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# AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MARRIED, MATURE-AGE, UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

DONALD EDMUND CHAPMAN

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1986

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The central importance of entering into worlds other than our own -- and hence of anthropology itself -- lies in the fact that the experience leads us to understand that our own world is also a cultural construct. By experiencing other worlds, then, we see our own for what it is and are thereby enabled also to see fleetingly what the real world, the one between our own cultural construct and those other worlds, must in fact be like.

Walter Goldschmidt,
Forward:
The Teachings of Don Juan:
A Yaqui Way of Knowledge.

Amid the shifting currents of this century one cannot be sure which will lead us safely into a deeper channel and which will merely spend itself in the sand. One cannot stand aside and attempt to calculate the caprices of future judgement of current reputations. One does better in the end to follow the things that truly engage one.

William Barrett,
Prologue to
The Illusion of Technique.

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a dissertation entitled AN INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MARRIED, MATURE-AGE, UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, submitted by DONALD EDMUND CHAPMAN, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

G. Konrad
Supervisor

Date MARCH 20, 1986

DEDICATION

In memory of my mother;

now I understand.

ABSTRACT

In excess of twenty percent of the full-time undergraduate students at the University of Alberta are now over the age of twenty-five. Many of these students are married and have continuing family responsibilities in addition to tasks related to seeking their first degree. This dissertation represents an effort to explore and describe, from the students' perspective, the social setting of a purposive sample of these older, married, full-time (non-continuous) students, during their first term at the University of Alberta. The study was interpretive in orientation and exploratory in design and conduct.

Over a period of approximately four months during the fall of 1984, a sample of eight volunteer students and their spouses participated in an iterative series of semi-structured interviews and structured data collection activities. A combination of conventional and novel data collection activities was utilized in an effort to reveal the participants' understanding of their educational setting, which involved experiences of family and university.

Through the research process, the participants were encouraged to describe and interpret their lived experience in terms of their new and ongoing family-university setting. In reporting, an effort was made to "locate" (historically and socially) these participants within the context of their

own personally meaningful field of experience. This study was intended to draw attention to aspects of personal meaning and relevance, individual and shared viewpoints and logic-in-use. The primary orientation of the study, then, was directed toward an understanding of the non-continuous student setting from the point of view of the student rather than from the point of view of the educational institution.

Among many other factors, the descriptions include matters such as: student family histories and aspects of student socio-economic background; influences operating between the university and family settings; spousal relationships; family adjustments; relationships with professors and student colleagues; relationships with aspects of the institutional structure; and positive and negative aspects of the student learning experience.

The conduct of this study, within the field of Educational Administration, represents an effort to adopt a rather non-conventional research stance. Specifically, through the use of a "situational-interpretive" perspective, the dissertation also represents an exploration of the "place" of the researcher within a human research setting. The study, therefore, includes reflections about the research process itself, as well as comments with regard to possible implications of the findings for the community of the University of Alberta.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While they must remain anonymous, without the kind and generous participation of the students and spouses who were the subjects of this study, this particular story of the married, non-continuous university student would not have been told. Any breath of life which may be found in this document belongs to them.

I thank all members of my committee for their questions and guidance. I am particularly grateful to my advisor, Dr. A. Konrad, for having the wisdom and courage to allow me to make of this study a heuristic, aspects of which may often have clashed with his own sensibilities. Dr. D.A. Mackay, was kind enough to plow through an early draft of this document, and to offer supportive comments when I need them most.

In terms of my own family, throughout this process, Connie, has displayed a tolerance level usually reserved for saints. We may have debated over the placement of commas, but her spelling always prevailed. I think she shares my relief that this, my first step, is over.

A number of my fellow students provided moral support and more silently suffered my potifications.

Last but not least, I am also indebted to the faceless institution in the form of the University of Alberta Student Awards Office. Without the financial support, this study would have been an even more unlikely undertaking.

While the document exists, in part, due to the support of all the above, I accept responsibility for all omissions and errors of fact or judgment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Introduction and Problem. . . . . | 1 |
| | Research Questions. . . . . | 3 |
| | Definitions and Delimitations . . . . . | 7 |
| | Non-Continuous student. . . . . | 7 |
| | Social ecology. . . . . | 8 |
| | Social place. . . . . | 11 |
| | Problematique . . . . . | 11 |
| | Conceptual Underpinnings. . . . . | 12 |
| | Dissertation Organization . . . . . | 16 |
| 2. | Participant Profiles. . . . . | 18 |
| | Profile Structure . . . . . | 18 |
| | Profile Content . . . . . | 21 |
| | Mary Baker . . . . . | 29 |
| | Sheila Eley . . . . . | 39 |
| | Judith Lynden . . . . . | 47 |
| | Gloria Makowichuk . . . . . | 57 |
| | Sam Maunder . . . . . | 69 |
| | Edna Sheskey. . . . . | 79 |
| | Steven Sharpe . . . . . | 93 |
| | Brenda Thompson . . . . . | 108 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| 3. | Research Approach | 124 |
| | Data Collection | 124 |
| | Overview | 124 |
| | Purposive sample | 126 |
| | Participant selection | 126 |
| | Reasons for participating | 132 |
| | Selection complications | 136 |
| | Children | 139 |
| | Participation experience | 141 |
| | Interview process | 143 |
| | Spouses and the interviews | 155 |
| | Timetable activity | 157 |
| | Financial statement | 160 |
| | Symbolic drawing of family life space | 161 |
| | Clustering activity | 165 |
| | Boundaries of the research context | 169 |
| | Participant journals | 173 |
| | MUGS involvement | 179 |
| | Research Ethics and Researcher Effect | 180 |
| | The researcher | 184 |
| | Researcher effect | 199 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| | Limitations | 206 |
| | Data Analysis and Reporting | 211 |
| | Analysis | 212 |
| | Reporting | 218 |
| 4. | Family Setting | 221 |
| | Family Images | 222 |
| | Setting Interpenetration | 227 |
| | Family life space | 228 |
| | Complexity | 232 |
| | Sharing | 246 |
| | Being Overwhelmed | 254 |
| | Super organization | 271 |
| | Social adjustment | 284 |
| | The Spouse | 296 |
| | Responsibilities and relationships | 297 |
| | Social contract | 308 |
| | Spousal educational plans | 319 |
| | Financial Circumstances | 326 |
| | Financial statements | 328 |
| | Employment patterns | 332 |
| | Student loans | 336 |
| | Financial independence | 342 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| | Ongoing financial affairs | 352 |
| | Housekeeping assistance | 358 |
| 5. | University Setting | 361 |
| | Beginning | 362 |
| | Sense of Place | 362 |
| | Student Colleagues | 374 |
| | Courses and Professors | 378 |
| | Full course load | 378 |
| | Learning experiences | 381 |
| | Systemic sexism | 388 |
| | Grading and success | 394 |
| | Self-confidence | 397 |
| | University-as-school | 400 |
| | The system | 405 |
| | Personal Growth | 429 |
| | Grading University | 438 |
| | Participant Epilogue | 441 |
| 6. | Reflections | 443 |
| | Research Approach | 447 |
| | Conceptualization | 448 |
| | Data collection | 449 |
| | Interview process | 450 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Chapter | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| | Timetable activity | 453 |
| | Financial statement | 454 |
| | Symbolic drawing of family life space | 455 |
| | Clustering activity | 455 |
| | Participant journals | 458 |
| | Researcher as research instrument | 459 |
| | Data analysis | 461 |
| | Reporting | 464 |
| | The Participants | 471 |
| | Outsider | 472 |
| | Student setting | 474 |
| | Student finances | 476 |
| | Guilt | 479 |
| | Social contract | 485 |
| | Attitude change | 487 |
| | Participants compared | 492 |
| | Pain and pleasure | 499 |
| | Institutional Implications | 506 |
| | Questions | 510 |
| | Ideas | 511 |
| | Suggestions for Further Study | 520 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS


| Chapter | Page |
|---|---|
| Bibliography. . . . . | 524 |
| Appendix A. . . . . | 537 |
| Appendix B. . . . . | 543 |
| Appendix C. . . . . | 550 |
| Appendix D. . . . . | 552 |
| Appendix E. . . . . | 556 |
| Appendix F. . . . . | 558 |
| Appendix G. . . . . | 561 |
| Appendix H. . . . . | 564 |
| Appendix I. . . . . | 566 |
| Appendix J. . . . . | 575 |
| Appendix K. . . . . | 577 |
| Appendix L. . . . . | 579 |
| Appendix M. . . . . | 587 |

# LIST OF TABLES

Table — Page

1. Students in Senate Study Compared to Students in Present Study . . . . . 122

## LIST OF FIGURES


| Figure | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Sample Clusters . . . . . | 167 |
| 2. | Excerpt - Coded Transcript. . . . . | 215 |

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction and Problem

Changes in the social, technological and economic conditions of western industrialized nations are beginning to result in significant social dislocation. This is evidenced, in part, by high and sustained unemployment and the changing nature of work -- the transition from an industrial society to an information society (Masuda, 1981). In many quarters, education is viewed as a fundamental instrument for facilitating this transition. This attitude was evidenced most recently by the general recommendations of a national policy review, "Learning For Life" (1984), submitted to the Federal Minister of Employment and Immigration by The National Advisory Panel on Skill Development Leave.

Historically, the educational focus has been on the public school system and the preparation of young people to take their place as productive and stable members of society. Schooling, including postsecondary education, has been seen as a "launching pad" for life. As a consequence, the 18-24 year-old, recent high school graduate has been the traditional student of institutions of higher education.

In contrast, increasingly, mature-age students are entering Canada's colleges, technical institutes and universities. These non-continuous adult learners are

rapidly becoming a prominent, if little understood, element of the student mix. Concepts such as "lifelong learning" and "recurrent education" are only just beginning to be understood and to exert an influence on the very core of institutional operations -- full-time, credit programs.

Chudwin & Durrant (1981:1) report that, in the United States, "one-third of all college students now fall into the mature adult category." University of Alberta figures indicate that the situation is no less dramatic in Alberta. Leaving aside part-time and extension students, 26.8 percent of the full-time 1984-85 winter session students at the University of Alberta were over the age of 25 (Summary of Statistics, 1985). This figure represents a combination of 82.5 percent of the full-time graduate students and almost 20 percent of the full-time undergraduate students. So, about one in five undergraduate students at the University is now over the age of twenty-five.

The ratio of mature age students has been rising steadily over at least the past five years, and the rise shows no sign of abating (1980/81 - 24.1%; 1981/82 - 24.4%; 1982/83 - 25.5%; 1983/84 - 25.5%). The Report of The University of Alberta Senate Task Force on Mature Students (University of Alberta, 1983:11) indicated that as many as two thirds of the mature students sampled were either married or cohabiting, and up to 50 percent reported having children.

The Senate report went on to say that the majority of

these mature students were attending university full time, with an occupational objective. The report's brief comments regarding the disruption of family life indicated that over 40 percent of the married women in the sample found that family disruption was an ongoing problem. The report also indicated that student families only continue to be supportive of the student so long as their own routines are not upset.

The report provided little sense of what "disruption" meant for these students and no sense of their lived experience. These observations about family/student interaction and its effects were based essentially on only student responses, collected through limited response questionnaires. Hence, there appears to be a need for a more detailed understanding of the situation of the married, mature student -- the student's combined experience of university and family.

Research Questions

Unlike the traditional university student who is often loosening bonds with his/her family of origin, the non-continuous learner, returning to university or entering full-time study for the first time, often comes to the learning situation with concurrent and continuing family responsibilities (a family of procreation). This family member brings the roles and responsibilities of spouse and frequently parent to a new role as student.

This student, then, does not fit the traditional

stereotype of the 18-24 year old undergraduate university student. In fact, little is known of the nature of this student, and more particularly, of her/his university experience within a personally meaningful social milieu, which includes a combination of personal, family and university circumstances.

In discussing research into educational organizations (schools), T. B. Greenfield (1975:82) argued,

> The purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality.

Greenfield suggested that through this approach we might not reveal truth, but our research might help us to make sense of our world.

The orientation outlined in this dissertation is an effort to give form to the spirit of Greenfield's notion. This dissertation essentially rests upon two major intents. The first and primary element was to develop a description of the students' experience of their social context. It was an effort to arrive at an interpretive understanding of selected aspects of the first-term experience of eight married, mature-age, University of Alberta, full-time undergraduate students and their non-student spouses.

Again, in part, T. B. Greenfield (1975:93) provoked this orientation through the quotation set out below. It would not seem to add to the heresy of the statement which follows, if the word university were substituted for the

word school:

> What is needed for better research on schools is better images of what schools are and what goes on in them. 'Better' in this case means creating images of schools which reflect their character and quality and which will tell us something of what the experience of schooling is like. Since schools are made up of different people in different times and places, it is to be expected that images which reflect the experience of schooling must be many and varied. These images would be sets of 'one-sided viewpoints', as Weber calls them, each throwing 'shafts of light'. . . upon social reality in schools.

This study, then, was an attempt to evoke a particular "one-sided viewpoint" of the experience of university, a mature-age, married student viewpoint. In this regard, Richard Bates (1982:2), an Australian scholar attempting to bring aspects of Critical Social Theory to bear on the field of Educational Administration, has condemned educational administrators and scholars involved in the field for distancing themselves from educational issues.

In particular, Bates observed that educational administrators do not wish to become involved in examining the relationship between administration and student achievement. This study might also fall under Bates' criticism, as it did not focus on this relationship either. But perhaps it represents a beginning. I felt it would be premature to focus on the relationship administration and the student without first giving some voice to student interests and experiences. Prior to examining relationships among interest groups within human organizations, one might be well served by spending time and effort in attempting to

understand the world from each viewpoint. In particular, this study was intended to give some substance or form to a student perspective, whatever it might be.

The second major intent of this dissertation established the tone for the first. The study itself involved the creation and exploratory application of methods emerging from an ecological (contextual) and interpretive perspective. Hence, the second major element of the dissertation involved the description and assessment of the conduct of the research activity itself.

As a consequence, within the reporting of this study, I have made an effort to ensure that the methodology would not become invisible or transparent to the reader. Since the methodology, in part, emerged from the situation under study and became intertwined with the social circumstance of the participants, I have attempted also to maintain it on the surface for the reader. Chapter three represents the primary effort in this regard; it includes not only a description of the research processes, but also the participant comments about their experience of the processes.

The specific research questions guiding this study into the described social context of the married, mature-age university student, then, were as follows:

1. What is the reported experience of being a mature-age, married, undergraduate university student attending the University of Alberta?

2. What is the social ecology of the non-continuous university students examined in this study?

3. What is the student's sense of social place within that ecology?

4. What is the student's sense of his/her family's social place within that ecology?

5. In what ways do the student experiences of family and university interact? Is there an indication of commonalities of experience and social meaning among the group of student families being investigated?

6. What, if any, implications might there be for the university institution, faced with dealing increasingly with non-continuous, mature-age, married students?

## Definitions and Delimitations

Non-Continuous student. For the purposes of this study, the term "non-continuous student" refers to university students who had enrolled in their university program, not as a direct continuation of their high school education, but after an interruption for employment or other diversion of at least one year.

This notion of the non-continuous student was further delimited in this study, so as to include only Canadian students over the age of 25 years and enrolled full time in undergraduate programs at the University of Alberta. In addition, participation in this study was limited to those students who had been legally married for five years or more, and were continuing to live with their spouse while attending the university. This latter provision prevented documentation of families which might have been going through early adjustment to marriage. I also intended that this provision would ensure that some of the subject

families would include children.

As a consequence of the above definition and delimitations, the subject students are probably best understood as a subset of the more diverse mature-age, full-time university student population.

Social ecology. The notion of social ecology, as used in this study, represents a perspective or way of viewing the personal social context of an individual -- in this case the non-continuous student. This view suggests that the student's social context is personally delineated through each individual's particular relationship with elements of the surrounding social and physical environment. Hence, this perspective suggests that each student develops an understanding of her/his social place, which is uniquely meaningful or relevant to her/him.

Bronfenbrenner (1979), in his discussion of the ecology of human development, conceived of the personal environment as consisting of a set of nested structures outlining differing degrees of direct personal experience and interaction with the social environment. The boundaries or contours of this construct are interpreted from the perspective of the individual. They are defined in terms of personal understandings derived from the experiences of social interaction in various situational roles, activities and relationships.

Bronfenbrenner (1979:26) stated that personal development may be thought of as "ecological transitions"

-- changes in the personal ecological environment, as a result of change in role, setting, or both. The individual grows and develops as a result of these ecological transitions -- stretching or expanding the setting or the contours of her/his direct experience. For example, a person might decide to attend university for the first time, undertake new employment, or become a parent. To the extent that these new endeavors involve the individual in moving into new social settings, these undertakings would represent personal development activities brought about through the process of ecological transition.

The transitions, according to Bronfenbrenner, may be initiated by direct personal action or be changes imposed by aspects of the social context. The transitions may involve work, school, home, and more; but to the individual, these various situations would not be isolated from one another. Their combination would form a personal social matrix of meaning. This social ecology, then, is an integrated, personally profound, pattern of life experience.

I hasten to reinforce, however, that this unique personal ecology is not achieved in isolation from the understandings of others; in fact, the very opportunity to interact with others, in a variety of contexts, enhances the unfolding or evolution of the individual's sense of meaning and place.

This perspective implies a complex social/psychological view of the student -- the individual as the center of a

dynamic matrix or pattern of personally meaningful social activity. For example, in contrast to a more traditional, behavioristic research orientation, this ecological perspective would not be significantly informed by attempting to understand the individual through establishing a stereotypical list of characteristics or behaviors, with the intent of reducing these to simplified causal relationships.

In part, the essence of "meaning" in this ecological idea was borrowed from A. Schutz (1971:93) who suggested that an actor within the social world

> groups the world around himself (as the center) as a field of domination and is therefore especially interested in that segment which is within his actual or potential reach.

The interactive or dynamic aspect of the social ecological notion is best represented as Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979:21) described it. He indicated that there is a

> progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives.

This perspective, then, focuses on the notion that the individual -- cast in the role of student or otherwise -- may be studied as the primary subject of interest. However, this individual may be most usefully viewed as being situated within and interacting with a personally meaningful social milieu. In viewing the non-continuous married university student, I was guided by the notion that his/her

family setting interacting with the university setting, likely represents a principal aspect of the student social milieu.

Social place. The idea of social place represents the individual's sense of his or her position relative to other aspects of the social ecology. This notion suggests a personal awareness of her/his location within a broader physical and social environment, as well as temporal location along a continuum of personal history and future expectations.

In view of the ecological perspective taken in this study, I anticipated that, to a greater or lesser degree, the students' notion of personal social place would exist interactively with some shared notion of family social place and social place as university student.

Problematique. This word is borrowed from Botkin, Elmandjra and Malitza (1979:1). As used in this dissertation, it relates essentially to social situations and represents any particular situation as a tangle of complex problems. The value of the word rests in the fact that its meaning serves to convey the notion of a continuing state of complexity and this meaning resists the idea that the social situation is reducible to a single problem or a series of related but separately identifiable problems.

Conceptual Underpinnings

The epistemological basis of this study was informed by Berger and Luckmann's (1967) discussion of the sociology of knowledge. They argued that the reality of everyday life is a social construction. The social world does not exist independently of the people who live and interact within it; quite the contrary. In the words of the authors (1967:19):

> Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world. . . . It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these.

This idea of the social reality of the student as a social construct, rather than an objective "fact," formed the basis for the perspective used in this study. In addition, the selection of the subject matter and the chosen methods of investigation reflect aspects of a process of inquiry which Jurgen Habermas (1978:308) referred to as "historical-hermeneutic." I prefer T. Aoki's (1980:8) equivalent label, in which he referred to the process as "situational-interpretive" inquiry.

Habermas indicated that this form of inquiry is "always acknowledged" as being mediated through the researcher's pre-understanding, as derived from her/his existing situation. In this study, then, subjectivity was acknowledged and embraced as a fundamental element of human experience -- in this case, the research experience.

Habermas (1978:309) went on to state:

The world of traditional meaning discloses itself to

> the interpreter only to the extent that his own world becomes clarified at the same time. The subject of understanding establishes communication between both worlds. He comprehends the substantive content of tradition by *applying* tradition to himself and his situation.

Habermas also suggested that a situational interpretive approach derives from a practical orientation on the part of the researcher -- an interest in interpreting and understanding the existing social situation, of which he or she is a part.

On the same theme, Gareth Morgan (1983:389) maintained that social phenomena may be revealed to the researcher in many different ways, and that "the way realized in practice depends on the mode of engagement adopted by the researcher."

Morgan went on to argue that the particular technique with which the researcher engages the phenomenon may say more about the researcher than the phenomenon itself. This very notion, of the "researcher revealed," was also outlined in H.L. Gray's (1982:33) discussion of alternative approaches to the investigation of social organizations.

In the face of these statements, it seemed that the interpretive approach used in this study left little to separate the researcher from the student subjects and their spouses -- all became revealed through the research and reporting process.

Implied in this orientation, then, seemed to be the notion that the report should also be a self-reflexive

exercise. This seemed to be particularly the case, as I and the processes of the study became very much a part of the participants' first-term university experience.

This dissertation, therefore, explicitly acknowledges the interaction between myself, as the primary researcher within the research situation, and the research situation itself. In other words, my research perspective was very much one of "being in the world" I was examining. I made no effort to attempt to "stand outside" and comment as a totally objective observer.

Aoki (1980) indicated that the root activity of a situational-interpretive approach is an effort to understand the deep relationship between the subject and his/her social world. The interest of the researcher, then, is in identifying intersubjective understandings, shared by the actors -- including the researcher.

My role as researcher was systematically to clarify motives and reveal the structure of the interpretive meanings people gave to their shared social situation.

Not only did this perspective guide my structuring of the specific data collection techniques, but, as the perspective implies and I have tried to argue, the analysis and reporting processes were also significantly shaped by these same ideas.

For at least two reasons, this study should be viewed as exploratory in nature. First, the social phenomenon of the non-continuous, undergraduate student is fairly recent

and little studied. Secondly, the particular situational-interpretive perspective I attempted to use as a guiding orientation for this project requires further refinement in both its concept and its application. This study was not directed at scientific explanation; rather, it was directed toward understanding -- systematic and scholarly, as well as personal. This study, therefore, represented exploration on all counts.

Within the constraints of limited financial and human resources, then, I made an attempt to gather a rich base of data about the married non-continuous university student. The collection of data, analysis and reporting also became a journey of personal exploration and discovery.

The study certainly revealed common patterns of experience, shared social meanings, identifiable themes and issues which might encourage further study. But just as importantly, there are many unexplained complexities, contrasts, and outright contradictions revealed in the descriptions and statements of the participants. In the reporting, I have made an effort to maintain at least some sense of the perplexity, the inconsistency, and the contrariety of the everyday life described by many of the participants. The inconsistencies and incongruities were not only evident across the group of participants -- a finding that may not be particularly surprising -- but also within individual participants.

In reporting the study, it seemed important that the

revealed contradictions should not be trampled in an unseemly scramble to seek a neat scholarly gradation, thematic congruence, a sense of regularity or a tidy summary of the lived experience of the participants. In essence, it is unclear to me that patterns and regularity are necessarily what an understanding of the mature-age undergraduate student is, or ought to be, about.

Dissertation Organization

Chapter 1 of this dissertation was an effort to outline the research problem, state the research questions and introduce the reader to the underpinnings of the research orientation.

In order to identify the participants as early as possible and to avoid any reader confusion which might be caused by quoting unknown respondents, Chapter 2 outlines, in profile form, the historical context of the students and their families.

Chapter 3 is an elaboration of the research perspective -- a description of the specific details of data collection, analysis and reporting processes. In order to address potential methodological and ethical questions, Chapter 3 also includes detailed comments of the participants about their involvement in the research process. Finally, in concert with the situational interpretive orientation, Chapter 3 also includes an extensive section which involves a somewhat autobiographical presentation on my part. The intent is to give the reader some sense of the personally

meaningful field of experience I brought to the research situation.

Chapter 4 details aspects of the student experience, presented against the backdrop of the family situation.

Chapter 5, describes elements more directly related to the university aspects of the students' setting and includes a brief epilogue which updates the students' situation at the time the dissertation was completed.

Chapter 6 includes reflections about the research approach and aspects of the student situation and experience as revealed during the process of the study. Comments are made regarding possible implications of the study for the university as an institution. Potential issues for further research are also outlined.

The extensive appendices form an integral part of the report document. While an extensive literature review was not undertaken as part of this study, a brief outline of literature, pointing out the historical roots of research dealing with married university students, is included as Appendix A.

# CHAPTER 2

## Participant Profiles

In introducing the profiles which follow, it seems important that the reader know from the outset that, without exception, I enjoyed working with all the participants. I found them and their circumstances to be interesting and often fascinating. Through our interaction I experienced a sense of warmth, which I feel comes from sharing many similar perspectives. In this regard, my understandings should be assessed in terms of the comments regarding researcher effect outlined in Chapter 3. Also as outlined in Chapter 3, for purposes of maintaining anonymity, pseudonyms have been used throughout the document.

If at any time, my observations, remarks or judgments about the participants, as revealed in this document, imply a sense of criticism of them or their actions, this ought to be understood as reflecting more upon myself than upon those who kindly subjected themselves to my scrutiny.

### Profile Structure

The student family profiles are based primarily upon participant comments made during our first interview session. Essentially, then, they tend to flow out of the context of the participants' experience very early in their first term at the University of Alberta. However, during

the preparation of the profiles, in order to present as complete a picture as possible, this earlier material was supplemented by information gathered at other stages of data collection.

Each profile begins with a brief indication of the student's circumstances after completion of his or her first term at the university. Often these introductory comments relate to academic outcomes as measured by grades. But, as information became available, I also included brief remarks regarding other aspects of the student's personal situation. Also, in some instances, the academic outcomes of the second term are included.

After this very brief "flash forward," the core of the profile is presented.

My intent in organizing the profile in this manner was to give the reader a quick assessment of each student's situation at the end of the term, before plunging into the more detailed antecedents. I trust this device provides the opportunity for the reader to examine and judge each participant's comments about her or his social context and goals, while having at least a glimpse of the student's not-too-distant future.

Where possible, I made extensive use of the actual statements of the participants themselves. These direct remarks produce a vibrancy and flavour that is modified or lost, if filtered and synthesized by me. At the same time, those familiar with the nature of taped transcripts will

realize that the quoted remarks have undergone some significant editing. I attempted to take a good deal of care to maintain what I understood to be the original meaning and intent of the various statements, while removing tangential comments, digressions, normal pauses and false starts.

The core of the profiles, to a greater or lesser extent, varies with the detail provided by the participants -- keeping in mind that some participants were involved in a less intensive data collection process, or were more or less descriptive about various aspects of their lives than were others.

Some basic themes, however, guided the general content of each presentation. First, each profile represents my effort to locate the student and her/his family within her/his unique historical and social context. Since the historical data presented are based upon joint participant narratives -- without the use of additional verification processes -- it may be assumed that, in some sense, each description represents the joint participants' shared understanding of their own social and historical place. Of course, as previously discussed, the description of the social situation also includes some of my own observations, made during my interview visits to the student homes.

I made an effort also to include some description of each spouse's educational and employment background, as well as to give some sense of the reported ongoing activities of

the children, if any.

A cursory description of each family's housing situation and any recent major housing changes, is also included. In each case, where the family had made special arrangements to provide study space for the university student within the home, these arrangements were commented upon.

Through my general observational comments, I attempted to convey an impression of each family's material or financial circumstances. To supplement this information, in a somewhat more concrete fashion, a simple financial statement, for six of the eight participating families, was prepared and is included in Appendix B.

Finally, as far as thematic elements are concerned, each profile includes the participants' shared explanation of the roots of each student's desire to attend university and, where possible, a description of the link between these roots and the ultimate decision to attend the University of Alberta.

Profile Content

In order to orient the reader, it seems worthwhile to comment upon a few of the commonalities evident in the profiles which follow. For example, most, if not all these students indicated that attendance at university was not a spontaneous act. Regardless of gender, work history, previous education, etc. it appeared that all the students had nurtured a long-standing intent to attend university.

While for some, university attendance related to an explicit job or career objective, more importantly, for all, the gaining of a university degree seemed to represent some measure of personal achievement -- well beyond any instrumental value the degree might have represented for future employment. The result was that the participants took their educational project very seriously.

For all, regardless of personal situation, a certain dissatisfaction with their current pattern of life seemed to be a key factor in their decision to attend university now. There was a strong sense among these people of wishing to move away from the indifference of a comfortable life. For some, a single event may have presented itself as an overt trigger for the decision: the losing of a job, all children finally in school, a sense of time running out, embarrassment at having less education than peers or spouse. But in all cases, the final decision seemed to emerge through a complex set of personal and social circumstances.

Many of the participants described earlier formal post-secondary educational experiences. These experiences -- good and bad -- often appeared to represent a pattern of testing the educational waters -- of gaining self-confidence or finding direction prior to engaging in university as a full-time student.

For most, gaining a university degree was really the only game in town -- a college or technical diploma or certificate was not a serious alternative. It appeared this

attitude was either the result of some feeling that a university degree has prestige beyond other forms of post-secondary education, or the participants' own experiences with the application of other forms of education in the work place had demonstrated the transient value of narrowly focused, certificate and diploma programs in our rapidly changing society.

Interestingly, the participants' previous part-time university experiences or experiences in other types of institutions didn't seem to have reduced their feelings of fear, vulnerability or personal anxiety, as they took up their full-time university programs. While the very act of involving themselves in this educational endeavor obviously involved an act of tremendous personal courage, each of the students displayed a significant level of self-doubt. Almost invariably, the students admitted that in order to take the steps to become registered as a full-time student, the initial self-doubt was partially overcome through the encouragement of their spouse. But as we shall see later in this document, spousal encouragement seemed to have a price attached, in the form of an implicit social contract between the spouses.

Some of the students, particularly those with some unhappy previous university experiences, anticipated that the university experience would discipline their personal habits. They were now, for the first time, grudgingly prepared to accept previously unacceptable forms of

institutional control. This, they felt, was a means to an end: The credential, the university degree.

Generally, during the period of deciding to attend and making application to the university, the families outlined in the profiles were not in what one might describe as stable situations. For example, all but one family had changed housing within the twelve months previous to the student deciding to enter university. And in many cases, there had been a recent change of employment situation for the student and/or the spouse.

At an individual level, it was intriguing to note that four of the eight students had recently gone through, or were continuing a weight reduction program. In fact, this was also the case for the ninth student, who terminated her participation near the commencement of the study.

Another interesting pattern: almost all the female student participants had spouses whose employment required that they spend significant amounts of time away from home. For all intents and purposes, therefore, in those situations where there were children, these students operated for extended periods of time as single parents. In fact, it was suggested by one female participant, that the very kind of independent person this type of marital situation produced, might also have been the kind of person to seek challenges beyond the traditional role of homemaking.

For me, it was surprising to discover the significant place that organized religion had in the lives of many of

the participants. Most also expressed strong commitments to family and, particularly, their children. These commitments were particularly interesting when ultimately juxtaposed against the impact of their university experience. As we shall see, the students became burdened by overwhelming guilt feelings, related to an inability to give full attention to all matters which were personally important.

In two cases, the primary bread winners were in white-collar occupations. One family, through unemployment of the student spouse, was in a state of economic transition. The remainder were financially supported by what clearly would be considered to be blue-collar bread winners.

For the most part, as I examined each student's family circumstances in some detail, I felt that these families might be described as "the people next door," or "the people we would like to have live next door." Their backgrounds displayed intriguingly diverse personal journeys, but in their situation at the time of the study, their circumstances also revealed many features common to other people we all might know.

At the risk of reducing the human aspects of the descriptions which follow to a form of statistical profile, my above comments about the family descriptions and the descriptions themselves might be judged against the following socio-economic and financial indicators.

The Census of Canada (Statistics Canada 1981:1-1) reported that over 80 percent of Edmontonians were born

within Canada, but that 61 percent of Edmontonians were movers -- occupied a different dwelling five years previously. Another Statistics Canada report (1982:2.16) indicated that the average family size in Edmonton in 1981 was 2.56 people. The average age of the head of the household was 42.7 years.

Also according to the 1982 report, average pre-tax family income in Edmonton was $34,426, with almost 21 percent of the families reporting the "wife" worked full time. The same source indicated that, Canada-wide, almost 70 percent of families had total income levels below $35,000 (1982:2.8). Slightly over 53 percent of Edmonton families owned their own home, or were in the process of purchasing their own home (1982:2.16).

Comparing the participant families to the above statistics, the participants tended to be somewhat younger than the average age of household heads, as reported by Statistics Canada. The family size tended to be somewhat larger than the average.

Allowing for inflation since the Statistics Canada reports, the income levels reported by the participant families seem to indicate that, economically, the families involved in this study were probably average or above average, in terms of family income.

All of the participants in the study were living in homes they were currently in the process of purchasing. In addition, all but one of the families lived in single-family

housing. Because of recent changes in housing, most would seem to fall in the Statistics Canada category of "movers."

The profiles reveal that, generally, the participants had attained whatever material wealth they had, through hard work and sometimes difficult circumstances. Most had struggled up an economic ladder to their present financial position. The level of financial attainment, however, varied fairly widely among the families.

As we will discover from later descriptions, the fact that these participants could be identified as average or higher income earners, did not ameliorate a sense of financial concern felt by many of the them. No general statistical reference was available for comparison to the financial statements included in Appendix B, but the statements of the participating families revealed that, while many of the families displayed significant total personal assets, a number clearly did not have the cash resources for meeting emergent family needs, nor to sustain the significant traditional expenses of attending a university. For cash requirements, most depended very heavily upon current earnings.

In summary, then, as one examines the profiles, it should be evident that the people represented were essentially fully-functioning members of the society. By many measures they would be judged to have been successful. There was little or no evidence that -- for the purposes of everyday living -- these students emerged from a situation

which required a university experience which would reshape them socially, or give them an environment within which to mature. If anything, they appeared to desire and seek enlightenment, intellectual enrichment, personal enhancement and some form of academic validation.

Profile - Mary Baker

Age: 28 Married: 11 yrs.

Spouse: Joe - Age: 34 - Occupation: Millwright

Dependents: One daughter - Age: 9 yrs.
Two sons - Aged: 6 & 8 yrs.

Faculty: Arts Dept.: English

Admission Status: Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Homemaker

Program Year: First

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Student Situation After Completion of the Term

In September of 1984, her first term as an Arts student at the University of Alberta, Mary Baker enrolled in three courses: art history, computing science and French. At the end of the term she had successfully completed all three courses. She had obtained a grade point standing of nine in both French and Computing Science, and a grade point of eight in Art History. She was considering applying for a scholarship for the coming academic year.

As Mary entered her second term, she was also registered in three courses, including a computing science course in micro computers. Mary had toyed with the idea of taking four courses, but decided against it. She was very much looking forward to the micro computer course as her daughter was involved in a similar program at school. The family was considering purchasing a home computer.

During the early stages of the second term, Mary was

having trouble with illness, which, to her chagrin, caused her to miss a number of classes. Mary subsequently discovered that she was pregnant; the baby was due in September 1985. She eventually dropped her computing science course because it was scheduled later in the day and was causing her to have to wait around the university after her morning classes.

After the birth of her child, she anticipated returning to university in January 1986.

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

Mary was born and raised in a town about thirty miles north of Sudbury, Ontario. She described her educational plans, after graduating from grade thirteen:

> I had planned originally to go to university after grade thirteen, and then I got married and that was out of the question when we went up north. But it was always there in the back of my mind.

In our interviews, Mary presented herself as quiet and reserved. This impression was reinforced by Joe's observation that she was not an outgoing person. He claimed, "If there isn't somebody to take the initiative with her, then she won't speak up." Notwithstanding this observation, Mary indicated that she had an ambition or a dream of being a writer. Her activity in this regard has reportedly laid fallow for some time.

Her literary ambition caused me to look more closely at Mary's personal journal entries. In comparison to others in the group, they displayed a generally moderate style, but

they also evidenced a clarity and control which suggested that she was as comfortable as one could be, in placing her thoughts on paper.

Joe was born and raised in Hamilton, Ontario. His high school education finished at grade 10. About 8 months after he joined the work force in Hamilton, he moved to Sudbury, where, he reported, there were lots of jobs at that time.

After two and a half years in the work force, Joe travelled to England for a couple of months. When he returned to Canada, he was involved with a literature distribution team for a Christian organization. It was during this period that he decided he wanted to return to school. Joe enrolled in a Bible school in Edmonton for a year. Then he took high school upgrading at Alberta College because he was having trouble finding full-time employment.

Mary and Joe were married immediately after she finished grade thirteen and while he was still involved in his upgrading courses. Mary also attended Bible school in Edmonton for four months.

As Joe described the time:

> That's when things got a little bit difficult financially. Mary, at that time, couldn't find a job. I was in school, as well as doing part-time jobs. We found that was a bit too hard. So I went back to what I knew best, and that was mining.

The Bakers moved to Uranium City in Saskatchewan, where they lived for almost ten years, although there was a return to Sudbury for one year during this period. While they were in Uranium City, their three children were born.

As far as her occupation was concerned, Mary indicated that, "I basically spent my time, since we've been married, raising family." Mary did, however, take an inter-session psychology course from Laurentian University.

> I was so nervous and so afraid that I'd really flunk out, but I ended up being the top of the class in that course. Which really boosted my confidence . . . that I could maybe handle university.

Mary also took a University of Regina extension course in social work, while in Uranium City. She described that experience as "totally disgusting."

During the same time period, in Uranium City, Joe made efforts to earn his millwright ticket, something he had still not completed at the time the interviews for this study took place. At the time of the study, he had his second class ticket; gaining his journeyman ticket required only his successful completion of the Alberta Apprenticeship Board Exams. Joe indicated that his various educational experiences since high school had showed him that he has the ability to succeed; what he stated he lacked was self-discipline.

As a result of the mine closure (Uranium City closed down in 1982) the family moved back to Edmonton in 1983. Joe now worked two weeks out of every four, as a millwright in a mine in the Northwest Territories. The days that Joe was to be away were marked in blue on the calendar in the kitchen. The schedule was known well in advance. At the outset of this study, the Bakers indicated that this type of

life was a little tough to get used to at the start, but they were finding that they were beginning to like it. This positive attitude seemed to reverse over the period of the study.

One of the major factors affecting the family and anticipated to affect Mary's university experience was the fact that Joe was away for long periods of time. When away, Joe called home daily on the company's direct line to Edmonton, But Mary was essentially a single parent during these periods of Joe's absence.

Since moving to Edmonton, both Mary and Joe had registered in courses with Athabasca University. Joe's course was in administrative studies. Mary completed her course in English during the period of this study. When asked how she would describe herself as a student, Mary indicated that she would consider herself to be "pretty successful."

All three children attended public school. When Joe was away, a neighbour drove the kids to school; otherwise, this was Joe's task. The children took bagged lunches to school. The children reportedly had little to do in the way of homework -- Mom and Dad indicated that they simply checked with the children daily, to see if anything needed to be done.

The family owned a piano and the two oldest children were registered in piano lessons. The children also attended a weekly club activity at the church. Both these

activities occurred on the same evening.

The Bakers just recently purchased a television set and they monitored the TV watching of the children quite closely. The TV night for the children tended to be Friday evening. In contrast, however, Mary admitted that, while Joe was away, television could be a constant attraction for her.

While the interviews for this study were in progress, the children were allowed to wheel the television into a bedroom. Their treat on the occasion of one of my visits was some potato chips -- while shopping, apparently, each child had chosen a different flavour.

If the Bakers did go out for entertainment or shopping, they reported that the whole family generally went together. This would happen most routinely on Saturdays.

When asked how they would describe themselves as a family, Mary indicated that she thought they were better than normal -- very stable and happy. The "normal family problems" were acknowledged, but she felt that the kids were coping well, and they were excited about her "going to school."

Joe was apparently a little surprised by Mary's view; he would have described the family as normal, although he conceded that he felt the family had something better going for them than a lot of other people -- specifically, some of their neighbours.

There seemed to be some uncertainty about whether Mary's attending university would change their perception of

their family's status. Joe did not feel their situation -- with Mary at university -- was really very unusual. He compared it to other couples they knew, in which both people might be working. In this regard, he conceded, "The thought of one going back to school doesn't seem to be the in-thing to do."

As mentioned earlier, Mary testified that she always wanted to attend university, and how the circumstances seemed right. "Our youngest is in grade one, so he's in school all day, and the university is so handy -- it just seemed like the right time."

But apparently, Joe played a significant role in triggering her decision. Mary observed,

> I probably wouldn't have sent in that application if he hadn't really pushed me this summer -- just encouraged me a lot, to send it in. Because I was quite nervous about the whole idea.

Joe explained further,

> I knew she wanted to, and I knew that she was getting bored. Last year we had a lot of spare time; it's like having money in your pocket -- we frivolously used this time. We would go out for coffee, and walk around shopping malls and stuff. I thought: Well, its better spent if she were to make that application and go to university. If she never starts university, she's never going to get there.
>
> I feel really good for Mary, because this was her tentative plan after high school. I went down and I married her. I talked to her dad and sought his approval. Right away he said, "No way!" Mary was going to go to university, and so forth.
>
> I more or less promised him at the time: After we're married, she can still go to university. Well, he didn't hold me to my word, but it took ten years to get to this point. And I'm glad for her.
>
> I feel that when the time comes, and if I'm up to it, my turn will also come."

In this latter regard, Joe indicated that he looked upon his present job as a "means to an end." He declared that he did not want to be a mechanic until he was sixty-five.

Mary conceded that, ultimately, she would like to be employed outside the home some day, but she wanted the job to be as something more than a waitress. In particular, she wanted to be in a position to support the family, so that Joe could go to university. She denied, however, that that was the only, or even her primary reason for attending university. She indicated that she was studying -- particularly English literature -- for her own enjoyment.

This revelation came as no surprise to Joe:

> A few years ago, back when we were dating, she was talking about university, and she said, "When I go, I'm going, not for what kind of a job I can get out of it in the end." She said, "I want to go and study what I enjoy studying."

"That," according to Joe, "was her original motivation."

It was obvious that church and religion played a large role in the life of the Bakers. The church was located just a short walk away from their home. Mary reported that she had been pretty active in the church. Joe stated that he was a Christian when he moved to Sudbury, and he had been active in Sunday school and lay preaching.

The Bakers had a circle of friends whom they identified as "church friends." Their Sunday mornings and evenings were involved with regular church activities, as was Tuesday

evening with the children's activity club. Mary indicated, however, that her personal involvement would have been greater had she not decided to enter university.

The Bakers had very little other formal community involvement. The previous year they had volunteered to work at the childrens' school, two days a week, but there was no intent to do the same this year.

The family lived in a modest but new house on the extreme southwest edge of Edmonton. After previously renting in northeast Edmonton, they bought their present home in June. The housing in the area was all new (2 - 2 1/2 years old), and it appeared to be a fairly typical subdivision development. One block away, barbed wire marked the abrupt start of Alberta farm land.

Like many of the houses in the area, the Baker's back yard was not yet grassed or fenced. My visits to the house gave me the opportunity to view only the living room and the kitchen. The kitchen contained what appeared to be new appliances, including a dishwasher. In general, the Baker's material possessions appeared to be modest in nature. There was little evidence of general reading material about, but the Bakers revealed that they had a couple of bookshelves in the basement. Mary also indicated that the family made good use of the public library. Mary suggested, however, that if she were ever going to collect anything, it would be old books.

As the study began, the Bakers were still in the

process of getting to know the neighbours in their area. The bus ride to the University, for Mary, was about 45 minutes each way. She found this ride to be a good time to plan and think about the day.

Generally, as I arrived for interviews, the stereo in the living room was playing easy listening music; I recall that once it was Gordon Lightfoot. All our interviews were conducted at the kitchen table.

It was interesting to note that by mid September a second table had been placed into the kitchen, along with a filing cabinet. Mary obviously used this space as her study space. There was often evidence of a paper in progress, or reading material on the table.

## Profile - Sheila Eley

Age 38 Married: 17 yrs.

Spouse: Rod - Age: 40 - Occupation: Millwright

Dependents: One daughter - Age: 13 yrs.
One son - Age: 12 yrs.

Faculty: Arts Dept.: General

Admission Status: Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Homemaker

Program Year: 1.5 - Previously Attended: Concordia College

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### Student Situation After Completion of the Term

Sheila was a transfer student who entered the University of Alberta from its affiliate Concordia College. As her husband, Rod, put it, she came "through the back door." At the end of her first term at the University of Alberta, Sheila had successfully completed two of the three courses in her program -- Economics 381 & 316 -- with marks of six and four. But she continued to be locked in a struggle with her full-year French course which, to her great joy, she ultimately passed with a mark of 78 percent.

The albatross which pursued Sheila mercilessly from the time she entered the University and which continued to hang about her neck, was the Writing Competency Test. Since entering the University, she had twice written the test, and received an unsatisfactory standing on both occasions. During the fall term, due to her first unsuccessful attempt, she was enrolled in the writing competency classes. In view

of her second unsatisfactory attempt, she was uncertain as to her continuing status at the university. By the fall term of 1985, she passed the test on the third attempt.

