"

The two married men in this study spoke of the support they received from their wives. Both of them were full-time students while their wives worked full-time.

"My wife is great. She teaches school all day while I go to school. She encourages me all the time. I can't wait until we are both teachers and are on the same kind of schedule."

"My wife, she has been super supportive, but she misses her washer and dryer."

The Family Unit. The family unit was an important source of support for those in transition. All of the adults in this study received a great deal of support
from their families. Those who had children spoke fondly of the support they received from them.

"My son tells everybody - my mom's going to school now, she's in college. I made the Dean's list last quarter and he went to school and told everybody."

"My children are very proud. They are very proud of me."

"I'm finding out that they do chip in when things get down. When they don't have anything to wear they can figure out how to use the washing machine."

"My children are already out of college, but they think it's great that I am going. They call all the time and ask me about my classes and tests and grades."

Even though these adults were quite a bit past the age of the traditional college student, they still received support from their parents. Some of them admitted that at first their parents were not sure if what they were doing was the correct thing, but once they enrolled and start taking classes their parents supported them.

"I think my father still thinks - what's a 33 year old man doing going back to college? But then he realized that with what skills I had been taught, I really didn't have a big chance to make it, except to make it with a bare minimum... Both of them are great about it now."

"My parents are pretty happy about it. ... My father lives in New York and he swears he's coming down for the graduation."

"My mother was so happy. I could hear her telling people... I knew that she was excited for me. She didn't say anything like - you did good, but I hear her telling somebody else."
"My parents are supportive, in their own way. I don't think they anywhere near understand what it's like for me going to school. . . . They are very proud of me. They love to tell about it."

"My husband's parents have been wonderful. They couldn't be any more supportive."

"I've got it coming from everywhere. I don't feel there is any way I could fail."

"I am the only one in my family to go to college. At first they thought I was crazy. However, when I got my scholarship and made the dean's list they were impressed. . . . I am just keeping my fingers crossed that my parents will make it to my graduation. My dad is 73, he's healthy, but that's old. . . . they are getting excited. I got inducted into Kappa Delta Pi and my dad was welling up tears at the ceremony."

Janet told a delightful story about two elderly aunts who were apparently very proud of her since she had returned to school and knew that going back to school had been a financial strain on the family.

"Aunt Jody and Aunt Elaine one time, it was so funny, I was fussing about not getting to go shopping. We're real big on shopping. We like to find the bargains. They come in and said - We cleaned out our closets and we can't wear these clothes. Now I can't wear their clothes. And it was right funny because there were price tags on all the stuff. They don't want to make me feel bad."

None of these students talked about negative support they may have received from their families. Apparently there was none. Although the amount of support varied, all did receive what they perceived as positive support from their immediate and extended families. Nobody said that they wished they had more support from their families.
Friends. Support from friends was mentioned by all of the adult students.

Several mentioned that they a friend who had gone back to school and this then encouraged them to do the same thing.

"I call her a friend, she's church family. She went back to school. I thought, well, Elaine done it and she has two kids. After I got accepted I asked her about getting started and all of that. It was a big help knowing somebody who had actually done it."

"I have one friend who had already been going to school. She started when her youngest child went to kindergarten. She probably had sort of an influence, that was probably another trigger, that she did it and I had always thought about it. She did it and I thought, I need to do that too. . . She was a big encouragement because she was able to make it."

A few of the adult students mentioned that they had received support from co-workers, or friends at work.

"(a co-worker) and I started our first class together. . . that was very helpful. I felt a little more comfortable, not so scared, even though I was nervous still."

"The support system that I have here at work has helped me."

"There was a fellow I worked for, Ken, he's about 15 years my senior. . . Every once in awhile we'd get drunk and he'd start talking about it - I wish I could go back, I wish I could go back. . . And every time he'd be working he'd say - stay with it, stay with it. And that makes me want to stay with it."

Mary shared a delightful story about a friend that she met in class, and how important this friendship was to her.
"I have found a friend here at school who is 38 years old. She is the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me. We just need each other. We have so many similar problems. . . and she needed somebody too. She didn't have a friend her age. She and I are great friends."

Others expressed the fact that they did not make friends with those whom they met in classes.

"I cannot think of anybody I know that I met through a class. It just doesn't happen in my age group."

"You get to be friendly with people during the class, but after the class you really don't see them. At least I don't."

Speaking of friends and acquaintances in general, two very different comments were given by these students.

"My friends thought it was fantastic that I was able to make a decision like this and to do it. I can't think of anybody that tried to be negative about this situation or to try to talk me out of it."

"I have to really watch who I talk to. Because some people are so negative and some people are so positive."

It was clear that the support of friends was welcomed and often influential to these adult students. Only one mentioned any kind of negative feedback from friends. Perhaps most of them only solicited support from those whom they knew would give it.

Institutional Support. Support can be found in a variety of institutions, such as political groups, social groups, community support groups, and religious
organizations. For the purpose of this study the adult students were asked about the support they received, or did not receive, from the university where they were attending class. Most of the students' commented that they were well received by their teachers.

"I think older students are very well received by the instructors. I think older students are more serious about their work and I think the instructors like to see that."

"I haven't had any problems with any teacher whatsoever, as far as me being an older student."

"I always thought that nobody at a university, that nobody would care. And then at the end of the quarter I got this assignment back and it had a note written on it and it had a smiley face, and things I thought people didn't do anymore."

Others spoke of specific instances when they received support from various parts of campus.

"I took some developmental studies classes . . . I honestly don't think I would have made it if it had not been for that."

"And I went to my financial advisor and I just mentioned separation and she said, What? And she just filled the papers out and I had a Pell grant right then and there. She was wonderful . . . she's my guardian angel."

"Night school was, well there were very small classes. I was lucky enough to have a few more people closer to my age . . . I would recommend night school to any older adult college student."

There were a few varied negative comments about the lack of support for the older students at the university.
"Each individual organization is very helpful, but there's not one specific group that says, we can help the older students, come see us first."

"My advisor... me and her just don't seem to hit it off for some reason... sometimes I feel like she thinks - What the hell is he doing here?"

"The thing I have found most aggravating is I would like to either have a grant or a scholarship or something to go to school, and the first thing that comes out of their mouth is - we have a loan for you... I have to be divorced which really ticks me off."

"Of all my classes, he was the only one who didn't like older students. He was just an arrogant grad. student - I won't say what I want to call him."

Support was an extremely important factor to these adult students in making the transition to student status. Whether the support came in the form of affirmation or aid, it served as a catalyst to launch a successful transition. Whether or not the amount of support that the adults need to get them through their college years will still be there in the future, no one knows. However, it was clear that the support they needed to "get going" was there. Table 4, The Variables of the Environment, appears in Appendix C.

From listening to the voices of these adult students, we have seen how important all the variables in the Schlossberg model were to their transition. The interplay of the variables characterizing the transition, the variables characterizing the individual, and the variables characterizing the environment made up the transition process. The importance of these variables
and how they interacted with one another to assist or hinder the adult student as he or she made the transition from non-student to student status will be addressed in the next section.

Discussion

The importance of each of the components of the transition process as described by Schlossberg (1984), was identified through the voices of the adult students. Figure 2 lists the variables of the transition process as listed in the Schlossberg Transition Framework, as well as the variables of the transition process listed in order of importance as determined by the adults in this study. Schlossberg (1981, 1984) never stated that the variables were listed in any particular order of importance; however, they were always listed in the same order. To completely understand the significance of the components of the transition process in this situation it was necessary to determine the order of importance of each set of variables. By looking at the charts which displayed the comments made by the adult students in this study, the researcher observed that there were far more comments about the variables which characterized the individual, than there were about the variables characterizing the transition and the environment. Not only was the frequency of the comments noted, but the intensity of the voices of the students was also a factor in determining this ranking.
THE SCHLOSSBERG TRANSITION FRAMEWORK

Variables Characterizing the Individual

As listed by Schlossberg: Listed in order of importance as determined by the adults in this study:

1. Socioeconomic status 1. Commitment and values
2. Sex role 2. Ego development
3. Age and life stage 3. Outlook
4. State of health 4. Coping resources
5. Ego development 5. State of health
6. Outlook 6. Personality
7. Commitment and values 7. Socioeconomic status
8. Personality 8. Age and life stage
9. Coping resources 9. Sex role

Variables Characterizing the Transition

As listed by Schlossberg: Listed in order of importance as determined by the adults in this study:

1. Trigger event 1. Degree of Stress
2. Timing 2. Role Change
3. Source 3. Trigger Event
4. Role change 4. Previous Experience
5. Duration 5. Source
6. Previous experience 6. Timing
7. Degree of stress 7. Duration

Variables Characterizing the Environment

As listed by Schlossberg: Listed in order of importance as determined by the adults in this study:

1. Intimate relationships 1. Family unit
2. Family unit 2. Intimate relationships
4. Institutional supports 4. Institutional supports

Figure 2. Order of importance of variables in the transition process.
When the adult students spoke about their individual characteristics such as commitment and values, they were animated and spoke with great intensity. It was obvious that this educational experience was of great importance to them. These students also spoke of a commitment to themselves, of finally doing something that they had thought of doing for awhile, and of finally pursuing their own goals. This was a part of ego development, a variable that ranked second in importance in the variables characterizing the individual. It was obvious from their comments that they had developed those skills necessary to now take care of their own needs. Other characteristics that stood out in the interviews were outlook and coping resources. Every one of these students had a very strong and positive outlook about this transition process. They all described the coping resources they had developed to make this a successful transition. The variables characterizing the individual were forceful factors that influenced these adult students greatly, and made it possible for them to make the transition from non-student to student status.