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

Sheila reported that she returned to the education system essentially because her children had become quite independent and she was bored. She indicated she wanted to do something constructive:

> I love to read. I was going through books -- I couldn't keep up with the supply of books. I figured, if I'm going to spend all this time reading, I might as well read something worthwhile and learn.

While there appeared to be no particular family financial necessity for her to take up employment, there were work aspirations connected with Sheila's attendance at university. She felt that her previous working skills were now antiquated. In addition, she was no longer interested in clerical work. She did have a specific educational objective: a commerce degree. Her employment objective was to ultimately work in the personnel field.

Rod was supportive of her efforts:

> Why not do something that you want to do? And the only way to do what you want to do is you've got to re-educate yourself. This is one of the main reasons why she's going back.

The couple also felt that Sheila's returning to education served as a model for their children. "It gives them some discipline," Rod declared, "some motivation -- to realize that if they don't do well in school, their job

selection is going to be very limited." Rod went on to suggest that, based upon Sheila's Concordia experience, her return to school offered a healthy contest of marks, between "Mom and the children."

Sheila chose to attend Concordia initially, because of its size:

> I don't like crowds. I get very rattled in crowds. I hate them. Parking was not a problem for me. It took me fifteen minutes to get to Concordia from here. So I wasn't losing an awful lot of time in travel. If they offered a degree program, I'd still be going there, because it's smaller. Mind you, the course selection is very limited.

Sheila was somewhat unique in this study in that she had an extensive "support group" of transfer student colleagues, all of whom transferred to the university at the beginning of the fall 1984 term. She maintained contact with several of them, both on campus and through contact from home.

Sheila, however, described herself as a bit of a loner, and although it was not something that I became aware of until she commented upon it, Sheila had a walking difficulty, a condition which required specially fitted leg supports.

The notion of Sheila attending university apparently extended back to a "missed opportunity," prior to their marriage. Rod described the fact that Sheila didn't move on to university in the late 1960s, just after completing her high school education at night school, as "our mistake."

Sheila suggested that, for her, the idea of a university

degree had a special place:

> It's more of a challenge. I think it was the way I was brought up. Anybody going to a technical school didn't rank quite as high as somebody with a university degree. Mind you, at my age, I probably would have been much wiser to go to NAIT. But then, I still wouldn't have gotten what I want to at the end.

Sheila and Rod had known each other for about twenty years. When they met, Rod had been working as a millwright in a mine in northern Saskatchewan, and Sheila was in Edmonton working and working toward her high school matriculation. They were married in 1967; they referred to it as their "Centennial Project."

After their marriage, over a period of about six years, they lived in two different house trailers on the edge of Edmonton. Rod described it as "an experience and a half," and Sheila as "dreadful."

Sheila was working as a secretary for a drilling school and Rod was involved in construction. A strike in the construction industry caused them to lose almost everything. For about six months, they were living on Sheila's salary alone. Rod subsequently took up an equipment maintenance position in the steel industry.

The birth of their first child motivated them to begin looking for bigger housing. They chose a building lot in Sherwood Park and built their present home on the site. During construction, they lived with Sheila's mother. Rod described this adventure as, "an experience and a half."

Once they had children, Sheila was no longer employed

outside the home. She did, however, become very active in community organizations used by her growing children. For example, when her daughter entered kindergarten, Sheila became involved as chairperson of the Early Childhood Services program. She was also involved in Scouting as a leader. Rod indicated that his community involvement was minimal because of the extensive travel involved in the job he has held for some ten years.

The Eleys lived in Sherwood Park, in what might be described as a pleasant "middle class" home in a well kept suburban neighbourhood of similar standing. The neighbourhood was apparently about ten to fifteen years old, and the Eley's were one of the early residents in the area. Their house and yard appeared to be well maintained.

Groups of children playing road hockey in the neighbourhood gave indication that many of the area's residences continue to include younger families.

During the latter part of the term, on my visits, a well constructed home-built trailer, containing four snow mobiles, was frequently in evidence, parked outside the garage. Sheila's journal revealed that the construction of this trailer was an ongoing evening project for Rod.

Sheila had a well laid out study space in a spare room in the basement. It included a good light source, shelving, file cabinet and a typewriter. Sheila declared,

> I enjoy it down there; I feel comfortable. I actually can relax down there. I cannot sit up at the kitchen table and study, with all the goings-on.

An IBM compatible computer was located in the same room. The family apparently purchased the computer just prior to the summer holidays. Since Sheila's courses for the first term apparently only required one written paper, she hadn't yet tried to learn to use the word processor. She indicated that sometimes, when the kids were using the machine, it bothered her studying, but not often.

The children's school was about one mile away from the house and the children walked or rode their bikes to school. The children prepared their own lunches, which they ate at school. They generally arrived home about 3:30pm daily. Sheila attempted to finish studying prior to the children getting home.

Her son was involved in piano lessons, hockey, soccer and Boy Scouts. Her daughter was in a jazz band and also took piano lessons. These activities took place Monday through Thursday and, of course, on weekends. The children's activities often involved the parents in transportation or watching the events. Dinner hour was often adjusted according to the children's activity schedule.

In particular, Sheila found that her daughter was able to help with domestic responsibilities. Her son did lawn work and snow shovelling. Both children assisted with dishes and the tidying of their own rooms. But both parents reported they spent considerable time assisting the children with their homework assignments.

As mentioned, Rod's employment as an Industrial Gas Turbine Technician in the petroleum industry, took him away from home quite often. In the previous three years he suggested, "I'd be very fortunate if I made it home on the weekends even."

Sheila declared,

> Last winter was the roughest year I've put in. From the middle of August until Christmas, he was home one week. From Christmas, until I finished school [Concordia College] at the end of April, he wasn't home. I was both mother and father."

Rod felt, however, that the children were very well adjusted to his absences:

> They know that I haven't run away, that I'll be home. And when I do get home, it's the situation where we're very selfish. Weekends are ours, just the family. We have a lake lot, a little cabin on it. Summer and winter we get out continuously -- doesn't matter what the weather is; we go. To get away from the phone, and plus, it's to spend time with the kids.

Because he was out of town, Rod was not involved in our final interview, the clustering exercise.

Our interviews were conducted at the kitchen table. The children were usually occupied elsewhere in the house, but occasionally they would enter the kitchen to get a snack. Rod and Sheila would often carry on a prodding banter with the children at these points. In particular, Rod seemed to like to play a game of one-up-man-ship.

When out of town, Rod reportedly tried to phone home at about 11:00pm each night. When at his workplace in town -- which was about ten minutes from the house -- Rod generally

ate lunch at home, and unless he worked overtime, he was usually home by four in the afternoon. Sheila found she did less studying in the evening when Rod was home.

After their rather humble beginnings, Rod appeared to take a good deal of pride in the fact that he could afford to support Sheila through university. Rod did not seem to mind Sheila's attending university, although he felt that, at her age it would be silly to think that they would get their investment back.

His feeling was that the spouses of men who are on the road are probably more independent and active, rather than passive. Sheila seemed to agree with this assessment, indicating that being alone so much might cause one to seek to return to school.

Both spouses agreed that the family came first; and Sheila's university education should not interfere with this principle. Sheila indicated, however, that domestic and family responsibilities did have an effect on her course work, and that often, after the kids were in bed at night, she really didn't feel like studying.

When I asked why she was not taking five courses she replied,

> I tried five the first year. I just found that I had no time at all to spend with the family. I couldn't go out with the family on weekends. I was catching up on work, getting papers done, etc.
>
> I'm not in any great rush; I've waited this long to go; what's another couple of years. I'm on a six year program, as far as I see it. It'll take me six years and that's fine. I've allowed for that.

Profile - Judith Lynden

Age: 26 Married: 6 yrs.

Spouse: Michael - Age: 29 - Occupation: Geophysicist

Dependents: None

Faculty: Education Dept.: Secondary

Admission Status: Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Oil Company - Audit Clerk

Program Year: First

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Student Situation After Completion of the Term

At the completion of her first term at university, Judith tended to understate her academic achievements. To some degree, she felt that she had "bombed." This, in spite of the fact that her cumulative grade point average for the term was approximately 6.8 -- she had been trying for a seven. On the other hand, her economics mark was five, whereas, she had been expecting a final grade of four. Judith was very pleased, however, about a nine in her violin course.

In addition to the above courses, during the term Judith was enrolled in choir, clarinet, educational psychology and the writing competency course. In the case of the latter course, she had apparently received a marginally satisfactory mark on the initial test, but felt that the course would do her good because she was uncertain of her writing skills.

During her second term, Judith reported that she dropped her economics course; she planned to retake it during the spring term. She found the second winter term somewhat heavier than her first, but she also indicated that she didn't work as hard. Her cumulative grade point average moved to 7.4.

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

The Lynden's described themselves as a fairly average family, except for the fact that they were a childless couple. They reported that they were keeping the option to have children open, but at the time, Michael referred to their current family situation as a "weighted choice."

Michael suggested that they were always finding reasons to put off having children. He explained further:

> University has obviously offset having children. Which may not have occurred had Judith not been going to school. Children may have come sooner. In which case, now they might not come at all. They won't come before four years, hopefully. That was something that was part of the decision making.

Judith saw the notion of "community involvement" as being generally related to families with children. Hence, the Lyndens didn't really consider themselves to be active within their home community.

They were very active socially, however; for example, they maintained subscriptions to three theater organizations and regularly attended musical performances. They were also involved in wine tasting. Michael was active in sports: soccer, squash, racquetball and baseball. And since moving

to Edmonton, they became more involved in general education courses, in interest areas such as basement development and paper tole.

In addition to the courses in her degree program, Judith intended to take piano lessons during the first term. That idea was subsequently dropped due to time pressures. But in the meantime, Michael did borrow a piano from a friend.

During the period of this study, Michael completed his first evening university course, "Business Management and Decision Making," in the Business Certificate Program, through The University of Alberta Faculty of Extension.

The Lyndens resided in Sherwood Park. Within this suburb community, they lived in what might be described as an established but recent, aesthetically integrated housing development. The development centered around a lake and included many "palatial" homes as well as more modest structures.

In driving to the Lynden's home, one drives through most of this complex of literally hundreds of houses, each displaying variations on a theme of pastel shades and hues. The development would probably be described as appealing to economic "upper middle class" or "professional" families. The Lynden's home probably represented the mid range of the spectrum of houses present in the development.

Their home was very tastefully and, I would judge, expensively decorated. The house included an attached two-

car garage, and during the early part of the study, Michael was involved in completing the fence around their yard. The yard appeared to be fully landscaped. Although I did not view it, Judith apparently had her own study area set aside at home.

Our interviews were conducted in the family room, just off the dining area and kitchen. We often had the company of the other members of the family, a large and friendly golden retriever and the family cat.

Their location in Sherwood Park did create some travel problems for Judith. Frequently, she would ride to the university with Michael, as he was on his way to work, taking him about ten minutes out of his way. Bus transportation was really only viable during rush hours. This situation caused lengthy travel times on those occasions when it was possible for Judith to return home during the day.

Before Judith left her job and started university, the Lyndens used the services of a house keeper on a regular basis. When Judith began university, for financial reasons, this service was dropped. The couple -- particularly Judith -- felt constrained by the loss of her income. As Judith put it:

> I guess I feel guilty because I'm not bringing in any money. Whereas, I used to -- before.
>
> It was obviously a major topic when we were deciding if we could handle my going back to school. I know all the times we discussed it, I felt like: I can't [attend]!

In our interviews, Judith had an intriguing way of describing her past actions, as if she was in conversation with herself. She was bright but self-deprecating. She was a diminutive woman, and tended to look considerably younger than her twenty-six years; a factor which was to create problems for her during the term. Although to the untrained eye she did not appear to be overweight, she indicated that she was on a weight reduction regimen.

> I haven't bought any clothes, but it's not because I don't have any money. I gained quite a bit of weight over the summer time, and as punishment, to try and get myself to lose weight, I've been wearing these jeans since the summer. Thinking that I would embarrass myself into losing weight.

Judith was born in Detroit, Michigan -- of Italian descent -- her mother and father were born in Italy. Judith lived in Detroit until she was fifteen, when the family moved to Toronto. She completed high school in Toronto.

Judith had two older sisters, both married to Canadians. Her younger brother was enrolled in a technical college in Ontario. She reported that she had many relatives in Toronto.

Judith indicated that she applied to university three times in the past, but had not followed through. Michael conceded that the first time this happened was probably because he convinced Judith to make some money, so that he could finish university and they could get married. As Michael put it:

> It was partly because I didn't think you were ready -- because you weren't sure. And so I said: OK, if

you're not sure, don't go in and waste your time.

Judith agreed that Michael was a factor in her earlier hesitancy about university.

> I think if I hadn't known Michael, I probably would have blundered through like everybody else. Not really knowing why you're going, just going.

But she also acknowledged her own uncertainty. "I kept chickening out. I just didn't think I was good enough; or it was just too overwhelming I guess."

Judith went on to describe the nature of her lack of self-confidence:

> I guess I just didn't have enough confidence in myself musically, at that time.
> In the Royal Conservatory of Music, I'd take lessons, and you'd walk through the halls and you'd hear all these people playing or singing, and you'd think: 'Oh! gawd! I don't sound like that. I'm never going to sound like that! I shouldn't be here!'
> So I just kind of talked myself into thinking that I wasn't good enough.

As for her later initiatives, Judith lamented,

> I think the second and third time I applied, I ended up applying in General Arts, and that really really wasn't what I wanted to do.

Judith had, in the past, taken evening accounting courses at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. But she felt strongly that a university degree was what she now wanted.

She felt she had something to prove. Simply, she couldn't "settle for something less." Laughing, she announced: "I had to try it."

Michael exuded confidence. He was open and pleasant, and gave the impression that he generally had his personal situation well under control. His comments and observations indicated that he was practiced at thinking problems and issues through. His speech contained the residue of a Scottish accent and he talked very rapidly -- something which he, in consideration of my transcription task, apologized for at the outset of our interviews.

Michael was somewhat prone to responding to questions on behalf of his wife. In one of our discussions, he gave his rationale for doing so:

> But you don't say it fast enough [laughed]. You sit there, and I know what you're going to say and I give up on you, so I say it [both laughed]. It's one of my attributes.

Judith's reaction was, "Geez!"

Michael was born in Scotland. His family, including a younger brother and sister, moved to Canada when he was thirteen. He considered Toronto to have been his home for the ten years prior to moving to Alberta.

Michael had a degree in geology and physics from the University of Toronto. He went on to graduate study in Exploration Geology in London England, but "backed out of that" -- apparently because it was too costly.

Michael subsequently tried to obtain a job in Toronto area. He described this tough period:

> I was in hard rock geology, Geophysics -- which is minerals, gold silver and such. There were no jobs down there -- none that would allow to stay home at all. I'd have to be out in the field all the time. Ended up selling encyclopedias for a couple of weeks.

Didn't sell any.

In their earlier years, Judith and Michael already had a common interest in music; they met during an amateur theater musical production, while Michael was still in university. Judith was just finishing high school. At one point, after his first degree, Michael reported he also wanted to study music.

Judith and Michael were engaged when Michael moved to Calgary in 1977. Michael came west during the boom years of the petroleum industry. Eight months later, they were married and Judith followed him to Calgary.

They "set up house in Calgary," where they lived for four years. Judith began working in the accounting department of a large petroleum firm. Two years ago, Michael was offered a job in Edmonton and they've lived in the Edmonton area since that time.

The idea of Judith attending university apparently had been the subject of frequent discussions between the couple for the previous eight years. But reportedly, "serious debate" took place only over the year prior to the fall of 1984.

Judith explained that the decision was a complex process:

> It has always kind of been niggling in the back of my mind. I guess it's really quite complicated. Obviously, it's an emotional and a psychological. . . . I just can't say: "Well, I was poor and I've never been able to go to school; now I've got money, and I'm going." It's not like that at all.

Michael felt that Judith was waiting for circumstances to press her into making a decision to attend university. He described a growing concern between them, about the need for Judith to complete a degree prior to deciding to have children. He indicated that Judith was also feeling "left out" of their circle of friends, most of whom were university educated.

The factor that apparently finally triggered Judith's move to university was work-related. She observed:

> When we moved from Calgary to here [due to Michael's taking a job in Edmonton], the company wouldn't transfer me. They made me quit. They rehired me here. But they rehired me on a temporary basis.

It became apparent to both of them that unless Judith had a university degree, there was no room for advancement within the company she was working for. As Michael put it:

> It doesn't matter what your degree is in -- it can be in paper tole -- but as long as you've got a degree, they'll accept you and they'll put you higher.

Judith presented an interesting description of the process of choosing her field of study.

> I went through a whole process. When I first was thinking of applying to university, I was going to go through business. I went down and I talked to a counselor, down at student counseling. I did the little test, to find out really what I should be doing. And of course, music was way off the scale.
>
> I kept saying to myself: "But music isn't going to make me money! I wanna make money! If I go into business, I'll go back and work for [my former employer] after four years. A lot of people have done that."
>
> Once I took that test, it started making me think again: "Judith, if you're going to go back to school, you really have to think -- you're going to have to do something that you really want to do.

Because you're not going to do well if you're going do something just because you want to make *money*. It just doesn't work that way.'

Eventually, through the process, I eventually came to the conclusion: "Forget it! You're not going to go in business -- do what you want to do!"

Music has always been a love of mine. I guess I would like to be able to be related to the music field in some way. If I had my choice, and if I was younger, I would like to try and perform. But now I feel too much time has passed.

This route, at least you end up being able to teach -- maybe -- some day. I might not be able to get a job once I graduate, but sometime down the road, at least I've got that ability to be able to teach music -- something that I love.

Profile - Gloria Makowichuk

Age: 29 Married: 6 yrs.

Spouse: Doug - Age: 32 - Occupation: Draughtsman

Dependents: One daughter - Age: 9 yrs.

Faculty: Arts Dept.: General

Admission Status: Non-Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Volunteer Agency Administrator

Program Year: First

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Student Situation After Completion of the Term

During the first term Gloria was on a weight reduction plan and was pleased to have lost eighteen pounds. She reported that she and her husband, Doug, were very busy. Their plan to expand their social contacts had exceeded their expectations. Gloria had become heavily involved in the Women's Progressive Conservatives and Doug, in addition to his full-time employment, had commenced evening classes at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

At the end of her first term, Gloria received an eight in English and a seven in political science. She was very happy to earn a six in her French course. She intended to continue French studies, not because it was a required part of her program, but as she laughingly put it, "I want at least a minor in French. You cannot be Prime Minister of Canada unless you speak French."

I am certain that this observation was not made totally in jest.

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

Doug observed that, as a family, "we feel that we are not normal at all. We are something more than a normal family would be. I think we're much closer. We do more things together."

In fact, Gloria suggested they might even be considered to be snobs, because they spent so much time together -- to the exclusion of what she called, "beneficial others." In order to rectify this problem, as the term began, Gloria and Doug were in the process of attempting to end their perceived isolation. They were engaged in a conscious effort to enlarge their circle of friends. As mentioned at the outset of this profile, during the second term, Gloria indicated that their plan was well into "phase four."

Gloria and Doug saw themselves as having different values than other people. As an example, they suggested that one of their important values related to the feeling that children should be polite and manageable -- not yell, scream and dominate adult conversations.

They were also very concerned about the place of television in the lives of the average person. They were very proud of the fact that television had a very limited place in the life of their family. Both Gloria and Doug indicated that they grew up without television; their intent was to continue this experience with their daughter. They indicated that their daughter probably watched less than one hour of television per week.

Their daughter was present for at least a portion of all our interviews. She was polite and curious. She was most interested in the documents that I distributed. In this regard, her parents unhesitatingly shared the interview transcripts with her.

Turning to Gloria, she described herself as a "real hill-and-valley person." During the writing of her journal, she apologized for excessive use of exclamation and question marks, but she speculated that this was perhaps a reflection of the way she spoke -- an observation with which I would concur.

Gloria also described herself as "a child of privilege." Her father, a physician, was Chinese and her mother, Scottish. Gloria was not a native-born Canadian, nor, at the beginning of the study, was she a Canadian citizen. Gloria was born in England, but her family moved to Hong Kong prior to her first birthday. Her father and mother separated when she was six. After that point, Gloria lived with her father, "which, back then," she observed, "was really really different."

Gloria and her father emigrated to Canada in 1970, when she was about thirteen. But Gloria described her Hong Kong period as her "growing-up years." Coming to Canada, meant moving from a city of four million, to a town of four thousand, some distance from Edmonton. "You know," Gloria lamented, "when you're thirteen or fourteen -- that really impressionable age -- it was just a disaster!"

In Canada, Gloria encountered serious difficulties, one of which was attempting to complete high school. In the process of struggling to complete school, she and her father tried several approaches: she boarded at Alberta College in Edmonton; another time, she tried correspondence. These efforts were not successful.

Gloria strongly maintained that her education stopped the day she left Hong Kong. Up to that point, she described herself as "a darn good student" from an "exceptionally good school." She declared her Canadian school experience to be "a long litany of failures." According to Gloria, "I am technically a high school drop out."

Gloria confessed that her life, after coming to Canada, was a "rather sordid story." She apparently went through a long period of problems with drugs and, what she referred to as, "extra-legal behavior." In retrospect, for Gloria, it was a process of growing up too fast among a crowd that was "bad news."

She was first married at eighteen. Her daughter was born just as Gloria turned nineteen. She noted that she was twenty-one and a half when the marriage ended. Gloria reported that there followed another long period of instability, including alcohol abuse.

Gloria indicated that she was beginning to "grow up" just before she met Doug -- for her, things were starting to "come together:"

> I had decided that I just did not want to live the sort of life I had been living. I decided I wanted to be

> married. So I went back to Hong Kong to find myself a husband -- and I found one. I was engaged to a fellow in Hong Kong. I figured if I was going to be married, I might as well marry somebody who lived in a warm climate. I came home to sell my house -- pack up my belongings and move.

When Gloria returned to Canada, she met Doug. During our interview, they described that they immediately felt a certain bond -- they both came from single parent families and they were both born in England, within sixty miles of each other.

Doug's parents separated when he was in grade school. He grew up with his mother and brother. In contrast to Gloria, though, Doug was a high school graduate. He attended a college in Toronto and completed one and a half years of a three year Civil Technology Program. He left that program in 1974, to work as a carpenter for a housing construction sub-contractor in Edmonton.

"Moved west to make my fortune," he offered. "Still looking for it -- waiting for it."

Doug felt that, since he and Gloria came together six years ago, they had been moving in a positive direction.

> I think we've been growing since then. It's been a tremendous personal growth for me. Actually being -- if I could use the term -- a bread winner for the family, and having that responsibility. Plus the responsibility of being a husband, and the added responsibility of being a parent -- an instant parent to a 4-year old, at that point. It's been great for me.

Doug was now a draughtsman, working as part of a "term-uncertain" contract -- which may run until 1986. Doug was

also in the third year of a course in popular piano for adults -- begun as a result of his daughter's school having established the piano program for adults. He and Gloria reportedly began the course together, but only Doug continued after the first class. However, that is getting ahead of the story.

Gloria indicated that, in 1978, it was not in either of their plans to marry one another. The story is most vivid in her own words:

> It's almost like one of those tacky novels; one day we woke up and realized that we really really wanted to be together. We had to move! I had a reputation that trailed me wherever I went. The marriage -- the relationship was doomed to failure if we stayed. So we did our little back-to-the-land number. We moved out to Bonnyville and we bought an acreage. We grew vegetables and slaughtered pigs, and did all those kinds of things that I think are important in everybody's life.
>
> It was a good thing, it was a really good thing. For one thing, it solidified our relationship, which then meant that we could do other things. We could face other things, like layoffs and uncertainty, being broke and moving around. So we lived in Bonnyville for three and a half years -- 1978 to 1981.
>
> Then we came back to Edmonton. We came back to Edmonton because we were too broke. The company that Doug worked for, and the company that I worked for, went bankrupt -- owing us money and leaving us with no jobs. Bonnyville's close to where they didn't build the Imperial oil plant.
>
> We had to move! There was no possibility of work in Bonnyville, for either of us. We had already planned the move, rented the truck and all the rest of it.

By serendipity, it seemed, Doug was offered a job in Edmonton, as a project draughtsman. For several months, he had been applying for jobs with various levels of government. But he credited this particular opportunity to

his earlier Civil Technology Program, and ten years of waiting for a job like that to come along.

He declared:

> Oh, we thought it was just dynamite! Here I got a job, guaranteed for five years, at least! It was that contract position, and we thought: "This is great, we're in the money!"

It appeared the excitement was equally real for Gloria:

> Doug phoned from a phone booth on Stony Plain Road, where the trucks *roared by* -- and he's calling long distance in the middle of the day -- and he's yelling: "I got the job, I got the job, I got the job!" It was just -- it was a great moment. That was really grand!"

But Gloria went on to concede that it was not all sweetness and light:

> When we did finally extricate ourselves from our home in Bonnyville, we had lost close to $35,000 in the process. Which was everything -- I had been a homeowner before -- every kind of paper gain that I had ever made from "trading up" houses, and an awful lot of "sweat equity."
>
> When we came to Edmonton, we were renting and still trying to make payments on the house in Bonnyville. It was a disaster! The real estate market wasn't moving and we were tremendously broke. When we sold it -- it was just such a relief, even though we lost. We lost everything essentially. That was all we had. So we rented.

Since returning to Edmonton, the family moved frequently. They tried rental accommodation in Castle Downs, Old Strathcona and a downtown high rise. Finally, in May of 1984 -- spring of the year that Gloria began university -- they bought a condominium townhouse in Mill Woods.

Gloria explained:

> To tell you the truth, we never figured we'd live in a condominium. Our expectations always were that we would live in a single-family home. But the fact of the matter was that we couldn't afford anything else.
>
> We never thought we'd live in Mill Woods: Mill Woods was one of those places that 'other people' lived in. So that was a bit of a shock too. I was really surprised. I've always thought of Mill Woods as kind of temporary, transient -- not really a nice place to live. But that changed. It really did.
>
> I have to tell you, that since moving here, for me personally, and I think, from what I see from [daughter], this has been the best move we've ever made. The sense of community here really surprises me, and I am really comfortable with the actual living setup.

The townhouse in question was in a well-maintained complex in a pleasant, established area of Mill Woods. The neighbourhood seemed to be about ten years old, and consisted of a mixture of condominium complexes and detached homes. The townhouse itself was more elaborate than conventional row housing. The unit was off the street, included covered parking at the door and had a fireplace, as well as a small private yard area. The drive to the university took about thirty minutes. Gloria strongly rejected the use of the bus system as impractical in her situation.

Their home was tastefully furnished. The kitchen displayed a microwave oven and dishwasher, in addition to other standard appliances. They also owned an earlier model home computer, for which they felt they had paid too much. The monitor for the computer was their only television set.

Gloria did most of her studying at the university, so

there was no special study area set aside at home. When she did study at home, she used the kitchen table:

> Yes, we have a very nice spare room. We have a desk and all the rest of it; all my books are up there. In fact, it's a damned inconvenience because all my dictionaries and reference books are up there and I spend a lot of time running up and down the stairs. But it doesn't prompt me to move, because here it's convenient and the light is good. I just feel at the center of my home here."

During the short period of time they had lived in the area, Gloria indicated that they have developed "the usual network of neighbours." In all likelihood, her feeling of community integration had something to do with the fact that, during the fall federal election campaign, Gloria campaigned door-to-door in the neighbourhood, for the Progressive Conservative candidate.

Gloria was chairman of the board of her daughter's after school care center. Both the center and her daughter's school were thirty minutes away from the Mill Woods area, by car. Her daughter had attended the same school since the family returned to Edmonton.

Gloria saw her involvement in this board activity as important for her daughter, but also for herself.

> That's one of the things that I am extremely proud of doing. It's one of the few places where I feel I have a lot to do with something that is very positive.

Gloria's motivation and decision to attend university emerged through the complex interaction of a number of factors. As far as her work history was concerned, Gloria indicated that, as a high school drop out, she had always

had to work at jobs such as cocktail waitress and/or bartender:

> It is fast money and you don't have to worry about your qualifications. By the time 1982 rolled around, I simply couldn't stand it any more. For one thing, I'm getting too old to do that. I am getting too old to stay up at night and enjoy it, and be up the next day. For a person with my history of "substance abuse," it's not a good thing to work in.
>
> So I spent an awful eight months at home. Doing the rounds of: a place called Options for Women, which is a career counselling service specifically for women; the Career Center; the people at the University; the people at Grant MacEwan -- all those kinds of counselling services.
>
> I decided to take a one-year program at Grant MacEwan, in the Administration of Volunteer Programs. The idea of having a 'legit' kind of desk job at the end of a one-year program was thrilling. So I did the program.
>
> Even before the end of the one-year program, I got a job as a volunteer coordinator for a senior citizens organization in the inner city. If the truth be known, I didn't really want to be a volunteer coordinator -- but it was a job! I know that now. Maybe I even knew that then. But I just didn't want to say it because it was SO LEGIT, and that was SO NICE -- that I had a job. I had a place to go to, and it had a measure of respect, and I didn't have to say to people that I WORKED in bars and things like that.
>
> I worked there for close to a year, and left there -- under a cloud. There was an internal scuffle. There was a volunteer who wanted my job and who eventually got it. I'd never played those kind of office games -- just played them all wrong.
>
> So, I was unemployed; it was a disaster! I just had lost all of those things that I'd come to really value. At the same time, my father was diagnosed as having lung cancer. So, within a matter of weeks, we were doing the whole hospital -- 'Yes it's lung cancer' -- treatment at the Cross -- rehabilitation, all the anger and all that sort of thing.
>
> Right at that time, Doug was laid off from February until May! It doesn't sound like a long time when you say February until May, but oh, it seemed like f-o-r-e-v-e-r! We had a real dose of it!
>
> Nothing was going right: I didn't have a job; Doug didn't have a job; my father was with us -- my father is a difficult-to-live-with-person at the best of times. That didn't make it any easier. It was just a disaster!
>
> Not much thought was going on for future things

> either. I was interviewing and doing all those kinds of things, and this cloud was hanging over me employment-wise, and I thought: "Damn it, I'm going to apply to the university, just in case I don't get a job in September."

This idea of entering university initiated a major reorientation for Gloria. She went on to explain:

> I have these great pretensions about myself. Somehow, being in the first year of an undergraduate program just does not fit in with what "I" consider "I" can do. It would always have been too much of a let down.
>
> That four months at the beginning of this year was a very humbling experience. All of a sudden, I started thinking: "If I'm ever going to do this, if I'm ever going to be educated and be somebody, I'm going to have to start at the beginning. Nobody is going to give me a shortcut."
>
> I've been waiting for somebody to: "Yes Gloria, we would really love to have you in the last year of law school." It just hasn't happened. It's not going to happen!
>
> So I applied, just in case I didn't get a job. It wasn't until about the middle of the summer that I was offered a job that I had wanted all along. I had wanted a job with [a particular volunteer agency] because I'd been so involved. They offered me their job of volunteer coordinator -- to have the job of volunteer coordinator at [the volunteer agency] is about the best that you can get.
>
> All of a sudden, I had the job that I wanted -- or I'd said I wanted -- all along. And I didn't want it, because I was going to go to school! That was a toughie. That was really a toughie.
>
> I still hadn't been accepted [at university], and here's this huge ego thinking: "They have to accept me." There was no doubt in my mind that they had to. That's why, when they almost didn't, it came as such a shock.
>
> Through a loss of documentation in the registrar's office, I almost didn't get accepted. The outrage was incredible! I could not believe that they were doing this to me! There was a great sense of that loss of control and that loss of power. I still haven't come to terms with it. . . . This whole process is really humbling. That's probably the biggest problem that I'm going to have to deal with."

When asked to outline her educational objectives, Gloria put it this way:

> People want to see something substantial -- they want you to say right at the beginning, what it is that you're going to do. If the truth were really known -- Doug knows this -- I don't know what it is that I want to do. I have the marks that could probably get me into law school, and I have the tongue that could probably do me quite well there. I'm a prolific writer, and all those sorts of things that would make it appropriate for me to be a lawyer.
>
> I say that I will apply to law school. Whether I will or not, I really don't know. I am glorying in the idea of being a first-year general arts student. That's a real switch for me -- because I've never considered myself wishy-washy, but I really don't want to commit myself until I know myself a little better in the university setting.
>
> I want to be a student, have no political involvements, no lobbying involvements and no volunteer involvements. I want to see how the ground lays. I just want to see how it is, before I commit myself to anything. It could be -- at the end of this year -- that I see that it is just not something I want to do at all. In which case, that would be OK. It wouldn't be the end of the world. I wouldn't be terribly crushed. Although, gawd only knows what I'd do for work. But it's really important to me that I take this slowly and I sort of savor each step along the way. I want to use my mind, which, according to all accounts and my experience, is a rather fine instrument that I haven't been using a great deal lately.

Profile - Sam Maunder

Age: 29 Married: 8 yrs.

Spouse: Ellen - Age: 29 - Occupation: Bank Officer

Dependents: One daughter - Age: 7 mo.

Faculty: Education Dept.: Elementary

Admission Status: Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Photo Interpreter (Unemployed)

Program Year: First

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Student Situation After Completion of the Term

At the completion of his first term, Sam received a grade of six in music and grades of seven in both micro economics and English. He felt that he had "bombed" his music course. When I asked if he had spoken to the professor about this grade, he stoically replied that there was no use -- he seemed to be suggesting, as he had at other times, that if he had deserved a better mark, he would have received it.

At the start of his second term, Sam remarked that his courses looked heavier than what he had experienced in the first term. He was concerned because the second-term courses in mathematics and statistics included many assignments and his time was limited.

The statistics course was apparently already giving him problems. It was scheduled for first thing in the morning, and Sam found himself sleeping through his alarm. He was continuing in his struggle to find time to complete an

Athabasca University history course, which he had commenced prior to entering the University of Alberta.

Notwithstanding these factors, Sam registered in four courses for the second term. But during the second term, because of his time constraints, he found that he had to drop one of the courses.

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

As high school students, Sam and Ellen Maunder both attended Bonnie Doon Composite High School in Edmonton. They reported that they had known each other for about fifteen years. They began dating thirteen years ago and, as indicated above, had been married for eight years.

Both had diplomas from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT): Ellen, in secretarial technology and Sam, in forestry technology. Sam and Ellen had a strong commitment to their church. Both sang in the choir, and Sam was involved in counting and accounting for the funds received from the weekly collection.

Of all the participants in the study, the Maunders seemed to have the most evident and sustained contact with extended family, primarily parents. Much of this contact seemed to be related to their new daughter Kelly, but the reported relationships seemed to take the form of general support as much as an interest in a grandchild.

Sam had a dry, almost cynical, sense of humour and a ready wit. Ellen was very quick and had an infectious laugh. During the interview process, the Maunders

described themselves as a "laid-back" couple. My first meeting with them would have caused me to describe them as polite, but a little aloof and somewhat distant. Ellen described Sam as a bit of a loner and somewhat shy; I would have called him, reserved. Later in the interview process, I discovered that, during the first interview, Sam had been suffering from strep throat, a factor which may have contributed to my initial impression. Subsequent meetings were warm and both participants seemed genuinely interested in the process.

Since, of necessity, our interviews took place during the very limited evening time periods normally set aside for shared family time, their young daughter Kelly was present for all interviews. Kelly's parents reported that, during their shared times, she often remained awake and with them until about ten o'clock, when they all retired.

Kelly was a very active and vocal child but did not appear to be cranky or ill-tempered during any of the interviews. On a couple of occasions, she fell asleep in her father's arms, and he continued to hold and rock her throughout the interview -- family time became a scarce resource during Sam's first university term.

Early in the term, during the day, Kelly was taken care of by her grandparents. By early October, after much searching, a suitable day home was found for Kelly.

But, returning to the matter of her parents' backgrounds, Sam graduated from NAIT in 1976. Upon

graduation, he commenced study for a B.Sc. in botany at the University of Alberta.

He reported:

> That only lasted for the first term -- I dropped out. I was intimidated -- just that simple. I just didn't like having to run from one class to another -- from one part of the campus to the other, in ten minutes, in the dead of winter. When you get to the class, there is absolutely no place to sit down. I just didn't understand how a person could learn in that situation. I knew I couldn't!

Sam subsequently took a position with the provincial government, and over seven and a half years, moved from being a Forestry Aid to a Supervisor of Photo Interpreters. During this period Sam availed himself of some management courses provided directly through his employer.

In 1982/83, he also took courses in the Personnel Administration Certificate Program, through the University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension. Sam held his supervisory position for about three and a half years. But, he observed wryly:

> We were so efficient in what we did that we worked ourselves out of a job. We finished up the project a year ahead of schedule. They just didn't have anything for us.

In March of 1984, Sam was one of the last of his group to be laid off. He remained on unemployment insurance until he commenced his university program in the fall of 1984. Since becoming unemployed he had continued to search for employment, and shortly after starting university, he was hired by a transportation firm, to work full-time loading

freight in the evenings. As a result, as his university program began, Sam was attending classes during the day and working an evening shift. He would generally return home between 1:00 and 2:30am. During the term, his regular "days" off work were Monday and Tuesday evenings.

Accordingly, our interviews were conducted during the evenings of his days off. Regularly, when I arrived for the interview -- around 6:30 or 7:00pm -- Sam would be napping and Ellen would wake him. He admitted that he had to catch sleep when he could.

The time schedule aside, Sam indicated that he enjoyed his new employment -- the people and the challenge of the work. Coordinating his work schedule and university, particularly with regard to getting transportation home early in the morning, was a continuing problem. More will be said about this later; suffice it to say that Ellen -- as a treat for Sam -- was enticed to drive him to and from work on Saturdays.

Sam was working in the evenings for only one reason, according to Ellen, "We do need the additional income."

Ellen graduated from NAIT in 1975. Since graduation, she had been employed full time, through a succession of increasingly responsible positions. She moved from being a secretary, through a position as administrative assistant, to her current position with a chartered bank, which she joined in 1980.

She related:

> I was fortunate enough to get in. The unfortunate part is that I am not working as a Mortgage Officer. I was trained as a Mortgage Officer, but at the point when I got in, there was nothing happening in mortgages. So I'm in commercial credit area, which I don't care for much.
>
> Right now, after maternity leave, I'm on "overrun." So I haven't really got a full-time post yet. I actually like it -- very little responsibility right now. If they keep me on overrun for the next three years, I won't be too upset.

For Ellen, however, Sam's layoff was a significant disappointment. She had intended to stay home and raise her new daughter. As financial circumstances dictated, she reluctantly returned to employment, but this was well before it was firmly decided that Sam would attend university.

Of her disappointment, Ellen observed:

> Once you're back at work and established, it gets easier. So, whether or not he's at home as a sitter or taking university, really makes no difference at all. Because the thing for me was, I had to go back to work, and I'm established back there now, and I'm over that hump.

An interesting connection with Ellen's employment -- which gets us a little ahead of the story -- was that through the university term, in addition to everything else that was happening, the Maunders cleared snow from the sidewalks around the bank's foreclosed mortgage properties, a task which apparently required some assistance from Ellen's father.

The Maunders lived in a pleasant home with an attached garage in Millwoods. They purchased the house in the winter of 1984, prior to knowing that Sam would be laid off. They

also owned a condominium townhouse in the west end of Edmonton, which was apparently their former residence. They were hoping to sell the condominium, but until the real estate market improved, for a nominal rent, friends were "house sitting" the townhouse -- to prevent deterioration.

The general area of Mill Woods, in which they now lived, was probably about 10-15 years old. But it was within a very short distance of the southern edge of the city's developed land.

The home was not expensively furnished. On the other hand, they owned a piano and what appeared to be a good stereo system -- a further indication of their love of music. As with many of the other participants, our interviews were limited to the living room and kitchen; I, therefore, cannot comment on other physical aspects of their home. They indicated that their television was a black and white model that they had purchased used about twelve years previously.

The Maunders drove a fairly new Japanese automobile and also owned a pickup truck. During the first term, they purchased a new K-car and were attempting to sell the truck.

Sam reported that he did most of his studying at the university or during breaks at work. They had, therefore, not set aside a specific study space at home.

Their church was about a twenty minute drive from their home. Sam usually took the bus to get to the university -- a ride which he apparently enjoyed.

But when working, Sam used a complex combination of transportation methods to get to the university, work and then return home. These complex transportation arrangements arose essentially because he did not have or qualify for parking privileges at the University.

The primary factor which moved Sam to attend university was, of course, the loss of his job. But, as he described it, his initial approach came before his lay-off, and was somewhat tentative:

> Just to keep the options open -- even before I was let go -- I had sent my application for university, because it has to be in that early. But that wasn't until it became painfully obvious that there was no job for me anywhere, because I'm so highly specialized. I'm not really good for anything except exactly what I was doing. So, when we realized that situation, [university is] all we had going for us anyway -- so, that's what we had to do."

As the term began, both Sam and Ellen viewed university as "just another form of education." In Ellen's words, "It's highly overrated." To the Maunders, then, Sam's university program was seen in very instrumental terms; it very much represented a means to an end.

But interestingly, Sam's intent to study Elementary Education also had fairly deep historical roots. He explained the historical context:

> When I went into Forestry as a career -- into NAIT -- I had the interest of either going into Education or into Forestry. I chose Forestry because it was a two-year program. It was just a little bit higher on my list of possible career choices; it seemed a little more interesting. And I've done well! But now that that's over with, the door has opened for me to get into education, which is something that I had wanted to do anyway. So the time is right to do that.

But the practical side of Sam's decision to try university again still related to a calculated career objective:

> There is a baby boom on now -- for the last two or three years. I'm hoping that in four or five years, there will be a need for elementary education teachers. Elementary education is my preference; and fortunately enough, in four or five years, there's going to be a demand -- maybe not an overwhelming demand -- but more than there is now.

It was interesting to note that, in the face of his earlier difficulties with university, Sam's success in his extension courses was helpful in giving him the confidence to try university again.

> As far as education is concerned, I had taken a couple of extension courses while I was working, and I did very well in them. I think that was another -- not a motivating factor -- but a lack of hindrance.

In terms of trying university again, Sam acknowledged that he had probably changed personally. At the beginning of the term, he reported that he was also bringing some new personal strategies to bear on the situation:

> I've also taken pains to ensure that I can get to the class earlier and have enough time to get from one class to the other. So, those nit-picky things, I've managed to plan around. So I don't have that problem anymore. I also took pains to ensure that the courses I took this year were -- not "mickey mouse" so much -- but certainly something even I could teach -- aside from English.

In fairness, it seems appropriate to indicate that as the term progressed, Sam discovered that what he had thought were mickey mouse courses, turned out -- to his delight -- to have more substance than he had anticipated.

As a final note in discussing Sam's circumstances, it was interesting to examine the reasoning used by the Maunders, to rationalize Sam's university/employment situation. After being on unemployment insurance for several months, but having decided to attend university, Sam viewed the chance to have the freight handling job as an opportunity that might not present itself a second time. The comments which follow were made just prior to Sam's being offered the evening job. He saw his choice as follows:

> If I was to stay on UIC, I would have to relegate my studies to night school. [In that case] I could collect UIC, because I would be available for a job if it happened during the day. I lose UIC because I am taking the day courses. But now I have a good possibility of getting that evening job.
>
> Also, UIC is only up until the end of March; after that there's nothing, and there's no guarantee that I can find any kind of job at the end of March -- aside from telephone soliciting. You've got to be pretty hungry to actually get a job like that.

Ellen concurred:

> We had originally worked it out so that he could go back and take his three courses at night, and he would still be eligible for his UIC. So financially, that would be all right, but with the job coming up, I'm hoping that we can handle all that. It seems like a heavy load.

Edna Sheskey

Age: 32 Married: 10 yrs.

Spouse: Frank - Age: 34 - Occupation: Millwright

Dependents: Two sons - Aged: 10 yrs. & 8 yrs.
One Daughter - Age: 5 yrs.

Faculty: Agriculture & Forestry

Admission Status: Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Homemaker

Program Year: First

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Student Situation After Completion of the Term

By mid November of her first term at the University of Alberta, Edna had dropped her courses in English, chemistry and agriculture. She did complete her economics course, in which she earned a grade of six.

As the term had progressed, Edna found that she was having difficulty handling "the whole situation," and the experience was less than enjoyable.

For example, part way through the term, Edna discovered that at registration she had been advised to take a particular full-year chemistry course which was apparently inappropriate for her program. She was finding the course increasingly complicated. By November, in her estimation, it was clear that her grades would not be sufficient to pass this course.

Her grades in English were fine, but severe time constraints prevented her from completing assignments. And,

although her marks were also good in her agriculture communications course, she dropped it because, as she put it, "I just couldn't face another day in that group!"

Edna's assessment of the problem, focused on two major elements: Lack of an adequate personal support system and taking courses which were not of "central" interest to her. At the end of the term, Edna was still avoiding telling her extended family that she had dropped most of her university courses.