The variables characterizing the transition were listed second in order of importance to the adult students. Listed first among these variables was degree of stress. Every one of the students could identify several areas of stress that accompanied this transition. Stress was the most important factor of the variables characterizing the transition, according to the comments made by the students during their interviews. Role change, trigger event, and previous
experience with a transition of a similar nature were also important aspects of the transition, but not as important as stress. Even though stress was mentioned often by these adult students, this factor did not appear to be as important to their adaptation to transition as did those variables which characterized the individual. Coping resources, a characteristic of the individual, enabled the student to handle the stress that accompanied this transition. In this particular transition the variables that characterized the individual were what gave the student the impetus to act. The variables characterizing the transition were of secondary importance to the adult students in this study.

The variables characterizing the environment were ranked third in order of importance in this study. Although all of the students mentioned the importance of support they received from family, friends, and the institution; this factor did not appear to be significant in their decisions to become students. All of the adult students in this study mentioned that they received positive support from their family and friends. The results of another study, in which the adult students did not receive positive support from their families and friends might obtain different results. The adult students mentioned both positive and negative support that they received from the institution where they attended classes. This factor neither influenced or prohibited their transition process.
It is important to note that this study focused only on the transition process faced by these adult students as they initially became students. They were all in the beginning stages of their transition to student status. These students had all made a successful transition to becoming a college student; however, it is unknown if they continued with their studies and finally received their college degrees. During this initial transition process the variables characterizing the individual were the factors which enabled them to make this transition. While variables of the environment, such as institutional support did not seem to be of great importance to these students at this initial stage of their educational experience, it is not known how important these variables would be in the future. It is probable that the rank order of the variables would shift during the time the adult student spent in college. Mid-way through the college experience, or at a time near graduation, the variables might appear in quite a different sequence. This study had determined the order of importance of the variables at the initial stage of the transition process.

Now it is necessary to ascertain how these variables interacted with one another in the specific transition of the adult from non-student to student status, and to determine if the Schlossberg Transition Framework adequately described this transition. In a diagram of the transition process, (see Figure 1, page 19), Schlossberg (1984) showed in visual form, how the three parts of the transition process (the transition, the individual, and the environment) interacted
with one another in a continuous manner. However, it was also the
interactions of the variables with one another that was crucial to the
understanding of the transition process. Schlossberg (1984) said, "It is never
one variable by itself but the way many variables interrelate that makes the
difference" (p.69).

The personal assessment of the variables in the Schlossberg Transition
Framework made by the adult students in this study revealed that they placed
the greatest importance on the variables characterizing the individual. These
variables were the ones that led the student to be able to obtain the coping
resources necessary to come through the transitional process with more assets
than liabilities, thereby having a successful transition. Therefore, the discussion
of how all the variables interrelated with one another was guided by the list of
the characteristics of the individual. A discussion of these variables and how
they interacted with the variables characterizing the transition and the variables
characterizing the environment will follow.

The Transition Process
Variables Characterizing the Individual and Their Interaction with the Variables
of the Transition and the Variables of the Environment

Commitment and Values. The first and most important variable to the adults
in this specific transition was commitment and values. The voices of these adult
students were strong and clear when they spoke of their various commitments.
One of the categories that emerged from the data was Commitment to Self.
Everyone of the adult students expressed thoughts and feelings that revealed a
strong commitment to themselves. Such phrases as "I knew one day I would do
it," "I feel like there is something out there that's meant for me to do," and "It
makes me think more about me," were found throughout the interviews. Even
though it took some of them a while to return or start school, there was no doubt
that the commitment to go to school was now present. Whether or not the
students retained this strong commitment is unknown. But for now, this
commitment to self was a major factor in the transition process.

The commitment to self could also be viewed as determination. Whether or
not they spoke these exact words, all 13 of the adults interviewed expressed
this determination: "I know I will graduate," or "I'm really determined to do it."
Not once did the researcher doubt that each of these individuals meant what
they were saying. This determination theme pervaded all interviews.

Commitment to their immediate families was also a major factor in this
category. The women, in particular, spoke of commitments to their children.
They all spoke of delaying the pursuit of their own educational goals until their
children were older and in school. They seemed very proud of this commitment
to their families. None of the men in this study had small children, so it was not
something that they brought up. The two married men, however, spoke of a
high level of commitment to their wives. The married women also spoke of commitment to their spouses, but not in as strong terms as did the married men.

Values were another factor in Schlossberg's Framework. All of the participants in this research project were able to pinpoint specific values that led them to this transition of becoming a student. Commitment and values are tied together, and the commitment of the women to stay home with their young children was also expressed as a strong family value. Most of the comments about values addressed the importance of education. The value of a college degree was high on the priority list for these adults. Having a job or a career where they felt like they were making a contribution to society was very important, and most felt that they could not obtain that job without a college degree. Several of the adults were ultimately pursuing a teaching career. In this way they thought that they could find a purpose in life. As one woman put it, she had raised her son and he and her husband did not need her as much anymore, yet she felt she had so much to share, that she thought if she became a teacher she would be able to touch the lives of many children. Adult developmental theorists such as Erikson (1950b) tell us that middle adulthood is often the time when adults are struggling with the issue of generativity.

It was inevitable that the characteristics of the individual would act in conjunction with or react to the characteristics of the transition. Commitment and values influenced the adult students perception of the variables
characterizing the transition. One of the major variables that characterized the transition was stress. Of all the various comments made by the participants in this study during the interview sessions, the category of stress contained almost twice as many comments as any other category. This strong commitment and determination to do something important for themselves may have been the catalyst that allowed these adults to get through the stress that accompanied this transition.

Role change was also a part of the transition process. Every adult student underwent a major role change when he or she became a student. For some, this caused much disruption in their daily schedules. For some, this caused disruption at home or work. Much stress often accompanied these role changes. However, the strong values, the commitment, and the strong determination possessed by the adult students in this study seemed to be of help to all of them in handling their various role changes.

Source of the transition was another variable that characterized the transition. Source of the decision to return to school was internal for all of the adult students. It was obvious that this individual characteristic of values and commitments was a major factor in the decision-making process of the adults.

Several of the adults in this study said that their desire to return to college had been present for a long time. For various reasons, they did not act upon that desire right away, but waited until the appropriate time for them. The
commitment was there but circumstances were not right. When the timing was right, they acted upon this commitment and enrolled in college. The determination was present for a long time. This transition to student status involved a process, it was not just an event. For some individuals this process took years, for other the timing was much shorter. Individual differences were the elements that caused the transition process to be different for each person. Although the transition itself was the same, no two people experienced the transition in the same way. However, values and commitments were a constant source of encouragement for the individual to persist with his or her own growth process.

Ego Development. Ego development ranked second in importance in the variables characterizing the individual. As was mentioned before, ego development basically was the frame of reference that differentiated the way people reacted to the world. This naturally involved the individuals' level of maturity. One of the categories that emerged from the data was self-knowledge. Ultimately this knowledge of self was deemed to be a part of ego development. Many of these adults finally discovered what it was about themselves that made them decide to go back to school. Such statements as: "For the first time in many, many, years I grew up," and "I feel like I have a little more control over what I'm up to right now," attested to the fact that these adult students grew in wisdom and maturity. Ego development allowed them to see the world in a
different way. They possessed confidence which enabled them to act. This confidence in association with their commitments and values was a powerful tool.

How did ego development interact with the variables that characterized the transition? Because of the combination of ego development with commitment and values, role change and stress were attended to much more effectively than they may have been at a previous date. Previous experience with a transition of a similar nature was also a characteristic of the transition. Two of the women in this study had previous experiences with attending college and both experiences had been disastrous. Also, there were two women and one man who had no previous experience with formal education. Had it not been for the level of ego development attained by these individuals, they might not have had the courage to enroll in college as an undergraduate student. Commitment and values may not have been enough; it was necessary for a certain level of ego development to be reached to allow these adult students to act upon their goals.

Support from family and friends was a variable related to the environment. Several of the adults in this study mentioned that they received support from their parents, but only after they had attended college and had "proved" themselves. Not one of the adults mentioned that this bothered them at all. If they had not had confidence in themselves, perhaps the negative comments from their parents before they started school may have prevented them from
doing so. Ego development was a very important factor in a successful transition in this specific situation.

**Outlook.** Outlook was ranked third in importance of the individual characteristics. Each one of the adults who were interviewed had, at the time, a very positive outlook on life. Vision is another term used to describe the outlook displayed by these adult students. They all had a clear vision of what the future held for them. Those who were juniors and seniors had a very clear vision of what they would be doing when they graduated. Some of the lower classmen also had a clear vision, but most could only see a vision of themselves as college graduates.

Duration, a characteristic of the transition was influenced by the individual's outlook. The duration of the transition was obviously temporary, but each individual's outlook, or vision, determined the length of the duration.

Support from family and friends influenced the outlook of the adult students. The positive support they received from their close ones led each of them to maintain their positive outlook on life. Support from their peers also influenced their outlook. Perhaps support was also readily available to these adult students because they clearly described their vision to family and friends.

**Coping Resources.** Each adult student not only was able to identify those things which caused stress in their lives, but they could also identify the stress and their coping responses. The coping resources were as varied as the
individuals undergoing the transition. The important point is that they all had coping resources, and they usually had several of them.

The variables that characterized the transition, such as degree of stress and role change, were definitely intertwined with this variable of coping. Schlossberg said that it is the individuals' coping resources which determine the balance of assets and liabilities in the transition. This successful transition experience for these adults was due to their ability to cope. Not only were coping strategies such as exercise, talking, and playing mentioned, but the adults all had an excellent sense of humor when describing their coping resources. Apparently this sense of humor also served as a marvelous coping resource. These variety of coping resources were also interrelated with the adult students personal values and ego development.

The following variables that characterized the individuals were not of great importance to the adults in this particular study.

**State of Health.** State of health was not an important factor in this study because all of the participants said they were in good health. This variable was ranked fifth because potentially this could be a major factor in adapting to transition. If one of the adults in this study was in poor health, the entire interplay of variables would shift. For example, the student might not receive support from his or her family and friends. The amount of stress would increase greatly and it is not possible to say if the coping resources would be available.
So, although state of health was not a factor in this study, it is still an important individual characteristic to investigate when studying transitions.

**Personality.** A judgment regarding the personality of the participants in this study could not accurately be made. As was stated before, all of the adult students who were interviewed seemed to be what one might term "regular" or "normal" people. During the 90-minute interview some participants were very outgoing and friendly, and some were quiet and reserved. All of them stated that they were happy with their decision to return to school and all seemed to be doing quite well academically. Personality did not appear to be a major factor affecting the transition process as experienced by the adults in this study.

**Socioeconomic Status (SES)** The adult students who were interviewed were very candid in their responses regarding the financial strains of becoming a student. Only a few of the students were not concerned about the cost of their education. None of these students mentioned that they were from wealthy families. The government was paying for one student's expenses. Two women said their husbands' salaries were sufficient enough to cover their educational expenses. The majority of the adults were concerned with the cost of higher education, but they discovered ways to obtain the necessary funds. Several students mentioned such things as scholarships, grants, and loans that assisted them in meeting their financial needs. Two women and one man told how they changed their spending patterns to save money for tuition.
Socioeconomic status was closely related to values. The high value that the adult students placed on their education was a strong motivation for them to "figure out" how they were going to cover the costs of a college education. Many of them used their problem solving skills. Also, some of the adults quit their jobs in order to become full-time students. Even though it was only for a couple of years, the loss of income by one spouse certainly affected the SES of the family. The individual's strong commitment to obtain a college degree showed that they placed their values over their life-style. Many people would not have done this. This was another example of the strong determination possessed by these adult students.

Stress accompanied socioeconomic status. One woman mentioned having to take out a loan, and how fearful she was about doing so. Another woman mentioned the stress she experienced when her grant did not come in on time. If these women would have had more money at their disposal, these stresses would have been avoided. The single, divorced, and separated men and women in this study expressed more concern over finances than did their married counterparts.

SES in some cases was related to one of the variables of the environment, family support. One woman told how her uncle purchased a computer for her, since he knew she did not have the financial resources to buy one for herself. Another woman told the researcher that her mother and father volunteered
frequently to baby-sit for her young children when she had special events to
attend on campus. They knew that she could not afford to pay someone else to
watch the children.

In a couple of cases, SES was actually a motivating factor for the adult to
return to school. One woman spoke about how she and her husband were
going to build their dream house once she finished college and got a job as a
teacher. The single woman in this study expressed how happy she will be
when she gets her degree and can find a job that will pay more than her
minimum wage job she now has. For some, their self-esteem was somewhat
related to their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

Although SES was not a major factor for the adults in this study, it did play
some part in their ability to adapt to the transition of becoming a student. For
others experiencing this same transition, it is possible the SES could play a
very important role.

**Age and Life Stage.** Age and life stage was not a major factor influencing
the transition process of the adult students in this study. Since this was a study
of adults over the age of 29, certain assumptions were already made about their
transition to the world of the undergraduate student. Age was definitely a factor
here. There were greater numbers of traditional-aged college students at the
university where these adult students were enrolled. So when it was said that
age and life stage was not a factor in the transition process of the adult students
in this study, that was an assumption made within the context of this study. There were no differences among the 13 adult students that were studied. The ages of the participants ranged from 29 - 56. They all expressed similar difficulties and concerns. One woman was a widow, and 20 years older than another woman who was married and had small children; and yet, they had the same concerns about such things as the buses, relationships with the younger students, and how they would handle the course work. Age was not a major factor in the successful adaptation to this specific transition.

Perhaps life stage was more important, although it appeared to be unlikely. Just where an adult was on the life stage continuum was difficult to determine within a 90-minute interview. It was as elusive as personality to diagnose quickly. However, as was said previously, these adults presented themselves to be normal, regular people, so one might assume they would fit into the categories of life-stage already determined by some of the adult developmental theorists. If one accepts the notion of age-grading, then Levinson's (1978) stages of adult development might fit the adults in this study. We would assume that some of these adults would be facing what he called the Age-Thirty Transition, and some the Mid-Life Transition. According to Erikson's (1950b) theory, some of these adults could be in the stage he called Adulthood, where the issue to be resolved is generativity vs. stagnation. Erikson did not place
ages on his developmental sequences; he said that one must pass through the sequences in order, and must master the tasks at each before moving on.

The age-grading theories were difficult to accept in this specific transition of the adult becoming an undergraduate student. The age range was almost 30 years, and yet the adults in this study all faced similar struggles and also similar joys of accomplishment. Age did not really matter. Life stage that is not related to age would be a more effective means of determining where these adults were in their developmental processes.

Age and life stage interacted with the other variables that characterized the individual. In this study, age was a definite factor in the commitment and values that were expressed by the adult students. For whatever reason, the commitment to their academic achievement was not present when they were younger. Age was to their advantage here, because all of them at this stage in their lives were determined to finish school. Ego development had progressed, and as they got older they all said they knew more about themselves and what they wanted out of life. They "saw" things differently than they did as young adults. Their outlook on life had changed because of the life experiences they had gone through. Because of life experiences, these adult students were able to develop coping resources to help them be successful.

Age and life stage definitely interacted with those variables that characterized the environment. Although these adults perceived that they had
support from their families, many of them said that their parents only supported them after they had already proven themselves. What if they had entered college as an 18 year old? Would parental support have been forthcoming more readily? Would they have had more friends who would have supported their decision to be a student? Probably so, but it was difficult to answer those questions. We do know that they would have had more peers undergoing this same transition with them had they entered college when they were young adults. At the time of the interviews, they all sought support from their peers, most by making friends with other adult students.

Age and life stage also correlated with the variables that characterized the transition. Role change was probably much less of a stressful situation for most 18 year olds who were becoming students, than it was for the majority of these adults who became undergraduate students. Closely related to this issue was the variable of timing. Neugarten (1979) said that when an event occurs at a time that is deemed socially correct by our societal clock, less stress seems to accompany the transition. An adult starting undergraduate school at age 35+ may be considered off-time by society today; therefore, that individual will have many hurdles to conquer in order to be successful.

The source of the transition was one variable that characterized the transition that was in favor of the adult student. Research has shown that many traditional-age college students went to college because it was expected of
them. They went to please their parents, grandparents, or perhaps teachers. Some went just because they did not know what else to do, or maybe just because all their friends were going. The source of their decision was external. We know that all of the adults in this study entered college because it was something they personally desired to do. The source of their decision was internal. Schlossberg (1984) stated that a successful transition is often one in which the source is internal. Therefore, these serious undergraduate adult students were probably "one-up" on many of their 18 year old classmates.

Previous experience with a transition of a similar nature worked in favor of the returning adult students. Those who had been to college before had two different perspectives. One group of students were successful as young adults so they thought they could be successful again. The second group was not successful at their first attempt at college, but they said they learned from their mistakes and thought they would be good students the second time around. Comments such as, "I take it more seriously now," and "It means a lot more to me this time," were frequently heard from both groups of adult students.

From what was learned from the adult undergraduate students who participated in this study, age and/or life stage was probably a factor that worked in their favor in this specific transition. Their determination, courage, and vision clearly led the way in making this transition a successful one. Perhaps also, our societal clock has changed and we no longer place the
stigma of being "off-time" on adults who have returned to college. Certainly these adults perceived their age to be a positive asset during this transition.

Sex Role. The final variable characterizing the individual to be discussed is sex role. Whether the adult students in this study were female or male seemed to make no difference when assessing their adaptation to transition. None of the comments made during their interviews ever expressed issues that were positive or negative regarding their sex role. The single man and the single woman expressed similar concerns. Stresses that they faced because of lack of money, or trying to work full-time and be a student part-time, were the same. Those who were married expressed similar situations regarding family support, role change, and stress. The only voices heard from the divorced, widowed, or separated adult students were from females. No divorced, separated or widowed males participated in this study. Since none of these women mentioned either difficulties or successes that had come their way due to their gender, it was assumed that their sex role did not play an important part in this transition.