Edna felt that she had failed. Now, she knew that she would not meet the longer-term personal deadlines she had set for herself. She felt that she would have to move a little more slowly in achieving her goals. She rationalized the situation by suggesting that maybe the children still needed more support than she had realized.

As the fall term came to a close, Edna was planning to continue her university program by taking another economics course in the second term. She also planned to take a required remedial mathematics course, which would ultimately allow her to proceed with program-required courses in mathematics and chemistry.

As it turned out, Edna took no further courses in the second term. She declared, "Everything is on hold." But Edna was also considering other educational approaches:

> I've been kind of looking at NAIT as an alternate, although I really don't think I'd be comfortable withdrawing from university altogether. I'd like to continue to work towards my degree. But I don't know; I'm going to think about it."

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

Edna's career, to the point of entering university, had essentially been as a homemaker. She was born in Edmonton, graduated with senior matriculation from high school in Edmonton, and was married in Edmonton.

During the interviews, Edna spoke quietly and often seemed to understate the strength of her feelings. More than many of the other participants in the study, she described her feelings or past actions by quoting her thought processes or conversations. Although she was not smoking when the term began, during the final interview, she was. Curiously, it was the reverse for her husband.

Although Edna indicated that she considered the prospect of attending university when she finished high school, she worked as a secretary instead: "Decided to explore the world."

It appears that personal exploration ended when she met her husband Frank, and as she put it: they started having kids.

Frank was transferred to Fort McMurray shortly after they were married. They lived in Fort McMurray for approximately a year, and with some irony, reported that they left just before the Syncrude boom hit the town. At the time, they were concerned about the lack of medical facilities and the effect of Frank's work schedule on their family life.

"Things were getting pretty silly," Frank explained.

"You couldn't refuse overtime, and overtime was every day. You couldn't say, 'No thanks, not today.' So I was away from home an average of about fourteen hours a day. Then when I did come home: Sack out, and that's about it."

The Sheskeys returned to Edmonton for the birth of their second son. A few months later, again following Frank's job prospects, they moved to Uranium City, Saskatchewan.

But for the last few years, they had lived in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, about sixty miles outside Winnipeg. The family built a house in Portage La Prairie, and from reports seemed to have established pretty firm roots in the community. One of the community activities Edna reported having been involved in was Scouting.

During the latter period of living in Portage La Prairie, Frank worked in the town; but during some of the time they were in that community, he was away from home and involved in construction in the north.

During the winter of 1983/84, Edna attended the University of Manitoba. She took her first year of agriculture over the winter term. For the full term, she daily commuted sixty miles each way.

Edna began her University of Manitoba program with five courses, but soon found that she couldn't keep up the pace. She was rising at five thirty in the morning and arriving home late, driving through the "mean" prairie winter. She indicated, however, that she was very pleased with the marks

she received in the three courses she completed. At the end of her year at the University of Manitoba, Edna reported she felt like, "Well, I can succeed at this!"

In April of 1984, just before the completion of her university year in Winnipeg, a job opportunity came up for Frank, which would allow the family to return to Edmonton. Edna recalled her reaction, "Yeah, sure. I can go to the University of Alberta!"

She went on:

> So, it all happened within about two minutes worth of thought -- that's what we were going to do. I hadn't even completed. I immediately wrote away and started the wheels moving, to get an application for admission sent out before I had even finished the courses -- written the finals and that kind of thing -- at the University of Manitoba.

The family moved to Edmonton in the early summer of 1984. At the time of the interviews, Frank appeared to be well employed as a millwright with a mining firm operating in the Northwest Territories. He was away from home for two weeks at a time. A situation which, although not new to the family, was probably tolerated rather than desired. Frank referred to his twice monthly return home as "reentry" -- a regular transition which involves him in some degree of personal struggle.

Frank was a man of few words. During the interviews, he spoke very quietly, tended to interject only occasionally, and then, with very short comments or phrases of two or three words.

This description should not leave the impression that

Frank was not interested in the process of the study. Quite the contrary,, for example, in one instance, he was making coffee while our interview at the kitchen table continued. Later, he asked Edna to check the taste of his final product, because he had gotten so interested in what was being said that he had lost count of the number of spoons of coffee he used.

Frank indicated that he was happy in his trade and had no personal interest in attending university himself. He did feel, however, that he had gone about as far as possible in his trade. He had a Journeyman's Ticket as a millwright, which was a three-year program he took in the late 1960s. He also took some supplementary vocational training:

> I took one year of heavy machinery -- it used to be called the Manitoba Vocational Center. They've changed the name -- given everything Indian names now -- and a Welding course -- same place.

Frank revealed that he was a firm believer in a person getting an education or a trade. His feeling was that if a person does not have a skill, trade or a profession, it is very difficult to make a living.

As outside activity, while in Edmonton, Frank enjoyed being a cub leader. In addition, through his father-in-law, Frank was somewhat reluctantly involved in the Masons. Unfortunately, he found that he was much younger than most of the members and had little in common with them. Most of his time in Edmonton, however, involved domestic responsibilites, particularly since Edna entered university.

Edna explained that her intention to attend university had been "lingering" about for some time. The process in arriving at the decision to attend apparently involved much discussion between her and Frank. Edna acknowledged that she probably wouldn't have entered university as soon as she did, had it not been for Frank's encouragement.

The catalyst seemed to be Edna's feeling like a "nobody." She related:

> I realize it's a noble thing to raise your children, but it isn't something that I could see myself doing -- staying home. When they're 18 years old -- having nothing at the end of that time.
> At some points I'd say, "That's it, I'm getting a baby sitter and going to work."

But this notion was tempered by a strong sense of the difficulties she would face.

> Unless you work through the logistics of *taking the kids* -- babes in arms -- to the day care every day -- back and forth. That got to be exhausting -- just thinking about that. So we kind of ruled that out -- waited until they started to get into school. Then it became more reasonable to attempt going to school myself.

It appeared that, to some degree, her desire to attend university was also driven by a desire -- shared between the two of them -- for Edna to be financially independent.

Frank reasoned: "Working in the mines -- I'm not saying I'm going to get killed -- but if I get hurt, killed, whatever happens . . ."

Edna completed the thought: "I'd be capable -- to be self-sufficient without having to depend on him."

As Edna's desire to return to the work force increased,

she attempted to find work. But she found that the job market was very tight and her secretarial skills were no longer adequate.

She reassessed her own objectives in terms of the kind of career she actually wanted to be involved in. Secretarial work offered her no long-term challenge: "I just felt that I wanted something that would require more from me in terms of exercising my intelligence."

Frank reported he was in full agreement:

> I tried to convince her to go back to university. Instead of bringing somebody coffee, have somebody else bring you the coffee. Get the other end of the stick for a change.

About two years previously, in Portage La Prairie, the decision was finally taken:

> I thought about going to school and having a career. I would be a wage earner!
>
> I guess more self-respect too. Not that I didn't respect what I was doing. But it was getting to where I had so much leisure time, it was driving me up the wall!
>
> At first I thought, "Oh this is crazy. You can't expect me just to jump back into it!"
>
> So I felt a bit pressured and nervous and scared about even writing away for an application form to the university. But at the same time, that kind of went along with a: "Wow! This is going to be OK! This is something I've really wanted for a while." It was kind of a relief, finally doing something about it. So, it was mixed emotions.

Apparently, choosing her program in Agriculture also required considerable "deliberation." Edna explained:

> We decided that we'll always need food in the world. I guess, living in a farming community, you sort of develop an interest in the things that go on around you.
>
> I took aptitude testing with the counselling

> department [University of Manitoba], and they said these are the fields that you obviously are interested in, from your responses. So it helped zero in.

Edna's career objective was a government or industry position in the area of entomology and plant diseases. She acknowledged, however, a continuing interest in developing her self-confidence. She expected that a future job and her self-confidence were related: "I hope that it wouldn't just end with a job. I hope I'd be able to keep on advancing in my knowledge about the field -- for my own sense of self-worth."

While not immediately related to Edna's University of Alberta experience, it was interesting to note that her attendance at The University of Manitoba did cause some interesting negative reactions among the family's peers in Portage La Prairie.

Frank reported that friends and co-workers were telling him that Edna would leave him as soon as she received her degree. Frank recalled, "Even the personnel manager of the company I was working for, [had] a 'fatherly talk' or whatever it was. He was about 60-65."

Frank attributed this type of attitude to the nature of the people and the community. "Portage is a farm town, and still very traditional. Women can go to work as long as they're tellers in a bank, department store or cafe. But that's about it. It's not a hard and fast rule, but it is -- practically."

Edna confirmed that she came under the same pressure,

and that she found the attitudes discouraging. She found herself thinking: "Well gee, if they think I can't make it, maybe I'll never make it."

But she rationalized:

> I'm sure everybody goes through that too--especially when you get older. You think, "Oh, my brain's gone sluggish."
>
> But, at the same time too, you resent it. It made me feel like, "I'm just going to go prove them wrong!"
>
> I think it's probably part of the driving force. I'm not going to let them see me kind of dwindle and fade, and go back to what I was doing. Maybe it was good to have that attitude: "Why am I doing this? I'll show them!"

Neither Frank nor Edna felt that these attitudes were prevalent in their Edmonton setting. However, in the face of these reported negative attitudes in her Manitoba situation, it was interesting to reflect upon the fact that, at the end of Edna's first term at the University of Alberta, one of the key problems she identified was her lack of integration into the community and the accompanying feeling of no longer having the valuable personal support system which she enjoyed in the Manitoba setting.

In my visits to the Sheskey home, I never really did meet the children. They were usually outside playing, in their rooms, or watching television in the living room. Often, when I arrived for interviews, the house was surrounded by many children, all engaged in active play.

Their parents reported that the kids were not involved in hockey, skating or soccer; but as a family, they occasionally went to the library or the Space Science

Centre. The boys both took piano lessons and attended Cubs once a week. The family avoided shopping on Saturdays, because of the crowds -- Saturday was home time.

One reported family activity involved renting a video recorder for the weekend and watching several family-oriented movies.

Not unexpectedly, since returning to Edmonton, the Sheskeys had developed regular contact with their extended family, particularly Edna's parents and siblings. Edna indicated, however, that the family all had their own attitudes about her attending university. She suggested there was general encouragement, but some dissension also.

Frank put it this way: "The family's divided between: Why isn't she taking seven courses -- or two years in one? To, why is she going back to university in the first place?"

While their extended family may have harboured mixed feelings about what Edna was involved in, Edna and Frank clearly felt that, within the context of their immediate neighbours, they were not unusual. Edna pointed out that one neighbour -- another mature student -- was also returning to university this fall. He reportedly already had one degree. The woman who lived across the street was also expressing an interest in returning to school. Edna declared, "No one here is surprised by the phenomenon."

The Sheskeys clearly felt that they were not out of the ordinary when compared to the other people on their block. Their knowledge of the neighbours' plans suggested that,

even in a short period of residence, the Sheskeys had become integrated into their neighbourhood. This notion was further enhanced by the fact that, during one of the interviews, a neighbour phoned to tell Edna that one of her children was outside without a coat.

The Sheskey's home was located on a side street in central Mill Woods. The area appeared to be about ten years old. The House was a white bungalow with no particular special features or special landscaping. During the fall, a tent trailer was pulled up on the front lawn in front of the house. The house had no drive or garage.

They purchased their house immediately upon arriving in Edmonton, and during the early stages of the fall, were involved in renovating the basement. This renovation project included a bedroom for one of their sons and a study room for Edna. The study area was sparsely furnished, but comfortable. As a surprise for Edna, Frank installed an extension telephone in the study.

Our interviews were all conducted at the kitchen table. The kitchen contained all the standard appliances, including a microwave oven which the children used to heat their lunches when they came home from school. Just inside the living room, a home computer sat on a shelf. It was apparently generally used by the children to play games.

Most of the family's activities and services were located close by. The sitter for Edna's five year old daughter lived just two houses away. The school was a three

to five minute walk for the boys. The boy's music lessons were also within walking distance, and their Cub meetings were held at the school.

Unfortunately for Edna, the bus ride to the university was long, particularly when she was attempting to travel in the non-peak hours. The bus could take up to one hour and fifteen minutes. She tried to use the travel time to study or read, but she suffered from motion sickness.

Edna did not qualify for a parking spot at the university, but her journal indicated that she made significant use of the family car. When we had interviews, the car was usually parked at the curb in front of the house. During the winter, a power cord led from the front steps to the vehicle on the street. Edna experienced some starting and snow problems during the winter.

In October, the family took a bank loan to purchase a 1979 Chevrolet Malibu. This was partly because Edna was having problems with their old vehicle, which was four years older than the Malibu. Frank indicated that concern about the recession prevented him from considering a new car purchase.

As the first term at the University of Alberta commenced, both Edna and Frank reported feeling good about Edna being at university. Frank declared: "Actually, it's been a lot happier atmosphere since she started going to university."

Edna elaborated:

> You know, you get outside of yourself and it's something that, I think, everybody needs -- outside interests.
>
> Before, I had trouble developing -- "Where should I take myself?" But it probably all comes down to: As the kids get older, you get more time to yourself, and it leaves you time and room to do that.

Profile Steven Sharpe

Age: 30 Married: 11 yrs.

Spouse: Pam - Age: 28 - Occupation: P/T Retail Clerk

Dependents: One son - Age: 10 yrs.
One daughter - Age: 8 yrs.

Faculty: Arts Dept.: Political Science

Admission Status: Non-Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Firefighter

Program Year: First

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Student Situation After Completion of the Term

Steven received a grade of seven in his four first-term courses. Since he was intent upon a grade point average of 7.5 (Minimum requirement for entry into Law without a degree), he was not completely happy with these results. Steven had some particular concerns about his grade in political science. It appears that though he attended all classes, he was given no credit for attendance and class participation, something he had been counting on. He spoke to the professor about the matter and as the term closed, was awaiting a decision.

In the second term, Steven took his second political science course -- from the same professor. It was Steven's observation that he and this professor essentially dominated the second-term class. Steven remarked that nothing was discussed unless the professor and he allowed it. In this regard, Steven felt that he dominated the student input.

Steven reported no pangs of conscience about his dominance. When I pointed out that his actions were contrary to his previously stated sense of appropriate student behavior, he laughed and agreed. As he entered the second term, Steven seemed more confident than he was during the first term. He reported that he was no longer afraid of making a fool of himself.

However, as Steven's second term was getting under way, he conceded having trouble "getting into" the term, and he wondered if others were feeling the same. He confessed that it didn't feel so much like a second term, as a second year -- a totally different experience.

In the second term, Steven took five courses. He worked out a new arrangement with his employer, whereby he could take his annual vacation one day at a time, in order to attend classes when he might normally be required to work. As a consequence, he was able to maintain his regular class schedule and no longer be faced with the uncertainty of having to trade days with his work colleagues, as he had done in his first term. His wife Pam indicated that it was a perfect schedule.

At the end of the second term, Steven again received grades of seven in all his courses.

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

One of the images of the Sharpe family that sticks in my mind occurred when I was delivering a transcript to their home one weekend afternoon. At my arrival, Steven and the

children were in the final stages of making bread and cinnamon buns. Steven was up to his elbows in flour and dough. On the dining table, he was vigorously pressing flat a roughly rectangular slab of dough. His daughter, Sherry, was using small pieces of dough to create her own special shapes.

Steven was obviously in charge of the whole operation, reportedly because he did a lot of baking at the fire hall. Also, apparently his bread was lighter than his wife's.

At the penultimate moment Steven discovered that there was no cinnamon in the house. Since there had already been one trip to the grocery store, there was some discussion among the parents about how this oversight might have come to pass. Son Cliff -- specimen cinnamon container in hand -- was dispatched to the corner grocery store for a fresh supply. Upon his return, the cinnamon was liberally spread upon the waiting altar of dough. Steven rolled the dough, cut it roughly and placed the buns in a pan to rise.

It was only at that point that the level of activity subsided and the participants dispersed to other areas of family interest, including my delivery of the transcript.

Steven and Pam were married in 1973. At that point in time, neither of them had completed high school. Pam confessed that she may have been the reason that Steven didn't finish school, but he contended that it might have had more to do with the fact that he was a "motorcycle bum." It was only in 1984 that Steven completed his high school

through correspondence.

At our interviews, Steven sipped from an ever-present glass of cola. Steven was a big man -- solid, was my impression -- he was very conscious of his weight. He displayed a certain uneasiness with his responses to my questions. He frequently seemed to be concerned about whether his responses were what I wanted. Often, he cut his narrative short, feeling that it might be boring. He seemed to be relaxed, but there was always a certain undercurrent of intensity.

Steven was quite forthright about his feelings of personal insecurity: "I'm insecure! I do a lot of consulting before I move. I have to be told how good I am before I'll risk it."

When asked to identify the roots of this feeling, Steven responded:

> Does being fat all your life have anything to do with it? It's hard to say. Just insecure I guess -- a bit. I was always overweight in high school, if that counts. Never was good at sports or anything like that.
>
> When I went on the Fire Department, I went through quite a rigid workout thing. I just made up my mind.
>
> I was trying to get on the police or the fire. One of those two -- anything with a pension, was about what it boiled down to then.
>
> I got down to 195 pounds and was in pretty good shape -- was in really good shape! Just slow. But that's the first time in my life I was ever thin. I was 25 years old then. I quit smoking last year and I put on forty pounds.

He added, ironically, "I might have been born thin, I'm not sure."

As noted, Steven was now a firefighter. In spite of

his general sense of insecurity, he appeared to feel reasonably confident of his employment situation. "[The job is] not guaranteed, but even the guys who got laid off aren't laid off any more. So, it's a career. I can retire at fifty-five. I make good money."

Steven went on to indicate that he aimed at being the "best" fireman; he reported that he came second (out of 30) in his firefighter seniority exams, and (coming second) "ticked me right off."

As a fireman, he worked complex sets of days and nights, on and off -- from 6pm to 8am (14 hrs.) or from 8am to 6pm (10 hrs.). For Steven, the one blessing in this arrangement was that the schedule was planned well in advance; he maintained, "I can tell you when I'll be working five years from now."

As the term commenced, in order to attend some of his classes, Steven traded work days with his colleagues. Generally, the trades involve having someone work his shifts during the term in return for some of his days off the next summer. He also took his 1984 annual vacation during the first month of the term, in order to get settled in to the university routine.

Steven expected to be able to study at the fire hall. He mentioned that it was hard to sleep during the night shift, so this offered some potential study time. He indicated that there were about two hours of general duties on each shift, then the time was his own -- with the

exception of emergencies, of course. There apparently tend to be more fires in the heating season, and Steven indicated that if there was a fire during a night shift, his next day "goes all to hell."

In any event, the fire department appeared to officially encourage and accommodate its members taking on personal education projects.

To some degree, Steven appeared to be patterning his program of study after a fellow firefighter who had earlier completed a law degree while in the department, and who was now in practice. Steven's impression of this fellow's university experience seemed to be that he found the arts program, prior to entering law, to be fairly easy. I was left with the feeling that Steven was often comparing his own performance with his image of his colleague's.

Steven was actively involved in the community. He was Sports Director of the community league. Also through the community league, he was involved in a neighbourhood security identification program. He sat on the credit committee of the credit union which was carrying the mortgage on their home. He was also a non-active member of the provincial Conservative Party. Finally, both Pam and Steven -- as part of the condition of their children's participation in sports activities -- were required to work on six fund-raising bingos over the year.

While at university, Steven intended to continue his active community involvement because he felt that the

Faculty of Law prefers student candidates with a demonstrated commitment to their community. Also keeping his ultimate goal of law practice in mind, prior to the beginning of the term, Steven obtained a copy of the LSAT exam, in order to use his "free time" preparing for entrance to the Law Faculty.

Steven proclaimed that Pam was his "booster." He credited her with getting him out of truck driving and into the Fire Department, and now into university.

Pam modestly claimed, "I only help him with what he's already got. I don't have any doubts, he'll make it."

In the past, because of Steven's work schedule, they were able to do many of the routine family chores together. Pam saw some changes ahead, "I tend to think that I am going to have to do a lot more without Steven. We've been used to doing everything together. I realize that it can't be like that forever."

Pam was born in Red Deer, but since her father was in the Air Force, she had also lived in British Columbia and Manitoba. Pam indicated that, because she was from a small town and couldn't cope with big city schools, she dropped out of school when the family arrived in Edmonton.

She remarked, "I'd like to finish high school and do something too. But I still have to tend to the kids. The kids are the most important right now. I have to raise the kids. When I finish raising the kids, I'll have nothing but time for me."

Steven reported that he has tried to talk Pam into continuing high school, but with little success. Pam suggested that she might begin correspondence during the current school year, in hopes of also attending university when her turn comes. During the period of this study, progress on her plan didn't materialize.

Over the interview period, I was left with the impression that Pam was both intelligent and insightful. She declared that she read a great deal and she was quite proud of the family library. Pam described herself as a housewife. She mentioned that her mother was a homemaker all her life and that "she was a wonderful mum." Obviously something Pam, herself, aspired to be.

Pam spoke at a-mile-a-minute, but Steven, interestingly, suggested that she tended to hold things within herself; in his words, "She never reacts."

Pam saw her role as "standing behind" Steven, "making sure he gets where he wants to go." For her, his attending university was a team effort. As she put it, "I think, in order for our marriage to last, it has to be. Because eight years is a long time. That's a big commitment. In eight years, our kids are going to be adults."

Pam reported that she took a good deal of comfort from being well organized in her day-to-day life, but, she suggested that she and Steven were two very different people. Pam liked to plan ahead and arrive at activities a little early. On the other hand, she reported that Steven

is somewhat more impromptu. It was only since the university term began that Steven had purchased a wrist watch.

Since 1983, Pam had been working part-time as a cashier in a department store. She was currently maintaining the job because it was secure and because the family finances were very tight. Over the term, she was hoping to increase her hours of work in order to ease the financial situation.

Finances were a major concern for the Sharpes. For a number of months, they had been trying to sell the solar home they had just finished building for themselves. Steven was concerned that the high mortgage payments might cause them to lose the house, but Pam reassured him that things would work out.

While Steven was at university, it was their intention that the family finances would be left to Pam. "I'm not even going to look," Steven declared. "She's gonna handle it all: worry, get the ulcer. If we lose the house, while I'm writing the finals, she won't tell me til we're done. She is going to take care of all the finances!"

Steven went on:

> I think that's one pressure that really bothered me when I was taking the correspondence. That's when we decided to sell and try and alleviate some of that pressure. It really bothered me. It was hard to study. Every once in a while it just creeps into your mind and you can't quit thinking about it.

Steven felt that their family might not be what one would call average. "Here we are, sitting in a solar home

we built on the back of the lot, instead of the front of the lot. We didn't put gas in it like everybody else. I think we're above normal."

In fact, Steven suggested, that he was often viewed by his peers as someone who didn't do things "the way everybody else does it." But, he asked rhetorically, "If you don't try something new, how are you gonna ever . . . expand?"

Pam had a somewhat different assessment of the nature of the family. She began with a question and then answered it:

> What is a normal family? I think we're probably normal. We're regular, every-day people. We have every-day problems. The same thing happens to us that happens to everybody else. Cliff plays hockey. Sherry's in gymnastics. They're normal kids. We're probably normal.

In fact, because of the family financial situation, Sherry was not in a financial position to register in gymnastics, but she continued her figure skating.

Pam did concede that they may have been a different family in one regard:

> We weren't like the average married couple -- he worked all those funny shifts and I was home all the time. We went everywhere -- all the time -- together. All of a sudden -- Bang! -- we can't do that anymore.

But the Sharpes both conceded that, just like everyone else, they sometimes found themselves trying to keep up with the "Jones" family. At the same time, they suggested that they were not "heavy entertainers" -- they did not have a lot of friends that dropped over to visit.

Both Steven and Pam had extended family members living in Edmonton. Through Steven's period at university, they anticipated that their parents, in particular, would assist in handling some of the logistics of the children's activities, if it happened that neither Steven nor Pam was available.

Extended family influence was also apparent in another way. The fact that Steven's parents had recently separated for a year caused both Pam and Steven to reflect upon the implications of one spouse growing while the other remained static. More will be said of this in later chapters.

The Sharpes viewed their family life as the most important element of their lives. Steven was concerned that, in going to university, he might not have enough time for the children.

> That's hard on me. When you think about that, my son will be out of grade twelve before I'll be out of university. So he's going to grow up, all through puberty and manhood, while I'm still in school. I don't want them to get alienated because I'm in school all the time.

Pam, however, saw this as a short-term problem -- until January -- until, she anticipated, things would settle into a routine. But they were not entering their new situation with a firm plan -- they argued that it was just too complicated -- the whole family had busy schedules. And as Steven maintained, "We never lived like that anyway."

The Sharpes lived in an older area of Edmonton. Most of the original housing probably dated from just after the Second World War. There was some new housing in the area,

but in general, the physical appearance suggested that the housing in the district was stable or declining.

Their home was very unusual for the neighbourhood. It was a solar design, which they had built themselves. They heated with solar energy and wood which Steven collected from outside the city using a borrowed trailer.

For financial reasons, the house interior was not completely finished, but it is certainly comfortable. The house was of a two story open-area design. The furnishing tended to be fairly utilitarian.

Steven's study space, a large older desk, was located in the master bedroom, upstairs. Pam was apparently able to sleep while he studied well into the night -- apparently, only the flipping of pages woke her.

A small sail boat was pulled up at the side of the house, which was set at the rear of a long narrow lot. The Sharpes had lived in the location since 1980, but previously, in a small, run-down 600 square foot house at the front of the lot.

The city apparently had declared that the original house was "non-conforming." In addition, the basement flooded, causing the whole family to have to occupy the living room, and turn it into one big bedroom.

Steven ruefully granted: "It was cozy. It was like a little cabin. Never had to lock the doors because the burglars wouldn't go any where near it. We moved into this house last September."

Pam tried to throw the best light on the experience of their previous home:

> The only thing I think it did to the kids was make them closer to us. I don't think it bothered them, because we always had the hope of -- "We're gonna get a new house, and we're all going to have our own bedrooms."

She went on,

> That was the most important thing about getting a new house -- we'd all have our own bedroom. When we moved in, Sherry thought maybe Cliff was "too young" to sleep in his own room. She thought maybe she should sleep with him. But she got over that, and realized that it was great to have your own room.

The Sharpes indicated that their house was now a center for children of the neighbourhood to gather. This observation seemed to be borne out during some of my visits by such activities as the children's go-cart construction taking place outside.

Their home was located a block and a half from the children's school. Pam's work was about fifteen minutes away by bus, and a trip to the university took about the same time by car. Even though he could ride free of charge on the city transit system, Steven had a strong aversion to using the bus. It was also not clear that his schedule would have allowed for bus travel.

Apparently, the desire to attend university was not a recent one for Steven. "It's always been in the back of my mind, to go back to school. To do something, sooner or later.

> I came out of school, started driving truck. Who wants to be a truck driver all their life? Then I got on [at] the Fire Department. I thought that was the cat's

meow. It turned out that it's kind of a boring -- cynic here I guess -- it's not any fun.

Steven indicated he would never have considered college training, university was his only objective. Over the years, however, he had taken many short courses through the fire department.

The turning point in deciding to attend university, for Steven, was somewhat serendipitous. His sister was apparently taking a psychology course, and as Steven related, "She brought around IQ Tests. My mother always told us how smart we were, but it turns out we were fairly intelligent. That's when I thought about it."

Pam indicated that, even when they were dating, Steven would talk about being a lawyer.

"I always wanted to be a lawyer," Steven continued. "Maybe watched too much Perry Mason or something. Not a contract lawyer, but a criminal lawyer:"

> To go to university is a privilege. But in grade twelve it wasn't. It was just another pain. Who wants to go to university? So I didn't want to go.
>
> But now, I'd rather change the world. I would like to offer something. That's all. Maybe I just want to be more successful than I already am. Politics maybe, or something like that -- United Nations.
>
> I always thought law was a way into politics, and politics was a way into helping mankind. Mushy as that sounds. But you have to have a career in it before you can turn it into something else.

Steven felt that his current job gave him a stable economic platform from which to launch his further education. He was not too concerned about the future job market for lawyers:

"At least I [will] have that education and I [will] have that degree. Then, maybe I'll get into civic politics."

For Steven, becoming a lawyer had a very high priority: "Of everything, it has the second highest."

The first priority, he stipulated, was keeping the family together.

Profile - Brenda Thompson

Age: 38 Married: 10 yrs.

Spouse: Brad Potter - Age: 42 - Occupation: Church Clergyman and Administrator

Dependents: One daughter - Age: 8 yrs.
One son - Age: 6 yrs.

Faculty: Physical Education Dept.: Recreation Administration

Admission Status: Non-Matriculated

Most Recent Occupation: Adult Educator - Church

Program Year: First +

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Student Situation After Completion of the Term

At the completion of her first term, Brenda was somewhat circumspect about some of her final grades. She indicated that she received a six in the psychology course, which she had hated, and a seven in one other course. I had the impression that her other two courses also resulted in grades of seven. She was more forth-coming about her second term results: She averaged 7.5, with grades of eight and seven in her four courses.

At the end of the first term, Brenda was very pleased and excited that her department had accepted her proposal for an independent study program. She realized that the program she had developed in consultation with a faculty advisor might take her about a year and a half longer than she had originally intended to be at university, but she accepted this fact, primarily because she was very enthusiastic about the proposed program. She was also

thinking that future graduate work might not be out of the question.

As the second term got under way, Brenda's husband Brad, who in order to assist with family responsibilities during the first term, had significantly modified his fall work schedule, was now very busy with his job. When asked how that was going to work out for her -- Brenda declared, "It just has to!" If second term grades can be used as the indicator (a very risky proposition), it appears that things did work out for Brenda.

Student Circumstances as the Term Began

Brenda was thirty-eight years old, and to some degree, felt time slipping away. It would be fair to say that Brenda had always been attracted to, or surrounded by, the kinds of career opportunities that a university education makes available in our society. But she suggested that her own employment opportunities had been based more on a certain serendipity, about which she showed a faint discomfort:

> I've had several positions that I've always gotten through a fluke, or through knowing someone. Really shouldn't have been there if you looked at me on a piece of paper. But somehow, some way, things just kind of worked out. So, I always had wonderful job opportunities.

At first meeting, Brenda conveyed a sense of sophistication and competence. As our interviews progressed, however, it was also obvious that she had her share of self-doubt. But it was clear that as far as

employment was concerned, Brenda's personal abilities and character had allowed her to operate in employment environments which normally demand academic credentials beyond those she currently held.

Her description of her most recent part-time job situation, in Edmonton, supported this view.

> I got a job at [The University of Alberta]. One of the faculty was away. They needed someone to fill in, doing the continuing education programming for [organization]. So I filled in there for six months. In fact, I have a quarter-time job, as well as going to school now.
>
> It . . . raised a whole lot of questions for me about what I was doing and what I was going to do with my life. Here I was in another wonderful *faculty* position -- they need a *faculty* person, but they need someone with an M.A. -- and here I sit -- having gone to three universities, and looking for a B.A.

During the 1960s, Brenda took a two-year diploma in recreation, from the University of Guelph. At the time, she liked the idea of a short program:

> I could come out and I could actually work! And my real thing was to work. I wanted to go out to change the world at that point. I was twenty years old. So I took that, and I worked for eight years in Toronto with that background. Did really quite well.

During the period that she was working in Toronto, Brenda did some travelling in Europe. As time passed, the thought occurred to her that she should begin a Bachelor of Arts degree. So she enrolled in three arts courses at York University. But she found that the courses were not very engaging and she lost interest. Another factor disrupting her arts program seemed to have been related to the fact that she got married -- a marriage that later "dissolved."

Brenda suggested, "that turmoil" and her "real life" took over and caused university to be set aside.

Brenda's second, and current marriage, took place in 1974. She and Brad had two children and she declared,

> I guess, when the kids were about two and four, I was going nuts in the house and thought: "Well, this is a really opportune time to take courses."
>
> By that time, we were living down near the University of Toronto. It was a long way to York, so I transferred down.
>
> After I got to U of T -- took [four] courses -- and then this job just sort of happened. It was just too wonderful to not do. So I terminated taking courses.
>
> I worked at the Ecumenical Forum of Canada. It's a mission organization that looks at questions of mission around the church -- both internationally and nationally. And tries to help local congregations and various denominations in the church community to interact around questions of mission.
>
> So I got to work with interesting people and worked a bit with the World Council of Churches. We met in Vancouver last summer. So the whole world was kind of opening up to me, through a job opportunity.

In addition to the travel and international focus of the job, Brenda found that, since the job was located right in her Toronto neighbourhood, she could handle her parenting role fairly easily. For example, she could be home for lunch with the children.

A year previous to this study, because Brad took on an administrative position within the church, the family moved to Edmonton. Brenda described her feelings:

> Coming to Edmonton, for me, was a huge upheaval. It's not just that [Brad's] at work every day and I was here. But it was that Brad was travelling. He had, and still has, I think, access to the same community of people -- even though we are two thousand miles away from Toronto. Whereas, my whole community was just cut -- severed. I had to begin again. So that was a really pretty traumatic year, last year, for us to try

to figure out where we were.

In Brenda's earlier attempts at gaining a university degree, not only were there other activities of daily life vying for her attention, but she also appeared to have had some difficulty in achieving the necessary self-discipline in study -- in meeting the institutionally-imposed requirements. She had never liked writing exams and found writing papers difficult but interesting. Recently, her attitudes seemed to have changed:

> I'm willing to jump any hoop that they put in front of me. I'll even write exams. I think that's part of the discipline I need to learn. I think that there's some validity in seeing things like that."

Brenda continued to acknowledge that she felt that people who can live outside the institutional structure are very special, but she felt that for her, there was a different challenge at the moment: "For a while now, I really want to live within the structure. So there's a shift for me, and I'm willing to jump the hoops."

Because she needed the money, Brenda was continuing her part-time employment -- ten hours a week -- while attending university. One advantage of this was that since the job was on campus, she had access to staff parking. As Brenda entered her first term she was also involved in a dieting program, which she continued over the term.

As mentioned, Brad was a clergyman. He was serving as a senior church administrator in Alberta. He tended to work "office hours," but also had substantial travel obligations

and periodic evening meetings. At our initial meeting, Brad suggested that his role in our interview would be to give me "the facts," and leave the "oomph" to Brenda: Brenda agreed that she was good at oomph.

During our interviews, Brad was very friendly and cooperative, but I often had the sense that I was as much the observed as the observer. For example, I was initially confused over the fact that Brenda and Brad did not share the same last name. Before he good-naturedly explained where I had gone wrong, Brad enjoyed a little game which heightened my confusion. Brad seemed to enjoy testing one's mettle. He also liked hockey.

Brad gained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Toronto in 1962. He received his LL.B. from the Osgood Law School in 1965 and his Bachelor of Divinity in Chicago in 1968. As he described it:

> I basically went to school after high school, because I didn't know what else to do. I just kept getting bachelor degrees. That's nine and a half years of postsecondary education.

With an ironical laugh, he suggested that he could have had two PhDs. in that time:

> However, instead of that, I got three bachelor's degrees -- except both the law and the theology are equivalent of Master's, I guess.

He indicated that he has taken occasional continuing education courses over the years, but he didn't expect to do any more degree work:

> See, if I was to go back, I'd have to go back and do a Ph.D. or something. I don't have the grades to do

it, and I'm just not an academic. So it'd be useless.

I couldn't function in a university setting. I got mad at myself once: I could have done what they're offering -- the Doctor of Ministry -- which is partial academic and partial practical. Because the work that I was doing in Toronto, I think, would have been as creative a Doctor of Ministry as anybody could do. But I didn't realize until it was almost over.

I thought: "Geez, I'll just go and I'll tell them what I did and I'll write it up. I'll spend three or four months writing up the project."

But you've got to go through all this process crap. You've got to get your group, and you've got to start from the beginning, and all that stuff. So, I was a little mad at myself -- that I didn't think about it before I started. Then I could have had a Doctor of Ministry. But there is no way I'm gonna do that now.

I was just mad at myself, because here I'd been doing all this creative stuff, that could have been written up into a really neat paper, that could have been shared. . . . So, it's mad at myself -- and the system, for not saying: "You're right, that should be written up. So why can't we accommodate?" But it's an academic thing: You gotta follow the academic rules.

In Brad's work, the months of September and March were the worst for travel. He could be away for a week at a time. Brad had meetings in the evenings about once a week, and was occasionally engaged in activities on Sundays. But for the most part, there was apparently no clear pattern to his schedule. Notwithstanding this, at the beginning of the term, he and Brenda attempted to identify and plan for major commitments for the coming four months.

Brad also engaged in various activities such as walk-a-thons, demonstrations regarding social issues, political activities and the like -- partly as a result of job responsibilities but also clearly because he had strong personal feeling about social issues.

Brad indicated that when Brenda was home, they watched

television. When she was not home, he read or did little chores. Brad and Brenda reported a nightly pattern of watching the "National" and the "Journal" on C.B.C. from ten to eleven o'clock.

Until their move to Edmonton the year previously, Brenda and Brad lived most of their married life in Toronto, which was also the home of much of their extended family. They reportedly had a "decent relationship" with the extended family that they saw regularly in Toronto, but extended family was not as much an intimate part of their life as their community friends were.

Brenda and Brad did not seem to be particularly happy in Edmonton. In fact, after the first interview, I might have used the term "alienated" to describe them. In Toronto, Brad pointed out, the family was very closely linked to their neighbourhood:

> We were involved in a lot of community activities -- politically, socially, with the church and so on. It was a fairly integrated life, although a very busy life.
>
> We worked in the same community that we lived in. Our family lives were caught up in the same kinds of things as our careers were. I would go to meetings because of my job, and they would happen to coincide with meetings that Brenda had because of her job. Our jobs interacted and interrelated -- at least in the last fifteen months or year and a half before coming here.
>
> Here, it's a little more fragmented, in that I go off to a job that the family does not have much participation in. Before, as minister of a church, the family participated in that church. So we were all part of that deal. Here, I go off to work like the normal person, and do a job. The kids don't really understand what I do; whereas, they did before. And Brenda goes off to her job. We haven't got quite as integrated into the life of this community, the school, or other things. So, it's more fragmented.

> There's more family strains here because our lives are lived in more different locations than before.

Since moving to Edmonton, Brenda and Brad report they had not done much entertaining. On Sunday evenings they occasionally had a barbecue with a neighbour. Brad observed,

> I think there are probably two or three neighbours that we're involved with -- Brenda particularly. Whereas we came from a place where there were forty neighbours -- thirty -- or something like that.

"I think that we're a lot more normal and usual than we would want to admit," Brad remarked. But, he also disclosed,

> There are some areas in which we are not very usual. We're the only ones on this street that had an N.D.P. sign on our lawn in the last month.
>
> I think we've got some different priorities -- certainly from people in this neighbourhood. But we live basically like most other people: We live in a pretty nice house in a middle class suburb, and we've got two children and a cat. We're both fairly well educated. We're unilingual. We're both professionals. We do things that a lot of other people here do. If we can afford it, we go skiing, and we go camping, and so on.
>
> But the place where we're a little off from what I gather is the norm here, is some commitments: to a different form of education than you'll find in the local school and in the system here. And I guess, some of the justice and peace issues that are around. But there are a lot of other people concerned about those.

Brenda agreed, "I think we have some commitments that many other families don't share. That comes from our church connection as well."

But Brenda was less certain that she was yet qualified to be described as "fairly well educated." She expressed her perspective -- of where she fitted in -- slightly

differently from Brad's:

> There aren't a lot of other people in this situation. I feel quite different from most people in this situation -- I mean, in this city. I'm not saying that I'm unique, but I guess I'm saying: I haven't an opportunity to connect with people that share similar values and ideas as much as you [Brad] have through your work.

Notwithstanding the distance Brad and Brenda felt from their Edmonton community, the activities of the children had certainly served to link the family with many community aspects. The children were in grades two and four, and their school was just at the end of the street. Neither parent was impressed with the school situation. For example, a thorny problem related to the school's lunch policy. The school would not allow children from the immediate area to eat lunch on the premises. The students who arrived by bus were permitted to eat lunch at school.

Brenda and Brad had taken this problem up with the school authorities, but apparently, no variance was permitted, regardless of the circumstances of the parents. As a consequence, because of Brenda's attendance at university, the family had arrange for the children to eat at a neighbour's.

Their daughter was involved in swimming lessons, school choir and ballet. Driving to and from ballet was shared with a neighbour. Their son was active in soccer. Both children took piano lessons. The children reportedly watched television from about 5:30 to supper time -- a

favorite program being "The Travel of Nim."

The family lived in a 15-20 year old middle to upper-middle class neighbourhood in south Edmonton. Their split-level house was generally consistent with other homes in the district. Their home was comfortably furnished with many antiques, and in this sense, was somewhat eclectic in decor.

Many of the antiques were apparently from Brad's family. Brenda was reportedly less enthusiastic about antiques or "things old."

The living room, where most interviews took place, contained many reading materials. The house was full of art work in different media, each of which, once again, had a special significance more because of personal meaning rather than as part of a consistent decorative theme.

It took them about 20 minutes to drive to their church and about the same for Brenda to get to the university.

Brenda had no special study space set aside. She tended to do most of her intense studying at the university.

Brenda and Brad continued to own their home in Toronto, which they were renting for an amount sufficient to cover its mortgage payment. Some assets -- apparently the proceeds of an estate -- in Brad's name only, were not included in the family financial statement in Appendix B.

Brenda's decision to return to university seemed to be very much related to the family's move to Edmonton, but it also had strong roots in her past experiences:

> I guess I have not ever believed in the model of education -- about going to university and getting

> educated. There's always been another kind of idea about education in my mind -- that was much broader than that.
>
> On the other hand, I've always had a real desire to participate in that structured educational situation. I went to the University of Guelph to take a recreation course, because it allowed me to be in a university setting. But it was a two-year program.

She conceded that even when she was happily employed at the Ecumenical Forum, she wanted to return to university:

> I was thinking about going back, because I really felt that I needed -- for myself -- to complete that degree.
>
> So, because we moved, I really do have an opportunity. Because a year ago -- here we are! I don't have all the family; I don't have the community ties; I don't have all the pulls of interaction with other people. I can really just focus and go to school. And that's what I decided to do.

Of course, the final decision was not made before Brenda had once again spent a period of time back in the role of full-time homemaker:

> What I felt like was that I had made the break, gone out into the world, and then, I'd had the door slammed -- and I was back in the house again. That was my feeling about it. Even though, I think, there were attempts on Brad's part, to try to soften that.
>
> The reality was that I was in the house. The kids went off to school last September. Brad went off to work, and I was living in this house. It was terrible!

But becoming employed at the university, and having her employer discover that she did not have the credentials they assumed she had, was the final push Brenda needed. As she described it:

> For the first time in my life, I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I've always, somehow -- in the work situation -- been able to. . . Someone's been there to move the boulder over, or whatever.

I'm 38 years old and I guess I just really felt very strongly that it's about time I start moving my own boulders. And this is the first time I couldn't do what I wanted to do, and I really want to be able to do that. I want the key. And part of it is that degree.

As we shall discover in Chapter 3, this study involved no sustained effort to ensure that the participants or their situations as outlined in the foregoing profiles, were representative of the general mature-age, undergraduate student population at the university of Alberta. I suspect, however, that as the description is developed, the question of representativeness will emerge in the minds of some readers. In an effort to respond to this curiosity, a very sketchy aggregate comparison between a description of the general population of mature-age students at the University of Alberta and the eight first-term students just introduced is provided in Table 1

As mentioned in Chapter 1, The University of Alberta Senate Task Force on Mature Students submitted a report in 1983. The report (University of Alberta, 1983: 10-13) included a brief description of the characteristics of the mature student population, based upon a survey of 500 students 25 years of age and over, <u>in all years of study, including graduate students</u>.

Using the findings of the Senate report and the characteristics identified by its authors, Table 1 represents a comparison between the characterisitcs of the population, as identified by that report, and the participants of this study.

Acknowledging the very severe limitations of this kind of comparison, my assessment would be that the participants of this study tended to be very similar to the population

Table 1

A Comparison of Students in the

Senate Study and the Present Study

| SENATE STUDY 1982 | | PRESENT STUDY 1984 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender: | 56% Female<br>44% Male | Gender: | 75% Female<br>25% Male |
| Majority: 25-35 years old | | Majority: 25-35 years old | |
| Entered university from: | | Entered university from: | |
| - full-time employment | 75% | - employment or temp. unemp. | 50 % |
| - employed part time | 14% | - employed part time | 12.5% |
| - roles in home | 8% | - roles in home | 37.5% |
| Married or cohabiting | 66.6% | Married | 100% |
| Home responsibilities beyond self | 75% | Home responsibilities beyond self | 100% |
| Children at home | 40% | Children at home | 87.5% |
| Family income > $25,000 | 50% | Family income > $25,000 | 100% |
| Majority attending for employment preparation | | Many attending for employment preparation | |
| Most registered in Arts, Science or Education | | Most registered in Arts, Science or Education | |
| GPA average or above | | GPA average or above | |
| Married men held concurrent full-time jobs | | Married men held concurrent full-time jobs | |
| Majority had matriculation and some postsecondary study | | Majority had matriculation and some postsecondary study | |

in terms of the characteristics presented. The major difference being that the present study was totally composed of married students and included a greater female representation. It must be remembered, however, that the Senate study included students at all levels of study and that the Senate study would not, in any systematic way, have included students who entered university and then were lost to attrition.