Another reason that there might have been no differences in comments made by the men and women in this study regarding their personal transition, is that all of the men were hoping someday to be teachers. Although they were not majoring in Education, as were many of the females, they all had aspirations of being teachers. Since many of the women also expressed the
desire to be teachers, and were majoring in Education, perhaps this common thread of aspiring to be a teacher was a factor in how the men and women in this study handled the transition from non-student to student status.

This discussion has shown that in Schlossberg's Transition Framework, the variables that characterized the individual were of extreme importance. While some variables appeared to be more of an influence than others in this particular transition, all played a part in the ability of an individual to adapt to transition. The fact that it was not just the variables that characterized the individual that were important, but the way that the variables characterizing the individual, the transition, and the environment interrelated with one another confirmed Schlossberg's theory that transition is a process. Although the Schlossberg Transition Framework described transitions in general, this study has shown that it is well suited to describe the transition process of the adult who is becoming an undergraduate student. An understanding of these variables and how they interrelate will help not only the adult undergraduate student in transition, but also those who are assisting the individual during this transition process.

Additional Findings

From the wealth of information gathered through the interview sessions with the adult undergraduate students, the researcher was able to identify three characteristics of this specific transition. When reviewing the comments made
by the adult students in this study, and when reviewing the rank order of the variables as determined by the adults in this study, three factors stood out as being a major part of this transition as expressed through the voices of the adults who were interviewed for this study. Each of the adult students expressed a strong commitment to their pursuit of a college degree. They were determined to pursue their goals. They also overcame many obstacles enroute to becoming an undergraduate student. Some of the fears that they overcame would have stopped the majority of people. They possessed courage as they went through the transition process. And finally, each of them had a vision of what the future held for them. They could clearly see themselves as college graduates. Not only did these three characteristics stand out prominently in the interviews, but the way that these variables interacted with each other was also evident. It appeared that these characteristics were THE most important part of the transition process to those students who were interviewed. Since there appeared to be a relationship amongst these three variables, the researcher concluded that a successful transition of the adult undergraduates in this study could be described as follows:

\[ \text{DETERMINATION + COURAGE + VISION = A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION} \]
These three variables were all necessary for a successful transition from non-student to student status to occur. As was true of the variables in the Schlossberg Transition Framework, these three variables also interrelated with one another. Each was an important entity of its own, but all three were necessary for the success of the transition as described in this study. One factor could not be missing from the equation. DETERMINATION + VISION would not necessarily predict a successful transition because the courage necessary for the adult student to confront the many obstacles that are present when starting college, would not be present. As the adults in this study mentioned, it took courage to initially perform rather simple tasks such as riding the bus, or registering for classes.

COURAGE + VISION might help in the transition process, but without determination, it is doubtful whether completion of the transition would occur. The adult students interviewed stressed how important their determination to enter college was in their ability to actually act and complete tasks. The close combination and interaction of determination and courage were crucial to a successful transition.

Finally, vision was important, because DETERMINATION + COURAGE alone would not necessarily be sufficient for the transition to be successful. The adult students in this study frequently spoke of their vision of the future. Although courage was important at the beginning of the transition, it was the
determination combined with the vision that seemed to be what kept the student on task. The complete equation clearly states what was necessary for the successful transition to student status as expressed by those adults who participated in this study.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Although transitions in general have been studied extensively, the specific transition of the adult from the role of non-student to student has not been thoroughly investigated. It was the intent of this study to uncover the meaning of the transition process from the perspective of the adult undergoing the transition. The Schlossberg Transition Framework was chosen to study the adult in transition. Since this framework is a general model of transitions, the purpose of this study was to determine the adequacy of the Schlossberg Transition Framework in explaining the actual transition of adults from non-student to student status.

The findings of this study supported the model of transitions as proposed by Schlossberg (1984). This model is a framework to help understand how variables of the transition interact in a fashion unique to each individual. This study obtained the individual's perspective in the transition process to determine the relevancy of the model to the specific transition of adults who became college students. The results showed that the experiences of the adults in this study could be assessed through the Schlossberg Transition Framework, and that the model covered every aspect of the transition process as described by the adult students in this study.
This study found that in the Schlossberg Transition Framework, those variables characterizing the individual were the most important in identifying the components of a successful transition. Commitments and values, ego development, outlook, and coping responses were significant to the transition experience of these adult students. A major finding of this study was that the determination, courage, and vision possessed by the student were major factors in the success of their transition. The process of a successful transition, as reported in this study, tells us that these students were successful because they were self-directed and willing to commit themselves to a new direction with persistence and determination.

In addition, the variables characterizing the transition such as degree of stress and role change proved to be of secondary importance to the these successful transitions. Support from family and friends was also an important factor to consider when describing this successful transition.

This study also supports Schlossberg's consideration of transitions as a process. Most of the adults in this study found that the decision to return to school, and the actual returning to school, took time to accomplish. Although their particular transition had many stressful components, the end result seemed to be worth it to all adult students. Since the source of the decision to return to school was internal for those in this study, negative factors influencing
the success of their transition were minimal. These students experienced the transition as a response to changes within themselves.

As the selected studies in the literature review suggested, the Schlossberg Transition Framework has been used to successfully describe transitions to parenthood, school administration, and retirement from sport. This study acknowledged that the Schlossberg Transition Framework also adequately described the transitional process of adults who became college students. However, the results of this study showed that there was something important missing from the Schlossberg Model. An order of importance to the variables which characterized the transition process was absent. Since the Transition Framework is a very general model, the factors of the transition process were listed in no specific order. This study showed that there was a very important and logical sequencing of variables according to the importance given to each tenet as described through the voices of the adults in this study. This order of importance is valuable information for those in transition, as well as to those assisting them.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on a very small group. Although the group consisted of men and women, there were more women than men in the study. There was only one African-American and one Hispanic person who participated. A more
ethnically diverse group might provide a better overall understanding of the transition process. This study provided information obtained from both full-time and part-time students. A study focusing on only one group might reveal more specific data to analyze. Also, this study focused on students from only one type of university. A study which had a greater population and could include the voices of students from a variety of types of institutions of higher education might provide a richer description of the transition process.

The students who participated in this study were only interviewed once. Interviewing students right at the beginning of the transition and then mid-way through the transition would provide the investigator with yet another perspective on the transition process.

The students who were interviewed for this study had all made a successful transition. A study which focused on those who were successful as well as those who were unsuccessful might reveal a different perspective on the importance of the variables in the Schlossberg Transition Framework.

Implications for Future Studies

This study focused on discovery as well as verification. Future studies need to focus on more specific verification questions regarding the transition process. Now that the transition experience has been explored in depth, the context of verification questions naturally follow. Questions that need to investigated
include: Are there racial, ethnic or societal differences associated with the successful transition to student status? Are there differences in the transitional process experience of students attending private colleges? Small colleges? Community colleges? How does the Schlossberg Transition Framework function in each of these situations? These are all context of verification questions that could be investigated based on this research.

The research from this study suggest that an instrument might be developed that would assess the potential for a successful or unsuccessful transition within the educational setting. Professors as well as students could benefit from such information.

Professors and counselors might be able to use the descriptive statement derived from the results of this research to determine whether or not a potential student has the qualities necessary to make the transition to student status. Further research using this descriptive statement is necessary to determine if the statement applies only to those students in this study, or if this statement describes successful adult students in general. By determining the values and relationships of determination, courage, and vision, to the student at all points in the transition process, would help those interested in assisting the adult student in making the transition to college. Student personnel workers would benefit from this knowledge as they sought ways to provide the necessary programs
and assistance needed by the adult students attending their colleges and universities.

**Conclusion**

This study has suggested that the Schlossberg Transition Framework may be a helpful model for assessing individual experiences of transition from non-student to student status. The model attempts to reflect variability in the experience of transitions, which is an important feature when dealing with the diverse population of adult students. This model also included a comprehensive list of variables important to the transition process. By emphasizing the interaction of the individual, the transition, and the environment, the model is particularly helpful in developing an understanding of the complexity of the transitional experience.

This transition from non-student to student status is one of major importance with many changes that impact the life of the individual undergoing the transition. The following descriptive statement was formulated to describe the important aspects of the transition process as experienced by the adults in this study:

**DETERMINATION + COURAGE + VISION = A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION**
By understanding this complex process, educators and counselors, as well as those individuals in transition, may come to view this experience as a process with great implications for future growth. The opportunities for understanding transitions, one of the more interesting complexities of life, is illuminated by the knowledge gained from this study.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

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Fig 3-1, "The Individual..."; Fig 3-2, "Coping Resources."

Your reprint is requested for inclusion in: (Title, Author, Publisher, Date)
Doctoral Dissertation, "Adult in transition from non-student to student status," P. Graham; August 1993

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Dorothy Kouwenberg, Permissions Coordinator
Date: 11 August 1993
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

FACTORs AFFECTING TRANSITION

"I am interested in your recent transition from non-student to student status. I want to understand this change in your life in order to help me to understand what happens during the transition process. I'll ask many questions of you to encourage a complete description relative to your transition. In all avenues we explore please elaborate fully giving as much detail as possible. Some of my questions may be probing - my intention is to stimulate you to delve into the experience as much as possible. I do want to assure you that everything you say will be kept confidential. The tape of our conversation will be coded with a fictitious name, and as soon as the dissertation process is complete, I will erase the tape. Please feel free to ask me questions at any time during the interview."

Characteristics of the Transition

"Please describe for me your decision to become a student. Place your decision in the context of your life. What was going on in your life, and how did those experiences lead to this decision?" (role change, affect, source, timing,
onset, duration, degree of stress, previous experience with a transition of a similar nature)

**Characteristics of the Individual**

"Help me to understand how this decision reflects your character or true nature. Describe how your values influence your decisions. Describe what effect this decision has had on your life." (psychosocial competence, socioeconomic status, value orientation)

**Characteristics of the Environment**

"Reflect now upon the manner that others were affected or will be affected by your decision. Who played what role in this decision?" (internal support systems, institutional supports, physical setting)

Personal characteristics of the individual will be noted during the interview. During the course of the interview, if information necessary for an analysis of the model does not occur, then direct questions will be asked.
APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT DATA
Table 1

Demographic Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<td>full-time</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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### Table 3

**Variables Characterizing the Individual**

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<th>Person</th>
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<th>Health</th>
<th>Ego Devel.</th>
<th>Outlook</th>
<th>Commit./ Values</th>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Coping Resour.</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Table 4

**Variables Characterizing the Environment**

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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
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<td>Tom</td>
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<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX D

SAMPLE INTERVIEWS
Interview with Tom. March 28, 1993

Pat: (020) Please describe for me your decision to become a student. Place your decision in the context of your life. What was going on in your life and how did those experiences lead to this decision?

Tom: (023) I had been in the marine corps altogether for a period of 13 years. . . . When I was real young I went in for four years, right after high school, . . . I got out after four years and really had every intention of going to school at that time, but I was 21 and really didn't have any idea of what I wanted to do with my life. . . . I held several odd jobs, then I met my wife and fell in love, and that kind of changed my priorities around and made me grow up a bit. I still didn't know what I wanted to do so I went back into the Marine Corps, and stayed in the Marine Corps for another nine years. And I really had a good career in the Marine Corps, I didn't have any problems. . . . I got out in August of '90, but we made the decision probably a year before that, as far as to make the transition to college. . . . My brother was a student here at ---------. I came down to visit him. . . . My wife really fell in love with the place. I was a little apprehensive about coming to a school like ---------. We had made up our minds that I didn't want to stay in the Marine Corps another 8 years just for a pension. . . . I wasn't really having a lot of fun, it just wasn't a lot of fun anymore. I thought about doing this college things for the last ten or fifteen years. I knew that one day I would really do it. And we just decided, I was 33 at the time, we decided that if I was going to do it, now was the time to do it. And also, when my wife was younger, she had a lot of college credit and she was going to pursue the nursing program here. I had always loved sports and physical education and always wanted to be a coach, so it wasn't any problem about me making up my mind what I wanted to study. (066) So back in 1990, with my brother's help, and his wife's help, we came here to ---------. (070) I had been up here years ago as a kid to see some football games. But I had never really visited the campus, and I probably never would have had it not been for my brother living here.

Pat: (072) So then did your wife go back to school also?

Tom: (073) Yes, she did, and it was a real disappointing experience for her. It's kind of been real mixed for her. We didn't realize how super competitive the nursing program was here at ---------. (090) She's got a great job, she's a supervisor out at --------- . But I think everything's kind of bittersweet for her. She has over 200 hours and no degree.
Pat: (096) When you made the decision that you were going to come back and be a student, were there any other things you were thinking of?

Tom: (100) . . . I've always been a sports freak. . . . I really didn't concentrate on academics when I was in high school. . . . The only A's I ever made were in physical education. . . . My first year I had to attend strictly night classes. If your GPA is very low then when you first come to the University and not get accepted you might as well just go ahead and take night classes and show them that you're serious and get a good established GPA. If you do that for a year, then you can get accepted into day school. So that's what I did. I never had any doubt that I wanted to coach and teach. And still definitely that's what I want to do. . . . (118) Then after a year I transferred to the day school.

Pat: (120) When you went to night school, tell me what that was like.

Tom: (121) I loved it. Of course I was scared to death the first quarter or two. . . . In a way I am glad that my grades from high school were bad and I didn't get into day school. . . . Night school was - there were very small classes. I was lucky enough to have. . . a few more people closer to my age. . . . I loved the small classes, you got to know the Professor a lot better, one on one, and be able to talk to him or her about the problems or whatever. . . . (134) I would recommend (night school) to any older adult college student.

Pat: (135) Tell me what it was like when you went to that very first class.

Tom: (137) I can still remember it, it was an English 101 class. A lot of apprehension, being scared, very exciting also at the same time. Taking a different step in my life. . . . That's what was nice about night school. I think I might have run out of the class had it been all 18 and 19 year olds sitting around. (149) I still have trouble with that. . . . I don't try to be one of the crowd, but I don't try to be Mr. Joe Adult or anything. . . . I haven't had any problems meeting students. I'm sure it's just all the pressure I put on myself a lot of times. I still feel a little funny sometimes sitting in class, especially since I've been taking day classes. . . . (156) Being a physical education major, I'm by far the oldest person in class. . . . There aren't too many 35 year olds who want to be a coach and teach. So I'm kind of proud of it.

Pat: (163) When you went to that first night school class, and you said you felt apprehensive, what do you do when you get those kinds of feelings? . . . What made you go into that class and sit there, where other people would say - I just can't do this.
Tom: (168) I knew that I had to do this if I wanted to accomplish what I wanted to get out of life. I knew that, but I still had doubts. Sometimes I feel like I should be out working or something. I sit at home and play Mr. house-husband while my wife works, I don't work at all. . . . I just knew that there was no other way that I've got get at least the 4 year degree if I want to pursue what I want to do as far as trying to be so-called 'happy'. . . . I just knew that I had to do it. It was either that or . . . work with computers. . . . I knew I wasn't really trained for anything else and I knew I had to do this if I wanted to pursue my goals. . . . (192) I had seen what the last few years in the Marine Corps, where I wasn't happy anymore with my situation and I didn't want to go to a job where I was just doing it for the dollar and not actually feeling good about it myself. Not actually happy with it myself.

Pat: (196) Help me to understand how this decision reflects your character or true nature. Describe how your values influence your decisions, and then describe what affects this decision has had on your life.

Tom: (220) As I was in the Marine Corps, especially my last part of my career, I was a supervisor. I was constantly working with people younger than me. . . . I always enjoyed working with younger people. Maybe trying to, not trying so much to throw my values, well I guess we are in a way, because anything that you believe in, when you teach somebody else I guess if you're worth your salt you would try to have it rub off a little bit on them, and I think I found out too, in the Marine Corps that I saw the 20, 21, 22, 23 to 25 year olds - I can't describe it, . . . but the values that I had had when I was first in the Marine Corps wasn't what I expected out of a lot of young people coming in today. . . . They just seemed very spoiled to me. . . . Everybody wants to know "why" about everything. . . . (244) I even noticed it from the kids in the physical education classes. It's good in a way. . . . but I just felt too, that I always coached little league teams all during my life, and I really enjoyed working with the high school aged kids, and on down, and I thought that when I wanted to do this, that was one of my goals too. I was raised real well by my mother and father. . . . and I thought I might have something to offer to the kids. . . . (275) I still remember some of my teachers and coaches that had an affect on my life. . . . (288) I'm a very competitive person myself, but I think there is a place and a time for competition and a lot of times it's just win, win, win, . . . (298) I want to try to, I may have to go to a lot of different schools because I am not going to put winning over the development of my players, I may get fired a lot of times, but we'll have to see.

Pat: (306) You said that when you were in high school you thought that you might want to be a teacher and a coach. Was there any particular reason that you didn't go to college?
Tom: (309) I still don't know, even to this day. I think I was just scared to death. I really couldn't decide what I wanted to do. I remember my senior year a Marine recruiter came down and talked to me and I thought this might be the greatest thing since sliced bread. . . . He just really sold it on me. My father was really torn about it. I think it took me a long time to mature. He thought it might be best to go in there for four years, whether I liked it or not, just to mature a little.

Pat: (319) Do your parents have a college degree?

Tom: (319) No, they don't. . . . My father was strictly a self-made man. He had been in the insurance all his life. He made lots of money. . . . I think he knew how important an education was. . . . this was 1975. . . . he didn't super push it on me. You know about college, you got to go to college, it wasn't really drilled into me. I was kind of a wild and crazy teen-ager anyway, so he didn't think the Marine Corps was a bad idea at all. I have no regrets. The experiences I was able to - no I have no regrets about that.

Pat: (349) Tell me what affect this transition has had on your life.