Having "met" the participants of the study, and having gained some impression of their historical context and social setting, let us now turn to a discussion of the methodology of the study itself and an elaboration of some aspects of the rationale underpinning its conduct.

# CHAPTER 3

## Research Approach

### Data Collection

With regard to the primary focus of the study, heed for the student/family situation was initially gained through the selection criteria used for choosing study participants. The selection process limited the study to a purposive sample of the general university student population -- of older, married students seeking their first degree, and entering their first term of full-time study at the University of Alberta. More importantly, the fact that the spouse as well as the student provided data and interacted in the interview situations revealed individual perspectives as well as perspectives arrived at by consensus. These perspectives included perceptions of the family circumstances and the relationship between family setting and the student university experience.

Overview. The primary data collection technique was a systematic and iterative series of interviews involving the students and their spouses. The interviews were conducted over the period September 5, 1984 to December 13, 1984 (Appendix C) -- approximating the first term of the students' University of Alberta experience.

After the first round of interviews, the participants were divided into two groups (two tiers): one group of five couples (tier one) was more intensely involved and participated in four transcribed interviews over the fall term. The group of three remaining couples (tier two) participated in two transcribed interviews only, plus a third interview which involved developing a family timetable, but which was not transcribed.

The rationale for limiting the more intensive interview process to five couples only was based upon the limited resources available to the researcher, in terms of time available to transcribe interviews and react to data during the iterative interview process.

During the same four-month period, to supplement the interview process, all nine of the participants (including myself) maintained journals of personal experiences, perceptions, emotions, and reflections. Specific instructions as to the conduct of this journal-keeping process were included as part of the first interview session (Appendix D).

Finally, as a technique intended to assist me in developing a more broadly based understanding of the experience of mature-age students in general, I involved myself as a participant in the activities of the University of Alberta Mature Undergraduate and Graduate Student Club (MUGS). This involvement extended over the same four-month term as the primary data collection period.

Purposive sample. The study included eight students and their spouses. The original intent was to involve ten student families. In retrospect, considering the research approach and acknowledging the limited research resources, the originally intended sample size would probably have been unmanageable. In any event, as selection of the participants proceeded, circumstances served to restrict the sample size to eight couples.

Participant selection. The Office of the Dean of Students at the University of Alberta coordinates a Mature Student Orientation during the latter part of August each year. During the 1984 orientation, the officials in charge agreed to allow me to include a request for volunteers, as part of their normal orientation registration document (Appendix E).

The Mature Student Orientation at the University of Alberta is coordinated by Student Services but run by volunteer members of MUGS. In mid-August, after receiving permission to include my request for volunteers on the orientation registration form, I became a member of MUGS and participated in some of the preparations for the orientation itself. My membership provided an opportunity to make the group aware of my study, and also gave me an opportunity to engage some of the people in conversation about their own university experiences.

Over the period August 22 to August 25, 1984, I attended all four sessions of the Mature Student

Orientation. I was interested to observe the process of orientation and interact with the new students. I was also interested in monitoring the process of collecting volunteers for the study.

Unfortunately, when the orientation registration forms were printed, my request for volunteers was placed on the reverse side of the form, with no indication that both sides were used. As a consequence, by my making general announcements during the orientation registration process, I drew the registrants' attention to the reverse of the form.

In the confusion of their first day on campus, it was clear that many students were never aware of my request. On the other hand, it was also clear that a number of the volunteers were simply mechanically filling out any form placed in front of them.

In total, some 300 people registered, and thirty-seven registration forms indicated a tentative interest in participating in the study. Application of the minimum criteria for inclusion in the study, reduced this original group to twenty-three. This reduction to twenty-three potential volunteers was essentially based upon the previously mentioned demographic criteria (Definitions and Delimitations, p. 7). The orientation registration form, along with the volunteer request form, provided sufficient information to make this preliminary selection. Forms which were incomplete and did not provide sufficient information were also eliminated at this stage; some students also lived

too far away to make data collection practical.

Of the twenty-three remaining volunteers, twenty were female, and the split between matriculated and non-matriculated students was about even.

The actual process of selecting participants took place over the period of September 1 to 17, 1984. University registration week was during the period September 5 to 7, 1984. The original intent was to have all participants selected during the registration period, but the logistics of making contact, interviewing and gaining agreement simply took longer than anticipated.

The first step in the selection process was to contact the remaining twenty-three students by telephone, in order to confirm their continuing interest and to arrange interviews for selecting the ten continuing participants. Since there appeared to be similarities as well as differences among the remaining candidates, and since I anticipated that the full quota of participants might be achieved prior to contacting all twenty-three volunteers, I undertook an exploratory statistical process (Erickson & Nosanchuk, 1977) to identify a cluster of about ten students displaying similar characteristics with regard to age, years married, and number of children.

The mean, mode, and median for each of the above three characteristics were very similar. Using the mean in each case, I selected a range of approximately one standard deviation on either side; all the students who were between

the ages of 28 and 38, with two children, and who had been married between seven and fourteen years were selected. This yielded a cluster of one male and five female students.

I then included other candidates in the cluster, based upon certain other arbitrarily chosen differences. The two remaining males were included, in order to ensure that there would be a male student in the final group. Two couples with no children were added. The only couple with children in the later teens was added. One female student, entering what appeared to be a non-traditional field of study, was added. Since there was only one couple with a child under the age of two in the cluster, an additional couple with this characteristic was added. The total preliminary list, therefore, included thirteen families; eight of these students had matriculated.

I first contacted the potential participants by telephone to seek their agreement to participate in an introductory interview. During the telephone contact, I advised them that the first interview would be approximately one hour in length. They were informed that the project would be fully explained at the interview, and they would choose then, whether or not to agree to participate further.

I made it clear that participation was strictly voluntary and that the study would require the participation of spouses. The volunteers were also told that, if they chose to participate in the interview, a portion of the first interview would be taped.

During the telephone contact, I attempted to answer, as specifically as possible, all questions raised by the volunteers. At the point of the telephone contact, for various reasons, some volunteers chose not to proceed. In other instances, when I attended the first interview, it was quickly apparent that some potential participants, although interested, were already extremely over committed. In these instances, I exercised my own judgment and counselled two volunteers not to become involved.

As a consequence, it should be noted that this selective elimination placed a further delimitation upon the study: The study did not include married students whose families, at the outset of the term, already manifestly appeared to be overextended.

Our initial interview contact, at the family residence, included my presentation of a standardized description of the project, clarification of ethical matters and the gathering of additional family and personal data (Appendix D). Both participants (student and spouse) were in attendance. These interviews rarely ran longer than one hour. The specific objectives of this interview were as follows:

1. Review the standardized written description of the project with the subjects and gain verbal confirmation of an interest in further participation.

2. Develop rapport between researcher and participants, and answer questions.

3. Place journals in the hands of the participants.

4. Gather biographical information -- demographic, historical, and financial -- about the student and the family.

5. Gain a "sense" of the family situation and their commitment to continue participating in the study.

In all instances, where the first interview proceeded, the couples agreed to continue participation in the study. Upon gaining this agreement, the interviews concluded with the taping of responses to two standard questions (Appendix D).

Riskin (1976:436) indicates that:

> Once families have agreed to an initial home interview, they do demonstrate an interest. Once they have indicated a willingness to participate, they do follow through.

This observation certainly proved to be the case in the study at hand. It is my feeling, from the experience of this study, that in terms of gaining commitment from the participants, it would be difficult to overstate the importance of the first meeting.

In the end, the effort expended to establish an initial cluster of candidates was unnecessary. It was ultimately necessary to contact all twenty-three of the volunteers in order to obtain the final sample of eight participating couples.

Actually, nine couples made a commitment to the project, but one of the couples dropped out of the process after sixteen days, reportedly because the spouse did not wish to continue. The remaining eight students and their

spouses, with surprising persistence and enthusiasm, continued to participate in the project until disengagement.

I was well satisfied with the final sample of eight students and spouses as represented by the profiles in Chapter 2. In general, I found the participants to be interesting, interested, cooperative, open, friendly, helpful, and articulate.

Notwithstanding the comparisons made in Table 1, Chapter 2, there can be no assurance that the sample was statistically representative of the University's mature-age, married, student population, nor was any heroic effort expended to make it so.

In order to protect the identities of those involved in the study, I advised the participants that, through the use of pseudonyms, their anonymity would be assured. But during the first interview I took pains to explain that, since the product of a doctoral study is a public dissertation, their comments and my descriptions would not remain confidential. The participants entered the research on the basis of this understanding.

Reasons for participating. In building our sense of who the participants were, it seems appropriate, at this stage, to include some of their comments, which may throw some light on their reasons for participating in the study.

For the most part, the participants were at a loss to explain why many of their peers had not volunteered for the study, and they were often also unclear about their own

motivations for volunteering. Mary Baker's reason was as simple as "curiosity." Sam Maunder, whose original written agreement to participate was the only form on which a volunteer had explicitly state that his involvement would be contingent upon his spouse's agreement, joked that it was I [Don Chapman] who had decided he would be involved. His memory was that I had "chosen" him.

In retrospect, however, Sam explained his own motivation:

> I just thought: Well, maybe a study like that might find out something that nobody has looked at before. I was sort of interested in what the problems are: of a married, mature student, with children -- or a child -- going back to school. I think that's sort of an interesting case. I think it's becoming more and more -- well, maybe not the norm -- but certainly becoming more common.
>
> I also think another reason why I put an affirmative response, is because I thought: This time -- going back to university -- for me, it's almost a make-or-break-it proposition. And I figured, doing a study like this, or taking part in a study, might be more of a motivating factor for me too. Like: I'm involved in something!
>
> So, it's important for me to keep this up. Not only for my sake and the family's sake and everything else, but even for the study's sake. The more things that depend on me, the more important it is.

Sam's hint of altruism seems worthy of a brief comment at this point. Throughout the conduct of this study, it would be fair to say that I was deeply moved by the fact that a group of strangers would undertake to make, what I considered to be, a significant commitment to be involved in a piece of intensely personal research, particularly during a period of incredible demands upon their own personal time.

Gray (1982), in his examination of some alternative approaches to organizational research, puts forth an interesting proposition with regard to altruism. He states: "Individuals always behave in terms of what they believe to be their best interests. Altruism is best understood in terms of self-interest" (1982:36). He also suggests that the reality of self-interest is that it cannot be pursued without due consideration for others as well as self.

A suggestion of altruism comes through even more clearly in Sam's wife's rationale. Ellen explained:

> I don't think people really want to get involved with anything that means involvement. Unless they made the choice it's gonna be fun or something -- for them. It's like down in the States; you always hear about a fight in the middle of some freeway and nobody risking to even call the police. Because somebody else is gonna do it. I would think that this is probably along the same lines.

Another spouse's explanation, Pam Sharpe's, paralleled Ellen's:

> It's the same old thing, if community members don't pay fifteen dollars, then there's not a Community League. If Don has a survey and nobody goes in it, then Don doesn't have a survey. So somebody's got to.
>
> I tend to think that people are scared to volunteer. That's why, when you have a meeting, and you're having elections, no one shows up. At school, it's the same kind of thing.
>
> I don't think you realize it until you get older. When you get older, you feel pressured. You feel like you have to volunteer for something in school because the kids are in school, or you have to volunteer for something in the community because you've lived here for so long.
>
> Now I've found that if you volunteer for something, it's really not the end of the world. You find that -- granted, you do have to allot time to it, which is sometimes difficult -- but you can have a lot of fun. And you get to know the people that live in your neighbourhood. But initially, everyone's scared.

Her husband, Steven acknowledged that he possibly had been "scared" to participate, primarily because he was also employed full time. But somewhat like Sam, he felt that maybe the study would act as an external check, to warn him if "[university] is not working out." He also acknowledged, from his experience, "a survey is probably a good way to get to know what goes on."

Gloria, half jokingly suggested that she and her husband Doug decided to participate because they thought they were interesting. But Doug also echoed Mary's suggestion of curiosity and Steven's expectation that the study might represent an opportunity to gain information. Doug said he was interested

> to become involved with somebody already in the system. To maybe find out some of your [Don Chapman's] experiences at the various universities you've attended. And just to meet somebody else -- meet somebody who's actually been there for a few years -- just see if they're real people or not.
>
> Maybe wanted to find something in common with the rest of the mature undergraduate students and spouses.

From these remarks, it was obvious to me that these people had "real-life" experiences. They were connected with their social situation. They knew what it was like to attempt to live and participate in a social world. They understood that within a social context, the process of receiving involves some aspect of giving.

The above quotations, to a greater or lesser degree, appeared to represent the feelings of most of the volunteer participants. It was clear, then, that for many of the

participants in this study, the process of involvement provided the potential for a direct, personal payoff. It was also clear that many of the participants anticipated this from the outset.

Selection complications. As mentioned previously, a two-tier approach was developed for the interviewing process. After the first round of interviews, I selected five couples (tier one) for the more sustained interview involvement. I intended that the remaining three couples (tier two) would provide a form of back-up, in case there was attrition during the term of the study. But more importantly, the three couples in the second tier were also to maintain a continuing journal of their individual experiences throughout the term, so as to provide additional richness to the reported experiences.

At the point of assigning couples to the two tiers, two problems emerged through the application of this methodological tactic: One problem related directly to the need to make the choice. I had planned that this selection would be based primarily upon my "sense" of each couple's commitment to the project and the rapport developed between us during the first interview.

But in practice, after only a one-hour interview, it was difficult to make fine distinctions about degree of rapport, and all of the couples seemed to be very interested in participating fully in the study. As a consequence, once people had made the initial commitment to participate, there

seemed to be little way of avoiding creating a sense of disappointment or "failure" for those that were not chosen to be part of the full interview process.

As I became aware of this issue, I attempted to make it clear that, regardless of who was selected, I considered all participants to be equally important to the study. I indicated that the existence of two levels of participation was a reflection of my limited resources rather than a comment on how interesting any particular student situation might be to me. In spite of this, there was disappointment.

Advising people of the decision was, for me, a very difficult and delicate task. In the case of one family, the casual remark of one of the children confirmed that, for them, there had been some notion of "pass/fail" perceived in the selection.

In order to allay some of the difficulties mentioned above and to encourage the continued participation of the three couples, I modified my original data collection plan. I advised tier two participants that they would be included in the final, taped interview process and that they would also be interviewed with regard to the family timetable, although their timetable interview would not be transcribed.

In the final analysis, as the interview schedule (Appendix C) indicates, the three couples were involved in interviews at a level almost equal to that of the other couples. However, from my perspective as researcher, the remaining difference did maintain my original objective of

the two-tier approach, which was to control the number of hours I had to devote to verbatim transcription of tapes.

The second methodological difficulty which arose related to the restriction requiring exclusion from the sample if either member of the volunteer couple had been under psychological treatment during the previous two years. Fortunately, this situation came to light in only one instance. In this case, the student's spouse was concurrently taking prescribed anti-depressants.

As may be noted from the first interview outline (Appendix D), the discussion of this issue was planned for later in the first interview session -- in anticipation that some level of trust would be established by that point. Unfortunately, along with trust, a certain level of interest, on the part of the participants, was also firmly in place by that stage.

In practical terms, when I was made aware of the medication and this individual's related problem, it was then very awkward, if not impossible, to decline the couple's participation, particularly when they had already expressed considerable enthusiasm for the idea of participating.

My approach, when faced with this problem, was to acknowledge that their revelation presented some difficulty, in terms of the requirements of the study. We completed the non-taped portion of the interview, and then openly discussed my concerns about the expected additional strain

of participation. I left the decision as to whether to continue to participate, with the couple. My own unstated decision, after consultation with my research advisor, was that if the couple chose to continue, they would be selected as one of the back-up participants. As matters developed, the couple in question was the couple which voluntarily withdrew.

Children. In those family situations which included children, it was tempting to consider having the children participate in the interview process. However, I rejected this idea at the outset, because I felt that the involvement of children might raise undue ethical concerns for the study; the potential costs seemed to outweigh potential benefits. As a consequence, regardless of the presence of children in the families, data collection was limited to interview sessions with students and spouses only.

This is not to say the the children were unaware of the ongoing study. In fact, during a number of the interview sessions, overt curiosity was often expressed on the part of many of the children. The parents also reported that their children had questioned them about the process. I intentionally left it to the parents to explain to the children the nature of the study and my presence in their home.

Children in the families ranged in age from thirteen years to under one year old. In most instances, during the two-to-three-hour interview sessions, the parents made

arrangements for the children to entertain themselves at other activities. Frequently, the interviews were scheduled by the parents to occur just before or after the childrens' bed times.

In the instance of the Maunder's, at the parents' choice, their daughter was present for all the interviews. This was primarily due to the fact that the family's schedule was so constrained that interviews took place during a period which they had normally set aside to be together as a family.

In the case of the Makowichuks, again at the parent's choice, their daughter was present during considerable portions of the interviewing. I did not question the daughter directly, but her presence was acknowledged and she did make the occasional comment.

This same daughter was, however, given complete access to the interview transcripts by her parents. On one occasion, since the transcripts included remarks about extended family members, I felt it appropriate to caution Gloria that the transcripts contained comments which she might want to ensure were treated with some discretion.

But in general, except as outlined above, I did not deal directly with the children during the study. Comments regarding the interrelationship between the students and their children are based upon parental reports and my extremely limited observations.

It seems reasonable to assert, then, that the interview

sessions did not provide a particularly natural setting within which to observe "normal" family interaction with children; hence, no great dependence has been placed on this as a potential data source.

Participation experience. In terms of a more holistic understanding of the participants, it also seems valuable to describe their sense of the research situation.

Throughout the data collection process, the fact that all of us were involved in a rather unique situation remained close to the surface of our attention. In particular, it was the subject of some reflection and comment in the interviews with the tier-one participants. I trust that what follows will convey some notion of the data collection process and the place of the participants within the process.

As the study commenced, Mary Baker gave indication of what she felt might take place during the study, and how she felt it might affect the interaction between her and her husband Joe:

> I think it will keep us honest with each other. Things might come up in our conversations with you, or in the journal, that we might not otherwise share with each other -- that might be a problem or a good thing, either way.

Based upon his recollections of our early interaction, Joe reported similar expectations, but he had anticipated additional effects:

> At some point, you mentioned the group -- your study group -- and I was thinking to myself that the

> group that you're studying is probably going to fare better in school -- weather the whole experience better than other students, other married students. Because you are acting as a sounding board for Mary and me.
>
> She said things tonight that I wasn't really aware of, and I've probably said things that she didn't know. So we'll have a chance to talk about it. And I think it's going to generally improve how I perceive what will happen in the future. And, of course, the same thing for her -- I would guess.

The expectations that the Bakers anticipated apparently were shared by other participants as well. Later in the interview process, Gloria acknowledged that the involvement in the study was actually expanding her experience:

> I'm especially thrilled with the journal. Because it allows you to examine things a little more carefully and from a few more different angles than you would normally, if you were just trying to get through your year -- just trying to make it to Christmas -- just trying to make it till spring. It gives us the breathing spaces to pause and look, and write, and read -- that we wouldn't normally take.

Husband, Doug, agreed:

> So far, it's a very positive experience. Especially doing your interview process. It really makes things more clear. It helps us understand what we're experiencing, I suppose.

Brenda Thompson and her husband Brad Potter, echoed the above sentiments:

> It does make us sit down and actually talk about what we're going through. I think we'd probably just go through it with not much talking about it. So, it gives us an opportunity to focus, specifically, on the whole process of me going back to school.

Brenda went on to describe the impact she felt from the requirements of the study:

> I quite look forward to it -- the journal keeping

> and that sort of thing. I find it positive. I haven't expended any additional energy on the fact that you're a part of [the university experience] -- at this point. But when we sit down like this and talk, it's really nice to spend two . . . I mean, we would not spend two hours talking about me going back to school. We just would not do that.
>
> So it's kind of nice to be able to do that -- when you're here. But I'm not aware of any particular energy going to thinking about that when you're not here. I keep a journal anyway. So I'm just writing it on another piece of paper. And Brad does too.

Sam and Ellen expressed similar feelings. Sam admitted, "Actually, I look forward to these interviews." Ellen further explained the feeling:

> This is good for Sam, because he does not [normally] come home with his problems. He bears them all himself. Makes it very, very difficult. It's always been a problem and we both know it's there. If something is bothering him, he'll bring it home and I don't know what it is. I just know that something is bothering him. He won't discuss it. This is maybe a way to bring that out -- first through the writing, and then, if you're interviewing him -- verbally. So, it's probably good for him.

Interview process. As mentioned, the primary data collection process was a series of semi-structured, free-response interviews -- conducted approximately monthly. All interviews were conducted at the students' residences and, with the exception of one instance during the fourth round of interviews, both the student and the spouse were present at all sessions.

There was little indication that the interviews created undue additional pressure upon the busy schedule of the participants. In fact, as revealed by the earlier comments, the sessions were often viewed as a respite from the daily

grind.

Within the inquiry approach of this study, the participants were considered to be the "experts" in the ecology of their particular family circumstance, and its effects upon them and their student experience. In some ways the participants might be looked upon as co-researchers; although this probably represents an overstatement, since the time they generally had available for reflection and to exert influence was extremely limited.

In most instances, however, through the questions posed, I attempted to encourage the participants to explore their own experiences. In order for me to be able to make comparisons, I would occasionally describe the experiences of other participants and ask for comment.

I attempted to be non-judgmental about the various participants' reported activities and opinions; although as a fellow mature-age married student, I was not reluctant to enter into a dialogue and openly share my own university experiences, opinions or expertise. This sharing often seemed to encourage elaboration.

Even though, on occasion, I thought it might be helpful to press for further reflective analysis on the part of the participants, I am convinced that being non-judgmental about their actions and their understandings was the most appropriate stance for me to take. Two incidents convinced me of this fact.

In one case, as I was making conversation with Sheila

Eley prior to beginning an interview, I thoughtlessly made a remark about the fact that there was a trailer with four snowmobiles parked in the drive of her home. Although this was preliminary "small talk," I must have made a comparison with the material possessions of some of the other family situations represented in the study. There was no immediate reaction, but in a subsequent telephone contact with Sheila, she raised the matter and suggested that she and her family were not frivolous with their money. I then found myself involved in a substantial effort, to attempt to "clear the air" and regain a level of trust.

In another instance, which involved more intent on my part, I engaged or challenged Gloria about some of the descriptions of her experiences. Since I perceived some inconsistencies in her reports, I wished to attempt to resolve these by pursuing them. This more active "interrogation" on my part did not result in greater clarification. At least temporarily, it did seem to result in a reduction in the level of trust she accorded me. In order to clear the air in this instance, the two of us, along with Doug, spent some time discussing what had taken place during this "experiment." It was my perception that our prior research relationship was essentially re-established through this process.

Aside from the above two instances, I viewed that my role during the interview process, was to act primarily as an involved communication facilitator and data recorder. As

the data collection process proceeded, I began to feel more and more like someone at the hub of an information gathering and information sharing network.

What I mean by this was that I was the only individual, among all the participants, who had contact with the others. At the same time, through my comments and questions, they were very much aware of each other. To the degree humanly possible, I attempted not to abuse this delicate central position. But for further comment in this regard, reference should be made to the section on Research Ethics and Researcher Effect in this chapter (p.180).

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed using a microcomputer word processor. Appendices D, F, G and H indicate the general guides or check lists which were used for each of the four interview sessions. Interviews two, three and four each involved a data-gathering activity, in addition to the less-structured taped interview sessions.

In iterative interviewing of "nonlabeled families," Riskin (1976:437) found that although there was a continuity of material from interview to interview, conventional questioning tended to become stale. He suggested the introduction of other activities to maintain interest. Following this line of thinking, while attempting to further enrich the data base, I planned a unique core data-gathering activity for each interview session.

Interview two (Appendix F) involved the participants in the preparation of a family timetable, covering what they

thought represented a typical week in their life at that particular point in time. Interview three (Appendix G) included an activity, based upon Geddes & Medway's (1977) task-centered technique, of having family members develop a Symbolic Drawing of Family Life Space -- an exploration of familial structure (a sociogram).

Interview four (Appendix H) involved each student in the use of a creative writing, clustering technique developed by Rico (1983). This process was used to focus the students' thoughts on aspects of the context of her/his student experience -- relationships and structures of personal meaning. All three of these activities are described in greater detail below.

The interviews, of course, also involved more conventional taped question-and-answer sessions. These sessions were not formally structured and the content and pattern varied from session to session and couple to couple. But to a great extent, each interview took its form and substance from prior interviews and the material I gathered from individual journals.

Prior to each interview, I reviewed the transcript of the couple's previous interviews and their individual journals. As a result of this process, I would record specific questions or comments to be used to facilitate the upcoming interview session. Questions, comments and matters needing clarification, which came to light through this process, formed the central focus for each taped session.

Occasionally, I would ask the same or similar questions at more than one interview session. My intent, overall, was to attempt to prevent premature closure by encouraging the participants' continued examination of, and reflection upon, their on-going family and student setting.

The questions which appear in each of the checklists in the appendices represent a "standardized" bank of questions. These tended to be questions about which I was initially curious, or questions which emerged as we proceeded through the interview and transcription process. These questions were "standardized" only to the extent that I felt it might be interesting to give all the participants an opportunity to respond to them. On the other hand, these questions were often used only as and when time permitted -- after issues arising from previous interviews or the journals had been dealt with. Often, the unused questions were carried forward from one interview to the next.

The written form of the questions as they appear in the appendices acted only as guides for me. The questions were not necessarily posed in the form they were written. For example, sometimes issues related to the standard list of questions were covered through the normal interaction of the interview, without reference to the specific questions. In some instances, because the interviews turned to other matters, questions on the standard list were never addressed directly. This, to my mind, was not a significant concern, since I intended from the outset that the interview content

with each couple would tend to be defined by the unique situation of that couple.

In all instances, I was the interviewer; I also transcribed all interview tapes. While the transcription process was, in many ways, a mind-numbing experience, it also provided an invaluable opportunity to review the material in detail. I am certain that many of the questions emerged from my intimate involvement in this transcription process.

In this regard, I feel that during the interview process, my attention was usually focused on "doing" the interview. During transcription, I found more of my attention was focused on what was actually being said. As I transcribed, I would often find a participant's responses making me curious about some further aspect of his/her description. I was often delighted to discover that, as the transcription progressed, the interviewer (I) had also been curious and had probed the issues. This allowed me to "rediscover" the responses. I must admit that I was also sometimes disappointed that a matter was not followed up.

Follow-up questions didn't often emerge at the precise time of actual transcription; but as I later reflected upon what I had heard for the second time, questions would occur to me. When this happened, I made a practice of jotting the questions down on anything that was handy at the time. I then collected the scraps of paper for inclusion in the standardized list. Some questions also emerged from the

reading that I was pursuing during the interview period (This was a period in which I was involved in two courses dealing with alternative approaches to administrative and organizational theory and research.)

A key logistical problem during the interviewing process involved completing all the transcriptions prior to the next interview session. Each hour of taped interview involved something in the range of ten hours of transcription time. This time commitment was further complicated by transcriber equipment failure and the fact that transcription equipment was not available on a continuing basis. In any event, in all instances, a typed transcript of each interview session was available to me prior to the next interview with the same couple. In most instances, the transcript was also available for the couple.

Originally, I had hoped that the couples might spend considerable time reviewing and reflecting upon the transcriptions of their earlier remarks. In practice, most of them did not have time within their busy schedules to do this. In one or two cases, participants reported that the interview process and reading of transcripts did cause them to have in-depth discussions beyond the interview situation; but for most, it seemed that their attempts to survive from day to day obstructed any process of deep ongoing reflection.

While most of the participants were interested in reading what they had previously said, self-reflection

appeared to take place, primarily, through the follow-up questions I posed during the interview process. Virtually no unsolicited comments, regarding the substance of their earlier remarks, were made by any of the participants.

Some of the lack of deep reflection might also have related to the fact that I produced verbatim transcriptions of the first interviews. These initial transcripts contained all of the normal pauses, false starts and half sentences of everyday conversation. All of the participants, myself included, found reading these to be a humbling experience. In the end, more concern was expressed about how we talked than about the content.

Mary expressed these concerns as follows:

> Just the way we talk. I thought, tonight, I would really try to speak well -- clearly, and coherently. And I would always say "yes," instead of "yeah." But I find that I have been saying yeah anyway.

Gloria had similar feelings:

> We're going to go out and buy a video recorder and record each other speaking. So that we can improve our speaking styles -- stop saying uhm, you know, like, uh, well, and going off on tangents.

With a laugh, Ellen suggested that I leave out the notations about her laughter. On another occasion, she remarked that she and Sam had noticed that the punctuation I chose for the transcripts could really change the meaning. They indicated that they would take some time to make some suggestions in this regard, but their time was at a premium and this task was never undertaken.

For subsequent transcriptions, even though I removed much of the "verbal chaff," I think that the residual of this initial experience partially reduced the value of future transcripts as catalysts for personal reflection. In most instances, the transcripts were reportedly read with interest, and in the end, most participants remarked that the transcripts fairly represented what had been said; but they continued to be as much concerned about how they "sounded," as about what they said.

A couple of remarks added further confirmation to my notion that the content of the transcripts did not represent a major focus of their attention. At one point Ellen revealed, "I think we just both briefly read [the transcript] after you left it off. It was up on the piano till tonight." On another occasion, at the Baker's, our interview took place just after Joe had returned from out of town. He said, "I never saw [the transcript] till a half an hour before you came, so I never got through it."

For the most part, then, for many of the students and spouses, there was little or no evidence that they spent significant personal time reconsidering the substance of matters they had revealed in previous interviews. The content was either not a major concern for them, or it had an understandably low priority within their busy schedules.

Notwithstanding these facts, the intent of the iterative interview process -- beyond gathering new information about the changing situation -- was to encourage

an interactive and sustained dialogue, using a shared base of information. Since my idea of this happening spontaneously proved to be somewhat less effective in practice than in theory, through my more intensive use of questioning, I played a somewhat more intrusive role than I had originally envisioned. To a degree, this made me more influential in shaping the content of our interviews.

Through each iteration I consciously made an effort to refer the participant couples to issues raised earlier -- to give them an opportunity to review and clarify. I tried to offer opportunities for them to re-evaluate our earlier discussions in the light of a number of factors: their changing family situation, the changing student situation, and any information -- provided by me -- about the nature of other participants' experiences.

In order to gain confirmation of previous comments, enrich the information or deal with contradictory statements, I would often refer to previous journals. Unfortunately, however, this tactic created some confusion for the participants. The confusion, I think, likely resulted from two factors. First, as I have already stated, the couples generally had spent little time reviewing the previous material. But the more important factor, one that I overlooked too easily, was that their daily experience itself was transitory -- life had moved on; the previous comments belonged to the past and were often forgotten.

I was brought face to face with this latter issue when

people were unable to recall previous comments, or the context of previous remarks. For example, in one instance Gloria acknowledged, "I can't even remember the comment. I have a hard time remembering my previous moods and swings, and all the rest of it." And with regard to my questions about apparent contradictions between statements, Gloria wisely observed, "You would expect people to change their minds over time."

Steven made similar observations when his hesitation to respond caused me to ask if my questions were too difficult:

> No, it's just that you ask me things that . . . I don't have that great a memory. Pam always says I just remember what I wanna remember -- or what is important to me. Everything else, I just sort of blow over.

He made a similar observation at another point: "You know, what's a major incident today, may not be easily remembered tomorrow."

In effect, then, the transitory nature of the daily experiences of the participants, combined with the intermittent nature of the interviews, argued very effectively for the value of the personal journals as part of a more continuous data collection process.

As a final remark on these aspects of the interview process, let me make it clear that none of the above was intended to convey the idea that the participants were behaving in an inappropriate fashion. These descriptions of events are intended only to convey some sense of the "experience" of the research situation, as opposed to an image of my idealized plan. With this in mind, let us now

turn to the role of the spouse in the research process.

Spouses and the interviews. Originally, I anticipated that the interview process would focus as much on the spouse as on the student. In practice, however -- regardless of gender -- spouses tended to play two supporting roles in the interview situation. One was a role as interview catalyst. The other was a role of clarifying or confirming the perceptions of the student participants.

Spouses did respond to specific questions and they often actively participated in discussions, but the primary respondent was almost invariably the student. As the series of interviews proceeded, the interviews tended to become structured in such a way as to reinforce this difference in focus. I decided not to attempt to force my original intent, and, in fact, through the questions asked, I began actively to acknowledge the dominant place of the student in the interview process.

This is not to suggest that the spouses' role in the research process was diminished. Quite the contrary, there was solid evidence that the presence of the spouse affected the ethos of the interview process and assisted in providing me with a somewhat more complete sense of the student situation.

The following interaction between Brenda and Brad reveals an explicit demonstration of the place of the spouse in the interview situation:

> Brenda: I've become much more quiet since I've gone back to school. It's really interesting. [laughs]

Brad: I don't think that's true.

Brenda: Oh, don't you?

Brad: What did we talk about at [friend's], what do we talk about here? It's "leisure."

Brenda: But I didn't talk about it.

Brad: They wouldn't have mentioned the word leisure.

Brenda: They asked me what I was doing.

Brad: So you told them. And then, you went on with Ted. You had about an hour's conversation with 'em.

Brenda: That's an interesting perception. See, I thought I was extre . . . in fact, I was worried that I was extremely withdrawn.

Brad: You were! Until you got on to it. Then you connected with his planning idea, against your professor's, and you were off and running, for about an hour.
That's what you were talking about here, when you got into stuff -- a little bit with Earl and with Brent.

Brenda: Well, that's an interesting perception. That's certainly not how I feel about it. I feel like I've become much quieter. And the kinds of things that are exciting me right now, I don't feel that I have enough information to be able to carry on a proper conversation.

Brad: Well, you're doing it anyway, whether you know the information or not. [both laugh]

Brenda: Oh dear!

Brad: No, it's fine. It's nice to hear you talk about something different.

Brenda: Well, that's interesting. I had a much better grasp before I started, than I do now. I feel like everything's in a mumble-jumble. It's just all thrown up, and it's in the air. God knows when, or how, it will come down. That's basically how I feel about most of my courses.

I suggest that my understanding of the student's situation was much more complete as a result of interactions such as these. The interaction between the spouses is further discussed under the section pertaining to research ethics and researcher effect (p.180).

Timetable activity. The timetabling was conducted as the central activity of the second interview (Appendix F), which took place about three to four weeks into the term. As stated previously, this activity was conducted with all eight couples. The process of preparing the timetable was audio recorded but not transcribed. I subsequently used the recording to produce explanatory notes which assisted me in understanding the prepared timetables.

The intent of the timetable activity was to provide me with an early, general sense of what a typical week in the life of the participating families might be like. It also was a way of concretely representing the daily activities and responsibilities of the various family members.

During preparation, a separate timetable was created for each of the spouses; if there were children in the family, a combined timetable was prepared for them, using the reports of the parents. The couple participated interactively in the total exercise although they each took primary responsibility for outlining their own activities.

The timetable made provision for a seven day week, displaying the hours of the day starting at 6:00am and finishing at 12 midnight. It is interesting to note that in

the case of Edna Sheskey, the 18 hours displayed on the timetable were insufficient to represent her waking day.

Using relatively broad blocks of time, the participants indicated their typical activities between rising and bed time; I recorded these reports on the timetables, using coloured pens. Of course, the process of timetabling was not an unfamiliar activity for most of the participants. The task, however, led to much discussion and "gnashing of teeth" -- in itself leading to valuable insights about the family setting.

It was acknowledged by all that the timetables were more representational than actual. Most participants expressed concern that the timetables did not adequately represent the variations in their daily and weekly schedules. They felt the timetables did not give any adequate indication of the unusual or the non-routine.

The activity did, however, serve to give me a better general understanding of the ebb and flow of family life. In a very general way, it clarified matters such as transportation methods and time, university time, class schedules, household tasks, child care arrangements, employment schedules and the like.

Interestingly, many of the couples found the exercise itself to be a revelation. For example, in a number of instances the timetable made apparent, for the first time, the differing perceptions that each spouse held about the amount of "free" time that was available to the other.

Brenda confessed, "I've just learned a lot from writing these schedules down. I've learned a lot about how our life works."

In a discussion with Brad, she went on to assert her new understanding:

> If you look at that outline, you block in my hours: I have to be here at 3:30pm and I can't leave before 8:30 or 9:00am, because of the kids. So, already, I'm blocked there. You put in my classes -- I don't have a whole lot of time in between those.

Sam, contrary to Brenda's experience, felt that, in his situation, the timetable held no unanticipated information for him.

Gloria's attention was caught by one aspect revealed by the timetable -- the subjective experience of time:

> The idea that, when you point to a little time line that says: All right, you're finished supper at 6:30 and you don't go to bed till 10 o'clock. What do you do in between?
>
> Often times, I really don't feel like there's any time between supper and going to bed. I know that we don't eat supper at 9:30 every night. I know that we don't go to bed at seven. It seems to just be: Supper one minute and bed the next! And there doesn't seem to be any time in between.

But Gloria was concerned that the timetable made their life appear "so dull, and it's really not." However, "as far as blocks of time go," she acknowledged, "that's a fairly accurate representation."

In the final analysis, it appeared that the timetabling process was most useful in revealing blocks of time, general activities and regularities in schedules. The process also acted as a communication device for the spouses and a

catalyst for our interview dialogue.

Financial statement. Also as part of the second interview process, a basic net worth statement was prepared for the five tier-one families (Appendix B). The intent was to provide basic financial information.

The valuations reported in the financial statements were based upon the perceptions of the participants. No effort was made to verify any of the financial information. In particular, it should be noted that the participants were asked to value their household and personal goods at realizable value rather than at replacement value. The reliability of the valuations in this latter regard are likely subject to question. In fact, the values used for household goods were even commented upon later by some of the participants when they were reviewing a draft of portions of the dissertation. The value of the information rests not in its factual accuracy, but in the notion that it indicates the financial context within which the couples understood themselves to be operating.

In addition to the information related to the families' net worth, I also attempted to determine the family income; once again, on the basis of reported figures only.

I was somewhat reluctant to gather this financial information from those couples not involved in the intensive data collection process. Even for those couples with whom I was interacting on a more regular basis, one or two (jokingly, I trust) suggested that this information could

prove to be profitable to me; that maybe the whole study was an elaborate hoax and I was actually a thief! These doubts aside, one tier-two couple did provide a financial statement. Since financial concerns seemed to emerge as a significant element in the interviews with the Lyndens, near the end of the term, I did gather the same basic financial information from them also. In total, then, six of the eight couples provided the financial information referred to in this report.

Symbolic drawing of family life space. The third interview (Appendix G) involved the five tier one couples in an activity based upon the reported research of Michael Geddes and Joan Medway (1977). In their use of life-space drawing, these researchers were reportedly using the symbolic drawing as a clinical process to facilitate communication and interaction among their subjects. In this study, I was primarily interested in the information which might be revealed in production of the final product. As was the case with the timetable activity, it was a way for me to gain a better sense of the participants' family circumstance.

My modified technique was intended to develop a representation of the student's family life space. I hoped that the exercise would reveal information about the structural configuration of the family and, more importantly, the linkages between the family and the general social environment. In addition, the activity offered me an

opportunity to judge the degree of congruence between the spouses, regarding spatial positioning of important elements of their family life space.

I used the activity in a pilot test prior to using it with the participants. Although those involved in the pilot test had some minor problems with the concept, the results were generally satisfactory; I proceeded without further major modification.

In the case of the participants, the spouse was present and interactive throughout the process, but the student's perceptions were the focus of the task. The exercise began by presenting the student with a large sheet of paper, at the center of which was a circle, four to five inches in diameter.

So as to convey a sense of what the final product might look like, the participants were very briefly shown some of the diagrams in the Geddes and Medway (1977) article. I assured the participants that there was no "trick" or "test" involved in this process, nor did I intend that the final drawing would be subject to "psychological interpretation."

I informed the student that the circle represented the boundaries of her/his family. Anything that she/he chose to place within the circle was considered immediate family; anything beyond the circle was outside the immediate family. I indicated that it was OK to place items on the boundary.

People were to be indicated by drawing circles and institutions, such as church, school, etc. were to be indicated by squares. During the drawing I recommended that we first deal with people, then institutions. As the final step in the process, the various elements were to be linked by lines indicating various frequencies of contact.

I asked the student to indicate her/himself and immediate family members within the large circle. Other people important to the family and student were located outside the circle -- the distance from the circle was to provide some indication of relative importance to the family in its current circumstances.

Institutions of importance to the family and student were located on the drawing in a similar fashion to the process used for placing people. All elements were labeled so that they could be identified as we discussed them.

In order to proceed with the final step in the drawing -- determining the linkage patterns -- the student was asked to identify the one institution or person outside the immediate family circle with which s/he had contact most regularly. With some guidance, the level of this interaction was quantified by the student.

The student was then asked to identify the person or institution on the diagram with whom s/he had the least regular contact. The level of this interaction was also quantified. The quantified level of interaction at these two extremes was used to assist the participants in

evaluating the relative regularity of their contact with the various other elements in the drawing.

The student, using a colored pen, connected the circle representing her/himself to other elements of the drawing. Those which approximated the level of interaction previously indicated as most frequent, were connected with a solid line. A dotted line was used to connect elements with which s/he interacted on a more modest level. And finally, no connection was made between elements approximating the lowest extreme of interaction.

Using the student's drawing, a different coloured pen and the previously developed interaction frequencies, the spouse then linked her/his circle to the various elements of the drawing, as s/he felt appropriate.

Upon completion of the above process, the transcribed portion of the interview commenced. I asked participants to comment upon and discuss the various aspects of the drawing. Relationships were clarified and notations made on the drawing. A standard query I made of all participants, before moving on to other matters, related to how much different the drawing might have looked six months prior to the student having entered university.

For the most part, the participants made little or no comment about the drawing activity, but most found it somewhat difficult or confusing to complete. On the other hand, although the process apparently provided the spouses with little in the way of new information, it was valuable

to me in that it gave the opportunity to clarify relationships beyond the immediate family setting.

In two instances there were recorded comments. Ellen was surprised by the fact that the drawing revealed that they were more closely connected with their extended family than she had previously thought. And Gloria jokingly remarked, "That's very neat. I'm quite fascinated. We should photocopy it and send it to our friends as Christmas cards: Here's how you rate!"

Clustering activity. The core activity of the fourth interview (Appendix H) involved a process intended to summarize the student's thoughts about their first term at the University of Alberta. In effect, the clustering activity was used as a way of structuring a personal "brainstorming" session, the results of which could then be used to structure the subsequent interview.

All eight students undertook the clustering exercise. Well prior to the final interview, I advised all of the participants, in a general way, about the nature of the clustering activity. In the case of those participants involved in the complete interview process, this initial explanation took place at the conclusion of interview number three. For the other participants, it took place during one of the contacts made when I was collecting journal pages.

I explained that my use of the exercise was experimental and that it was based upon a creative writing technique (Rico, 1983). I was uncertain as to how seriously

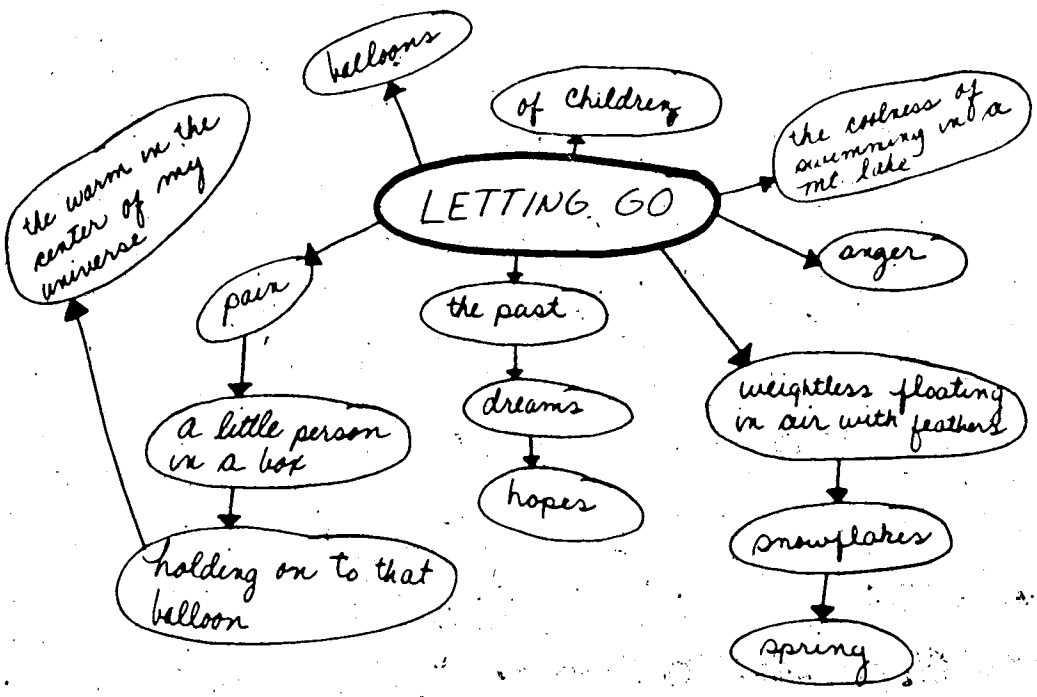
this activity would be accepted by the participants; hence, this early introduction was to "ease" them into the idea, and to give them time to reflect upon how they might go about the process. I briefly discussed copies of examples taken directly from Rico's book (Figure 1) and left the samples with the couples.

At the time of introducing the exercise, I had not yet decided whether to have both participants complete the activity individually, or to have only the student complete the task. I advised the participants that I had yet to make this decision. In the end, primarily for reasons of time and the dynamics of the various interview situations, I chose to have only the student complete the activity. Facsimilies of the actual student clusters are included in Appendix I.

Both the student and the spouse were presented with the written instructions (Appendix J). The student was given a large sheet of paper with an ellipse drawn in the center. Within the ellipse were the words, "Three Months as a University Student."

In order to demonstrate what the final product might look like and to demonstrate that the activity could be done, I gave the participants a very brief glimpse of one of the clusters completed in a pilot test of the activity. The quick look was not long enough for the student to be "contaminated" by categories on the example.

Each student completed the clustering activity in a



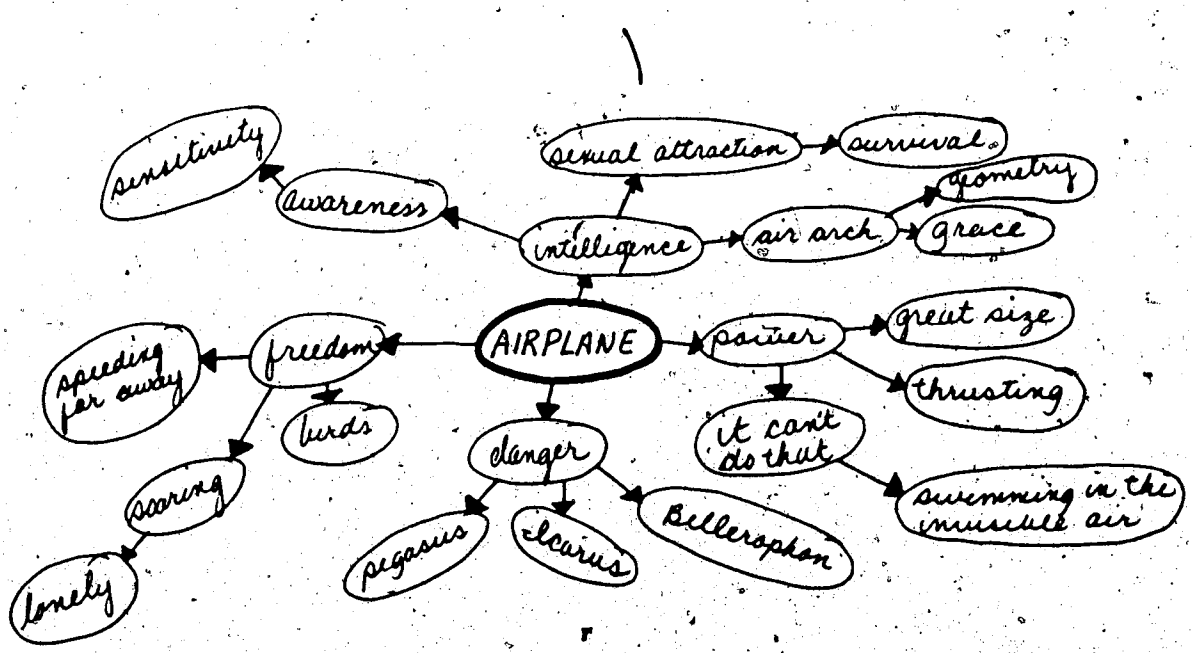




Figure 1
Sample Clusters

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separate room, while the spouse and I visited casually. In most instances the cluster was completed by the student in about 15 to 20 minutes. In no case did it take longer than 30 minutes.

Upon the return of the student to the interview setting, the tape recorder was turned on and the fourth interview began with an interactive analysis and discussion of the cluster the student had produced.

The spouses, of course, also had comments about the process and the product. For example, when Joe saw Mary's cluster (Appendix I) and listened to her explanation, he made a remark which pretty well summarized my own good feelings about the usefulness of the activity: "I was kind of surprised at how it all came together."

It was interesting to note that on more than one occasion, it was obvious that the drawing had taken place on the intuitive level, particularly with regard to the linkages formed by the students. A few minutes after completing the cluster, the students were occasionally at a loss to explain their "rationale" for linking various ideas -- an indication that the process was not necessarily something that easily lent itself to verbal description.

For example, Brenda finally resorted to waving her hands when she attempted to explain the connection between Opportunity and Freedom on her cluster:

> Well . . . I just need to be able to connect that stuff in a way that makes sense, and put it into verbal language. I don't feel like I have the words to . . .

Steven ran into similar difficulties, "I don't know why I hooked it to that. I can't remember. Just the whole thing, in general."

In a similar vein Gloria, prior to plunging back into her effort to explain and clarify what she had produced, remarked, "It made tremendous sense when I was drawing all of this out."

Brenda, left us with one cautionary note about the cluster:

> I don't think that any of that stuff is done to scale -- in terms of its importance. You asked me to brainstorm; I didn't prioritize -- or whatever the word is.

But aside from these matters, from the research perspective, the general effect of this activity was to allow the student to set the particulars of the interview agenda, and to give the opportunity for a more in-depth discussion of complex issues which were viewed by each individual student as important and interrelated in some way.

Boundaries of the research context. During the data collection process, as I was attempting to "get inside the experience" of the participants, it occurred to me that they might have questions of their own, which could serve to: (1) reveal areas of their situation which were of concern to them, and (2) raise issues that could be reviewed with other participants.

When I asked the participants what questions they might ask, if our roles were reversed, Sam's comment was interesting.

> I've been thinking about that for the last couple of weeks and I don't know where you get the questions that you ask. I wouldn't ask half the stuff that you ask -- just wouldn't think of them.

To the extent that his comment indicated an on-going reflection about the process of the study, Sam was somewhat the exception. It was more common for the participants to simply indicate that they hadn't thought of anything worth asking, or hadn't had time to think of anything that I hadn't covered.

Specific concerns did, however, come from three sources. Steven suggested the following questions:

> Why did you go to university?
> What did you have to forego?
> Are you going to go to university next year?

In addition, Steven felt that the study should attempt to get at why the mature student feels "a little out of place," a fact he attributed to being "out of date" and possibly being "vain" enough to care about his appearance, when nobody at the university seemed to care "how they look."

Gloria indicated that she did not have questions well formulated; but she was interested to know: "Do your other subjects -- co-researchers, guinea pigs, whatever -- have a certain sense of 'playing the game'?" Doug was interested in how the other spouses were feeling about their participation in the study. He had held high expectations

at the outset, but in the end, found himself to be somewhat on the periphery of the research situation.

In one form or another, I integrated these questions into the bank of "standard" questions, to be used when and if the opportunity presented itself.

But returning to Sam's remark for a moment, his statement clearly hinted that the process of the study was not limited only to the context of the interview sessions or journal writing. There was evidence that the effects of the study reached well beyond the formal processes.

For instance, Gloria acknowledged that she and Doug talked about the interviews "for days afterward." And, following Mary's clustering activity in interview four (Appendix I), Joe remarked:

> As Mary was explaining it all, I could see a lot of what has come up in previous discussions. A lot of this is just coming out, all being put together on one page. But a lot of what's said here has been said previously, in bits of conversation. We discuss some things.

The study also inserted itself into other spheres. Sheila, for example, remarked that she had made a couple of her former Concordia College student colleagues aware of her participation in the study. She reported, "They think it's neat. They hope that I can help other mature students." Interestingly, however, Sheila was quick to deny that her discussions with these students had included any of the specific questions or issues raised in our interviews.

Another comment Sam made at one point, was also

interesting in this context. He described the fact that he didn't understand how his English professor had come to know his name. As he laughingly put it, "I almost wonder if Don is behind this -- 'Watch out for Sam'!" Of course, I quickly assured him that I didn't know his English professor; nor would I have taken such action.

In a similar vein, Gloria once indicated what appeared to be an enhanced level of consciousness, regarding what others might think about the kinds of things she and Doug were saying. She exclaimed:

> I hate this talk about money! This whole thing is going to come back making it sound like we're so, greedy -- money bags, counting the money piled under our mattresses. Aha!

She and Doug jokingly expressed concern about how someone might use their financial disclosures in the interviews, to "get them" twenty years from now.

In any event, these examples were indications of "spill-over effects" of participation in the study. They indicate that the participants had some sense of the study having the potential to affect matters beyond the context of the immediate data collection processes. In short, to some degree, the study was part of the totality of their everyday experience.

In concluding the general description of the interview process, it seems to me that the sustained participation of all couples was an indication of a significant and generalized level of flexibility, maturity, understanding, curiosity and good faith. The patient participation of all,

obligated me to exercise good faith in return.

Participant-journals. The collection of individual journals from all participants was planned as a secondary source of research data. Instructions for the production of the couple's journals are presented in Appendix K. These instructions were discussed and distributed as part of the first interview session (Appendix D).

In planning this element of data collection, I was concerned that the process could be onerous and might not be sustained. In fact, the participants performed this task with an unexpectedly high level of persistence. Keeping in mind the busy circumstances of the participants, the continuity of reporting was really quite astonishing. The journals proved to be an invaluable source of ongoing information.

Writing styles and presentation, of course, varied greatly, but the following gives some general sense of the level of participation in this activity: In the case of the students, over the term, they produced an average of approximately 23 journal pages each. The range was from 9 to 33 pages. Five of the students continued journal writing into December, while three discontinued in November.

The spouses were understandably somewhat less committed. On average, the spouses produced approximately 15 journal pages each, ranging between 1 and 25 pages. Three spouses participated into December, three discontinued in November, and two stopped prior to that.

While the journals were not always deeply reflective, even the most superficial efforts provided some valuable material. They were particularly helpful in focusing the interview sessions. In fact, insights about the ongoing experience, derived from some of the journals, proved to be at least as valuable as those derived from the interviewing process itself.

When compared to the requirements of the interview process, apparently journal keeping tended to be more of a "chore" for the participants. In fact, many of the participants experienced a good deal of guilt about not regularly recording information in their journal. At one point, Gloria remarked:

> I discovered that I haven't done any writing in the journal at all -- about the mid-terms. It wasn't intentional. I didn't know quite how to feel about the exams.

But, she conceded,

> The guilt is definitely outweighed by the positive effects of writing in the journal. I enjoy writing in my journal. I'm not just saying that. But when I don't, I do feel extremely guilty.

For Gloria, the struggle was not limited to only a single time period during the term:

> The one place that I do feel guilty is not writing in the journal every day. Like I said, I've been feeling terribly depressed and I can't move myself to do anything when I'm depressed. And I feel very badly -- I don't write on week-ends, but probably six days, seven days have gone by that I have made no entry whatsoever. No attempt at any recapitulation or catch-up or anything. Just no entry! And that makes me feel guilty. Because I feel like [doing the journal] is [part of] a bargain.

Doug also reported feelings of guilt about keeping his journal:

> Sometimes there is a lot to write, but the initiative isn't there -- to pull the thing out and to write down what you're feeling; why you're feeling this way; any observations -- things like that.

Steven's comments sounded much like Doug's experience:

> When you can't write in the journal every day -- it's a little bit of a grind. I haven't written in that journal since Thursday . . . I had some big things to write in, but I didn't have the time. And that kind of bothers me, because I'd like to give you something.

But Steven's regret wasn't solely because he felt that not maintaining the journal might adversely affect the research. He too found personal benefits in the process: "It's like taking a load off your mind, when you sit down and you write it on a piece of paper. You kind of feel better." An observation with which his wife, Pam, heartily agreed.

In order to encourage reasonably regular recording of information on the part of the participants, I retrieved the journals on a fairly regular basis. Usually I made a collection of journal pages between the interview sessions, so that I could review the material prior to the interviews. After collection, the journals were photocopied and I returned the originals directly to the participants, usually at the next interview.

This process was useful in maintaining regular contact with the participants. I also did not hesitate to phone the participants occasionally, particularly if I had not had

contact for some time, or if some "event" of interest was developing in their situation. Of course, I also normally phoned ahead to arrange my visits.

There was a certain level of uncertainty on the part of the participants, about "what I wanted in the journals." My stance was to be generally supportive about whatever was submitted. This was an easy task because much of the material, regardless of who was preparing it, served the purpose of enriching my understanding of the participants' experiences.

As mentioned earlier, it was not unusual, at one time or another, for most of the participants to express a feeling of guilt over not writing in the journal regularly. My "standard" response was to suggest that they should not feel guilty. I assured them that, while regular records were helpful, I was grateful for any information they could spare the time to give me. I also indicated that my own journal writing tended to be sporadic, and that it varied within my own time constraints.

Unfortunately, it is probably reasonable to conclude that the journal preparation, or lack thereof, continued to be a source of guilt feelings for the participants, throughout the data collection period. I suspect this was unavoidable. It was also likely that the journal content was less complete with regard to periods of their highest activity or personal stress.

Mary gave some idea of when her journal writing took

place: "It's not really a hassle. Some nights I remember just before I go to bed that I haven't written anything down. So I quickly write something down."

Sam, on the other hand, did most of his journal keeping in the morning.

> I think it's good because, even when I'm in my meditation -- you know, nine o'clock in the morning, in the Fine Arts Lounge -- I sort of think about [the study]. That's usually the time I write in my journal for the previous day. I get a chance to reflect on all sorts of things. So, it gives me my quiet time. And, as long as I have that quiet time, I get a chance to resolve most of the problems and conflicts by myself -- have them resolved, have them settled, and away I go.

Each couple made its own determination as to whether they would share the information in their journals with each other. To my knowledge, only Brad and Brenda chose not to share their journals with each other, a pattern which was consistent with their own pre-existing journal-keeping activity.

On the other hand, both Judith and Michael acknowledged that they were, to some degree, using the journals as another channel of communication between them. Judith explained:

> I know sometimes, if I was feeling bad about something, maybe that he had done, I would probably write it to him. Hoping that he's going to read it.

Joe and Frank, understandably, found it difficult to sustain journal writing during their long periods away from home, primarily because they could see little sense in doing so. Apparently, while away, what they were experiencing did

not seem to have that much to do with their wives' situations. And finally, although he had the best of intentions, Rod's participation in journal keeping was marginal and, hence, it was unlikely that he experienced any significant effects of the process.

Although, as mentioned, there was a great variation in the style, persistence and substance of the various journals, a series of remarks from Pam and Steven seems to provide a final general overview of the nature of the participants' journal-keeping process. Pam suggested that, for her, often the recording was "really off the top of the head." But, notwithstanding this, the process also apparently involved a certain degree of reflection and personal revelation:

> Pam: I sometimes do question what I should write in mine because I'm not the student. I'm never quite sure what you want from me. So I might write what Steven is doing; what I'm doing; what the kids are doing; and what we've done for the day. And that's sort of it. Only once did I ever write in there, how I felt. Because that, at some points, doesn't seem to enter the picture.
>
> Steven: We had a big "set-to-do" here not too long ago.
>
> Pam: Yeah, I was having a hell of a time. I sort of wrote a brief. . .I didn't give the full thing because it's our personal life, but I did put in there how I was feeling and what was happening to me and all that kind of stuff. I was definitely having a hard time and it was really showing up -- with the kids especially.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, I also maintained a journal record of my ongoing activities, interactions with the other participants and reflections about the research and my situation. This was my first attempt at keeping a

systematic record of my personal activities, and in many ways, I had experiences similar to those of the other participants. For example, my entries also were more sporadic than detailed field notes. But, at the time of the data collection, the journal process and the reflection it involved, often served to clarify matters of personal interest, confusion, or concern. Although the demands of journal writing created additional stress for me, the process also served to relieve some of the ongoing pressure involved in this research undertaking -- there was someone available to speak to and share with: myself!

Now -- at the time of analysis and reporting -- the journal notes have been invaluable in refreshing my memory and assisting in "placing me back" within the circumstances of the data collection process.

MUGS involvement. As the final element in the data gathering mix, and as mentioned earlier, I also became involved -- as a member -- in the University of Alberta Mature Undergraduate and Graduate Student Club. I made the organization members aware of my ongoing research project. It was intended that I might use the informal interaction with members of the group to confirm or contradict experiences revealed by the ongoing research.

Once again, practice turned out to take a path different from the one planned. In my estimation, my involvement in MUGS was relatively ineffective in serving to confirm or contradict aspects of the ongoing research. What

the experience did was to offer ideas for the interview process. The MUGS experience also provided me with the opportunity to observe some of the institutional activities of the University, particularly as they were directed toward mature students.

In addition to the various orientation activities, I also attended a number of the regular Brown Bag Lunch sessions sponsored by the group, as well as several other social functions. This participation left me with a modest sense of the nature of the institutional commitment to the mature student group.

Research Ethics and Researcher Effect

The orientation and nature of this study raised the potential for a number of ethical concerns relating to the possible effects of the study upon the family members. As stated in Chapter 1, my intent as researcher was very much to attempt "to be in the world" of the participants -- to understand the meaning of their university/family experience as they understood it.

In this regard, I was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979:31) statement:

> To disregard the meaning of the situation to the research subject is to risk invalid conclusions both for research and, particularly in the study of human development, for public policy.

My research stance has been that in order to get at the situational meaning for the "subjects," it was not enough that the researcher be an objective external observer in the

conventional sense. To gain understanding means to engage in the social situation. The material presented thus far in this chapter reveals the process of this activity and, I hope, some sense of its effects upon the participants.

The research literature is not silent on the issue of the way in which social research may affect the participants. For example, Larossa, Bennett and Gelles (1981) indicate that the ethical issue, with regard to qualitative family-related research, has two fundamental aspects: A concern for the risks versus the benefits to the participants, and a concern for the matter of informed consent.

In terms of potential costs and benefits to the participants, Larossa et al. (1981:304) point out that most social research involves risks, such as the potential for discomfort, anxiety, reduced self-esteem and the revelation of intimate secrets.

Jules Riskin (1976:438), in discussing whole-family-research with nonlabeled (normal) families, seemed to concur: "Families are affected by being interviewed and observed," he suggested, and "there is no ethical way to observe and interact with them without their being affected."

But, within Riskin's particular study, he found that where the researcher had rapport with the family and avoided acting in a therapeutic role, neither the interview process nor the questions asked were perceived by the subjects to be

intrusive or disturbing.

Interestingly, in a later report on his ongoing family research, Riskin and McCorkle (1979:162) indicated that non-therapeutic intervention in the family situation, by a researcher with whom the family develops good rapport, may actually enhance certain communication skills that are judged by mental health professionals to be healthy.

With regard to informed consent, Larossa et al. (1981:305) indicated, "qualitative investigators approach their research settings with incomplete knowledge of what will transpire during a study," but they went on to suggest that the researcher must consciously attempt to remain flexible and receptive to the unexpected, and be prepared to operate in an unstructured or non-standardized setting. This was a tall order.

Turning to the present study, and referring to the description of the research approach outlined thus far in this chapter, it should be clear that the potential for research-induced family change was acknowledged from the outset. It was a guiding tenet that I as researcher would be a significant element within the research situation and, therefore, I attempted to be flexible and empathetic in my dealings with the participants. There is little doubt but that my presence acted to influence the nature of the participants' experience, but I did not operate with an agenda intentionally directed at initiating change in the various students' settings or perceptions of the settings.

My intention, to the degree practicable, was to know their world as they knew it.

A degree of rapport was established with the participants and there was some indication that the families experienced a minimal degree of disruption. I think it would be fair to say, though, that as Riskin and McCorkle had suggested, the reported participant comments indicated that communication between some of the spouses was enhanced by the research experience.

In my planning the study, the best protection against potential negative consequences of the research activity seemed to be by informing the participants as fully as possible as to the nature of the research, and the potential for the process to have some impact on their lives.

As may be observed (Appendix D), these matters were discussed during the first interview session with the couples. I informed the potential participants that interview discussions might touch on subjects of a sensitive nature and that they should feel free to exercise the option of declining to discuss any matters with which they might be uncomfortable. I also advised the participants that the process could be discontinued by either spouse, at any stage of the data collection. As was indicated previously, one couple chose the option to discontinue at a very early stage of the study.

In terms of establishing rapport, Bronfenbrenner (1979:31) (although his orientation is somewhat more

behavioristic than my own) seemed to suggest that the prospect of the researcher understanding the participants' situation is enhanced by the degree to which s/he shares common experiences with the actors:

> The significance of much of the behavior taking place in a given social setting *can* be understood, *provided* the observer has participated in the given setting in roles similar to those taken by the participants and is a member of or has had extensive experience in the subculture in which the setting occurs and from which the actors come.

The researcher. To me, Bronfenbrenner's notion suggested that I needed to attempt to understand who I was within the context of the research situation (the students' situation) and to bring to the surface the nature of my own experiences which might have been similar to those of the participants or might have influenced the research design, data collection and/or reporting. It also seemed to me that this information ought to be made available to any reader or user of the research (Darroch & Silvers 1982:3).

In short, it is my position that this study can not be fully apprehended without some explicit statement of who I feel I am and the nature of the particular field of experience which I brought to the research situation.

This stance seemed to require something autobiographical. Of necessity, what follows tends toward the internal, but the comments are generally cast in the light of the present research situation.

1. To provide a very brief personal historical context, let me start with a flash-back. The quote beneath my graduating photograph in my 1965 high school yearbook reads: "There is a danger in being persuaded before one understands." I recall being confused when my peers chose this comment to describe me. I certainly recall being curious about their intent. I seem to recall that my initial reaction was that I was being labeled as stupid.

Using the parallax of time, however, as I now reflect upon the statement, it seems to tell me a number of things: I come to matters slowly; I am seldom struck by the simple beauty of things. The quote seems to contain a certain suggestion of stubbornness -- this is no surprise, I think, unless this notion of stubbornness was also intended to signal a desire for the status quo.

Skepticism also seems to be reflected in the phrase and, I think, dissent. Certainly my peers seemed to feel that to describe the adolescent "me" was to talk about a desire for understanding which goes beyond the surface.

As a youth, I recall sitting before a mirror for fairly lengthy periods of time -- staring into my visage and asking repeatedly, "Who are you? What are you? Are you a brain, or is there more?" To my recollection, the answer was not forthcoming. These questions persist even yet, but now my curiosity has extended to the desire to understand others with whom I come into contact.

As part of my self-reflection process, related to this

dissertation, I discovered a brief anecdote by William Barrett (1979:17). He reported that the logical positivist philosopher A.N. Whitehead felt that all people could be classified as one of two types: "simpleminded" or "muddleheaded." Whitehead felt that his friend, philosopher Bertrand Russell, represented the former and he, the latter. According to Barrett:

> The "simpleminded" fasten upon the clear fragments of fact that lie in the foreground to the neglect of the complex background of reality against which those facts emerge. The "muddleheaded," on the other hand, are so engrossed in this complexity of background that enters into every atom of fact that clarity of expression emerges dimly if at all.

My suggestion is that this dissertation represents clear evidence of my orientation toward muddleheadedness -- in the Whitehead sense of the word, of course.

2. Three years after receiving my commerce degree, at age twenty-five, I returned to a university setting for one year, as a full-time special student, but still at the bachelor's level. Unlike the participants in the present study, at that time I was not married, but as a result of that experience, I have some sense of what it is like to be a mature-age undergraduate student.

In my second university contact I was without particular career objectives, but it represented a personal opportunity to study film as a form of fine art. In addition to those courses in which I was formally registered, I audited many others. It was a great personal

learning adventure. For a full term during this program of study, I also chaired a tutorial seminar in one of the courses in which I was registered as a student -- an experience which was particularly fulfilling. In short, as a mature-age undergraduate student, I immersed myself in a very personal learning project in the best tradition of those described by Allen Tough (1979).

But ultimately -- after one academic year of study -- in the lexicon of the university records, I failed! I did not complete. I dropped out!

In most subjects, I did not write the final exams or I dropped the course prior to completion. For me, my original personal learning intentions had been fulfilled. I had "successfully" completed. The final exams were redundant. I did not feel I needed or desired the institutional certification. Friends, relatives and instructors counselled me otherwise. Twelve years later, my decision still feels right.

These experiences may be temporally distant but the benefit of a rear view mirror allows me to see a connecting pattern between my "then" and the "now" of my current research effort. In fairness, I must make it clear that none of the foregoing comments, thoughts or connections were consciously in my mind at the time the research proposal was developed and approved. But it is now clear to me that these aspects of my personal field of experience are as much with me today as they were when I was living the earlier

events. More interestingly, during the interviews with the participants, through their comments, I rediscovered many of my own former feelings and experiences.

3. Over the past few months, as I explored the nature of an interpretive approach to understanding, the journal-keeping process caused me to reflect very seriously about how -- for the faceless reader -- I would deal with the virtual impossibility of putting a face upon myself. At a certain point, I began to think of potential descriptors. The image which came most readily to mind was "outsider."

I think it is fair to say that, for most of my life, the feeling of being an outsider has been a rather formless, yet ever-present companion. Many years ago -- I can't remember when -- I discovered a role model: Eeyore, in the writings of A. A. Milne. To this day, I continue to refer to him as such.

For those short on the experience of A. A. Milne, Eeyore is a gloomy, old, grey, thistle-eating donkey. Milne (1974) describes him as follows:

> Eeyore stood by himself in a thistly corner of the Forest, his front feet well apart, his head on one side, and thought about things. Sometimes he thought sadly to himself, "Why?" and sometimes he thought, "Wherefore?" and sometimes he thought, "Inasmuch as which?" -- and sometimes he didn't quite know what he was thinking about.

Sounds like muddleheadedness again.

About fifteen years ago, on the basis of title alone, I purchased a book by Colin Wilson (1963) entitled "The

Outsider." In the intervening years, any efforts I may have made to read Wilson's book were halting at best. In fact, it would surprise me if I had ever gotten past the first ten pages; I certainly do not recall having done so. But when, in reflection, the notion of my being an outsider occurred to me, I turned again to the book to assist me with my current challenge of self-description.

Wilson's presentation of the outsider as a type suddenly stood before me, like my image in the mirrors of my past. It was a revelation! A brief synthesis of Wilson's outsider type is included in Appendix L.

While the notion of being an outsider resonates with personal meaning for me, just as importantly, for the current study, the notion of the outsider type may also assist in partially understanding the nature of the student participants as well. The descriptions of the students, their backgrounds, their educational goals, and their values suggest to me some of the characteristics of the outsider type. I return to this matter briefly in Chapter 6, but for the most part, in terms of this study, I simply mention this matter as a curiosity -- something which could represent a useful conceptualization -- to guide me or some other researcher in future efforts to understand the psycho-social makeup of the non-continuous undergraduate university student.

4. Turning briefly to another matter, the path which led me to examine the undergraduate student's circumstance

and to use the particular methodology I have chosen was a somewhat torturous route. Once again, however, there may be some value to the reader in having a brief insight into how this choice came about. It once again reveals more parallels between my past and the circumstances of the participants.

My own family of origin -- a middle class Canadian family -- has offered me experiences with what are often referred to as middle class diseases: anorexia nervosa and alcoholism. In the not too distant past, physicians attributed the causes of these diseases almost exclusively to the particular family member displaying the symptoms. Recently, an alternate idea has developed: The symptoms -- regardless of which individual in the family displays them -- may be an indication of dysfunctional human group interaction (Caille, Abrahamsen, Girolami and Sorbye, 1977; Steinglass, 1980) rather than the problem of an isolated individual, who just happens to be a family member.

In my recent personal family experience, when both my wife and I decided to attend university concurrently, I noticed significant changes in our family situation: finances, patterns and processes of interaction, roles, etc. This realization, in conjunction with some awareness of the above-mentioned theorizing about dysfunctional families, caused me to wonder whether there might be some value in examining the university student at a molar level -- from the perspective of her/his family situation.

The first theoretical approach which seemed to offer an opportunity for this broader view was systems theory. The notion that the student might represent the conjunction of two systems -- university and family -- was immediately attractive. Unfortunately, after some study, I decided that the optic provided by this construct was somewhat too rigid for an exploratory study of the kind I had in mind.

However, the exploration of family systems theory also exposed me to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) idea of human development as a process of interaction between the developing person and the person's changing (expanding) social environment. Then, David Reiss' (1981) idea of "The Family's Construction of Reality," led me to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) work in the more general area of the sociology of knowledge.

Berger and Luckmann's treatise appeared to lend support to the idea of examining the world of everyday life, as interpreted by the participants. Added to this, Bronfenbrenner seemed to support using a macro view of the individual -- developing by entering new social situations. In synthesis, these ideas seemed to present me with the opportunity to explore an alternative way, a contextual way (a muddleheaded way?), a situational way of viewing the university student.

In arriving at this assessment, I found that what I was working with was a point of view or a perspective for organizing the research and interpreting the data. It would

be too rigid to refer to it as a methodology; rather, it was a stance, a viewpoint. This general stance served to shape the kinds of questions asked, of whom they were asked, in what situations they were asked and the specific approaches to data collection, analysis and reporting.

5. In terms of my examination and reporting of the participants' university experience, several features of my own concurrent university landscape seemed to have the potential of exerting influence, and, therefore, demand acknowledgement.

One experience could probably be described as my own struggle against the system of the university institution; specifically, in my case, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research. Since, within this study, the notion of the university as "The System" emerged as a major thematic element of the undergraduate students' experience, it seemed appropriate that I -- as researcher -- and other readers of this document, should be aware of one of my own struggles with the system, and the possible influence of my struggle upon both the data collection and the final reporting.

I am sure that during the period of this study, my own difficulty set a tone for my understanding of the relationship between the student and the institution of the university. This seems particularly likely, since my "running battle" began at almost precisely the same time that data collection for this study commenced.

On September 21, 1984, "by executive decision," the

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research banned the use of dot matrix printers for thesis production. The first reference to this issue appears in my personal journal on September 25th, and although the issue is not yet resolved for me (December 1985), my last formal action was March 26, 1985. The precise details of the dispute do not necessarily advance the current presentation, but in terms of the present study, let me simply describe the emotional sense which this conflict aroused within me.

I think it would be fair to say, however, that in September, 1984 I was incensed that such an "injustice" would be perpetrated upon students -- particularly me -- in the name of maintaining the institutional status quo.

The use of the micro computer was to be central to the conduct of my research -- I doubt that I would have considered this research approach, much less carried it out, without access to this technology. As a personal learning agenda, and to gain experience for undertaking the dissertation, I had committed considerable time, energy and personal resources integrating the micro computer into my graduate program, including some directly-related formal course work. In this regard, as a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration, there was no question but that, at the time, I was exploring new territory.

I must admit, I knew that by intending to produce my thesis through this system -- using the computer to sort and

organize findings, and printing on a dot matrix printer -- I was nudging the boundaries of institutional acceptability. This awareness did not soften the blow when, in one fell swoop, an apparently arbitrary administrative dictate crushed my ability to follow through on my plans, or at the very least, resulted in my having to spend considerable additional funds for printing and/or typing.

As my own study progressed, my efforts to resolve this issue left me with strong feelings of frustration and a growing cynicism about the nature of institutional education. My consciousness of the role of university as an institution of social control (Jules Henry, 1963; Bowles and Gintis, 1976) was noticeably enhanced. I began to question the fundamental nature of institutional learning outcomes, particularly when a university student experiences frustration and powerlessness in the face of an impersonal institution.

In my own situation, I began seriously to question the actual meaning of the degree I wished to attain. Since I was totally unsuccessful in having my viewpoint seriously considered by the university policy makers, as a student of organization and the administration of higher education, I questioned whether I had a real sense of the institutionalized educational milieu. I also began to doubt whether I wanted, any longer, to have a career within an institutional framework.

Along related lines, it was an interesting coincidence that my Candidacy oral took place on the day after the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research published the aforementioned edict. I quote from my journal September 22, 1984:

> My gawd! I find experiences like that [oral exam] to be terrible. One would think that by now, I would be able to approach these situations in life and treat them with the level of significance they deserve. I really do create my own misery. . . . I guess I am so used to feeling in control that what I feel is abject terror when I'm not. I certainly cannot think of any situation previously where I felt less in control.
>
> In the end, I felt empty. I certainly did not feel like celebrating. I did not feel like I had accomplished anything. I felt more as if I had been "through something" -- a fumbling, slovenly experience; an experience built of high anticipation and a rather grubby realization.
>
> In my advance preparation, as I went over possible questions or issues in my mind, my responses were eloquent, concise, logical, and thoughtful. In reality, I experienced the feeling of being a blathering idiot -- a teenager who had been presented with, or maneuvered himself into, the long-sought opportunity for the first glory of lovemaking.
>
> Yet, there was no soaring of the intellectual spirit. There was no meeting of great minds in a passion of intellectual intercourse. It felt more like inept fumbling in the back seat of a car.

In at least two instances, then, trembling and naked, I have stood toe-to-toe before Goliath -- the faceless institution.

For me, these profound personal experiences of "being within" the institution seem important to recount, primarily because they were temporally coincident with the study. There is little question but that my personal understanding of, and feeling about, my own university experience has been shaped by these events. I know that my feelings and

understandings have influenced the data collection process and they are also, no doubt apparent in the analyses and reporting. I hasten to add, however, that my awareness of these potential influences is in part a protection from the study being overwhelmed by them.

6. As I reflected upon the subject and form of this study, the fact that it should necessarily involve a process of developing a greater personal understanding on my part seemed inescapable. Of course, the primary objective -- studying the situation of married, mature-age undergraduate students -- remained, but it seemed only natural that an ongoing increase in personal understanding ought to take place in conjunction with the primary focus of the study. The remarks about my adolescent efforts toward self-understanding indicate that this type of process was not alien to my nature -- however, doing it in public is.

Of course, I am not unaware of the fact that the tack I am taking here -- in recording thoughts about myself -- highly personalizes this record. The process may even be viewed as self-indulgent.

To my mind, however, there are clear linkages between my subjective understanding of the world and the form and substance of what is ultimately reported in this dissertation, particularly in view of the interpretive approach I am taking. In addition, surely a dissertation is a very special kind of study; it is a personal as well as a scholarly statement.

On a more general level, it also seems to me that the social science researcher cannot be removed from the world s/he examines. We live within a social world and we always take a viewpoint from within that world. We cannot step outside ourselves; we always exert influence. As a consequence, it seems to make sense to me that those who are interested in this research record ought to understand something of the nature of the researcher.

As a result of this narrative, I trust it is apparent to the reader that -- within my field of experience -- incidents in my own university life cannot be divorced from my understanding of the other participants' university experiences. Nor should they be. My earlier reference to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) position that social research is well served by the researcher having had some parallel experiences to those s/he is studying suggests that this is a strength, not a weakness; the result is the potential for greater empathy and sensitivity. It seems to me that the primary protection against the research dangers inherent in these parallel experiences -- being overwhelmed by the researcher's viewpoint -- rests in candid disclosure. In many ways, each reader must make her or his own judgment about where my own perspective may have caused me to move the interpretation beyond the bounds of credibility.

7. Finally, to round out the description of my circumstances and their emotional and intellectual impact upon me, they should be set within the context of another

of my journal observations -- made earlier in September, 1984, just as I was beginning the process of getting firm commitments and initial data from my volunteer participants:

> I am profoundly preoccupied with this data collection process. It has pervaded my whole being. I am not able to shake it. For a moment, as we [my wife and I] left the movie theater tonight, I was overwhelmed with the feeling that nothing in my mind was attached. Everything moved relative to everything else. I couldn't, and still can't say firmly what I know about anything.
>
> Part of this has got to be exhaustion, but I think part of it relates to the sustained effort of reaching out into other people's lives. I feel that I am at the center of a network of linkages between me and my subjects. I feel as if my totality is a raw nerve, hanging out in space, pounded into insensibility by stimulus overload.
>
> At the same time, the interest in my own day-to-day family life is almost nil. I am having to use a significant amount of conscious energy to make certain that I pay attention to my wife, eating, sleeping, etc.

As a neophyte researcher in the area of interpretive research, it was fortunate that, at this early stage, I was faced with the realization that I had carried the notion of lowering my own personal boundaries beyond what I was able to control. I had allowed myself, literally, to become too wrapped up in what I was setting out to investigate.

In September, in an over-zealous effort to get inside the experience of others, in an effort to continually reflect on what I was doing, in an effort to constantly monitor the effects I was having on the other participants, in an effort to collect enough subjects to make the project viable, I was losing my sense of self. For a brief period, my cognitive and emotional anchors became unstuck.

As a consequence, I found that I had to approach the data gathering process with less intensity than I had originally anticipated. I judge that my idealized vision of the researcher, as one attempting to become ever more immersed or enfolded within the subjective reality of others, was neither practical nor sensible.

On the other hand, I suspect that practice might increase an interpretive researcher's ability to sustain a more intense level of data collection, but in this instance, as the above excerpt demonstrates, it was simply not possible for me to sustain the intensity I had originally planned for all aspects of the process: organization, questioning, taping, transcribing, journal writing, and commenting reflectively about everything which might be entering the situation under scrutiny. An additional comment on this matter is made as part of Chapter 6.

Researcher effect. Ultimately, with regard to the other participants in the study, the significant question -- which can only be partially answered -- is: What was the participants' experience of the research and researcher?

An actual incident, taken from an interview with Steven and Pam, graphically illustrated that the "surfacing" of thoughts and feelings could and did have a profound effect upon the participants:

> Pam: That last time you came over. I was really pissed off when you left. And I was angry with Steven too.

Steven: You were mad with Don?

Pam: No, I wasn't mad with Don. I was just mad with the whole situation [laughs].

Steven: Were you mad with me?

Pam: Just about all that I noticed, that I hadn't noticed before. Then I feel like a fool! I think, "Oh gawd, I must be a fool -- never noticed this." Just by things Steven was saying. All of a sudden, I was seeing him in a completely different light.

Don: As a result of our interview?

Pam: Yeah, yeah.

Don: That's why you were so quiet?

Pam: Yeah. Because I don't have anything to say when you surprise me [laughs].

Steven: You see [turning to me], you asked me a question; I voiced my opinion. Now I'm in trouble! [laughing]

Pam: Well, it was just the things he was saying, the opinions that he had -- that I didn't realize he had. It sort of just made him look different to me.

Steven: [whispered] O-h-h-h!

Don: And I had been drawing that out by my questions?

Pam: That's right. Yeah.

Don: So where does the "pissed off" come from? [Steven:(laughs)]

Pam: I was mad at Steven because . . .

Steven: There must be something I said.

Pam: No. Because if I get mad at myself, I get mad at Steven.

Steven: You were mad at me for something I said?

Pam: I can be mad at Steven all the time; and he'll still be here. I can't be mad at anybody else all the time, or they won't be here. Do you know what

I mean? I can be as mad as I want with him. He knows I'll get over it.

Steven: I knew she was mad at me last time too -- for something I said.

Pam: It sort of made it all come together. I remember when you came for your first talk, and you said that it would be different because you came -- you would make a change in our lives.

At that time, I couldn't understand that at all. I couldn't relate to that at all. Why would you make any change? We've met lots of people; they've never really made any changes that I noticed.

What is this guy -- thinks he's gonna change us? [laughs] So that's fine.

It's just that everything he said: All of a sudden I was thinking, "Gee! he's different than I thought he was."

So it comes to me as a disappointment -- initially. Because all of a sudden I feel like: "Hey, what's going on here? I must have missed something! What's wrong with me; I must be a fool." [laughs]

Then it just sort of went from there. After a couple of days I was fine -- once I sorted it out.

In addition to the obvious effect of the research process upon Pam and Steven, the preceding interaction, reveals some evidence that complete substance of the issue did not fully emerge. As the interviewer, it was not terribly uncommon for me to have a feeling that one spouse was not being quite as candid as s/he might have been in a one-on-one interview situation. This, I accepted as a natural consequence of the joint-interview research design. But in order not to enter a therapeutic role, when I became conscious of these occasions, I made no special effort to dig for the "truth."

Also as discussed earlier, with small exceptions,

during the data collection phase, I attempted to avoid becoming involved in offering judgments about the relative appropriateness of student and family activities or interactions. In practice, my efforts in this regard represented walking a very fine line.

It proved difficult to be involved, interact and share experiences without, at least, tacit judgments being implied. This stance was further complicated by the fact that in several instances, the participants were looking to me, as a person well experienced in university life, to "authenticate" or confirm that they were performing appropriately.

As they developed, the interviews were not simply question-and-answer sessions (although this may have occurred more often than I considered optimally desirable). The give and take of inquiry, the process of establishing and maintaining trust; each entailed the sharing of experiences, perceptions, and beliefs. As indicated earlier in this Chapter, the participants actually anticipated my sharing, as part of their "return," for volunteering.

In addition, I intentionally shared the various individual's ideas and experiences among the other participants -- part of the planned process.

For example, while delivering a transcript to Steven and Pam, Steven expressed some concern to me about the "bad attitude" some people had toward education and university. We spoke at some length about this issue and Steven's

feelings. During a subsequent interview, Pam indicated that my talk with Steven had helped him resolve some of his concerns. As Steven put it, "That [bad attitude] bothered me. I felt better about that after you left of course. I still feel better about it."

My journal, covering the same incident, read:

> I spent some time trying to get Steven to feel more comfortable about what he was doing. I am concerned, however, that I may simply have added more things for him to think about, and thereby, caused him more confusion, or increased his uncertainty.

In contrast, it was interesting that Pam, at another point, went into some detail to deny any significant effect of my presence:

> I don't think that you've really had any effect on us -- on me and Steven. I think the kids really find you inquisitive. They really wonder, what Don's about, and all this.
>
> But I explained everything to them. About: It's just a statistic thing, and Don will be coming to visit us. Today, we asked them if they'd play outside with their friends because [of your visit].
>
> They're pretty old. You're gonna get a lot of feedback from them. You ask us something, they're gonna answer.
>
> Today, we mentioned to [Son] about you coming at one o'clock. And [you] wanted to know what happened when "The Dad" went to -- we use "The Dad" going to university, because they can relate to that. What happens to the kids when Dad goes to university?
>
> [Son] didn't think anything happened to him but he thought [daughter] was mad. And Steven said, "Why, because I go to university?"
>
> He said, "No, I think she's like that all the time."
>
> So you can see that even with them it's not much of an effect.

The matter of the effect that my presence might have had on children also came up in Brenda's situation. One

evening, just prior to the beginning of our interview, I asked her if she was giving the children a special treat of tea in bed because she was going to have to spend the next two hours in an interview session. She denied that she had "particularly" felt she was doing that.

But a more subtle type of influence was no doubt experienced through my questioning process; Mary's comment represents an example of this:

> Well, I really hadn't thought of that until you asked the question. It never occurred to me that maybe he [Joe] would feel resentful, or feel that I wasn't pulling my load.

A final effect which continuously concerned me, was the demands the study made upon the time of the participants, particularly when the journals and interviews indicated that they were continuously treading the thin edge between chaos and control. Remarks, such as the following by Ellen, took me to the brink of despair and then offered solace before I became convinced to beat a hasty retreat:

> My doctor has said, "Scrap the housework. For Christmas, buy your gifts. Don't entertain, and if you have to entertain, send Sam to the Vendor and you go out and buy cheese and cracker plates."
>
> I just about died! Are you kidding? With all my German friends!
>
> She said, "Let the housework go. If it takes a month or two months, and you can't stand it in any longer, bring somebody in to help you clean it up."
>
> And I guess she's got a point, because you can't do everything by yourself. And you shouldn't feel guilty that that's a failure on your part -- but you do!
>
> She'd say, "Hang Don. Get him out!" She'd say, "Eat in a restaurant."

When, as a result of her remark, I asked her if I should leave, she responded,

> Oh no! If I was going to ask you to leave, I wouldn't have said that. Would probably have said it behind your back.

On another occasion, Ellen left assurances that the process was not an inconvenience:

> This is [Sam's] night off, and you're here! But we wouldn't have spent it in doing anything fantastic any way. We'd have probably watched television or played cards. So one extra person here really doesn't make it that much different. It's a visit time then. You're not really applying that much pressure here.

Regardless of these delicate matters, my primary concern, of course, was to make certain that I was continuously sensitive to any adverse effects I might be having on the participants. In this regard, Riskin (1976:438) indicates that there may be an advantage in using interviewers who are <u>not</u> experienced family therapists -- in that naive interviewers would not be inclined to enter into therapy-related activities. The criterion of interviewer naivete -- in matters of therapy -- was, I feel, certainly achieved in this study.