Tom: (353) The first year we really didn't have too much time to think about it. Everything was new. . . . Since after that first year, I still feel like at times that I should be out there working and doing something. Even though I know that what I am doing down the road it will be worth everything. This little apartment, my wife, she can't stand it. . . . She has been super supportive, but she misses her washer and dryer, so I can relate to that. . . . We wish we could have us an 'ole dog. It seems like half the time, it's kind of one of those 50 - 50 deals, half the time I am on top of the world, because I know this is not the real world, but then at the same time the other half of me will really be glad when this is over so I can go out there and start teaching and coaching. (399) I really want to go ahead and pursue my masters. I know my wife would support me like a son of a gun, but I think, good gracious that's another year or maybe two in this little place - would that be fair on her, would it be in my best intentions to go ahead and do that? . . . so that's our next big decision coming up.

Pat: (410) Reflect on the manner in which others are or will be affected by your decision. Who played what role in this decision.

Tom: (426) I don't think I would have come here to --------- if it wouldn't have been for her. . . . She just fell in love with the place. . . . I was real apprehensive about this big of a school, of coming to it. I wanted to go back to my hometown of ------and they have -------College there. They have a lot older student population. Really it was her decision to come here.
Pat: (440) Were there any other people you talked to about this decision?

Tom: (440) I talked to my mother and father at the time. They really thought that we would come to (home town). . . . After we had been here about a year, then I think she(wife) would have gave anything . . . to have gone to (home town). . . . (464) I know it seemed a little funny to my parents at first, I think my father still thinks, what's a 33 year old man doing going back to college. But then he realized that with what skills I had been taught, I really didn't have a big chance to make it, except to make it with a bare minimum. . . . Both of them are great about it.

Pat: (478) Did you have other friends who had gone back to school?

Tom: (481) No. But they thought it was fantastic, that I was able to make a decision like this and to do it. . . . I know it takes a lot of sacrifice, but I don't think it was that hard. It's always hard just changing careers. I can't think of anybody that tried to be negative about this situation, or to try to talk me out of it. . . . (501) I really had a lot of things going for me that added to that support. I came into the Marine Corps early enough, back in '75, so I still fell under the old G.I.Bill. And that's just great. That pays for everything. . . . That did play a part in it. When we made the decision, my last year in the Marine Corps we just saved the heck out of our money. . . . The G.I.Bill pays for everything and still gives me a few dollars in my pocket. . . . once I checked into it, I would be stupid not to take it.

Pat: (551) What about the University itself, have they supported you as an adult student?

Tom: (553) As far as the teachers go, yeah. I haven't had any problems with any teacher whatsoever, as far as me being an older student. But I try to - it's real important to me not to be treated any different - so I don't try to - . . . I just try to be a regular student. (575) My advisor, ever since I have been in day school, me and her just don't seem to hit it off for some reason. . . . (598) Sometimes I feel like she thinks - what the hell is he doing here? She's really the only one.

Pat: (629) What about people up in the financial aid office, or student services?

Tom: (635) The people in charge up there have been fantastic.

Pat: (656) What do you do when you have those feelings like . . . a test or something, and you feel real apprehensive, maybe like registration? Speaking of registration, what was it like?
**Tom:** (668) That first time was a madhouse. But that's another great thing about evening school, the first time you register they have it set up for first time evening class students only to come by themselves. . . . They give you a presentation and then about 15 minutes before they let the hoard in. (688) In day school you just feel like a number sometimes.

**Pat:** (698) When you have a big problem . . . what do you do to relieve stress?

**Tom:** (705) Exercise. Absolutely. I used to drink in the Marine Corps but I found out that that sure didn't cure nothing. . . . I like to jog. . . . I give myself little pep talks, breathe in and out, that's my relaxing techniques. Mainly just talking to myself.

**Pat:** (740) What do you see yourself doing when you graduate? I know you said you want to be a teacher and a coach, but elaborate a little more on that.

**Tom:** (742) We're definitely not city folks . . . a nice little house in the country. I do not care about teaching in a big school. Give me a little 'ole country bumpkin school and I'd be happy as a son-of-a-gun. I would really love to - it would be my goal if I could coach baseball and teach health and physical education in a small school. That would be the ultimate. I'm definitely not in it for the money. . . . My other favorite hobby is fishing, so going fishing on the week-ends.
AFFECT

The first year we really didn't have too much time to think about it. Everything was new. . . half the time I am on top of the world, because I know this is not the real world, but then at the same time the other half of me will really be glad when this is over so I can go out there and start teaching and coaching. (353 - #7)

BACKGROUND

I had been in the marine corps altogether for a period of 13 years. (023 - #7)

I really didn't concentrate on academics when I was in high school. (100 - #7)

(neither his mother nor father went to college) My father was strictly a self-made man. He had been in the insurance all his life. He made lots of money. . . . He didn't super push it on me, you know about college. . . . I was kind of a wild and crazy teen-ager anyway, so he didn't think the Marine Corps was a bad idea at all. I have no regrets. (319 - #7)

COMMITMENT TO SELF

I knew that one day I would really do it. And we just decided, I was 33 at the time, we decided that if I was going to do it, now was the time to do it. (023 - #7)

I knew that I had to do this if I wanted to accomplish what I wanted to get out of life. (168 - #7)

I just knew that there wan at other way that I've got to get at least the 4 year degree if I want to pursue what I want to do as far as trying to be so-called 'happy'. . . . I just knew that I had to do it. (168 - #7)

COPING SKILLS

(Q: What do you do to relieve stress?) Exercise. Absolutely. I used to drink in the Marine Corps but I found out that that sure didn't cure nothing . . . I like to jog . . . I give myself little pep talks, breathe in and out, that's my relaxing techniques. Mainly just talking to myself. (705 - 37)
DECISION

I got out (of the Marine Corps) in August of '90, but we made the decision probably a year before that, as far as to make the transition to college. We had made up our minds that I didn't want to stay in the Marine Corps another 8 years just for a pension. (023 - #7)

FAMILY ENMESHMENT

(my wife went back to school also) and it was a real disappointing experience for her. It's kind of been real mixed for her. . . . I think everything's kind of bittersweet for her. She has over 200 hours and no degree. (073 - #7)

I don't think I would have come her to (name of school), if it wouldn't have been for her . . . she just fell in love with the place. . . . I was real apprehensive about this big of a school, of coming to it. I wanted to go back to my hometown, they have a college there. . . . Really it was her decision to come here. (426 - #7)

FINANCIAL SITUATION

I still fell under the old G.I. Bill. And that's just great. That pays for everything . . . . The G.I.Bill pays for everything and still gives me a few dollars in my pocket. (501 - #7)

FUTURE - OUTLOOK

I really want to go ahead and pursue my masters. (399 - #7)

Give me a little 'ole country bumpkin school and I'd be happy as a son-of-a-gun. It would be my goal if I could coach baseball and teach health and physical education in a small school. That would be the ultimate. (742 - #7)

ROLE CHANGE

Sometimes I feel like I should be out working or something. I sit at home and play Mr. House-husband while my wife works, I don't work at all. (168 - #7)
SELF-KNOWLEDGE

I knew that one day I would really do it. (023 - #7)

I had always loved sports and physical education and always wanted to be a coach, so it wasn't any problem about me making up my mind what I wanted to study. (050 - #7)

I never had any doubt that I wanted to coach and teach. And still definitely that's what I want to do. (100 - #7)

There aren't too many 35 year olds who want to be a coach and teach. So I'm kind of proud of it. (156 - #7)

I knew I wasn't really trained for anything else and I knew I had to do this if I wanted to pursue my goals. (168 - #7)

(Q: if you wanted to be a teacher and coach, why didn't you go to college right after high school?) I still don't know, even to this day. I think I was just scared to death. I really couldn't decide what I wanted to do. (309 - #7)

I think it took me a long time to mature. (309 - #7)

SOURCE - TRIGGER EVENT - ONSET

I wasn't really having a lot of fun, it just wasn't a lot of fun anymore. I thought about doing this college thing for the last ten or fifteen years. (023 - #7)

STRESS

I loved it. Of course I was scared to death the first quarter or two. (121 - #7)

(re: first class) A lot of apprehension, being scared, very exciting also at the same time. Taking a different step in my life. (137 - #7)

That's what was nice about night school. I think I might have run out of the class had it been all 18 and 19 year olds sitting around. I still have trouble with that. (137 - #7)

I still feel a little funny sometimes sitting in class, especially since I've been taking day classes. (149 - #7)
**SUPPORT FROM FAMILY**

I think my father still thinks - what's a 33 year old man doing going back to college? But then he realized that with what skills I had been taught, I really didn't have a big chance to make it, except to make it with a bare minimum . . . Both of them are great about it. (440 - #7)

**SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS**

They thought it was fantastic, that I was able to make a decision like this and to do it. I can't think of anybody that tried to be negative about this situation, or to try to talk me out of it. (481 - #7)

**SUPPORT FROM UNIVERSITY - POSITIVE**

Night school was - there were very small classes. I was lucky enough to have a few more people closer to my age . . . I would recommend (night school) to any older adult college student. (121 - #7)

I haven't had any problems with any teacher whatsoever, as far as me being an older student. (553 - #7)

The first time you register they have it set up for first time evening class students only to come by themselves. (668 - #7)

**SUPPORT FROM UNIVERSITY - NEGATIVE**

My advisor, ever since I have been in day school, me and her just don't seem to hit it off for some reason . . . Sometimes I feel like she things - What the hell is he doing here? (575 - #7)
VALUES

I always enjoyed working with younger people. Maybe trying to, not trying so much to throw my values, well I guess we are in a way, because anything that you believe in, when you teach somebody else I guess if you're worth your salt you would try to have it rub off a little bit on them. (220 - #7)

I was raised real well by my mother and father . . . and I thought I might have something to offer to the kids . . . I still remember some of my teachers and coaches that had an affect on my life. (244 - #7)
Interview with Claire. 4-2-93

Pat: (018) Please describe for me your decision to become a student.
Place your decision in the context of your life. What was going on in your life and how did those experiences lead to this decision.