As the term came to a close and the data collection came to an end, I recall specifically, that both Sam and Gloria expressed regret that the process was over. Sam seemed to be expressing genuine feelings when he mentioned that he didn't know what he would do when he didn't have his journal to write in any more. Mary suggested that I should get back to them in two or three years, and do all the

interviews again -- a feeling which was expressed by others.

So, in total, if this type of remark can be taken at face value, it would seem to indicate that the participants generally found the study to be a positive experience -- one that enhanced their own understanding of their university/family situation and, yet, did not interfere unduly with the conduct of their personal lives.

At the time of the fourth interview, near the end of the university term, I began to disengage from the participants. As a very small token of appreciation, my wife and I baked, and I delivered some Christmas goodies to each family. Since that time, I have collected a few final journal entries and maintained intermittent telephone contact, primarily to advise them of the progress of my writing. Each will receive a copy of the final document.

## Limitations

From the perspective of conventional positivistic science and its related imperative for generalizability, the research approach presented in this dissertation may be viewed as severely limited. This suggestion would be the natural consequence of assessing factors inherent in the study design, such as: the small sample size, the lack of random procedures in selecting the subjects, the absence of explicit testable hypotheses and the use of an interpretive stance. Worse yet, this study can not be replicated.

On the other hand, it is not at all clear that generalizability in a conventional sense should be an

objective for this type of study. This was an exploratory examination of a particular research approach, in an effort to understand a particular social setting. It is, therefore, difficult to refer to the notion of limitations in the conventional sense.

A more appropriate approach might be to outline the context or constraints of the study. To a great extent, the preceding description of the data collection approach and my role as researcher has been an effort to illuminate these very matters.

Other constraints, for the most part, were a reflection of the resources available for undertaking graduate student research, and are further influenced by the fact that this study, like most dissertations, represents a record of the tentative steps of a neophyte researcher.

From a slightly different perspective, I would like to draw another -- rather fine -- distinction. This study is not so much a thesis as it is a dissertation. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines thesis as, "a position or proposition that a person . . . advances and offers to maintain by argument." While the dictionary acknowledges some definitional overlap, dissertation is defined as, "an extended written treatment of a subject." This document was intended to be cast in the mold of the latter definition.

The focus of this study also displays what Kirkpatrick Sale (1980:39) describes as human scale:

> A scale at which one can feel a degree of *control* over the processes of life, at which individuals become neighbors and lovers instead of just acquaintances and ciphers, makers and creators instead of just users and consumers, participants and protagonists instead of just voters and taxpayers.

While not speaking directly to the issue of social science research, Sale (1980:38) argues that one must work to keep the problems of life to manageable proportions:

> So that individuals can take in their experience whole and coherently, relate with other people freely and honestly, comprehend all that goes on in their working and civic lives, share in decisions that make it all function, and not feel intimidated or impotent in the face of large hidden forces beyond their control or reckoning.

In fact, to the extent that I, through this document, suggest the merits of an interpretive, human-scale approach to social science research, I suppose this is a thesis -- in the sense of the definition cited above. In the realm of social science research, because I have not chosen a totally conventional route, this also makes this dissertation a political document of sorts.

Interestingly, in light of the notion of human-scale, interpretive research, as it turned out, the sample size of eight participant families in this study was probably somewhat larger than might have been optimally manageable. This fact, in itself, may represent a "limitation" of the study. The potential for achieving a relative richness of understanding within this select sample had to be constantly balanced against my available personal resources -- as researcher and principal "instrument" of analysis. At

times, as my journal excerpt revealed, these resources were stretched to my limits.

But size of sample aside, the sample of participants was intentionally purposive. It was severely delimited at the outset. Additionally, if anything, it is likely that students who volunteered tended to be more confident, organized and altruistic than their peers. As mentioned previously, during the final selection of participants, people who were manifestly under extreme time pressures, before the university term even started, were not included in the study -- even though a number of them expressed interest. Hence, it may be that this purposive sample included a group of students who tended to have their situation under relatively more control than one would find among non-continuous students generally. In examining the chapters which follow, this will be an important factor to keep in mind.

As alluded to already, a potential major concern may focus upon the pivotal role -- and potential source of influence -- of myself as researcher. As previously mentioned, I have tried to offset this concern by disclosure, but also by ensuring that the data collection was an interactive process. All participants had the opportunity to clarify the personal experiences, meanings and intents expressed in their interviews and journals. Through processes such as the clustering activity, the participants interacted in establishing the interview

agenda. In addition, the data flowed from several sources, including: interviews, personal journals, and informal interaction. These sources, I feel, served as the basis for the development of a form of triangulation.

In the final analysis, I feel that the issue of limitations really becomes a question of which set of investigative opportunities one chooses to live with. In many ways, this study, itself, represented a particular social ecology. This was not so much a limitation as an alternative guiding perspective for social inquiry. The particular data collection techniques used in this study flowed directly from this perspective.

As such, the perspective patterned the manner in which the social phenomena were viewed. The study affected all the participants; it was uniquely located, temporally and spatially; it was experienced and reported subjectively. In this study, however, subjectivity was explicitly acknowledged and confronted.

In any event, if the idea of interpretive, human-scale research makes sense, it seems appropriate to speak more of the study's constraints and context than of the conventional idea of limitations. This study should be identified as human-scale, exploratory research -- an attempt to understand a problematic social situation in terms of the circumstances personally relevant and meaningful to the student participants rather than in terms of the circumstances of the institution of the university.

Data Analysis and Reporting

In my role as researcher, I entered the research situation in the fashion of what Berger and Luckmann (1967:19) refer to as a "merchant of ideas." The preceding portion of this chapter gives some sense of the dynamics of the relationship between the participants and myself. In reporting, I was faced with the problem of how to be true to my own understanding of the participants' situation, without sacrificing the trust they placed in me -- the responsibility to represent as fairly as possible, their world of everyday life, as they had presented it to me.

In his interesting book about "The Idea of Progress," Sidney Pollard (1971:202) -- when discussing the orientation and activities of the historian and social scientist -- argued we should set aside a strongly deterministic view of mankind. He suggested that in social science, the notion of causation should not be viewed so much as a command or law of nature, but more as a description of what happens, including a description of the actors' own nature.

The orientation outlined in this dissertation (directed toward description and interpretation) does not represent an absolute rejection of the existence or importance of social norms, constraints, patterns or regularities. But Pollard (1971:202) draws an interesting parallel between the investigation of social situations and the observation of a poker game.

At one level, the poker game operates within a

framework of relatively easily understood rules and probabilities. But in the end, for the social scientist or the poker player, the predictable elements of the game are of less interest than the "gamble of guessing each other's actions." Or as Pollard referred to them: the unstable and unpredictable oscilations. It was these unstable aspects of the student situation and the challenge of how to maintain a sense of these through the reporting process which I found most interesting.

Analysis. The data collection procedures, to some degree, involved a data analysis and verification process. Throughout the data collection process, I sifted the material in an attempt to identify shared meanings, common themes, issues and concerns. Where it seemed appropriate, and where time permitted, during interview sessions, these matters were presented to the participants for comment and clarification. The participants had the opportunity to review and make corrections to the interview transcripts.

And in the end, during the drafting of the final document, Chapters 4 and 5 and the relevant profile from Chapter 2 of the dissertation in draft form, were provided to each of the couples for examination. The participants were requested to review the text for verification of aspects such as edited quotes, profiles and financial information. In addition, where, in my own writing, I had chosen adjectives which did not convey the original meaning of the participants, these were discussed and amended as

necessary.

During this process, most participants expressed the opinion that the descriptive material seemed to fairly represent their experience and that they shared many of the views expressed by others. They also felt that the material raised interesting and thought-provoking questions -- many of which they had not previously considered. A number also indicated that their situations had changed considerably over the year between the data collection and their opportunity to review the descriptive material, but they could easily recall the experience.

The descriptive elements of the dissertation, then, represent a participative synthesis of materials resulting from the iterative interview process and the activities outlined earlier in this chapter.

The interview data were transcribed and stored using a microcomputer. The storage of interviews required approximately thirteen single sided floppy disks, each having a capacity of approximately 180K. In addition, the data included the other materials collected through the various interview activities and photocopies of the individual journals, totaling some 300 handwritten pages.

During the transcription and interview process, potential and/or interesting thematic aspects and critical incidents became apparent. I maintained a running record of these. At the completion of the data collection, I reviewed these notes, eliminating or combining duplication in theme

or interest areas. Sub-themes, which were related to what appeared to be more general interest elements, were grouped together. This process resulted in the identification of a number of major areas of potential interest, some with several related sub-themes (Appendix M).

I assigned each of these areas a unique code; reviewed the electronic files and inserted the various codes where appropriate. This further review of the interview data resulted in the identification of some additional aspects of potential interest, and therefore, the coding structure was amended to accommodate these elements.

The same codes were manually appended to the material in the individual journals.

During this review and coding process, I made a preliminary personal assessments as to the relative significance of the various issues being coded. For example, references to parking problems were frequent. I decided not to focus on these issues since the university was undergoing a somewhat unique parking shortage at the time of the study. In coding, I also tried to maintain a sense of the richness of the data which might be available for any particular element. Of course, in many instances, a given portion of an interview would have several overlapping codes assigned. In other words, a particular remark or idea might very well refer to several themes or sub-themes, or interest areas. Figure 2 indicates the appearance of a coded transcript (See Appendix M for codes).

S: Yeah, this is strictly with the university. ^idz-ml
(I: This whole diagram?) No, just this one leg. Again, one of the prerequisites I went into university with, was to try and get orderly, and make sure that I could relax; and make everything as relaxing as possible.

Instead, from there, comes tension. Because I go into there relaxed -- or wanting to be relaxed -- and things happen. You get behind a ^crs-ml
couple of chapters or forget to read an assignment or something. It gets to you.

Or, if something's not working well at home, ^iuf-ml
or working well at work, it spills over into ^mtf-ml
school. It just makes you that much more upset, I guess.

That's where the frustration comes in too. ^mtf-ml
Because if everything isn't going like cogs in a wheel -- properly meshed and everything -- then it affects. Where it affects me, more than any place ^iuf-ml
else, is university. Probably because, what affects my university, more than anything else, is the family. If that's not going smoothly, well, university is the one that's going to suffer. Work is almost a self-contained unit. It doesn't affect me that much, and I can't affect that either.

I: So, if you needed extra time on the family-end ^owh-ml
of things, then university would get short-changed?

S: No, I guess work gets short-changed. I took a day off already.

I: Oh, did you?

S: Yeah. As a matter of fact, it was Remembrance Day that I took off. And I was happy with that. That was good.

S: Any other comments, since we've been around the circle?

Figure 2

Excerpt - Coded Transcript

In addition, as an analytical experiment, I used a separate code to identify those instances in which the participants used metaphors, images or figures of speech in their descriptions and comments. I had no preliminary sense of what the totality of this material would reveal, but decided to cast this analytical net. The results of the use of this particular process are included in Chapters 4 & 5.

For me, the genesis of the idea of focusing some attention on figures of speech was an article discussing the importance of metaphor by Andrew Ortony, published in Educational Theory. Ortony (1975:46) argues that, as conscious beings, our experience of everyday life is continuous: "Experience does not arrive in little discrete packets, but flows, leading us imperceptibly from one state to another" (1975:46). This position would seem to be consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) general notion of a continuous ecology of the developing individual.

When people use language to attempt to describe lived experience, Ortony (1975:46) suggests that the words, in their ordinary use, tend to partition experience:

> It would not be surprising if a discrete symbol system were incapable of literally capturing every conceivable aspect of an object, event or experience that one might wish to describe.

Having indicated the descriptive deficiencies of dependence upon the ordinary use of language, Ortony (1975:45) declares that the use of metaphor resolves this deficiency. He states that there is "fairly wide agreement

that metaphor involves, or is, the transfer of meaning." Ortony reasons that the use of imagery in language generates a "better, more insightful, personal understanding." Imagery is more vivid and it is a communication device for moving the interpreter from the "well-known to the less well-known" (1975:51).

Ortony's arguments seemed to offer the basis for a supposition that there might be the potential to gain a general, and yet rich, personal understanding of the student experience, through examining the images or figures of speech the participants used to describe their situation and their university experiences.

Although he used the label metaphor, Ortony was not unnecessarily restrictive in his definition; for example, for his purposes, he found it unnecessary to be unduly concerned with the distinction between metaphor and simile. In this regard, in this study, I was guided by the general definition in H. Shaw's Handbook of English (1979:251), in which figure of speech is defined as the use of "words out of their literal or ordinary sense in order to suggest a picture or image." Since the interpretive process of this analysis was not intended as grammatical analysis for its own sake, it was not my concern to distinguish between grammatical elements such as metaphor, simile, analogy, etc.

It should be noted, however, that in using this analytic process, it soon became apparent that there was a wide variation among the participants, in terms of the

extent to which they used imagery in their communication. In almost all cases, some level of use of figures of speech was apparent, however, this interpretive technique tended to give partiality toward the views of those who were most adept at using these communication devices.

In any event, returning to the more general process of transcript analysis, in order to gather the previously coded material, the "search and find" feature of the computer's word processing program was then used to locate and gather the material into the electronic files. These data were supplemented by the journal material. Finally, the material in each selected area was organized for final reporting.

I had previously used this technique with a more modest quantity of interview material. I must say, however, that the volume of data involved in the present study taxed the capabilities of my computer system and myself to the limit. On the other hand, I think that this research approach would have been infinitely more difficult without the facility of a micro computer.

Reporting. In the end, for reporting purposes, I selected key interest areas -- primarily, those elements which I felt would contribute to the presentation and which would reveal a sense of the reported experience of this select group of non-continuous married university students.

In order to protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used for all participants except myself. The concern to maintain anonymity also necessitated some

intentional vagueness in reporting some of the specific details of a person's occupation, or precise details of some course registrations. I trust this will ensure general anonymity and I asked all participants to be aware of problems in this regard as they reviewed the draft of the document.

In addition, as will already be apparent, in the reporting process I have chosen generally to refer to myself in the first person. This choice seemed to be consistent with the research perspective discussed earlier. My role was to attempt <u>not</u> to become a transparent aspect of the research situation. I trust the first-person style will serve constantly to keep the reader (and me) aware of my presence, and to convey some sense of the influence I exerted in the conduct of this study.

In terms of the actual reporting of material, I chose to make extensive use of edited transcript excerpts. For me, this approach served better to represent the actual reports of the participants. Since the focus of this study was upon context as understood and given meaning by the participants, I did not hesitate to include relatively lengthy excerpts when I felt they were useful in giving a more detailed sense of the situation the speaker was describing.

In those instances in which I felt it would be particularly useful, actual participant journal excerpts have also been used, rather than to depend solely on

interview data.

Finally, in a few instances in which dialogue between participants seemed particularly illuminating, or it was valuable in outlining an aspect of their spousal relationship or shared understanding, I chose to include the material in the form of the original dialogue.

In the end, I hope that these tactics have resulted in an interesting and informative narrative. This approach was informed to some degree by Wendy O'Flaherty's (1984:127) assertion that it is narrative which makes it possible to share our experiences. She tells us that narrative "is a basic form of human communication, because it makes an immediate contact, gathering the hearer into the speaker." O'Flaherty cautions us, however:

> Narratives do not constitute proofs; they act out proofs. . . . They merely tell you what is for them a truth, and you either accept it or you don't; it either matches an experience of your own, or it doesn't. . . . The hearer then responds, either by saying, "Yes, it was like that with me, too, it happened to me, too," or "It was different with me."

The role of the "hearer" (researcher or reader), then, cannot be discounted in this research situation. The reader must be aware of what s/he brings to the reading of this document. As a final note, O'Flaherty (1984:184) puts this notion very well: "We will read ourselves into any text that we read. Not only may we ask our own questions of the text; we cannot *help* asking our own questions."

With this in mind, let us turn to the descriptions.

# CHAPTER 4

## Family Setting

This chapter is oriented toward several aspects of the student participants' direct family circumstances. The chapter is structured around two major aspects: figures of speech used by the participants and thematic elements which appeared to emerge from the interview and journal material. The issues presented here are not exhaustive of all the potential matters which could be explored. Those included, however, did tend to be pervasive and appeared to be of some interest.

Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) notion of ecological development, I anticipated that the description and exploration of the student family situation might reveal a complex web of interaction and accommodation between the developing student and her/his expanding social setting. In essence, as the student entered the new social setting (the university), I felt that the participants might experience and describe a sense of overlap or a suffusion between family and university life. To my mind, it was even possible that some might experience a certain seamlessness between these two apparently separate social settings.

Should this turn out to be the case, there might be support for the notion that one way our general

understanding of the mature-age married university student could be enhanced would be by focusing attention on the student's sense of his or her context. In other words, this was an effort to attempt to view the learning situation holistically and from the perspective of the student -- not to be limited by viewing the student only in terms of what might be rather arbitrary institutional or classroom boundaries.

Family Images

By way of introducing this chapter, it seems appropriate, first, to turn to the kinds of imagery the participants used to describe their situation other than the direct university setting itself. These images set a general tone for our understanding of their experience.

From a spouse's viewpoint, Ellen Maunder declared that the student family situation was "not very orderly" -- "it's just running from morning till night." This feeling was apparently quite a change from earlier good times, when she and Sam saw a lot of each other and were "used to living out of each other's hip pocket." But Ellen indicated that, as a student spouse, she wasn't lonely, but was frustrated:

> If you go out, then all your work is staring you in the face when you get home; and if you stay home, you're burnt out and you don't have a good time because you don't see anybody other than the four walls and the mess.

In mid September, Mary Baker reported that both she and her husband, Joe, had been "run ragged" during the prior two

weeks. And later in September, Mary designated herself "supermom:"

> I got banking business done, took the kids shopping for winter boots and mitts, did a big grocery shopping, cleaned house, did loads of laundry, made a healthy beef stew for supper . . .

In contrast, the day previously she had chided herself for not baking bread or homemade cookies for the kids' lunches, because she was spending time studying.

Brad Potter acknowledged that he and Brenda had found themselves "scrambling to keep the thing going." Brenda described their family situation as "like a family of jazz," and Brad responded by proclaiming, "Jazz has got a lot more rhythm than this!"

In early November, a notation in Brenda's journal -- "What a pressure cooker" -- described her feelings about trying to coordinate her studying, employment activities and the activities of her family.

This must have been a similar experience to the previously-mentioned situation when, in anticipation of Christmas entertaining, Ellen "almost died" at her family physician's suggestion to "scrap the housework, bring in somebody to help and go out and buy cheese and cracker plates."

Gloria Makowichuk raised the issue of their "relative poverty." The family finances as well as the uncertainties of her father's medical situation and Doug's uncertain employment prospects had Gloria continually "waiting for

the other shoe to drop." She also acknowledged that their family financial situation was "not Ethiopia, but there is a difference in our lifestyle because of my being a student." She called her feeling a "sort of directionless resentment" or "panic" and conceded that she really had no place to "dump it."

Throughout the term, Judith Lynden felt isolated at the university. She indicated that she sometimes lost sight of her personal goals because of self-doubt: "When I start doubting, I take a little walk down a little side street." "Eventually," she assured herself, "I'll come back to the main road." But she acknowledged that it was often her husband Michael who gave her the encouragement to return to that "main road."

In an apparently similar fashion, Doug felt that his role as student spouse could be that of "sounding board" for Gloria. But the role of spouse as sounding board was not without its dangers. For example, Ellen admitted that under the pressure she felt, little things sometimes caused Sam to get his "head bitten off" -- not necessarily a typical student experience.

But obviously Frank Sheskey must have experienced similar events because he indicated that it was sometimes difficult for a spouse to give counsel "and not get shot in the head for it."

Steven Sharpe only half-jokingly objected that his wife Pam was turning into a "Libber." Pam acknowledged a change,

but argued that, as spouse, she too was under extreme pressure. She was being "torn" by the experience of having to work outside the home when her children were her first priority. She declared, " I'm not Wonder Woman any more. I seem to have lost my golden lasso."

Pam described what it was like when the lasso failed:

> Of course, I fall. I can't take all those things! It's just a spin. It's like a rat race. You're just chased by one, by one, by one, by one, then even something so small . . . . I was just having a really hard time with all the different little aspects of what [Steven's entering university] is going to mean to me?

Brad also found pressure in revised spousal responsibilities, but he suggested that for him, "the quid pro quo is a recognition of the contribution" he was making. He added that he didn't need a "lot of flak" if he found he had to unexpectedly meet some employment commitments.

Much later in the term, Joe's journal entry of November 14th seems to have involved an effort to reaffirm his spousal commitment:

> The more I think about it, the more I realize that, once having put my hand to the plow, I cannot look back. I mentioned earlier that what I am doing now is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Or shall I say, several end results. One of them being my wife's education. I must learn to think of the present situation as long-term, and become steadfast and single minded in pursuit of the long-range goals. In order to do that, I must take my eye off of the more immediate desire and focus on the future goals.

Sam used the notion of prison to describe the nature of his home/university/work existence: "The control is about as rigid as you can possibly get it without being in

prison." By this he apparently meant that work and university commitments had locked him into certain blocks of personal time demands which were beyond his control.

None of the other participants drew the boundaries as severely as Sam, yet even for him, there was a spill-over between the various settings he felt he operated within:

> If something's not working well at home, or working well at work, it spills over into school. It just makes you that much more upset, I guess. That's where the frustration comes in too. Because if everything isn't going like cogs in a wheel -- properly meshed and everything -- then it affects.
>
> Where it affects me, more than any place else, is university. What affects my university, more than anything else, is the family. If that's not going smoothly, well, university is the one that's going to suffer. Work is almost a self-contained unit. It doesn't affect me that much, and I can't affect that either.

Interestingly, in spite of, or maybe because of the rigidity, Sam found that he had to "find time in little crannies and bits of places here and there." Brenda had a similar sense. She did not anticipate "blocks of time to appear" for her, but she observed, "I think anything I do is going to have to be done in bits and pieces along the way. I don't see how I have any control, or complete control over that."

Steven spoke about a weekend of study that was "all wrecked" or "losing a day," due to visits from relatives, involvement in minor hockey responsibilities or personal illness.

All of the above images used by the participants, suggest that the move of one of the spouses into a new

social setting, required major family adjustment, a process of working out new relationships, establishing priorities, organizing resources and attempting to achieve some sense of personal control. Let us look more directly at some of the experiences described by the participants.

Setting Interpenetration

In terms of the connection between university and family setting, among the participants, a wide variation of experience was evident. The influences between family and university, however, seemed to have been both by direct physical contact between settings, but more importantly, by altered conceptions -- through reconstructed personal understandings, responsibilities and relationships among family members. The student, of course, always seemed to stand as the pivot point between the two settings.

Through this chapter and the next, I feel it is gradually revealed that, in many ways, the most rigid and unresponsive aspect of the new students' situation appeared to be the university setting.

While the whole of this dissertation represents an effort to explore the substance of the notion of a sense of the interpenetration of family and university setting it seems appropriate to begin with some concrete or more explicit indications of interaction, overlap or seamlessness.

Once again, I have to remind myself as well as the reader that the reported experiences and the understandings

which may be derived from them, are not without contradiction and inconsistency. Further, the inconsistencies may be as important to our understanding as any well-supported patterns which may appear.

Family life space. Probably the most obvious place to begin examining setting interpenetration is with the material produced as part of the family life space drawing activity. As mentioned earlier, five of the eight couples engaged in this activity. Four of these five students clearly indicated the university as being an institution located outside their immediate family life space. University was often placed along with other institutions such as church, employers and the like.

Gloria, however, positioned the university astride the family boundary of her life space drawing. For her (and Doug's comments suggest, for him also) the experience of university was clearly not isolated from other aspects of her life. This was most evident when Gloria was describing how she had been feeling about her life and concerns she was having that her good feelings might not continue - waiting for the "other shoe to drop," as mentioned earlier:

> Mostly because of the intensity of the good feeling that I'm getting from the university. I keep feeling like it's going to be replaced by an equally intense, totally opposite feeling.
>
> I'm waiting for . . . not just academic shoes to drop; I'm waiting for every shoe to drop. I'm waiting for [Doug] to lose his job, my father to die of cancer, [my daughter] to be kidnapped. A million things like that. Because, when things are going really well, I am obsessed with waiting for the other shoe to drop. And things are going really well!

> As I say, it's not just university, it's everything. But it is very strongly connected, because of the intensity of my feelings for what's gone on since September.

Doug also reported feeling the influence of the university because, as he reported, each day, Gloria tended to share her university experiences with him:

> Gloria brings home her university with her so I sort of get caught up in the whole thing. We sit around and discuss what she did. Stories of the day, and just expanding on ideas from the various classes, particularly in political science. I don't know any French.

For most of the participants, it appeared that opportunities for this type of regular sharing of experience represented a positive aspect in maintaining the support of non-student family members. Judith reported similar sharing:

> This introduction to psychology, for me, has been really interesting. Sometimes I'll come home and I'll just spew off, " You know that blah, blah, blah."
> [Michael]: "Oh, isn't that nice. Well, that's good Dear."
> Because [formerly] sometimes he'd come home and he'd do things like that to me. And I never had anything interesting to relate back. You just feel like a big dummy. Now I'm learning these things that I'm interested in.
> He'll ask questions. Actually, he doesn't just pass it off and say, "Oh yeah Dear, it's very nice. What's for supper?" He asks questions about it and things.

While, on the surface, this type of sharing activity might appear to be a natural part of family support, many of the couples were hampered in this process by the fact that their personal schedules became so complex as to virtually

eliminate this type of interaction. For example, at one point, because of opposing personal schedules, the Maunders were reduced to writing notes to each other about routine family tasks which needed to be accomplished. The Sharpes also saw little of one another. This lack of opportunity to share was also often experienced in those situations where spouses were employed outside Edmonton. In cases such as these, then, there was virtually no time for the sharing of the student experience between the spouses.

Returning to the Life Space drawings, unlike Gloria, Brenda initially set the symbol for the university well outside her family circle. But during the drawing process, she considered two other alternatives. Through discussion with her husband, as an alternative positioning, she also tried placing the university symbol well within the family space. Ultimately, Brad's suggestion was that the university ought to possibly be drawn in such a way as to totally envelope the family life space. His logic was that Brenda's attending university was having a significant effect on their total family -- the university surrounded their family.

For instance, to her husband, Brenda was interested in talking about only one thing with friends and family, matters related to her program of study (refer to the dialogue beginning on page 155 in Chapter 3). But Brenda had a different perception, she was becoming much more uncertain of herself and withdrawing from interaction with

others. Between spouses, differences in perception such as this, were not uncommon.

Regardless of whose particular perception might have been closer to the truth in this instance, it was clear that Brenda's program of study was having a noticeable effect on her relationship with her husband and friends.

In the end, with regard to her drawing of family life space, Brenda was ambivalent about the precise relationship between her family and university:

> Well, I guess it's hard to know where it goes. If you asked me, it's really hard for me to know where [the university] fits. What [Brad says] is right, and what I say is OK. And this idea [of university as a total envelope] makes some sense. But I don't know where I'd come down in the end. I haven't figured that one out.

Brenda was, however, certain about the fact that being a full-time student was qualitatively different from her experience of being a part-time student:

> I would encourage adults going back to do it full time and not part time. . . . It's easier to do that. It's not an adjunct, it's not attached on to your life. . . . Everybody is forced to take your involvement seriously.

This comment alone seems to suggest that, for Brenda, full-time attendance at university was something very central to her life, a fact which had to be reckoned with by others close to her.

Interestingly then, from these experiences, it seemed that the experience of university could penetrate the family situation in at least two ways: either through sharing new personal experiences and horizons, or by some disruption of

existing family relations through increased situational complexity.

I will now use these two notions as a somewhat arbitrary organizing framework for the remainder of this section.

Complexity. As was revealed in the introductory section on images, Sam was the only student who indicated that he had intentionally attempted to compartmentalize his life. In order to control what he anticipated would be a stressful situation, he attempted to isolate what he saw as the three relatively equal but separate, aspects of his life: employment, family and university. Over the term, however, he discovered that he had some difficulty in maintaining this neatly packaged arrangement:

> One of the prerequisites I went into university with, was to try and get orderly, and make sure that I could relax; and make everything as relaxing as possible.
>
> Instead, from [university] comes tension. Because I go into there relaxed -- or wanting to be relaxed -- and things happen. You get behind a couple of chapters or forget to read an assignment or something. It gets to you.
>
> Or, if something's not working well at home, or working well at work, it spills over into school. It just makes you that much more upset, I guess.

Regardless of this "spill over," the view of his life as divided into three relatively discrete compartments continued to guide Sam's organization and understanding of his situation throughout the university term. For him, it remained a structure of personal control:

> I think, at least psychologically, I've conditioned myself so that I can handle the university, and I can handle the work, and I can handle the family situation. And that's all I want to handle. I don't want to socialize, and I don't want to be active in the church. I don't want to do anything else. So anytime I have to, it's an intrusion.
>
> I feel that the family is being cheated because it's just slotted away. The three dimensions are getting unequal thirds. The family is getting the smallest third.

It seems possible that, in Sam's case, the relatively rigid structure of his full-time employment was something which gave him the impression that he could compartmentalize his life. His employment schedule meant that several hours a day were set aside as relatively untouchable. It is interesting to note that, within this study, this particular type of employment experience was a male student experience only.

But to Sam, in terms of time, his family was losing out to his employment responsibilites, so he made special provisions:

> Because [employment] is a solid eight hours. It's a solid third, every day. University is, oh I don't know, whenever I get there -- 9/9:30, till 3:00. That's all it is.
>
> So, because they are cheated, the family becomes a more important part than the other two thirds. That's where the effort is going, I think. I take [daughter] when I can -- on Tuesdays especially. Just so I can have her.
>
> Usually, I do some house work on Thursday mornings, when [Ellen] is at work. That frees-up Saturdays.

When Ellen pointed out that Sam had not accounted for his travel time, his response was, "Well, that's meditation time. That's time I can just 'veg.'."

But, it seemed, Sam didn't have much time to vegetate:

> I'm finding enough time for university, for the homework and that type of thing. I'm obviously finding enough time for work because the time is set out for me. But almost everything else, I have to find time in little crannies and bits of places here and there. And that's frustrating.
>
> There's never time to do any yard work. And that's getting to be sort of a pain. I started roto-tilling on Saturday and the blasted thing broke down on me again. I had spent almost -- I don't know -- probably two or maybe three complete days trying to figure out how to take it apart and put this belt back on. When I did finally put it back on and put the thing back together again, I found out that I must have put it together a little bit improperly, so now it's kaput again.

Interestingly, contrary to Sam's assertions about his ability to isolate his employment from the more general situation, there was evidence that work was at least partially affected. For example, Sam indicated he booked off on Remembrance Day (a regular work day), in order to get a brief break from the constant pressure he had been feeling from all the demands his situation was making on him.

In the end, it seems clear that, even though he tried desperately to compartmentalize his life, Sam's experience of university is probably most fully understood in concert with other aspects of his life situation. Even he seemed to acknowledge this at one point, when he stated, "I think if I can isolate everything, I could say that I enjoy university; I enjoy [employment]; but I sure don't like the two together."

The complexity of Sam's situation directly affected his university experience in at least two instances that he

mentioned:

> One specific thing that I even mentioned to the music instructor was the fact that the Music Library is only open certain hours. Maybe other resource libraries or resource things have the same limitations.
>
> For a normal sort of nine-to-five student, who has all night to bum around in, those hours are not going to pose much of a problem. But for somebody who has something else to do -- a job or something -- those are pretty severe limitations.
>
> I don't have any choice as to what I do during the day, except go to the music library, because it's the only time I have to get there.
>
> I cannot sign anything out of there. Can't take tapes out; can't take records out, to listen to when I have the time to listen to them. I can't do that. For me, that's the most limiting factor in that class.
>
> As a matter of fact, in this term, that's going to cost me -- it already has cost me marks. I just don't have the time to listen to the music and to know it properly.

On another occasion Sam mentioned the potential effects on his grades of his feelings of personal weariness:

> Well -- what day is it today? Monday? I guess that [question] tells you a little bit.
>
> Friday was really bad for me. I was very, very tired, and I'm just thankful I didn't have a test or an exam -- that type of thing -- on Friday.

Sam was fortunate in his exam scheduling, but Gloria described an experience which indicated the kind of family upset which might have faced any one of the students just prior to an exam. Gloria had three mid-term exams scheduled for the next day, and as she described it:

> We happened to have a family catastrophe the night before. It meant that Doug was out half the night and I was up half the night. There were calls to the police and it was very tense. There wasn't much attention being given to the matter at hand, which was the mid-terms.

In short, it appeared that at ten in the evening, Doug

was called by Gloria's best friend. She wanted Doug to protect her from threats of murder by her boyfriend's father. Doug agreed to mediate. Gloria, trying to study, remained at home for the duration of the problem:

> I went and turned off all the lights and went and barricaded myself upstairs and we started this on-again off-again phone contact. I figured, what the hell, we'll survive! Went to bed. [Worked on] my little essay on my English exam. Sat by. Manned the phone for a couple of hours. Went to bed late. Thought, "That's life!"
>
> Got up and wrote three exams and did reasonably well.

While most of the students might not have experienced difficulties which were quite as dramatic as this, the students generally reported family disruptions affecting their studying. Mary's husband Joe described his feelings about the mix of family and studying:

> Most of her work is done at the university, between classes. But some nights, I know she has sat here from just about supper time till midnight, and we haven't really disturbed her.
>
> But she hasn't requested not to be disturbed; if the kids come to speak to her, there's little problem that way.
>
> If Mary's marks really started to slip and she said, "Look, I need to put more time into it, so I'll be staying at the university over supper time." That would possibly cause more stress. That would remain to be seen I suppose -- how much we'd be willing to sacrifice.
>
> She gets what needs to be done, done. I think, if she were to set herself a more rigid schedule and insist that she not be disturbed between seven and nine at night, that would be far more irritating. It'd be harder on me and the kids. It may be more beneficial for her, but at this point, I don't think she needs that type of rigid schedule, because she's doing well. So I'd rather she didn't.

Mary indicated that she was sensitive to the kinds of

issues Joe raised and her remarks revealed that there was give-and-take involved in the situation:

> I can tell when Joe is finding it hard to cope with the kids and making supper, or something like that. He starts getting a little grouchy, or things just don't get done. Then, maybe, rather than studying, I'll do laundry that evening, or help him out with the kids or something.
>
> I think we can sense. He knows too, if I have an exam the next day, that I need that time in the evening.

Sheila also found that family responsibilities inserted themselves into her studying patterns. For her, there was a constant tension between family responsibility and the desire to study:

> Studying that works for me is when I can go down to my room and not have anything else on my mind. Not having to think: "Oh, what are we going to have for dinner?" Or, "I should be doing a load of wash. Oh, somebody needs something ironed for tomorrow."
>
> When I can just forget about all that and get right in and read for a couple of pages; stop and think about what I have read -- and it all makes sense. That's what I find most beneficial.

With her special study area in the basement, Sheila was able to physically move herself away from most family activities, although her feelings of responsibility remained. Edna also had a special study area in the basement. In Edna's case, she found that her children generally respected the closed door when she was studying, her husband, Frank, was another matter. But she, of course, had to balance his interruptions with the fact that he was regularly away from home for two weeks at a time.

With regard to spousal absence, Mary and Joe, of

course, were faced with virtually the same challenge as Edna and Frank. Mary and Joe acknowledged that each time Joe arrived home from his two weeks at work, it represented a major disruption. Joe laughed when he said, "The first couple of days, things go haywire."

Mary agreed, "Things go crazy." And she went on to suggest, "I probably get more work done when he's gone. So, maybe my marks would be better when he's gone. I might concentrate more on my studies when he's gone, and less when he's home."

But Mary also made another remark which indicated that, for her, Joe's absences represented a personal conundrum:

> The last two weeks that he was up north were my worst two weeks in a long long time -- as far as being resentful of his job and not handling things too well.
>
> But I think that that's probably when I enjoy going to university the most. I don't think about his job, or him being away, or whatever. I'm thinking about things that are going on [at university], or what I'm learning.
>
> It's more in the evenings, when I'm home, that I get up tight.

Of course, these kinds of attempts to study and work around family were not without consequences for the relationship between the student and other family members. Mary described what it was like when her personal resources were stretched to the limit:

> I used to devote all my time to my family. I used to do other things too, but basically, my time was devoted to my family. Now, I'm so busy with the university that I have less time.
>
> Like yesterday -- for halloween -- as I was coming home, I really wanted to do something special for the kids. So I stopped in at Safeway to get some caramels, to make caramel apples for them. And of course, they

were sold out, because it was halloween day.
Previously, I would have been thinking about that a week ahead of time; I would have bought them. I would have probably sewed costumes for the kids and all that kind of thing. I would have done a lot more for them. Now, I just don't have the time.

As was the case for many of the other participants, Mary noticed that she was forced to become better organized.

I would say that things weigh on my mind a lot more. Because before, being at home all the time, I had a lot of time to do whatever I wanted to do. It wasn't the same kind of pressure. I do find -- like riding home on the bus -- I'm thinking about what I'm going to make for supper, or what we have to do that evening, or: Oh, I've got to get laundry done tonight for sure, because I've nothing to wear tomorrow. I guess I'm more organized in a sense.

As we shall see later in this chapter, the increased complexity of the family situation alluded to by Mary, essentially forced all of the families to undertake more formal and more wide-ranging organizing activities. Interestingly, it was often difficult for me to judge whether this imperative to organize represented a positive or negative development within the various family settings.

In any event, the children were often a constant worry -- a worry which inserted itself, directly into the students' activities at the university. For example, for Edna, during periods when Frank was away from home, each morning at about 7:45 -- before her 8:00am class -- she would phone home to see how her boys were progressing toward getting ready for school. She would also have left an alarm set to ring at 8:25, to warn the boys to put their boots on and get off to school.

So, as Edna began each day at university, she was never certain that the family situation was fully under control:

> This was always a concern -- about my kids -- you probably noticed that, through the journal. When I go in the morning: Did they fall on the way to school and break a leg? That kind of thing.
>
> And phoning them: What are they telling me, really, when I ask if everything is all right and what are they doing? Suspicion! What are you up to?

Brenda also found herself phoning home:

> I feel guilty when I say, Ok, I'll take the time [to study at the university]. Then I'm sitting in the library and I phone home -- I mean, you can tell! -- I phone home three times. I do ridiculous things. But I think you just have to work through that.

Not only did Brenda find that her sense of obligation to family created difficulties in maintaining concentration on her studies, like Sam, she also found that family demands sometimes ran up against university regulations and operating procedures. She described an incident in which the final official date for dropping courses arrived, but she had not properly organized herself to drop the psychology course she was unhappy with:

> So that day, I began the process -- the last day -- and of course, I couldn't get hold of people. I was running all over campus. I did find out I could have taken an Ed. Psych. -- nobody had [previously] given me that information. I think that would have been better for me. I think it would have been more relevant to what I was doing, and I think it would have been a focus that I would have better understood.
>
> But, by the time I got 3/4's of the way through the process, it was 3:30pm and I had to come home for the kids. I just started the process too late. I didn't put it all together. So that's frustrating.

In a similar vein, family concerns obviously had a

significant impact on Sheila Eley's experience. She spoke of her whole family -- husband, Rod, included:

> I don't want them to feel my school work's going to start coming before they do. I've tried to work my schedule around their schedule. As a matter of fact, I do work my schedule around their schedule -- for my studying and such.
>
> Mind you, come the weekends this past month, they've all been aware I'm going to school. Because I haven't gone out [snowmobiling] with them, which I usually do.

But this scheduling around the family setting caused some very real difficulties for Sheila. For instance, she missed the library orientation at the beginning of the term; she found that the registration process tired her out so much that she didn't go to the orientation session during that day. She had been scheduled for an evening session, but that was also a problem:

> It was in the evening; it wasn't convenient. I didn't feel that I could justify the time. I believe it was a ten minute orientation period at the library -- ten or twenty -- and I didn't feel that the time was justified for half an hour of travel in, fighting for a parking spot, and then, half an hour drive out.

In retrospect, however, Sheila admitted that not attending the orientation had been an error in judgment, since she later had some problems in using the library effectively. Ultimately, she asked a friend to give her special assistance in properly using the library system. Sheila was obviously reluctant to approach the librarians, particularly when she had not taken advantage of the orientation.

On another occasion, Sheila was required to attend the university in the evening, to undertake the Writing Competency Test. Describing this experience gave her the opportunity to give a clearer sense of why evening scheduling was a problem for her:

> I don't like leaving my kids alone. They're old enough, but that's about the only time I have with them -- in the evenings. If [going to evening classes] is anything like that exam I had -- I was just so wiped, and so thirsty, it took me an awful long time to get back down. I got home at 10:00pm and I didn't hit the bed until 12:00.
>
> I've heard this is a complaint that a lot of mature students have about evening classes. They get too hyped up and then it takes them too long to get back down.
>
> I don't think evening classes are the answer, because kids have things going in the evening too. And if you've got a kid who goes to Scouts or Brownies or whatever, and they're supposed to be home at 8:30, I think you'd be sitting there in class, wondering if they got home. I think you'd be under a little more pressure in that regard.

Steven and Pam Sharpe apparently found that a seamlessness between the university setting and family setting had some negative overtones for their family situation. Steven reacted quite strongly to an element of university culture, which he placed under the rubric of "pink hair." He described the effects of his reaction on his family:

> I've been hitting everybody [his family] pretty hard with manners -- that sort of thing -- around here. Everybody. I'm merciless.
>
> I think it's because some of the carryings-on -- the mannerisms, whatever -- of people at the university are just terrible! Young people; some old ones too.
>
> I was brought up a little differently, and all of a sudden, it just clicks: Holy Smokes! I haven't really been hard on anybody! They're all going to grow

> up, and going to look just like these guys with the pink hair -- that can't speak English!"

Pam acknowledged the pressure from Steven, but put a positive face on it:

> I think that university is doing a lot for him. But I also think that, yes -- this manner business -- we are getting hit hard at home. It's not just a little; it's a lot! We're learning how to speak properly, and everything. And it's . . . very good. It's going to do a lot for the kids.

Throughout the term, however, the Sharpes expressed concern about continuing difficulties with the behavior of their children, particularly their son. In fairness, Pam attributed these problems more to the fact that she was having to work outside the home to a greater extent than in the past, but her remarks about Steven's increased concern for "manners" seemed to indicate that the effects of his being exposed to the university culture might also have been contributing to the continuing concerns.

Like most of the other students, however, Steven too attempted to work around his family responsibilities -- not always successfully:

> Well, I study best at night. It seems, the later it is, the better I study. I don't know why. It got to the point were I didn't even try during the day. As a matter of fact, I only study at home during the day if there is nobody home. Soon as the kids come home from school, about 3:30pm, that usually ends it.

Since Steven was generally a man of few words, Pam described the studying-family mix in a little more detail. Her description suggested an interesting parallel to the

Baker's situation, described earlier:

> [Steven] doesn't study well during the day -- only at night. And of course, during the day, the kids are busy and I'm busy and there's a lot of things happening in our house. It's pretty difficult for him. And even if he does get into a trend of thought during the day, I don't stop the kids from going in. Whereas at night, I stop them. I say, "No, Dad's studying. You can't go in tonight."
>
> You can't have a twenty-four hour "Dad's studying -- you can't bother him." Because they have things they have to say -- right now! Because they feel they have to say it.

But for Steven, there were disturbances beyond his immediate family members:

> This weekend was all wrecked! I kinda scheduled it. I was going to take Friday off, then I was gonna study like hell on Saturday morning -- till one o'clock or so. Then we had that Pee Wee [hockey] Breakdown till 5:30. Then I thought I could get some more in last night.
>
> Well last night -- Pow! -- I was sick, went to bed -- no studying. I did the Pee Wee Breakdown. But in the morning, my grandfather came up from Saskatchewan, on the way to the coast. So I'm over at my parents. So I lost all day yesterday.
>
> Then I thought, this morning, that I'd go and get that car fixed -- I lose too much time over that car.

Steven's feelings about his car sounded very much like Sam's feelings about his rototiller.

Like other families with children, Brenda and Brad also were forced to make special arrangements at home. They had to ensure that, each day, one of them was home for the children after school. The potential effects of this requirement were revealed by Brenda's earlier remark regarding attempting to drop a course. Hence, because of her university schedule, for the most part, the person that came home early was Brad. Brenda revealed that this

commitment was having a significant effect on her husband: "I think it's taking its toll on Brad now," she stated, "because coming home at 3:30 is the pits."

Brad agreed:

> Well, I'm feeling it. Yeah, I guess it is pressure. I'm feeling as though I've got a lot I've got to organize, and there are parts of the job that I'm not doing. There are things I should be doing. I think I'm doing what I'm supposed to do in Edmonton. But there are parts of the job that I'm not doing elsewhere, that I should be doing -- that I think I should be doing.
>
> I don't know what the solution is. While I'm here, there's still a lot of things to do. So I have to organize my time -- in terms of shopping, and laundry, and kids, and meetings, and commitments. I don't think I'm strung out, it's just that there's more on my mind, more pieces of organization I have to do.

On another occasion, Brenda found that in order to study, she had to make a choice to stay home from a family trip to visit relatives in Calgary on Thanksgiving. This was particularly upsetting to her young son and her family in Calgary.

Partially as a consequence of all of these kinds of family changes and accommodations, the students generally operated under an overwhelming and sustained feeling of personal guilt. Feelings of guilt certainly emerged from other sources also, but as the profiles in Chapter 2 indicated, most of the participants held the view that maintaining their sense of family was of primary importance. Yet the university undertaking on the part of the student, obviously involved most of the participants in situations of significant family disruption -- no matter how hard they

struggled to maintain the family status quo, they were continually having to compromise their espoused principle of "family first."

Sharing. But the overlap of university and family experience was not without positive aspects. Brenda and Brad, for example, did acknowledge some spin-off benefits of the changes they were experiencing. Brenda pointed out:

> One of the real benefits for Brad in this whole thing, is, of course, he gets evenings quiet -- by himself. I am studying and he's always wanted some space.

Brad also found that the new arrangements meant that he spent more time with the children. He acknowledged, however, that that the nature of the time he was spending with them gave reason for mixed reviews:

> I'm spending both good time and bad time. [The children] don't like to go [grocery] shopping but the only way I can do shopping is take them with me.

Brad also indicated that their daughter displayed much support for what her mother was undertaking and probably had a good deal of empathy for what she was experiencing as a student:

> She is really good at saying, "Well, that's pretty good Mum." She picks it up from our own excuses or reasons or whatever. But she says, "Oh, you haven't been to school for a long time. It's hard writing tests. That's pretty good."
>
> She's really very positive. I think the parallel student relationship has a lot to do with it. You're all going to school, so this is really neat. From the kids' point of view, it's kind of fun.

Brenda, as with other parents, certainly mentioned

feeling the direct support of her children:

> I've come home a couple of evenings, just dragging, really grumpy, and she'll say, "You sound like you've had a hard day. Can I help you make supper?"
>
> And she's eight! It's made my day. It just changes -- turns me around. It's really neat!

It appeared that this kind of experience was probably fairly representative of the kinds of experiences other participants had with their school-age children. Certainly, Sheila also reported assistance from her daughter and, as Mary described, she found that her children displayed new levels of responsibility:

> I think the kids are really trying to do their part, as far as making their beds in the morning and helping out. When Joe is gone, they really do help me a lot, as far as housework and that.
>
> There have been times when I got up Saturday morning around ten, and they have already vacuumed and dusted, and made their beds, and poured juice, and made toast for me. So they really do try. They seem to be conscious that they have to take some responsibility.

Another university-related development which was perceived as having positive ramifications for the Baker family was what Mary called the "far-reaching influence" of her art history class. It seems that on one occasion, on a walk on a downtown street, Mary found herself talking to Joe about Corinthian columns:

> That's right! I was giving Joe a lecture in classical architecture. It's true, you see things in a completely different way. I might have admired the building before, but I wouldn't have had any idea of the terminology or the history behind it, or anything. It certainly expands your mind, it really does. It helps you to see things differently, appreciate things more.

Joe was apparently fascinated by their discussion of columns, gargoyles and carved Indian heads: "I would have formerly figured that to be 19th century architecture, but really there's so much more into it."

But Mary, it seems, went beyond architecture and walking tours with Joe. She revealed her art studies also initiated a new interest in native art:

> I always sort of felt like I didn't really like native or Eskimo art, it just didn't do anything for me at all. Now that we've studied it in the past couple of weeks, I'm really anxious to go to this new art gallery that's opening Saturday, to see some of it. Because I feel like I understand it better and I appreciate it more.

Mary took the whole family to the art displays:

> Mary: We all went. And I was able to explain some of it to Joe, which was kind of neat.
>
> Joe: Yeah, it was interesting. She was like a tour guide. Right in the Bay, where they have this big display of Eskimo art.
>
> Mary: And we went to see the Robert Bateman paintings one day. It was really neat because the kids really enjoyed it. I was quite surprised. They were so interested -- not so much in the Eskimo carvings as the paintings. It was a good experience for them.

Joe seemed to have only positive remarks to make about these experiences. He indicated that he was not feeling intimidated by Mary's new-found knowledge:

> At this point, with the Eskimo art, I just found it very interesting. It's something that you wouldn't know otherwise. I mean, Eskimo art has never appealed to me. But when you look at them and some of the things about the art is explained to you, then of course, the art becomes more interesting.

It was clear that, for Mary, the experience of university

extended far beyond the walls of her classrooms:

> I feel like my learning doesn't just take place at university. That really helps and maybe it's like a catalyst or something, but for example, I was telling Joe yesterday, I really feel the urge to do more reading again.
>
> I read a lot anyway, but I sort of got out of just reading novels or poetry, or whatever. And I've been feeling lately, that I really have to get back into that -- sort of being aware of what's happening in Canadian literature right now. Which doesn't have anything to do with any of the courses I'm taking right now. So, I suppose, it's more than just the classroom.
>
> I didn't realize how much an effect it would have. I guess I thought what I learned in the classroom would be just sort of "that course, and that's it" kind-of-thing.

Mary suggested that on the whole, she felt her attendance at university had not created a lot of problems for her family. It was obvious from the remarks above, however, that while she may not have perceived major problems, there were dramatic influences.

For other families, within the constraints of their various situations, there were also sharing experiences. For instance, Frank Sheskey made a special effort to gain a feeling for the setting of the university. He and his young daughter made a familiarization visit to the campus. The intent of Frank's visit seemed to simply center on his curiosity to know something of the institution his wife was attending.

As the spouse of a student who was having some difficulties with her program, Frank was left with some interesting personal impressions. His impressions were partially based upon his comparisons with what he knew of

the University of Manitoba, from his visits there, during Edna's attendance at that institution:

> We wandered around and looked at the sights. Except for going and wandering around, going for a cup of coffee, there's not much doing.
>
> In Manitoba it seemed -- when I had to be at work every day -- I found I had more time to be at university, for some reason. I was there several times anyway -- just wandering through the buildings. But here, when I've got all the time in the world, I just . . . . It's a different atmosphere here. I don't know whether Edna's different, or . . . . University in Manitoba seemed friendlier for some reason. Sort of -- I wouldn't say less intimidating (can't see what's intimidating about it, they don't know who you are) -- but it seemed like a place that you could wander around.
>
> The University of Alberta seems -- I don't know -- seems to be colder or something. I can't describe it. It's a place you go to, and get out. If you have no business in there, don't . . . . Nobody ever said anything, nobody ever came up, "What are you doing here?" But I never got the same feeling as when you wander around the University of Manitoba buildings; and I can't explain why.
>
> [At the University of Manitoba], once you're on the campus, you are *on* the campus. It's sort of a campus atmosphere -- the only traffic is local people switching parking lots.
>
> In this one, you're sort of into town, out of town. I don't know, maybe that has something to do with it -- streets running through it. It just has a colder atmosphere. What may make it more difficult this year [for Edna] is that it doesn't look like a place to go.

Obviously, Frank's remarks indicated he was struggling to understand and give substance to his feelings about the university, and to relate his understanding to what his wife was experiencing. His final remark about "place" seems particularly interesting. As we shall explore in Chapter 5, the students' gaining of a sense of place at the university seemed to be an extremely important activity for them.

The other spouses who reported significant contact with

the campus itself, or with the activities going on there, were Doug Makowichuk and Michael Lynden. Doug tended to play down his direct contact as being relatively casual -- lunch with his wife, etc. Michael, on the other hand, was registered in a course through the Faculty of Extension. But Michael also jokingly mentioned that Judith "dragged" him along to several performances (orchestras, choirs, small madrigal groups, concert bands, plays) over the term. Michael, of course, had an interest in music, but his comment was that for him, attending these performances was "exposure, more than learning."

In relation to the Lynden's attendance at these events, Judith expressed a view which contrasted somewhat with Frank's assessment about institutional coldness:

> We really like doing that sort of thing anyway. There's a lot of things happening at the university -- and cheap -- that you can get access to. So it's very good.

It was apparent, however, that the Lynden's attention to these aspects of the university flowed naturally from their previously well-developed interest in the arts, as well as from Judith's exposure in her music program.

Edna's agriculture program, on the other hand, offered no such interesting links for Frank to pick up on. In fact, as we shall discover, Edna's particular mix of courses in her first term, didn't even offer her much connection to her own specific field of interest -- plant science. But more of that later.

Only one other participant mentioned directly involving a family member in the activities at the university. Brenda took her eight-year-old daughter to a Sociology class:

> She sat through my Sociology because I thought [the professor was] the most dramatic and interesting, so maybe she might enjoy it. She read a book through the entire thing -- but took it all in.

Judging from all the experiences reported above, it seems an unavoidable conclusion that the students' coexistent university and non-university settings did directly and significantly influence one another. Some of the influences may be judged beneficial, but the opportunity for a negative experience or at least a more complex experience was also very real.

In many ways, it appeared that the students who suffered the least emotional trauma from the coexistence of family and university circumstances were those who found it possible to control their personal situation in such a way as to set aside large discrete blocks of time for completing their university work -- most often at the university itself. Another strategy was to have isolated study areas at home.

Some participants, it seemed, experienced benefits from the ability of other family members to have an opportunity to share in some of the direct university experiences, but family time constraints, for most, severely limited opportunities for this type of activity. An idealized vision of other family members -- particularly spouses --

being able to partake of the facilities, services and other benefits of the university setting appeared to fly in the face of the reality of personal and family resources stretched to the limit.

Notwithstanding this, it seemed to be important that all family members felt positively about the program the student was undertaking and the specific kinds of university experiences the student was having. The problem seemed to be that efforts to sustain these kinds of positive feeling had to be undertaken in the face of rather dramatic changes in family relationships, which often worked to put unanticipated pressures on other family members as well as the student.

While subsequent descriptions in this and the following chapter turn to elaborating specific aspects of these married students' setting, the notion of the student's experience of the interpenetration university and family settings will be identifiable as a continuing backdrop against which the circumstances and experiences are described.

As a final note to this section, Sheila acknowledged that attending university involved a major commitment from the whole family, but she suggested that potential students (particularly female) ought not to be discouraged in the face of the difficulties this commitment posed:

> I would hate to see women or men not go, if they wanted to go, because they figured it would be too difficult to adjust to. They can all accept it or adjust to it. It takes them a while, but they can

> manage.
>
> Sure, things don't get done in the house -- according to the woman -- but who cares? They'll wait. If the family complains, they can do it. It's worthwhile. It's hard. It's not easy; but it can be done.

Let us now examine somewhat more closely some more specific aspects of the challenge which faced these students and their families.

Being Overwhelmed

As has been alluded to at various points in this report, all of the students and many of the spouses found themselves overwhelmed by the demands and complexity of their personal situations. My assessment was that this sense of being overwhelmed was not a simple case of feeling busy from time to time; rather, it was an experience of emotions and personal resources constantly stretched to the limit.

In reporting this sensation, my difficulty was, how best to convey some notion of this experience. For me, to simply state that the participants' situations were overwhelming was a lifeless generalization, somewhat like saying: "A roller coaster ride is exciting" or "war is hell!"

Once again, in this instance, it seemed that the most effective approach to reporting was to use the direct statements of the people that experienced the situation first hand. The journals seemed to represent the most useful source of material to deal with this issue, since it

was through this medium that this study came closest to sustained contact with the day-to-day experience.

Obviously it was not possible to include the large volume of journal material in its totality; therefore, I chose to focus on selected portions of the journal of Edna Sheskey.

I selected Edna's journal for several reasons: First of all, Edna's journal appeared to be quite representative of the kinds of situations experienced by other students, particularly those with children. In addition, Edna and Frank were not involved in the full interview process, and the journals of those who were not fully involved tended to be somewhat more regular and detailed.

Secondly, Edna's situation was of particular interest to me because, in terms of courses completed during her first term, Edna experienced the least success of the eight participating students. As the university term relentlessly ground on past her, the courses (and possibly she) ended up falling by the wayside.

Finally, Edna's writing displays a certain terseness of style, which, while conveying a valuable sense of her situation, does so in a relatively compact fashion. The material presented here is, of course, abridged, but only to the extent that not all journal entries are included. When an entry from a specific date is included, it is included in its entirety.

We begin with the earliest entries and proceed through

the term in chronological order. The entries representing periods of time when her husband was out of town, at work, begin with an asterisk (*).

In setting the context of these entries, it may also be valuable to keep in mind that Edna's normal rising time in the morning, when Frank was out of town, was around 5:00am. When he was in town, she could rise somewhat later because he took responsibility for the children. When at home, Frank's morning normally began about 6:00am.

Wednesday, Sept. 12/84:

- Attended the two scheduled classes I have on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.
- Attempted to purchase some of the necessary textbooks. The line ups in the U. of A. bookstore were appalling.
- Frank was fortunately available to register the boys for Cubs this evening. Thank heaven! I am still "stewing" as I try to choose a topic for an oral presentation next Tuesday, in my Ag. For. class. I really want to get a good mark on this one. I have tried to track down the professor for help, but no one in her office seems to know of her whereabouts.

Thursday, Sept. 13/84:

- Was late getting up today. My classes aren't until 11:00am, but I had hoped to get in to the used book sale at SUB, which opens at 10:00am.
  Fat chance! The line-up must have started forming at 8:30. By the time I arrived at 8:45am, it was up the stairs and around the corner.
  I loathe line-ups and can wait until later to purchase my books. Looking at the line-up, I rationalize, I would rather pay full price for the texts in the now-empty U. of A. bookstore.
- Thursday classes are very interesting. Learned a bit about the library from a tour which had been arranged by the professor of my Ag. For. class. The thought of researching a topic, using the libraries, is overwhelming. Panic sets in. But I am reassured by extremely friendly, helpful librarians.

- At home, Frank has been busy putting the finishing touches on the basement bedroom we are building. We should be ready to panel on Saturday.

- I have to escort my sons to their first music lesson of the Fall. I hope they will like their new teacher.

- About 8:00pm. One of my boys needed someone to listen to him read. I have my own reading assignments, but I can't refuse to listen.

Friday, Sept. 14, 1984:

- Late getting up today. I guess I read too late last night. I made my bus, however, to be on time for my 8:00am class.

- I still don't have a topic I feel comfortable with for my oral presentation. Panic is beginning to seize me.
  My English professor made some general comments in class about writing, which are coincidentally very helpful in relation to my dilemma. I have new hope for my Ag. For. presentation.

- I managed to procure all necessary texts, and none too soon, as the reading and problem assignments for Chemistry are beginning to mount up.

- I was really beat when I arrived home today -- no appetite for dinner. And totally unusual for me, I had to lie down for a nap while the family ate supper. So glad Frank was able to oversee things, but he will be leaving, Wednesday, for work away from home for two weeks. I won't have the luxury of him taking over when I am tired.
  I am sure we will manage though. We have before.

Saturday, Sept. 15/84:

- Arose late. Frank and I lingered over coffee. It's nice to have breakfast with the kids for a change. I like early classes, but I must leave before the kids are even up, and I miss saying a proper goodbye to them.

- Today Frank and I paneled the bedroom. Took the best part of the day. It was definitely a two-man job.

- Had to do some homework and wasn't able to start until about 8:30pm. Became frustrated over some Chem. problems. But, eureka! I have found my topic for the oral presentation. Not much time to polish it and make

it sound coherent, but I still have two days.

Sunday, Sept. 16/84:

- Frank and I put the finishing touches on our building project. We moved our son's furniture in, while he was outside playing. Couldn't wait to see his reaction -- finally, his own room!
  The little bum, quite naturally took it in stride. He walked in, said, "Oh!" and promptly locked the door.
  We are very proud of our accomplishment.

- My washing machine bit the dust just now. It's 8:00pm. Frank has had a full day and I told him not to worry about it for now. But he is in there trying to fix it for me. I am grateful I have such a supporting, helpful husband. I couldn't be luckier.
  On to my homework assignments and then, chase the kids to bed. I hope they have clean clothes for morning!?

Monday, Sept. 17/84:

- Foul-up today with buses, due to Pope's visit. Thought I would be late for 8:00am class, but caught a ride with next door neighbour.

- Had to shop for groceries after classes.

- Frank had to go to a meeting tonight, so I had more time to study. It seems easier to lock the kids out of my study area and time, than it is to lock out my husband. I wish I could figure out why.

* Wednesday, Sept.19/84:

- Arose at 4:30am to get organized to drive Frank to the airport. His check-in time was 6:00am. We said our goodbyes and gave last minute instructions. We've done this a million times, but it gets no easier.
  Drove back home. Gave instructions for the boys to follow at lunch time: "lock the door, don't snoop through the cupboards, turn out the lights, remember your key, put the milk in the fridge" (not necessarily in that order).

- Left the house at 6:40am to drop my daughter at the sitter's and catch the bus to school. Am <u>very</u> fortunate the sitter lives only three doors away.

- Attended classes.

- Purchased a locker in the Phys. Ed. centre. Took a twenty-minute swim. It's so different being at a pool and not having to keep up a constant vigil to see if my kids are going under for the third time (Personally, I don't trust life-guards with the lives of my children). The swim really refreshed me. I was able to study more than I expected tonight.

Got a short phone call from Frank.

* Thursday, Sept. 20/84:

- Wasn't necessary to leave the house until 9:20am this morning. I was able to see the kids off to school. This makes me feel less like a negligent mother somehow.

My oral presentation today went very much better than I expected. I was actually able to articulate. I'm not sure I made any sense to the class. The words came out, but did the meaning? Anyway, I feel much more confident about doing something like this again.

Home by 3:00pm. The boys had to be fed by 5:15pm, as they attend music lessons starting at 5:30pm. I chose tonight of all nights for homemade soup and the vegetables were still a bit raw. By now, however, the kids are used to this type of fare.

Received a phone call from a friend from Portage la Prairie. Must get together for coffee next week, if possible.

Argued with my youngest son, that he must go to music, even in the rain. Sent him off at 5:30pm, thinking he would be only a little late -- extremely fortunate that there is a piano teacher within walking distance. Sent son #2 to music at 5:50pm. Son #1 came in at 6:15pm, wet through and crying. He lost his way to the teacher's house. Called the teacher to explain his whereabouts during his lesson time. Next week both boys will go together. Son #2 arrived home at 6:35.

At 6:45, I left to attend the Parent Teacher night at the school. It turned out to be just a General Assembly kind of thing, and I left disgusted that I had wasted my time. I learned nothing new there.

Arrived home at 8:30pm. Sent the kids to bed. Tried to crack some books.

* Thursday, Sept. 26/84:

- Surprise oral presentation in Ag. For. class left me feeling humiliated.

- Feeling frustrated and lonely. Some days are like that

when Frank is not here to act as my sounding board.

- After supper, I escorted the boys to music lessons. Immediately after music, dropped by to visit my Dad. He lent an ear to my problems with my English assignment, and showered me and the kids with text books and house plants.

* Friday, Sept. 27/84:

- Collected results of Writing Competency Test, and received a mark of Satisfactory. Pleasantly surprised by the result.
  That test made me feel quite inadequate. I am so out of the habit of expressing myself in writing. No respect for my own opinions, I guess. That's probably at the heart of my difficulties in analyzing my English poem.

- Necessary to shop for present for niece's birthday tomorrow.
  Appalled by the lack of hard-cover children's books in most of the department stores at Heritage Mall.

- The car sounds funny lately. I drive it with a sense of impending doom. (So many worries; so little time to worry.)

Thursday, Oct. 4/84:

- Attended classes. (Frank dropped me off.)

- Arrived home at 3:00pm.

- Kids to music lessons.

- Frank attended Cub meeting.

- I, to my books.

Wednesday, Oct. 10/84:

- Classes at 8:00am today, as usual.

- Stopped at the Cameron Library to see if I could locate research material on new topic as assigned for Ag. For. Approached Gov. Pub. librarians for help in locating documents. Signed up for tour of Gov. Pub. library for tomorrow at 2-2:30pm.

- Frank and I went to bank to apply for car loan. Necessary to make an appointment with loans officer for 2:30 Thursday. As a result, will have to reschedule library tour.

- I have decided to go early tomorrow morning, to dig for more research material.

- Boys have Cub meeting tonight.

- Mid-term in Econ. is next Thursday. Must make up some study cards.

Tuesday, Oct. 16/84:

- Home sick today. Missed Chem. Lab. in the morning. Tomorrow, must see about a make-up lab. Tried to review Economics, in preparation for first mid-term, scheduled for Thursday. I hope I am not missing anything important in Economics class, which I was unable to attend today.

* Wednesday, Oct. 17/84:

- Frank left for work this morning.

- English and Chem. classes today. Late because of storm. I am getting badly behind in Chemistry.

- Arranged Chem. make-up lab. on Friday afternoon. And asked [daughter's] babysitter to look after her until at least 6:30pm.

- Chased boys off to Cubs - [Son's] investiture should be any day now.

- Furnace motor seized up today.

* Thursday, Oct. 18/84:

- Furnace repair arrived - 7:30am.

- [Son] sick, home from school today. Left him with instructions to stay in bed.

- Mock job interviews in Ag. For. Turned in thesis paper for term paper. Job interviews were a "mockery" all right. This course makes less and less sense as time goes by.

- [Son] was fine when I arrived home at 3:00pm.

- Music lessons cancelled because of the storm.

- Several questions on Econ. mid-term I was unable to answer. I hope I passed.

* Friday, Oct. 19/84:

- On the go from 8:00am to 5:00pm today. Arrived home at 6:20pm, Beat!!
  Very awkward managing the Chem. Lab. when I did not have access to my usual bench. It meant transferring all necessary glassware to an available bench. I hope I never have to do that again.

- Too tired to care about doing homework.

* Sunday, Oct. 21/84:

- Laundry day.

- Tried to clean house. Difficult to encourage boys to "do their share" of the housework. Had a few run-ins.

- [Daughter] off to birthday party.

- Tried to study Chemistry, in preparation for mid-term.

- Must write a 750 word essay on King Lear, for next Wednesday. How am I going to do everything?

* Monday, Oct. 22/84:

- Attended Eng. and Chem. today. Home at 11:00am to fix lunch for the boys. Necessary to do some bank business.

- Tried to study after supper, but felt too tired. Ended up going to bed at 9:00pm.

* Monday, Oct. 29/84:

- Chem. test today. Went all right, I think.

- Car wouldn't start today, when I needed it to go to the bank. Needs a new battery.

- Considering talking to the counselling office regarding the difficulties I seem to be having juggling all the homework etc.

- Kids are angry with me because we haven't any substantial plans for their halloween costumes yet.

* Tuesday, Oct. 30/84:

- Spoke with counsellor. Advised me to perhaps drop one course.

- Managed to get to bank on the bus. Picked up makeup for kid's halloween. Of course, they all have school parties tomorrow.

* Wednesday, Oct. 31/84:

- Received back Chem. mid-term. Worse result than I thought.

- Frank due home at 8:00pm tonight.

- Kids and I went halloweening at 6:00pm.

Monday, Nov. 5/84:

- Attended classes today, but very discouraged by marks of most mid-terms.

- Definitely must withdraw from some courses.

[During the week of November 5, Edna withdrew from three of her four courses: English, Agriculture/Forestry, Chemistry.]

Tuesday, Nov. 13/84:

- Attended Economics. Glad I remained in this course. I feel I am doing okay, and it means I'll be earning some credits before the year is over.
Mid-term in this course on Nov. 20. So I have begun to review and am trying to catch up reading assignments.

* Saturday, Nov. 17/84:

- Requested by sister to babysit her son while she works today. Also asked to bake cake and cupcakes for birthday party coming up next week. Her stove had been disconnected as she has her kitchen remodeled. I like to help out but would really rather it wasn't today.

Much rather be studying.

* Sunday, Nov. 18/84:

  - Attended Grey Cup party at sister-in-laws.. Wonderful time.

* Wednesday, Nov. 21/84:

  - Still shook up from Econ. exam yesterday. Very tough. Convinced I flunked.

  - Sister wants me to babysit again. Becoming more annoyed by my availability to everyone else's demands. Something has to be done!

Monday, Dec. 3/84 [Final entry in Edna's journal]:

  - Trying to review notes in Econ., in preparation for final exam on Dec. 17. Need babysitting arrangements for that day as exam is at 3:00pm.

  - Nervous about mid-term (Nov. 20) results. We receive the exam tomorrow.

It seems to me that the demanding nature of Edna's schedule speaks for itself. I find myself at a loss as to what I might add to make the image more complete. For me, the entwining of family and university matters displayed by the various journal entries once again gives concrete indication of the interpenetration of university and family life.

The gradually decreasing length and complexity of the journal entries over the period of the term also seems to be an indication of time pressures and a general loss of spirit for the undertaking. Edna was certainly far less introspective as the term ended.

It was interesting and rather tragic to note -- in an early entry which I did not include -- that Edna felt that she had her total situation well in control. Frank's journal also confirmed that she felt that way. But as the term progressed, the feeling of control seemed to slip away from her.

For me, no single factor seems to emerge as a key difficulty, or as a turning point. In conversation, Edna indicated that she felt the lack of a support network and she found that the courses seemed less relevant to her personal objectives than those she had taken at the University of Manitoba. But the journal indicated that her situation was far more complex than this. For the most part, her personal resources simply seemed to be stretched to the point where there was absolutely no resilience available for meeting unexpected or continuing demands. For example, on October 18 (p.277), in the face of the events of the previous three days, I find it difficult to imagine what it must have been like for Edna to face her mid-term exam. And it seems, Edna's illness (Oct. 16) was at least partially attributable to exhaustion. Yet staying home created more problems than attempting to maintain her routine schedule.

The general tone of Edna's experience was not uncommon among the participants. For example, Gloria, who had only one child and acknowledged that her academic schedule was relatively un-demanding, also mentioned that there was

little personal slack time available to deal with unexpected events, such as those Edna faced: children getting lost, unexpected demands of the school, bus schedule changes, problems with appliances and vehicles, illness, etc. And exhaustion was not only a problem for the students. Both Pam Sharpe and Ellen Maunder sought medical attention during the term, apparently for reasons similar to Edna's.

Edna was very disdainful of her experiences with university counselling services -- it appeared it was too little, too impersonal and too late.

In terms of interaction with the spouse, in Edna's situation, it was interesting to note that Frank's presence or absence operated as a double-edged sword for her. When he was home, he was helpful in that he took over many routine household activities; but his presence also made demands on Edna's precious time. When he was away, she did not have to concern herself about paying attention to his needs, but Edna was often lonely and needed someone to "act as a sounding board." As we have seen, Mary Baker, of course, reported similar feelings of ambivalence in her parallel situation.

Finally, lest the impression be sustained that the women were more vulnerable to being overwhelmed than the men, let us examine just a few of Sam's journal entries.

Friday, Sept. 21/84:

- Interesting logistics problem that now needs to be addressed and solved:
    a. There is no parking at the U. of A.

b. Bus service to U. of A. is good.
c. Bus service to [employment] is good.
d. There is no <u>free</u> parking at [employment].
e. Bus service to home [from employment] is good -- provided the buses are running that late.
f. Buses do not run after 12:38am.' [If Sam finishes work on time, he finishes at 12:30am. Cab fare home is about $12.]

Monday, Sept. 24/84:

- Started day off with bang, at 1:30am, on the way home from work. A lady decided to aim her car at my truck's rear wheel -- she was successful.
  Classes were tough -- very little sleep. I think I OD'ed on coffee. Thankfully my days off are tonight and tomorrow.

Wednesday, Sept. 26/84:

- Had preview of first music test. Need to concentrate more on composers. Tunes are familiar, but never was very good with names.

- Had to phone insurance to try and get together re truck. Scenario is like this:
  - Need a second car -- more practical than truck,
  - Truck is un-drivable due to accident,
  - Have a deal pending on value of trade-in of truck,
  - Need the truck fixed quickly (before Tuesday),
  - Can't get together with insurance adjuster because of my schedule.

Thursday, Sept. 27/84:

- Another breakdown in communication between the Edmonton Transit information officer and myself -- had to ask the baby sitter to drive me to [employment].

Thursday, Oct. 4/84:

- Picked up car and spent much time getting license plates, registration and insurance. I'm beginning to understand how valuable my time is. That is, how important it is for me to become more organized and more aware of what I'm spending my time at.

Tuesday, Oct. 30/84:

- This was a legitimate day off -- no mid-terms or papers to worry about. [Daughter] hasn't taken to her sitter. I'm not sure if it's because of the sitter's blond hair ([Daughter] doesn't usually "take" to light haired people.), or if [Daughter] is going through a "clingy" stage. When I picked her up, she stuck to me like glue.

Sunday, Nov. 18/84:

- After church, instead of going downstairs right away. I visited for a while with friends. When I arrived in the "money counting room," I joked with the others that I was late because I was upstairs trying to relearn and practice my social skills.

From Sam's entries, one does not sense the general tone of despair present in Edna's later journal entries, but the multiplicity of demands are evident. Sam was "surviving" the university experience; Edna was not.

I asked Edna if she felt that the task had simply been impossible. She thought not; in fact, it was evident that, in one way or another, she was prepared to shoulder the blame -- to see the problem as being one of personal failure:

> I don't think it was [impossible]! Maybe that's where I fail too -- in not seeing it realistically.
>
> If I had worked things out, or maybe, if I had only attempted two to three courses in the beginning, I wouldn't have been under that much . . . like you say, spreading myself that thinly.
>
> But I still feel it was some failure on my part -- to keep working at it a little bit each day. The luxury of just being able to sit back and put my feet up is too tempting.

During the term, however, it was never evident to her husband, Frank, that Edna had ever sat back and put her feet

up. Generally, what seemed to happen was that unexpected events would intervene, or on occasion, she would choose to attend to matters of family operation rather than studying. These instances may have been what she was referring to as "sitting back."

During her clustering activity, Edna wrote, "Feel I must not have enough control over the time." She explained what she meant:

> I think that just comes with the scheduling of study time and recreation time. I felt that I wasn't able to succeed in the course requirements because I -- you know -- you take a whole day off, then you try to spasmodically catch up. Then take another whole day off.
>
> I had my ideal schedule worked out, but none of it actually worked in practice. So, I feel that it's just a lack of self-discipline in some ways. There are also so many things that take away from your ideal schedule. There are things that come up in life that have to be dealt with -- NOW! They can't wait.

"Taking a whole day off" and "recreation time," I am certain, referred to time away from her studying, not time away from the regular demands of keeping the family organized and operating. Except for her swimming at the university, it was not at all clear that Edna undertook what others might label as "recreation time."

In one instance, Edna compared her experience at the University of Alberta with the previous year at the University of Manitoba:

> Thinking back to last year, the one thing that I found, because I commuted, I had to leave home by 6:30 in the morning. There was always a possibility that I could have left my daughter at day care. But there are no day cares open at that hour, so she had to come with me to Winnipeg. By the time I got to day care, it was

open; so that worked out.

I think that's part of the problem here. You feel ghastly, taking your kids -- all three of them -- at 6:30 in the morning, to someone else's home. To leave them there, so they are in the close neighbourhood -- to go to school or whatever. I think that's part of the . . . it annoys me.

I like to start early, but it's a problem -- thinking of what to do with your kids at that hour of the morning. You've got to allow an hour to get to university, and that kind of thing.

I don't know what kinds of changes might be made in that direction, if anything. It's kind of like you can't get out of the house without having some kind of babysitting arrangements or day care that are open at those hours, and close to where your kids attend school.

The primary university demand placed upon the students seemed to be course load. It may be an oversimplification, but my feeling was that, generally, the students who enrolled in more than three courses (Edna, Steven, Judith and Brenda) -- particularly if there were related labs -- seemed to experience much greater difficulty in coping with the demands of their overall situation. Those with three courses also faced difficulties in coping, but as the term progressed, they seemed to find their situation more manageable and seemed to have a more positive educational experience. Chapter 5 includes additional comments on course load.

In general, there seemed to be two tactics used to cope with feeling overwhelmed. One was to become what I call "super organized." The other was to make adjustments to existing social relationships or obligations -- most often, to retreat from what were formerly considered to be important or meaningful activities or relationships.

Super organization. It seems fair to say that all of the participants -- in the face of a novel and overwhelmingly complex setting -- felt as if they were totally disorganized and, even, inadequate at organizing themselves. The evidence, however, seems to have been quite the contrary.

For example, Steven made arrangements eight months in advance, to trade work days with his fellow employees, in order that he would be able to accommodate his class schedule when a work day fell on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday. Brenda and Brad also worked out a tentative joint schedule for the four-month period of September to December, in order to determine when each would be available to handle their children's regular needs and accommodate special circumstances such as Brad's out-of-town travel and the special demands of Brenda's courses, such as exams.

In most families where there were children involved, special arrangements had to be made for lunches, day care and/or after school care. When possible, usually one of the parents tried to be home by the time the children arrived from school. Meals had to be planned and produced within more limited and varied time constraints, or by a spouse and/or children unfamiliar with the task.

In those situations where there was only one vehicle, spouses often had to be driven to and from work, or to and from air terminals. Children also often required rides or supervision for their various activities. The basic but necessary activities of shopping for food and clothing,

getting to a bank and paying bills became complex exercises in logistics. Dependable transportation was a critical concern.

For most of the participants the organizational arrangements necessitated by these "routine" matters represented substantial changes from their former routines. For many, the work patterns of the breadwinners had previously meant that the spouses spent considerable amounts of time together, sharing activities and responsibilities. The new patterns meant that they were frequently engaged in different activities at different times and, therefore, required a greater level of coordination and communication. But, as we have learned, spousal time for communication and "working out" coordination was at a premium.

Returning to Edna's situation for a moment, the morning organization that Edna established for her boys has already been described, but the organizational demands did not stop when the children were off to school. In the early stage of her university term, on a typical school day, the boys would return home for a lunch which Edna had prepared earlier. On some days Edna was at the university over the lunch hour and could not call home because of her own class schedule. When the boys first arrived home, they had previously been instructed to reset the kitchen timer, in order to remind them to return to school on time. They were then responsible for warming their own lunch in the microwave, or whatever.

The potential for difficulties to arise in these arrangements were almost incalculable and problems did occur. Parental concern was always present. Eventually the boys ate prepared lunches at school (a practice which, apparently, the schools generally did not encourage; a policy which created difficulties for a number of the parents).

In short, as a minor representation of what went on, it seems clear to me that any observer could not help but be impressed by the organizational undertaking represented by even this one aspect of Edna's setting. Ironically, it seems Edna found that she was unable to get time to pack her own lunch, so her lunch waited until she got home about 1:30 - 2:00pm, after picking her daughter up from the sitter.

In any event, in spite of detailed organizational activity -- or maybe because of it -- Edna found that it was impossible to isolate study activities from the other aspects of her life. Ultimately she had to make a very difficult choice -- a choice which, to her, meant <u>she</u> had failed:

> I think somewhere in here [her cluster] I put: "I feel my study habits are too spasmodic." I was talking to someone and they said you have to learn to compartmentalize your time [laughs] -- "When you're doing something with the kids, then you just do that with the kids. You don't worry about school work."
>
> This is what I can't do. I sort of keep trying to do it all at once. I don't know whether that's the key -- just to put all of the family things aside, and just go off and do your studying. Try and ignore the rest of it, as if it doesn't exist.
>
> Anyways [laughs]. It gives me another perspective. I started thinking it over anyway: "Well, maybe they have something there. Something else I can

do to reschedule my life."
But that came down to: I'll just withdraw from some courses.

In the end, Edna and Frank decided that, if Edna was going to return to university full time at some point in the future, a different strategy would have to be in place -- according to Edna, a more professional approach:

> We're going to have to make some changes for next year. Definitely approach this with a more professional idea behind it: Get a sitter to look after the kids in the morning when I go to classes. See if that helps -- if you know you have somebody there to look after them.
> That way, you're not so concerned either, if you have a class that runs from 4:00 to 6:00 or something, outside of the fact that the buses stop running at that hour. At least you've got someone looking after your kids, getting supper, whatever.

Frank added:

> We'd sort of assumed [the boys] were a little more mature than they really were. Misjudgment on our part. Now, just babysitters and school lunches.

Regardless of the particulars of any one student's situation, all of the participants found that they had to exercise better stewardship over their personal resources and be more organized in their daily affairs. As Steven put it:

> But, like, even trying to get to the bank. Where [before] it was just a regular kind of thing, "Are you going to go to the bank?" You could go Monday to Friday, it didn't matter -- anytime.
> Now, "Geez, today's the deadline, I've got to go to the bank today!" kind of thing.

Gloria used a somewhat different example:

> If I didn't do laundry on a particular day, before, it was no big deal. And now, I only have two pairs of jeans, and if I want to wear jeans to school, I have to

do laundry.

Gloria went on to indicate that prior to entering university, she had "managed to fill entire weeks" with all kinds of activities. But she agreed with Doug's perception that, since she started university, their total situation had become very much more structured.

Doug joked:

> As a matter of fact, in today's journal, I wrote that Gloria phoned me today at work to make an appointment to see me sometime. Mainly because after supper, she likes to read, I want to do some music and maybe read. So, we don't have time to meet anywhere.

Brenda too found constraints in her new situation, but interestingly, as the comment below reveals, she rejected one of the choices the Sheskeys had viewed as a tentative solution to their particular organizational problem.

> I think [university] has probably made some difference, because I'm a little more careful about my time. I'm not as open to saying, "Sure, why not."
>
> It has to be far more planned. It has to fit into a schedule that I'm part of as well. I think I probably had more flexibility before. . . .
>
> I'm sure that it's going to work. I have enough of an idea about what I what I want to do.
>
> Of course it's going to work! There's no question in my mind. But I'm still at the point -- I think -- where I'm sorting out what's going to have to go and how it's going to be done. And what are the realistic things that I can't change.
>
> Brad is going to be away no matter what I do. I can't do anything about that. But what are the things I can determine?
>
> There are some options. One is [my] work. Maybe I just go and get a bank loan and pay my school that way. And say, "Screw the work." Maybe I'll have to do that.
>
> I'm more ready to do that than I am to cut off my kids completely, or hire a sitter to be here 24 hours a day, or something like that.

As mentioned earlier, one of the major organizational efforts that Brenda and Brad undertook was a change in Brad's activities. Brad apparently made a reorganizational commitment for the first term, but his own concerns made him uncertain about his ability to continue:

> Well, we're going to have to review it, in a sense, I guess. But, I think in September, we sat down and I looked at "overtime" -- if you can calculate overtime -- that I had, and I said that I would give that to Brenda -- in terms of coming home early -- so that she can stay at school. Or stay at work or whatever she chooses to do.
>
> So we started in September and went through, right till Christmas time, marking in the times that I thought I could be home at 3:30. Now, we've had to adjust that from time to time, because meetings come up that I have to go to.
>
> I try, as soon as I know about something -- something I have no control over -- to tell her as soon as I can. To say, "We're going to have to change it." I think I probably check out every little thing I'm asked to do. If somebody asks me to do something, I say I can't tell you until I check it out. So, I've done a lot more of that.
>
> It hasn't been a significant adjustment but that's how we did it. I took some time that I felt that I could take, and am applying it to coming home early.
>
> I'm feeling it. Yeah, I guess it is pressure. I'm feeling as though I've got a lot I've got to organize, and there are parts of the job that I'm not doing. There are things I should be doing -- not here, because I think I'm doing what I'm supposed to do in Edmonton. There are parts of the job that I'm not doing elsewhere, that I should be doing -- that I think I should be doing.
>
> So that's what I mean by, "We're going to have to look at that somehow." I don't know what the solution is. While I'm here [at home], there's still a lot of things to do. So I have to organize my time -- in terms of shopping, and laundry, and kids, and meetings, and commitments. I don't think I'm strung out, it's just that there's more on my mind, more pieces of organization I have to do.

Like Edna, Mary found that the absences of her spouse meant that she was forced to be more organized:

> I guess people would look at my schedule and say, "Well, she's not that busy, shouldn't really be any problem." But I think problems arise when Joe is gone.
>
> I feel, I guess I'm more tired when I get home. And 4:30 or 5:00pm is not the best time of day for kids or parents, when everybody's getting hungry and waiting for supper and that. So, I feel there is a bit more pressure in that way.
>
> I feel like I have a lot more to take care of than I did before I started going [to university]. It's not that I'm really over burdened with work, it's just the responsibilities I guess.
>
> I would say that things weigh on my mind a lot more. Because being at home all the time before, I had a lot of time to do whatever I wanted to do. It wasn't the same kind of pressure. . . .
>
> In the morning. I guess I'm more organized in a sense, because, in the morning, I make my bed the minute I get up -- [Turned to Joe and laughed] I did while you were gone -- because I know I'm not going to have time to go back to it. Whereas before, well, I'd get up and get breakfast and go back to clean the bedrooms or whatever.
>
> And I'm at the kids more, "Get your beds made right away" and "hurry, hurry, hurry." There's more hurry in the morning, for sure.

These remarks make it obvious that the pressure to be more organized touched everyone in the Baker family. But in addition, in her aside to Joe, Mary's remark gave just a hint of the fact that the spouse, when he/she was present, reduced some of the attention and energy she was required to focus in ensuring that all the details were taken care of.

As we shall see shortly, in Mary's case, the opportunity to set aside worry about making the bed and aboutchildren, probably related to the fact that Joe, when he was home, assumed most of the household functions.

Pam had a fairly systematic approach to the matter of family organization. She called herself "the organizer," and with a laugh, Steven acknowledged that he was "the

organizee: what she organizes." They both agreed that it had always been that way, but that since he entered university, she now had more to keep track of.

Prior to Steven entering university, Pam had maintained a large book which recorded family events, community meetings, appointments, etc. This practice she continued; but in addition, because of the increased complexity, she constructed a large wall-type calendar-schedule, which at a glance, indicated all of the family events and commitments, including both their work schedules.

Pam explained:

> We're not very organized. . . . What I'm finding is happening, is the kids are confused. They never know when I'm working, they never know when Steven's working, they don't know where they're going for lunch, they don't know who's going to be here after school. It's really a problem. So, I made a great big calendar -- here it is [displayed it].
>
> This is their calendar. They can write on here what they're doing. They can look and see where they're going, who's working and all that. It's going to make them a little more responsible. My only problem with it, at this point, is I don't want to put it here [on the refrigerator] because I don't like [neighbours and friends] coming and reading my calendar and asking me what meeting I'm going to.

The primary reason for the schedule was to give some assurance to the children about when to expect their parents home. Both Pam and Steven were working irregular shifts and, of course, Steven also had his class schedule at the university. Because the schedule was so complex, Pam developed a system of colour coding which indicated where each parent was at any given time.

Pam did not attribute the move toward more extensive family organization totally to Steven's university undertaking. She viewed it as part of a more broadly based family developmental process:

> I tend to think [the family's organization activity has ] become stronger over the years anyway. I don't think it's just because Steven is going to school now. Only now, we realize we need it more.
>
> But I think that its been coming because -- remember when we lived in the little house -- that was the height of un-organization because the house was extremely small, couldn't keep it clean, fifty million kids here all the time. Which is fine, but it means you end up with a mess. . . .
>
> Well, when we moved in here, it's sort of a different kind of story. We've got a lot more room. You can put things places and you tend to become more organized I think. And as the kids get older, you have to be, because they've got things to do, you've got things to do, everybody's got something to do.

For reasons presented in Chapter 3, it was not intended that this study directly detail the relationship with children in the new setting. But of course, as we have seen, much of what went on in the families and many of the organizational strategies were attributable to the presence of children and their needs and demands. Journal references and comments of some of the participants, particularly Mary, Brenda and Edna, led me to believe that some of the children may have intentionally "tested" the elaborate organizational systems put into place by the parents. I suspect that the children might have wanted to reassure themselves that, should an emergency arise, they would not be abandoned.

In this regard, there were a number of instances when the children apparently became ill, either at school or in

the morning, before school. The brief references to these events did not indicate a repeated pattern, hence, I use the term "test." In any event -- real or apparent -- the children's illnesses had the potential to create all manner of havoc for the parents. Much of their organizing related to attempting to have plans in place to meet the contingency of the child being sent home from school during the day. In one instance, Joe Baker, had a heart-to-heart chat with the children, advising them to make certain that they did not claim to be sick unless they really were sick! But most of the participants, Bakers included, depended on extended family or a helpful neighbour. If the support system was not in place, they were forced to develop it rather quickly.

Sheila's organizational situation seemed a little different from the others. My sense was that she was the family member who assumed most of the responsibility to become better organized. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, she attempted to establish her class schedule in such a way that the family's awareness that she was involved in attending university would be minimized. In this regard, her previous experience at the transfer college may have been helpful. Sheila was insistent upon scheduling her classes in such a way as to ensure that she had at least two days a week in which she did not have to attend the university:

> Because then it allows me time at home to catch up, to do some extra studying. And also the house work, the washing, and such, that has to be done as well. . . . I could be doing studying; I could be

> doing a little wash; I could be doing some ironing.
>
> That's why I didn't want to go Tuesdays and Thursdays. Mind you, if I could get all my classes on Tuesdays an Thursdays, I'd opt for those days, rather than the Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.
>
> I think that as a mature student, being able to adjust your timetable so that you have a couple of days at home, makes a big difference.