Claire: (021) That's real, real easy. My husband and I were having problems and as a teacher's aide I don't make enough money to support myself or my children. And I had had some college but a very small amount. I did not do well at all. And really had perceived myself as being kind of stupid. I had been a mother and had been home and then this pushed me into something else. I took my first class and found out I wasn't stupid. I thought, this is not easy, but it's something that is obtainable, and so I went from there. I found that I liked it, that I felt comfortable with it and that I was going to be just fine. No matter what happens between he and I. . . . (034) I think in high school I went for socialization! I had a real good time. And I was accepted into college, and went to college and met my husband and thought this is kind of cinchy. I did not apply myself, I had a good time. It was the first time I had been away from home and I went crazy. I had a wonderful time and flunked out. . . . I went home and took a job, and felt very comfortable with the job, I was working in a nursery school, still with children. I worked up to assistant director. . . . So I never felt the opportunity to go back, and was never pushed by my family to go back. I got married and immediately had two children and I was the mother and the housewife and stayed at home. I went back to work when the daughters entered school. Working as a teacher's aide and loved it and was - I always knew that was where I wanted to be, was in a school or with children. And then this all came up and I took a look at myself and at my finances and I had become independent enough to say to myself - Hey, if he thinks he is going to support me for the rest of my life, he's crazy. But knowing that I could not live off of what I was making, that pushed and so I applied and did all this myself and the first step was very difficult. Very difficult to put my foot in that door to go to class. After I got there I made a 79 on the first test, and then I just kept going up from there. The first class was Sociology. This was at -------------- , and I chose -------- because it was small. I felt more comfortable with small classes, and it offered night classes. . . . I just felt real good about going after I took that first class.

Pat: (070) When you went to college before, were you thinking of majoring in Education?
Claire: (070) No, Sociology. I wanted to go into social work. I had always planned something like that. . . . (073) I enjoy what I am doing now, I feel comfortable with what I do, I feel like I am good with my work, and I don't see why not. . . . I like the atmosphere here, good support systems around you, and it's there and it just feels good.

Pat: (077) When you decided you were going to go back to school and start working on your degree, how long was it before you kind of made that decision and you actually took the first step of going to class? . . . Had you been thinking of it for awhile?

Claire: (080) No. This issue with the husband completely took me by surprise. Knocked my out of - it just took my whole life away. And it forced me to think a lot of different things. One of them was - what am I going to do? Number one, I did not want to be around him if it came to a divorce. And I didn't want to have to deal with him. Financially - except through my children. . . . I didn't want him to have any say so in what I did. That really forced me to open my eyes and see the world in a completely different way.

Pat: (091) Tell me what that was like when you went to your very first class.

Claire: (092) I had a number of anxiety attacks before I went.

Pat: (092) Describe those anxiety attacks.

Claire: (93) Almost severe depression at times, crying - thinking what am I doing? What if I flunk out? What if I don't make the grade? What if I can't do this? What if physically and mentally with what I am going through right now, it's not going to help me. Stress is real. I didn't know that until all this. It's really strange. There are so many emotions that come out. But anyway, nervous just beyond belief. And the first class I went to I kept looking around, and of course I am the oldest one there . . . (104) I walked in and sat on the front row . . . and as I talked to different people during the break - that was very difficult for me, to walk up to someone new and try to carry on a conversation, especially knowing that they were so young. What do you have in common? But I found out that I have a whole lot in common with these people. And it was a big self-esteem booster to me. It has changed my life dramatically. Now, I have a long, long way to go because I am just a measley little freshman. But I know that eventually I will get a degree, without a doubt.
**Pat:** (114) When you said you had the anxiety attacks and stuff - how do you relieve that stress?

**Claire:** (115) I walk. I usually walk about 4 miles almost every night. And that is a big stress reliever for me. It clears my head, hopefully of the cobwebs. I walk at night because it is peaceful and very quiet. I walk by myself. . . . I walk late at night, it's a time when I can be by myself with myself, with my thoughts and walking just helped me. And the support system that I had around here too.

**Pat:** (127) After you married, you hadn't ever thought about going back to school until you were forced to think about it?

**Claire:** (127) No. I had two small children. I had a husband who worked 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Almost a traditional family type where the husband worked and the wife stayed at home. I took care of all the responsibilities . . . He's very supportive, and was very supportive, but I never felt the urge at that point because I was so involved with their lives and with his life. . . .

**Pat:** (137) Reflect now on the manner that others were affected or will be affected by your decision. Who played what role in this decision. Like your children?

**Claire:** (141) Very supportive. Sweet, wonderful - they promise they will get me through Math. I just keep putting it off. . . .

**Pat:** (145) How do you think they have changed, or have they changed since you were a full-time mom to now that you are a full-time mom and a student too?

**Claire:** (147) There have been so many changes in their lives in the last two years. When I started back to school they were 13 and 14, so they were very caught up in their own lives. Very typical. They don't realize that mom has to run home from work and fix supper, clean house, do the wash and all that. And all of a sudden mom just gets swamped, or she decides she doesn't want to take any more and she doesn't. And so they've adjusted real well to that. I'm finding that they do chip in when things get down, and when they don't have anything to wear they can figure out how to use the washing machine. It's just like one of those Cinderella stories where the mother stayed home and took care of everything and when the mother went back to work she still had the responsibilities at school, but she had everything else to do too. And the
rest of the family carried on as if she didn't have anything else to do, and that's not true. I think their eyes have been opened a lot. ... (165) My husband at that time was supportive by telling me - you can do it - but as far as helping, like taking care of business at home, he had no idea, or wouldn't even think about. He was always supportive of me going back to school and doing the actual school work. People here (elem. school) are just wonderful. Teachers come to my rescue. ... If I need reference materials, they are right here.

**Pat:** (178) What about your family?

**Claire:** (179) My parents, before they found out about my husband and I, just couldn't understand why in the world I would even think about doing this. Of course I didn't tell them for a good while what was going on, I felt like they should be proud of the decision to go back to school, no matter what. But that was not the case. I think they will still have a hard time understanding this. Why I am doing this. But that doesn't matter to me because I feel real strong about it. Jack's (husband) mom and dad have been wonderful. They couldn't be any more supportive. ...  

**Pat:** (194) Were there any friends that helped you make this decision to return to school?

**Claire:** (194) The lady that I work with, we talked a great deal about it. Tracey (a co-worker), she and I started our first class together. ... We talked each other into taking a certain class so we could be together. That was very helpful too. I felt a little more comfortable, not so scared, even though I was nervous still. ...  

**Pat:** (205) Help me to understand how this decision reflects your character or true nature. Describe how you values influence your decisions and describe what affect this decision has had on your life. ... You knew this was something that you wanted to do, you had to do, and you did it. There are a lot of people who want to, but never do. Do you know what it was in you that really made you do it?
Claire: (214) For the first time in many, many, many years, I grew up. I kind of grew up with the girls and maybe that was just kind of a growth period. I always wanted to be a mom and stay at home. I don't regret one minute of that. I feel a lot stronger personality wise, for awhile I stepped in the background. With a husband, he was working and we were entertaining . . . (227) for the first time I'm in the foreground. I don't know where he is, and that doesn't matter. It's something I feel real comfortable with. I know exactly what I want . . . (230) It's taking care of yourself. . . . My husband and I are separated at this time, so we are going through a lot of transitions. . . . One night we were watching TV. and (daughter) said - I think I'm going to marry me a rich man. I just died laughing, I fell out. I said - I'll tell you what, it seems to me what you need to do is get your butt in school, finish school, get yourself a good job and make your own money. She looked at me and said - You know mom, you're right, you are exactly right. . . . (241) And then the other one said - I've been telling you that all along, I'm not having some man take care of me! But, they grew up so differently. That was a really big eye opener for all three of us, to wake up and find out that we are perfectly capable of taking care of ourselves without any problem at all. Even though financially right now I can't. But financially later on I will be able to. . . (249) Also, it feels so good to find out that you are ok., for such a long, long time I didn't feel ok. even though I've always been happy in life, I felt just like I belonged. . . . (261) All the girls have seen on both sides are very traditional families. And this is not traditional. . . . But it seems ok. . . . (266) (Husband) has just finished his Ph.d. at the University . . . so the children have seen the whole thing . . . We lived like white trash for awhile, just getting him through school. So they have seen that role, that part of education. Both he and I are very educationally minded. I expect the girls to do well, and I expect them to go on to college.

Pat: (275) How do you think the institution itself helps adult students?

Claire: (279) The thing I have found most aggravating is I would like to either have a grant or a scholarship or something to go to school, and the first thing that comes out of their mouth is - We have a loan for you. I don't want a loan. I don't understand why - I now it is out there and I will find it. I have to be divorced, which really ticks me off. . . . (304) Something is out there for women. . . . My work experience counts nothing. . . . I do a lot of the things that teachers do, I do reading groups. .

Pat: (334) Has going back to school put a financial stress on your family?
Claire: (334) Sure, it's not cheap. Until I find out what's going on in my life too, that's another thing. I'm only trying to take 5 hours, but I work all day and work in two after school programs I can't do much more right now. I need to take 15 hours but I can't afford to lose my job. And the valuable experience I have plus the people, the resources, I just don't feel like that's an even trade right now. And so I am not willing to give that up just now. . . .

Pat: (377) You named a lot of positive things about going back to school and being a student. Can you think of any negative things?

Claire: (379) Free time. There is none. Really, because I am a studier. I sit, ponder and then worry. I really have to study. I retain better if I study every night. I am under a lot of stress, and I found out that through this stress I forget things. . . . My time is limited with the girls, and I miss that. We are very close. I enjoy the activities that they enjoy. They are real sweet about including me. I have gotten involved with the church. . . . If I divorce, dating, well you can forget about that. There's not going to be a lot of free time for that. . . . A lot of nit-picky things. Financially it's a burden right now. The benefits outweigh everything so much. . . .

Pat: (425) Had you done any formal education things since you quit college awhile back?

Claire: (428) Vocational school - for nursery school. I took a lot of courses and got a certificate. Child Development classes. . . . I had taken several computer classes.

Pat: (460) How about the physical setting of the buildings, classrooms - how were they?

Claire: (460) At -------- we were in the old high school. It just worried me half to death because of the bulletin boards. They were so ugly. . . . I wanted to change that woman's bulletin boards. . . . That really bothered me. But it was a stupid worry! . . .

Pat: (503) Can you think of anything about making the transition from being a non-student to being a student, that I didn't ask you?

Claire: (509) I did a lot of checking out before I actually did go back. I spent a lot of time applying at various places. I drove around and looked at various places and talked to different people, advisors, . . . I even thought about moving back to -------------. . . . I did a lot of investigating.
ANALYSIS - CLAIRE

AFFECT

It has changed my life dramatically. (104 - #9)

BACKGROUND

I think in high school I went for socialization! I had a real good time. (034 - #9)

I went to college and meant my husband and thought this is kind of cinchy. I did not apply myself, I had a good time. It was the first time I had been away from home and I went crazy. I had a wonderful time and flunked out. (034 - #9)

COMMITMENT TO SELF

... and I was going to be just fine. No matter what happens between he and I... (021 - #9)

I know that eventually I will get a degree, without a doubt. (104 - #9)

(parents) have a hard time understand this. Why am I doing this? But that doesn't matter to me because I feel real strong about it. (179 - #9)

CONFIRMATION OF SELF

I just felt real good about going after I took that first class. (034 - #9)

I enjoy what I am doing now, I feel comfortable with what I do, I feel like E am good with my work... (073 - #9)

For the first time I'm in the foreground. I don't know where he (husband) is, and that doesn't matter. It's something I feel real comfortable with. I know exactly what I want... it's taking care of yourself. (227 - #9)

It feels so good to find out that you are ok., for such a long, long, time I didn't feel ok even though I've always been happy in life... (249 - #9)
COPING SKILLS

I walk. I usually walk about 4 miles almost every night. And that is a big stress reliever for me. It clears my head, hopefully of the cobwebs. I walk at night because it is peaceful and very quiet. I walk by myself. (115 - #9)

FAMILY ENMESHMENT

I got married and immediately had two children and I was the mother and the housewife and stayed at home. (034 - #9)

I went back to work when the daughters entered school. (034 - #9)

Almost a traditional family type where the husband worked and the wife stayed at home. I took care of all the responsibilities. (127 - #9)

I never felt the urge (to go back to school when she was married) at that point because I was so involved with their lives and with his life. (127 - #9)

. . . for awhile I stepped in the background. With a husband, he was working and we were entertaining, etc. (227 - #9)

We lived like white trash for awhile, just getting him through school. (261 - #9)

FINANCIAL SITUATION

And then this all came up (separation) and I took a look at myself and my finances and I had become independent enough to say to myself - Hey if he thinks he is going to support me for the rest of my life, he's crazy. But knowing that I could not live off of what I was making . . . (034 - #9)

I didn't want to have to deal with him financially, except through my children. (080 - #9)
PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH A TRANSITION OF A SIMILAR NATURE

I had had some college but a very small amount. I did not do well at all. (021 - #9)

I majored in Sociology. I wanted to go into social work. (070 - #9)

I went to vocational school for nursery school. I took a lot of courses and got a certificate. (428 - #9)

ROLE CHANGE

I had been a mother and had been home and then this (separation) pushed me into something else. (021 - #9)

And the first class I went to I kept looking around, and of course I am the oldest one there. (104 - #9)

It's just like one of those Cinderella stories where the mother stayed home and took care of everything and when the mother went back to work she still had the responsibilities at work (and school) but she had everything else to do too. And the rest of the family carried on as if she didn't have anything else to do, and that's not true. (147 - #9)
SELF KNOWLEDGE

I had had some college but a very small amount. I did not do well at all. And really had perceived myself as being kind of stupid. (021 - #9)

I took my first class and found out I wasn't stupid. I thought, this is not easy, but it's something that is obtainable, and so I went from there. I found that I liked it, and I felt comfortable with it and that I was going to be just fine. (021 - #9)

I always knew that was where I wanted to be, was in a school or with children. (034 - #9)

I found out that I have a whole lot in common with (younger students). And it was a big self-esteem booster to me.

For the first time in many, many, many years, I grew up. (214 - #9)

That was a really big eye opener for all three of us, to wake up and find out that we are perfectly capable of taking care of ourselves without any problem at all. (241 - #9)

SOURCE - ONSET - TRIGGER

My husband and I were having problems and as a teacher's aide I don't make enough money to support myself or my children. (021 - #9)

Knowing that I could not live off what I was making, that pushed and so I applied and did all this myself and the first step was very difficult. (034 - #9)

And it (separation) forced me to think a lot of different things. One of them was - what am I going to do? (080 - #9)

That (separation) really forced me to open my eyes and see the world in a completely different way. (080 - #9)
STRESS

. . . and the first step was very difficult. Very difficult to put my foot in that door to go to class. (034 - #9)

This issue with the husband completely took me by surprise. Knocked me out of - it just took my whole life away. (080 - #9)

I had a number of anxiety attacks before I went (to first class). (092 - #9)

Almost severe depression at time, crying - thinking what am I doing? What if I flunk out? What if I don't make the grade? What if I can't do this? What if physically and mentally with what I am going through right now, it's not going to help me. (093 - #9)

Stress is real. I didn't know that until all this. It's really strange. There are so may emotions that come out. (093 - #9)

. . . nervous just beyond belief. (going to first class) (093 - #9)

That was very difficult for me, to walk up to someone new and try to carry on a conversation, especially knowing that they were so young. (104 - #9)

Free time. There is none. (379 - #9)

I am under a lot of stress, and I found out that through this stress I forget things. (#9)
SUPPORT FROM FAMILY

(two teenage daughters) Very supportive. Sweet, wonderful - they promise they will get me through Math. (141 - #9)

They (daughters) don't realize that mom has to run home from work and fix supper, clean house, do the wash and all that. And all of a sudden mom just gets swamped, or she decides she doesn't want to take any more and she doesn't. And so they've adjusted real well to that. I'm finding that they do chip in when things get down. (147 - #9)

When they don't have anything to wear they can figure out how to use the washing machine. (147 - #9)

My husband at that time was supportive by telling me - you can do it - but as far as helping, like taking care of business at home, he had no idea, or wouldn't even think about it. He was always supportive of me going back to school and doing the actual school work. (165 - #9)

My parents, before they found out about my husband and I, just couldn't understand why in the world I would even think about doing this. (179 - #9)

(Husband's parents) have been wonderful. They couldn't be any more supportive. (179 - #9)

SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS

The support system that I have around here (work) has helped me. (115 - #9)

(A co-worker) and I started our first class together. . . That was very helpful. I felt a little more comfortable, not so scared, even though I was nervous still . . . (194 - #9)

SUPPORT FROM UNIVERSITY - POSITIVE

I felt more comfortable with small classes, and it offered night classes. (034 - #9)
SUPPORT FROM UNIVERSITY - NEGATIVE

The thing I have found most aggravating is I would like to either have a grant or a scholarship or something to go to school, and the first thing that comes out of their mouth is - we have a loan for you. . . . I have to be divorced which really ticks me off. (279 - #9)

I need to take 15 hours but I can't afford to lose my job. (334 - #9)

VALUES

I always wanted to be a mom and stay at home. I don't regret one minute of that. (214 - #9)

Both he and I are very educationally minded. I expect the girls to do well, and I expect them to go on to college. (266 - #9)
VITA

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