Sam and Ellen also found that prudent class scheduling helped. Sam mentioned several times that he has been able to schedule his classes in such a way that he had the same basic schedule for both university terms. In this way, he hoped to bring some regularity to the situation and to be able to count on one day a week to spend with his young daughter.

In theory, Sam and Ellen felt it was just a matter of setting priorities and organizing. But, as Ellen ruefully put it:

> Yeah, time management -- boy, all of that. To sit down and figure out what you're going to do and then say screw the rest. But you don't sit down and take that hour or two to figure out what you should be doing all week.

As with most of the other spouses, in the Maunder's case, Ellen carried much of the direct responsibility for organizing the affairs of the family. Ellen remained employed in order to provide family income. She prepared and took their daughter to day care, did the shopping and a very important but time-consuming task of "PR" with the extended family. For the most part, this left Sam operating as a fairly independent agent.

With some understatement, Ellen observed:

> You just have to be a little bit more organized and you have to use your time differently.
> Like all of a sudden, Saturdays, during the day, and Sundays, during the day, are extremely important -- not to have to do house work. So that has to be done during the week.

A portion of the weekends became periods which the family cherished and tried to set aside for being together. Although, according to Ellen, this strategy did not always work:

> Oh, I think if you keep a positive outlook on everything, I think it's going to be all right. Right now, the major thing here is that we haven't seen each other in two weeks.

Within the context of her demanding situation, Ellen found positive aspects in curious ways:

> There are small rewards too. You have no idea how appreciative Sam is if I make [him] a [bag] lunch and leave it on the counter.

In agreeing with Ellen's assessment, Sam laughed but he was quick to point out that because of their busy and offsetting schedules, it was often a week or more before he could thank her personally.

Michael felt that Judith had always been rather unorganized. But Judith thought that her personal organization, since entering university, had shown improvement. Michael conceded the point and offered his assessment:

> I think that's progressing since when you started. You've started to utilize [your time] a bit better, a bit more efficiently compared to three months ago. You have to keep saying to yourself, "I've got to do this a

> little bit better and improve on this as I go along."
> . . . You know you can because it's just rearranging your time to be able to accommodate that. Working more efficiently. Not spending any more time, just a more efficient utilization of it.
> Like I was saying, some of the time is not really being too productive.

Judith felt that the organizational answer -- something expressed by many spouses -- was to set aside blocks of time, something she never quite achieved:

> You have to work harder; you have to know how to manipulate your time, to be able to do well, all the things that you want to do.
> This first term has kind of shown me that I have to do something to get myself organized. I'm finding it difficult, not having some set times to do certain things. Sometimes I just never get done, or I'm doing them at the last minute.

In concluding this section on organization, just two final anecdotes which do not necessarily indicate an orientation to organization, but may leave some sense of what becoming more organized meant to some of the participants. One involved Steven and the other Brenda.

With no "organizer" at the university, Steven found it necessary to buy a watch:

> I had to go out and buy a watch. I still won't wear it, but I had to buy one. My philosophy was that if you had a watch you were always rushed to get there on time. . . .
> I have this watch in my pocket -- I'll tell you exactly why: Because I get two hours off when I'm at school -- from twelve noon to two -- and there's a real nice spot outside that I go sit and read; but there's no clock.

In Brenda's case, as we observed in Chapter 2, she had not developed many contacts in the community, but her new

circumstances seemed to cause her to look for more cooperative, less independent ways of approaching some matters in her situation. For example, the following represented a small change, but one which was evidently valuable to Brenda:

> I went to the ballet lesson and I'm sitting there with [my son] and he's having fits because he's got to wait, and this other mother is there and she says, "Where do you live?"
>
> I told her were I lived and she said, "Well, I live a street over." She said, "Why don't we car-pool?"
>
> Well! That came like a bolt of lightning! I thought, "*Car pool! What a wonderful idea*" Hadn't even thought about doing that. I didn't even know how to think about that. So there it is. So now, we don't have to be [at the lesson] for the whole hour.

Social adjustment. As we have already seen, the first university term, for most of the students and their families, was a period of major adjustment -- the altering of relationships and the reassessing of well-established personal and shared family priorities. But in many instances, the students' expansion into the new setting meant having to not only become better organized but also having to shift resources or attention from existing priorities.

Some adjustments were planned and explicit, such as Gloria's stated intent to avoid extracurricular involvements:

> This first year, I really want to just experience [university]. I don't want to join anything. Doug and I went on a walking tour of the campus the other day. We went past a booth that was set up for the Women's Center and Doug said, "Oh the Women's Center, you

better go tell them you'll do something for them."

I'd been very involved in women's issues with the Sexual Assault Center, and all those kinds of things. And I said to him, "Not this year."

I really don't want to be involved with anybody this year. I want to be a student, have no political involvements, no lobbying involvements and no volunteer involvements.

Gloria's strategic social retreat, based on an explicit longer-range plan, however, seemed to be an exception among the participants. For most of the participants, it appeared that many of the adjustments which came about in their social setting simply tended to overtake them in the conduct of their day-to-day living. For example, many seemed to hold in abeyance hard decisions about changing priorities. Many ended up making choices under pressure, often based upon finally having to come to grips with the limitations of their personal and family resources. There seemed to be a tendency on the part of the participants to attempt to maintain as much as possible of the lifestyle they enjoyed prior to the one spouse entering university.

Brenda's statement, made in the face of mounting personal pressures, probably represented a sentiment not unfamiliar to most of the participants:

> I'm not at the point where I'm prepared to drop anything. I'm prepared to rearrange some of the other stuff, but I'm not prepared to drop anything because of the time factor. I think that would be crazy.
>
> I could use [my time] better, but I don't feel I have a whole lot of flexibility in my time. The thing I'll drop, if anything, is my work. I mean, that's what will go. But I can't determine that until I go through a semester -- I don't think I can anyways -- and sort of <u>feel out</u> and see how I end up with exams and everything.

Sam's remark seems to indicate that, to some degree, a mature sense of commitment was one reason for not altering lifestyle elements:

> We can't pull back from anything yet, because I'm committed to certain things. But I think, as soon as my commitment to . . . like my church involvement ends, at the end of December. I will, cut back there.
>
> I've cut back . . . I spose I've cut back the choir, which is Tuesday nights. That's one of my great joys; I guess -- the choir. I've cut that back because that's the only day I have off and I'd sort of like to keep it that way.
>
> But starting in January, I'm going to cut back almost everything else as well. Just so we can have the option of not having to go to church when we'd rather not. But now, we don't have that option.
>
> I know what it's like to get people to do things, because sometimes I'm in that position. Last couple or three years I've had to direct and produce an Easter play at the church. I know what it's like to try and get anybody to do anything. And so, I'll stick with my commitment until it's done with. I don't want to leave anybody in the lurch.

But even with this sense of commitment, as the pressures of the term mounted, Sam expressed a certain level of resentment about the intrusion of what had, up to that point, been an important aspect of his life:

> It started right at the beginning, the church became more of an intrusion into what I wanted to do and what I had time to do, than anything else.
>
> It started back with Tuesday night choir -- just didn't have time. Now, all I'm doing there is counting money every Sunday after church. Some Sundays I just don't have time, but I get there anyways.
>
> Sometimes I work overtime so I don't get to bed until two or three o'clock in the morning. And Sunday is the only day that I would have a chance to sleep in -- can't do her [laughs]!

Mary, on the other hand, at the outset of the term, chose to limit her church involvement. She made no statement that this choice had involved a conscious decision-

making process, but she did indicate that had she not been attending university, she would probably have been more involved with the church and with the church people. For instance, she thought she might have taught Sunday school.

A number of the participants found that as the term commenced, they had less contact with friends. This was not the case for Gloria and Doug, of course, because coincident with Gloria's entering university, they had undertaken their plan to expand their personal contacts. But it should also be kept in mind that Gloria was one of the students who had limited her course load to three courses.

Steven cautiously admitted," I've withdrawn from my friends a bit, maybe." But Pam's comments indicated that withdrawal from their friends was not easily accomplished, and that continued patterns of accommodating friends harboured the potential for creating discomfort or feelings of resentment:

> It's easy to sit down and say that we're going to plan to do this that and the other thing -- and we're not heavy entertainers, and we don't have lots of friends that come over and stuff -- but you can be guaranteed, if you plan something, someone comes over. And you certainly can't turn them away and say, "Oh sorry, I gotta study tonight."

But in the end, Steven remarked, "Actually, [our friends] are pretty good. Most of them don't bug me." A curiously negative way to relate to friends, but a possibly telling remark about shifted social priorities. Sam's comment, that his friends had been forced to become "understanding," seems to indicate that Steven was not alone

in becoming somewhat more isolated.

Mary found that the strain of continuous activity was enough to cause her to occasionally retreat to the confines of her home, and to feel quite comfortable doing so:

> Well, I think I used to like going out in the evenings. Before I started going to university, the two weeks Joe was home, we'd get up in the morning, have breakfast and go out for pretty well the whole day. I loved it, just tagging along with him on his errands. Or else we'd go and look at something, or do something together. Even in the evenings, often we would go out. Now I find that it's a real chore to go out anywhere.
>
> I just don't feel like going out. It depends on what's happening. Like tomorrow night we're going to the theatre. I'm looking forward to that, that's not going to be a chore. But if it's, for example, just going and wandering around the mall -- before, I could do that with no problem. But now, it just doesn't appeal to me at all -- window shopping or looking around.
>
> I think that I have other things to do that are more interesting. Being out during the day, is a lot more interesting. Also, I'm tired when I get home. I really just want to stay home. When Joe's gone, particularly, there are things that need to be done at home, which sort of makes me want to stay home and get them done. . . .
>
> Two weekends ago when I didn't go out all weekend, I really should have gone grocery shopping on Saturday. There were things that I should have done -- that I just couldn't summon up the energy to do. I just didn't feel like it. I just wanted to stay home and be with my children -- not bother with other things.

Brenda seemed to be expressing something of Mary's experience when, in examining her drawing of Family Life Space, she concluded, "I think that what it says to me is that I'm quite focused -- on my family -- in many ways."

As the students went through some of these experiences of retreating from people, responsibilities and activities, or resetting their priorities, they reported developing a certain sense of isolation -- apparently, not an unpleasant

experience. Brenda:

> I can sit around this table, having dinner with people, and all this conversation is going on, but I'm not really connected. I am, at points, but then. . . .
>
> There was a time when I would feel "not so good" about being "not connected." But that's quite all right now.

Sam, in particular, used the word isolation in his clustering activity. For him, isolation seemed to mean:

> The idea of just closing off the life, into just those three units. I don't have time for anything else. Don't want to have time, or don't want to make time for anything else. But at the same time, you feel like you're sort of put aside.
>
> Not lonely, that's for sure! Far too busy for that. Besides [at] work -- there's the people I've gotten to know there, people I'm starting to get to know at university. But they're not my friends.
>
> I've had my friends since high school. That's quite a few years already -- or even junior high. Those are my friends. Those are the people I'm isolated from.

And Brenda, paralleling Sam's remarks, had more to say on the issue of being alone:



> When you go and take the time to do your studies, then there's a real sense of being in this alone. . . . I think my sense of aloneness in this particular thing has increased.
>
> I don't mean lonely. I mean alone. Just facing the fact that if this is going to happen -- if this program is going to be completed, or anything else -- I'm going to have to do the work, attend the classes, do the research.
>
> There's lots of people, but really, it's my thing. I have to be supported by all of these people, my family and so on, but the actual process is mine.
>
> I think it feels good too!

If Sam and Brenda's descriptions were accurate in describing their increasingly isolated circumstances, this change no doubt, demanded a high level of understanding and

empathy from those "supporting people" -- family, relatives and friends.

Judith was never quite able to cut back on her activities, which included theater subscriptions, Grey Cup activities, opera, dinners, wine tastings, etc. As Michael attested:

> I don't think [we've withdrawn from the social activities] at all. As matter fact, we've expanded, because we're going to these other concerts and things at the university. Judith actually goes to more, that I'm not even involved in. They're even part of the curriculum, or closely tied into it.

But in the Lynden's case, there was an obvious dynamic operating between the two spouses. Judith had remarked that Michael "refuses" to sit home and do nothing on Fridays and Saturdays: "He hates it." She indicated that often, on Friday, she would like to just stay home by the fire. She acknowledged:

> We've been keeping [the social activities] up. It's really hard not to, because we enjoy doing them so much. I guess it just comes down to what's more important. If it's cutting into your study time, then we shouldn't be doing it.
>
> I guess this [term] was kind of us feeling it out, seeing what it's like if we do do it.
>
> It's really hard to say no.
>
> I guess, in a way, there is that guilt that comes back into it. I can't cut everything off. I can't expect Michael to . . . you know: "I'm going to school, to study Dear; I won't see you for I don't know how long."
>
> I can't do that. I still feel guilty enough doing this, period! Let alone not devoting time to my husband and my marriage.

For many of the participant couples there was another ever-present influencing factor -- the extended family.

Although my own time and resource constraints did not allow me to pursue extended family relationships in detail, the participant reports made it clear that the extended family -- particularly parents -- had the potential to exert tremendous influence on the students' perception of their situation.

I found it curious to note that virtually all of the students -- even at their relatively independent stage -- indicated that they felt the need to please their parents with their university performance. In this regard, it might be useful to recall that a number of the male spouses indicated that supporting their wife in her university effort, was a way of meeting an outstanding obligation to her parents for having usurped, through marriage, their daughter's earlier opportunity for a university education.

In any event, the influence of the extended family, within the context of the participants' university experience, was most often perceived by the student, with ambivalence or negatively. It seemed that one of the consequences of this was that the participants often tended to withdraw or limit contact with the extended family members.

Sam and Ellen were the couple who seemed to enjoy the most positive and supporting relationship with their parents. Both sets of parents lived in reasonable proximity; but Sam indicated that they [essentially Ellen] depended primarily upon Ellen's parents. One reason for

this was apparently the fact that Sam's parents spent most of the winter in warmer climes.

Ellen seemed to feel that her mother had particular empathy for her situation as a supporting spouse. This empathy translated into very practical assistance:

> My Mum was left a lot when she had us -- three kids. My Dad was out of town working full time.
>
> She'll drop in just to make sure that I'm not alone. . . .
>
> She does other things like sends my Dad [over to help]. [For example,] we were supposed to shovel a bunch of foreclosed walks on Sunday. Well, my Dad, all of a sudden out of the blue -- and he doesn't [normally] offer to do anything -- says he's going to go do it and I was to stay home with Kelly.
>
> I said, "Well, no. I'd like to go. I'd like to get out and get some exercise and fresh air." It was beautiful.
>
> I know [my Father's offer] was a plug from my Mum. And I just said, "No, I want to go." And that was fine. They babysat -- Mom took Kelly.
>
> Or [as another example] to call her and say, "Are you going shopping? Do you want a kid?" is really easy to do.
>
> I don't like to do it often because [Kelly] is not home enough. But it's good for [Kelly] to go and she likes to go and my Mum doesn't mind taking her. So we have that kind of support.

But even in Ellen's case, where the support was obviously well appreciated, she found that sometimes her parents' involvement created a problem: "Sometimes it's very inconvenient. Like: Go away, I don't want to entertain, I have the house to clean up!"

Gloria expressed feelings not unlike these:

> My father's illness is ever-present. An illness in the family always is. But when it's physically present -- when he is here and we have to do things with him -- or when, as it happened, my good friend's mother was ill -- and that was an emergency -- and we had to take care of other people's children; all of a sudden, the rhythm gets badly out of kilter and you start to panic.

> Because you depend on that rhythm to keep your days flowing.

For Steven, the once regular Sunday dinner with the in-laws (an event which reportedly tended to run from 3:00pm to 9:00pm) became an irritating interruption to his studies.

Sheila, in her journal, made a reference to an upsetting telephone conversation with her mother. When I questioned her about this, she indicated that the conversation had not dealt with university directly, but she did acknowledge that it had affected her studying:

> The only thing it has to do with university is, once one of those things flare up again, it blows me. I have an awful hard time concentrating after I've spoken to her. So it's best I don't speak to her [laughs].

Sheila went on to indicate that her extended family was not exactly supportive of her university efforts:

> I keep getting: I shouldn't be doing it and it's too hard on me. So, anyway, that's why it's just better that they're removed.

A comment which seemed to generally summarize the nature of many of the extended family relationships was made by Edna, when she was describing her withdrawal from most of her courses:

> Oh, [the relatives] don't know. To tell you the truth, I'm afraid to tell them. If I was still in Manitoba, I wouldn't be. But it seems that it isn't just the pressure that you put on yourself. For some reason, my family's the kind of family that: "Is she going to make it?" and "Why aren't you?"
>
> So I don't think I've ever completely thrown off this *control* -- that they've always felt that you should succeed in these areas.
>
> So, I've been afraid to tell -- particularly, my Dad. Because he's always been achievement oriented for

> us! It hasn't really come up in conversation that much. . . . If they should ask how school is going, I'll say something noncommittal like, "Oh fine. Great."
>
> I'm not telling [them] I've withdrawn from nine tenths of my courses [laughs]. Because, really, it's my problem, and I'm working at it. I'd just as soon not give them any ammunition. Actually -- maybe it's not really there, but you always feel that they're sort of waiting to see when you don't make it. You don't want them to use it the wrong way, so you don't tell them anything. . . .
>
> There are people who think that the whole idea is crazy anyway. They'd be just as happy to see you give up altogether and go back to what you were doing before, because it was comfortable and predictable.

In contrast to the patterns of social retreat, there were instances where entering the university setting resulted in expanded social experiences. Mary explicitly stated that she viewed university as an opportunity for "broadening [her] horizons a little bit." For instance, she became formally involved in a couple of extra curricular activities: Campus Crusade and Campus Right to Life.

She explained her reason for being interested in the Campus Crusade:

> The whole reason for getting together was, I have all that time -- particularly on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday -- between my two classes, and I thought, if there was a lunch hour Bible study one day, that I would get involved with that. And that's probably what's going to happen.

As far as the Right to Life group was concerned, Mary reasoned:

> I suppose I probably never would have joined such a group if I hadn't been going to university and seeing their table every time I walk through SUB. And the whole nuclear disarmament group is very much a presence at the university. You sort of tend to think more about these things because they're brought to your

attention a lot more.

In terms of her ability to be involved in other activities, it seems important to note that Mary was another of the students who was enrolled in the minimum course load of three courses (In addition to her Athabasca University course, which she completed in October 1984).

In another case, as I've mentioned, Edna, because of the opportunity provided at the university, began swimming three days a week at the university pool. This activity, however, fell by the wayside when she withdrew from most of her courses.

But aside from these examples, for the most part, for the majority of the student participants, attending university -- aside from the classroom experience -- seems to have meant a narrowing of their social context rather than a broadening or deepening of it.

In summary, however, the above descriptions suggest a broad range of general experiences as the students attempted to accommodate the new university influences into their existing social circumstances. It appears that the students who felt themselves in a position to take early decisions, which established more flexible personal circumstances, seemed to be in a position to embrace opportunities to explore a variety of learning social opportunities offered by entering the new university setting. But for a number of the students, because of a variety of constraining factors, their situation seemed to begin to tighten into a restricted

field of opportunity -- a field which tended to become limited to university classes, home and family, and employment if applicable.

The Spouse

I think it would be fair to say that all of the spouses, male or female, viewed themselves as being a support person to the new student in her/his university undertaking. Having said this, it was also clear that support meant different things to the various spouses.

In conducting this study, it was more difficult in the case of those couples who were less intensively interviewed, to determine the precise nature of the spousal relationship and support. In addition, what I describe in terms of spousal support should in no sense be taken to be judgmental or prescriptive. This study did not reveal the data in such a way to make it at all clear that any particular couple did a better job of working out their relationship than any other couple. This study was not designed to make these kinds of judgments. The following descriptions, then, should be understood within these research constraints. What follows is an effort to simply report, describe or make known my sense of three interrelated elements of the various spousal experiences.

The first element refers to altered relationships and/or reported changes in spousal responsibilities. The second describes aspects of what I understood to be an implicit

social contract operating between at least some of the spouses. The final brief section deals with some of the spouses' own educational plans, and the manner in which these apparently altered -- partially, I feel, as a consequence of the students' university experiences.

Responsibilities and relationships. Among the eight couples, the degree to which the spouses altered their pre-existing family roles, responsibilities and life styles, in order to accommodate or support the student, varied greatly. In all instances, however, there was evidence of some accommodation.

Due to the fact that the Lyndens, Eleys and Sheskeys were less intensively interviewed it was difficult for me to make an informed assessment. But beginning with these three families, it seems fair to suggest that Frank Sheskey, when he was home, was probably the most deeply involved of the three -- in matters of child care, meals, family organization and such. What was not clear from the data collected, was whether his activities in this regard were altered substantially as a result of Edna's attendance at university, or whether this was the continuation of an earlier pattern.

Rod Eley also travelled extensively in his employment, but the data collected did not indicate that Sheila's educational project resulted in Rod undertaking any significant new family responsibilities. In casual conversation, Rod indicated that his policy was to stay out

of the way.

Before Judith began her program, Michael apparently was responsible for some domestic chores, such as ironing. When Judith entered university, he maintained these. But for Michael, the major change in his lifestyle did not represent taking on additional duties so much as a conscious decision to accept a less rigorous standard for domestic organization -- household tidiness, meals, etc. He described his approach as follows:

> I think Judith still handles the majority of [the domestic tasks].
> I can't complain about Judith and the housework because I know that if she's not doing it, then I should do it. Therefore, if I'm willing to not do it -- and I'm willing to have it that way, because I'm the one who usually complains about the house -- then I won't complain about it.
> It's up to you to do it Michael!
> I guess I haven't taken on any more really. I probably should have taken on a bit more, but . . .

Turning to the more intensively interviewed couples, the couple which seemed to alter their operating patterns the least were Gloria and Doug. Gloria was taking three courses and their single child was one of the oldest children among the participating families. As a family, they also had previous experience at handling a dual career situation.

It appeared that the major changes for Doug related to having to transport his daughter to and from school more frequently, and seeing somewhat less of his wife.

As mentioned earlier, the problem of diminished personal contact between spouses, and hence, the reduced

ability to spend time together -- to communicate about family problems, plans, events, decisions, etc. -- was one of the most frequently described changes for all the couples.

For Brenda, the key to resolving emergent problems rested in the couple making the effort to communicate, but she too found this process was severly hindered:

> I think that you really get hung up if you don't talk about it. I think that stretches you even more. Because you're never sure about where you're at. We do that, but the times we sit down and actually talk about it .... and say, "Ok, you need to do these six things and I need to do these six things. So, if you do those in these times and I do these in these times, then I think we can cover them all except this one."
>
> It takes a lot of time and it doesn't always work. Because you don't have the time to even do that.

Ellen complained that she was frustrated by the fact that she and Sam were no longer doing things together -- not surprising, considering their mismatched schedules.

Pam's journal seemed to indicate that Steven was constantly studying, but his comments suggest that he felt that he was rarely getting any intensive studying done. Their conversation seemed to reveal that each had a somewhat different sense of what studying entailed:

Pam:

> As far as Steven is concerned, the only time he studies is when he gets something out of his studying -- right?
>
> If you study for six hours and don't get anything out of it, then you didn't study.

Steven:

> Oh no, I would still consider that studying. But reading English books isn't studying -- "Pride and Prejudice" -- that sort of thing. That's not studying.

That's recreation -- designated recreation [laughs].

Pam:

Designated recreation for the fun of being in school? I think it's all studying, actually.

Essentially, what Pam was concerned about was the fact that, like other spouses, she and Steven no longer had time to spend together:

> [Before], we had so much time to spend together, and I'm the kind of person that, if you give me a little bit, I want a mile. And that's it! Nothing less. There's no doubt about it! That's what I want! I don't want half an hour a day, if I'm used to having six or seven.
>
> So, I had to adjust to that. So, I'm adjusting to it.

Steven's participation in domestic matters decreased significantly due to the fact that the fairly extensive off-duty periods built into the fire fighting work schedule were now filled with university classes and studying. Pam assumed most of the domestic commitments and was quite prepared to do so. Unfortunately for her, because of the family's financial situation, Pam also reluctantly found herself working more hours at her part-time job.

The difficulties raised by the lack of personal contact varied in intensity, dependent upon each student's circumstances. For example, for those families in which the spouse worked out of town, at those times, limited communication was an ongoing problem -- the university experience may simply have exacerbated the difficulty.

In any event, the lack of companionship issue aside,

the spouses who seemed to make the most dramatic adjustments in their pre-existing daily responsibilities were Brad, Ellen and Joe.

Brad, for example, made arrangements to try to be home each day when the children got home from school. He decreased his out-of-town travel and his evening meeting commitments, and he undertook a number of the domestic responsibilities such as food shopping.

Brenda found:

> I really sense that Brad has taken on stuff that has made space for me. I've got some psychological space, and I've got some physical space that's not all tied up in my family or this house, this place.

Not surprisingly, Brad discovered that he felt somewhat the reverse, although he mentioned that he was reluctant to treat their two personal experiences as having a direct cause/effect relationship:

> I do feel less free. . . . But that's all right. All we are doing is what we agreed to do. . . . I'm just playing a role that, if we had money to pay somebody to be here, that person would play. In the hours from 3:30 to 5:30pm.

He also somewhat stoically acknowledged:

> Well, I'm finding a little bit [of space], when you talk about the evenings like that. A little bit, because I'm not doing other things that I would otherwise do. So, what I do is make the best of it.
> I do enjoy doing that reading. It's a substitution for other things. And you say, "Well, I can't be doing [work] so, instead of mindlessly watching television, at least I might be able to read a book.

Ellen, essentially, gave up her dream to be home with her new daughter, and continued to maintain her employment

outside the home:

> Had Sam had a full time job and wasn't going to university, I would probably be working part time or not at all. I'd be at home.

It must be said, however, that had Sam not been attending university, it is not completely clear that Ellen would have discontinued her employment. It seems she was employed primarily because of Sam's uncertain employment situation, not particularly because he was attending university.

Finally, in the Baker's situation, Joe made what appeared to be the most dramatic change in spousal activity:

> I've said "OK, when I'm home for two weeks, I do everything in the house." She does things but, essentially, they're my responsibility. She only does them if she want's to do them.

Through the term, it appeared that Joe was as good as his word. When I inquired as to how Mary reacted to Joe's new undertakings, she responded:

> [Joe's taking full responsibility for preparing meals] doesn't bother me at all. In fact, part of it is, I sometimes hold back from just digging right in and helping out because I don't want him to think that I want to take over, or that he's incompetent, or that he's not doing a good enough job -- so I have to do it. So, I hold back. But I feel quite comfortable. I don't feel guilty -- that he's doing the work and I'm not.

To my mind, this kind of statement indicated that Mary was attempting to strike some balance within herself, about the altered relationship. She also felt that she was carrying her own share of the responsibilities:

When he's gone, I have the whole load. And the thing that I really feel I want him to take over, is the children. Because, to me, that's the heaviest part of the load -- when he's gone -- just handling the children.

So, I guess I sort of feel like it's his turn. Not that I wouldn't help or be there for them, but it's just nice to know that he's sort of taking charge with them, while he's home.

As far as the housework goes, I say that I hold back, but actually, I have helped him out. I'm sure he'd agree. And he doesn't hesitate to ask if he's starting to feel swamped with work. He'll ask me to pull the laundry or help him clean up the kitchen or whatever.

Joe did agree:

Yes, she's right. She does pitch in. I know, if I ask her to, she will. But, I don't ask her unless I know that she's got nothing going. Like, if it's TV time and I'm overwhelmed, then I say, if you're not going to crack your books just yet, maybe give me a hand. And she does. There's no problem there.

Mary helps more than I had intended at the beginning. I thought I could just take right over. But I see less need of my sort of taking over 100%, because there are times when she's idle.

It's a reversal. It's the same thing as if I were sitting and watching Mary and she said to me, "Would you set the table?" I would do it. So, it's the same thing.

If she's sitting there, we're making light conversation after she comes home, I might say, "Would you set the table while I just make this up?"

There was, however, some irony in the altered responsibilities described by Mary and Joe. At another point in our interviews, Mary described what she had observed of the nature of this "reversal:"

Actually, at the beginning, you wouldn't let me do anything. Remember? You would tell me to go sit down if I offered to set the table. Yeah, you did! I do remember!

Now, you don't tell me to go and sit down if I offer to help.

But another thing that I thought was interesting

was the other night -- I guess it was Saturday night. We'd had a really busy night because the kids had a party and we decided at the last minute to let them go. We had to make up costumes for them and everything. . . .

Then, when we got home, it was about, oh it was probably going on eleven and we were still working around, trying to get the house straightened around. You were washing the kitchen floor and you said, "I can't believe that I used to leave all this work for you!"

And I thought that was really interesting. I think you have a new appreciation of how much work is involved in running a household.

Joe did not disagree:

Yeah, that's true. I would formerly leave it to her. I would quite often, maybe pick up a book, go lay on the couch and read. Now, it's really completely different. Because, if I had stuck to my original commitment, theoretically, she could have gone and picked up a book, gone reading. And I would have been stuck with the whole works. But she realized the magnitude of the project. She pitched right in.

Returning to some of the other relationships, let us examine some of them in a little more detail also. The interplay between spouses was probably most graphically represented in the situation of the Lyndens, the only childless couple among the participants.

Both Judith and Michael acknowledged that much of their family life revolved around their fairly extensive social activities. I've already pointed out that Judith felt Michael was not the kind of person to be happy just sitting around doing nothing.

Judith, on the other hand, was taking five courses, plus the Writing Competency course. She found she was often reluctant to get down to studying or practicing her instruments in the evenings at home. To some degree,

Michael viewed this as evidence of a lack of personal discipline. Only half jokingly at one point, he accused her of watching soap operas in the afternoons.

In general, Michael seemed to feel that Judith's course load itself was not particularly heavy. In our conversation, he outlined his thoughts to Judith:

> But yours is not a big work load. The distractions -- although it's not a great work load to my way of thinking -- the distractions that come from being around the house all the time, are such that it makes it a big work load -- coming home, making supper, everything else.
>
> Like I say, when I was doing it, I had so many hours a day I wanted to study. There was nothing else to do. I spent ten minutes feeding myself and went back to studying again.
>
> Whereas, you get so many other things which are required of you, and other things which will just distract you naturally, anyway. Things like: coming home, feeding the dog, feeding yourself, sitting down, maybe watching TV or something. All of these things are around, whereas, I didn't have any of those. I lived in a basement suite. I had no TV. I had no radio; nothing. So that would be critical to trying to keep your study habits up, with all these other distractions.

Judith, however, added Michael to the above list of distractions:

> Yeah. It is much better if Michael has something to do. He's doing something; he's gone off shopping, or he's gone out with the boys at night, or whatever.
>
> Not: Whew, I got rid of him! But I just feel that I'm not taking anything away from him or us.

Michael indicated that he was not unaware of the problem his presence created for Judith:

> I realize that, so I go out of the way to go out or tell her that I'm going to watch the hockey game tonight. I make a point of even saying what I am going to do, so that she doesn't feel guilty.
>
> If I just sat down here, she'd think: "Oh,

> Michael's sitting down there doing nothing. I wonder if he's upset, or whatever?"
>
> So, I'll try and make a point of saying something like: "Tonight I'm going to do this or that, or I'm just going to read." I'm going to be doing something to make it show that this is what I want to do -- don't worry about me sort-of-thing.

While Michael acknowledged these problems, it was also clear from his comments that he many times found himself judging Judith's educational situation in terms of his own personal experience as a single university student, a time when he had little in the way of commitments, other than to himself and his studying.

His feeling was that because they had been married for six or seven years and had established a pleasant lifestyle, Judith likely did not want to totally give up the lifestyle and truly commit herself to her studies. He felt she simply had to be more committed: not come home for supper, stay at the university and study.

This matter of a male spouse judging his wife's current university circumstances in terms of his own earlier college or university experience as a single person, presented itself in at least two other situations.

Somewhat in the manner of Michael, Brad, who was also experienced at the process of university study, felt that Brenda simply needed to make a more concerted effort to use blocks of time as they were presented to her [partly through adjustments to his schedule]. But during our process of outlining family timetables, Brenda was at pains to explain that blocks of time did not really present themselves to

her:

> I don't think it's a matter of simply me determining that I need this block of time, and it will appear. I mean, the reality in this household is that there are so many factors that change regularly. I have some control over that, but I don't have a whole lot of control.
>
> If we had someone that was here 24 hours a day, looking after the kids or something, then I could just simply say, "I'm sorry, but from 12:20 to 8:00pm, I'll be gone each day." And that will be the end of it. But I think anything I do is going to have to be done in bits and pieces, along the way. I don't see how I have any control, or complete control, over that.
>
> What I'm realizing -- having been [at university] for a month -- is that the "presenting of time" is not good enough. It doesn't give me enough time. I have to actually make the time, in some way. But I'm still very aware that's very difficult for me to do, because of the connection with your [Brad's] schedule and the kids' schedule.
>
> I cannot study when the kids are running around the house. I know that's an impossibility. So I might as well use that time to . . . I can clean the house when the kids are running around.
>
> Last night, Jeremy came up and said, "Mum will you read me a book?"
>
> I said, "I'm sorry Jeremy, I can't read to you right now because it's time for you to go to bed and it's time for me to study."
>
> Well, you know, I spent an hour after that feeling terrible! Because I wouldn't read my kid a book that would have taken ten minutes. I should have taken the ten minutes, read the book and then come down and studied.
>
> But it is that sense -- that every time I go to sit down to do something in this house, there's a lot of other things that happen. And I'm not very good at closing most things off. Maybe I need to learn to do that. Obviously I need to learn to do that. But that's really hard for me to do.

In the other instance of a spouse making judgments based upon his own earlier educational experience, when Gloria indicated that her domestic responsibilities required that she be able to take her car to and from university, Dave observed that he had been perfectly happy taking a bus

when he went to college and probably would still be satisfied to do so. Gloria was quick to respond:

> But you didn't have a child to pick up Doug! You didn't have to stop and get groceries on your way home! You didn't have to get home, cook supper, and turn around and go to a meeting!

All three of the above instances seemed to represent married student experiences which were profoundly different than the remembered experiences of the male spouses who, for the most part, although they displayed genuine efforts to be supportive of their student spouses, also appeared to be constantly comparing the new student situation to a fundamentally different personal situation they recalled from their own past.

Social contract. At least some of the participating couples displayed clear evidence of the existence of a social contract between the spouses. Some direct evidence of my assertions with regard to these contractual arrangements may be seen in the manner in which the participants described the arrangement of their ongoing relationship within the new student setting. Based upon the excerpts which follow, Chapter 6 includes a generalization about what I understood to be the terms and conditions of the social contract.

The conventional contractual elements of offer and acceptance were most clearly evident in the case of Brenda and Brad, and have already been briefly mentioned. Brad

apparently made his offer early in the university term:

> In September, we sat down and I looked at "overtime" -- if you can calculate overtime -- that I had, and I said that I would give that to Brenda, in terms of coming home early, so that she can stay at school. Or stay at work, or whatever she chooses to do.

Brenda had some reservations, but ultimately accepted:

> In September, I wasn't so willing to take the time, even though Brad offered it. That was really hard for me to do that. Somehow that just didn't seem right. I should be able to fit in what I was doing -- in the cracks.
>
> I think we talked about how hectic it was and so on. But I think a couple of weeks after that, there was just so much that I had to do. I just had to be at school, and I had to use the library, and there was just no way of getting around it.
>
> So, I was more ready at that point to say, "OK, you're offering the time, I'll take it."

I asked Brad if he had placed any conditions upon the kind of support he was extending:

> I think the quid pro quo, for me, is a recognition of the contribution I'm making. . . .
>
> In one sense, I hope she does as well as she possibly can do, but gee whiz, it's tough! So, unless there's an unconscious thing, I don't have any of that: You-better-do-well! stuff.

But the following dialogue between the couple gave just a hint of some of the existence of contractual conditions.

**Brenda:**

> I work in the basement of [U of A building]. The room next to me is filled with old books and old journals and all that kind of stuff. I go in there when I want to take a break. I just take a box down and start reading through the stuff. It's theology and has nothing to do with what . . .

**Brad:**

> You do? You hate old things!

Brenda:

Oh no. I'm really liking it, actually [laughs].

Brad:

[Turning to me ] She's changed!

Brenda:

I think that since I started this process -- a few years ago, when I was beginning it -- tentatively, very tentatively -- I wasn't as motivated. Quite obviously.

I'm surprised at my motivation; I'm very motivated at this point. Not enough to pick my marks up, but enough to hang in there.

I've always said that I hated history, but that interest has grown considerably. I've always said that I'd be interested in philosophy and we've always both laughed at that.

Brad:

You may have developed a little bit of interest in history recently, but you still -- even this term -- made disparaging remarks about history.

Brenda:

Oh, of course. I probably always will.

Brad:

Digging back into old books is quite an interesting phenomenon.

Brenda:

Well, the old Christian Centurys, from 1907! If you could see the issues that were being raised at that point! It's a cyclical kind . . . I went through all the journals, from beginning to end. I just sat in the stacks for an hour. I just love it.

Brad:

It's got a lot to do with the courses you take!

Brenda:

No, it has nothing [laughing]! That's the problem.

Brad:

[Turning to Don] I should be envious, eh? That she's wasting time reading all this junk when she should be getting seven and eight and nine on her courses.

Brenda:

It's not junk.

Brad:

> I think it's funny as hell [both laugh]. I think it's funny, just because it's so uncharacteristic.
>
> But maybe you're right. Maybe we've got a Ph.D. budding here.

This conversation seems to indicate that Brenda was beginning to enjoy some personal spin-off benefits of her university experience. She was experiencing some pleasure from personal change, but one can infer that Brad was surprised and a little uncertain about what was happening.

Another student who apparently found himself enjoying the experience of university was Sam. But when he revealed this feeling, Ellen responded that she was not interested in him gaining too much enthusiasm and that the family consequences could be dramatic:

> He said to me one day, "You know, I'm really enjoying university."
>
> I just kinda looked at him and I thought, "D-o-n'-t enjoy it too much! [laughs] Because you're not going to become a perpetual student."
>
> If he's going to continue working full time and going to university full time, then he may as well divorce us and do that! And I do mean us [laughs]!

At one point, Ellen also made a brief remark about the fact that Sam's program seemed to be somewhat less focused than she might have liked: "The first two years seem kind of . . . not very directive, towards teaching.

From Ellen's perspective, the level of family sacrifice seemingly demanded a fairly instrumental approach to acquiring a university education. This was the case even though Sam had found his previous technical training too

narrow in scope. Her remarks suggested that Ellen was prepared to act in the support capacity for only as short a time as humanly possible.

Interestingly, this time imperative was shared by other spouses. For example, early in the term, Joe put his expectations of Mary quite strongly:

> Well I told her, I don't want her fooling around -- like correspondence courses, unless you're a super-disciplined person, they just aren't the way to go. They give you twelve months, then they can give you an extension of twelve months, if you care to pay the price. It's just not the way to go.
>
> I felt the same way about [Mary] going to university. Now I may change, if I find that she's really under a lot of pressure when I'm gone -- in terms of housework. But I really would like her to proceed with the five year plan and not drag it out to a ten year plan because that, of course, will certainly delay my opportunities in the future.

Joe was "glad" for Mary's opportunity to attend university, but he also had his own agenda: "I feel that when the time comes, and if I'm up to it, my turn will also come."

For Mary's part, the conditions were clear:

> I feel that I have to do well. I have to put a lot into [university] because I'm taking that time away from my family. I've got to be responsible for it and do well at university. . . . In my case, I feel that my family's making some sacrifices for me to go. . . . It's sort of something that is owed to them.

In the Baker's relationship, these shared expectations reportedly resulted in some interesting negotiations. On one occasion, Joe revealed:

> I was very much involved in her selection of courses. I tried to encourage her and influence her in certain directions that I though she should go. And

she didn't.

She had her reasons for not taking the courses that I suggested and I said, "OK, that's what you want to do." I think it was more or less a compromise -- you know? -- some of the courses she chose. But, she had an idea of what she wanted to do in the future and I said, "OK, that's what it is -- then go for it -- don't stop short, go for it. Don't take something that's going to be short of you're goal."

Things didn't work out exactly as . . . I was trying to push her to take a full five courses, plus the courses she took by correspondence. I thought she'd just have those under her belt for another time when she was under more pressure.

She said, "No." She said, "Don't push me." She said, "Three courses are enough," with the [Athabasca University] courses she had.

At another point in our interviews, Joe confirmed the above incident and his intentions:

I did hassle a little bit about taking a full load. Then she just really told me to back off. She didn't want to rush into it. But I am anxious that it doesn't become a casual thing. Like, I would like her to get her degree in the required number of years, not over ten years. Not drop it to two courses and say, "Well, the work load is too heavy." Then, I might resent it -- if she decides to cut her work load.

But near the end of the term, Mary was still concerned about the thought of carrying a heavier course load:

Well, I still worry about [taking five courses next year]. I'm not so sure, because next year I'll be taking, probably, a couple of English courses and a more difficult French reading course -- more a French literature [course].

Those courses are heavier in terms of essays and reading and things like that. I have really -- as far as the courses I am taking this year -- there's not a really heavy work load. So, I think that it's not -- maybe not -- giving a realistic idea of what it would be like.

Interestingly, as the term progressed, Mary was

"pleasantly surprised to find that [she was] not working very hard" at university. In contrast, Joe suggested that she was probably working quite hard enough. This takes us back to some remarks reported earlier in this chapter. Joe did not wish Mary to be any more self-disciplined than she then was:

> I just thought, "I don't want you to be any more disciplined than you are."
>
> Because you're getting by and you haven't let your hair down. If you were any more disciplined, then there could be problems.
>
> [Mary] gets what needs to be done, done. I think, if she were to set herself a more rigid schedule, and insist that she not be disturbed between seven and nine at night, that would be far more irritating to the whole. . . . It'd be harder on me and the kids.
>
> It may be more beneficial for her, but at this point, I don't think she needs that type of rigid schedule, because she's doing well. So I'd rather she didn't get too [laughs] . . .

Another contractual matter for the Bakers seemed to relate to the social aspects of the university, and the learning which might take place beyond the classroom experience. Mary's position in the early part of the term was reasonably straightforward:

> I guess I pretty well felt like I was there to go to my class and that was pretty well it. I'm not really looking for a social life there, because I have my family and friends anyway. Which doesn't mean to say that I'm not going to be friendly to people.

Joe, once again, had fairly strong opinions on the matter, and at one point later in the term, they entered into a bit of a dialogue over the issue:

Joe:

> In terms of Mary's university and the social aspect -- I just can't see that being . . . at least, I

hope it's not a big part of her going because, really, it's for the young people. That's great. I mean, they want to go there and they've got to meet friends and prospective mates and so on.

Mary's going there to learn and the social activities -- even in the MUGS group -- has got to fall behind all the other responsibilities she has here. You know?

Mary:

I think both of us -- really enjoy a conversation. I think there's a lot to be learned just from people. So it's not entirely [a classroom learning process]. I don't know how to explain that.

Joe:

Well, you learn a lot just in life generally. But you get to a certain place in your life where the people you know, the people you associate with -- you've talked out most of your theories and your ideologies, and when you come to that kind of a dead end, the classroom is really the next place to go to. That's what I think anyway.

So learning, at that point, becomes a classroom experience. You're learning from someone who has the greater knowledge, rather than just on a daily basis or a life basis. Unless you meet somebody or make an acquaintance with somebody that's really on the bit. But, generally, I think you have to go back to the class.

Mary:

Yup, I agree. I do. I find I really enjoy being in the classroom. I feel like I'm learning something.

Obligations and expectations were also apparent in the Lynden's situation. In our final interview Michael was at pains to explain Judith's position:

Again, it's a guilt. You're scared, after committing to all this, and if you fail: "Oh my gawd! It means we went through this, we gave up that, we did this instead of doing that. Oh, I failed. I didn't complete it."

Then you feel a right ass sort-of-thing, and worse. That's part of your guilt coming in. The fear that -- not even for yourself probably, even to me -- how I would feel about you failing. . . .

Often people would just consider themselves failing, but you're feeling: "What does Michael

> think? What will he think, after what we have given up, or what we haven't done, or whatever?"
>
> Which may not really be something to worry about, if she gives it her best shot and all the rest of it. We've discussed that.
>
> In fact, I've said, "Don't worry about it dear, do your best and whatnot."
>
> But I still think that's something that's in her mind. It's one of her own obstacles. And there is no real obstacle to you attaining your goal, except yourself. It's one of these things that you're fighting yourself all the way through here.

Notwithstanding his observation that Judith was fighting herself, some of Michael's other comments indicated that he also had some personal expectations about the meaning of "her best shot," and since he was also involved in an extension course, he used his experience as a measure:

> Well, that's one of the points I have seen, is that I can be studying and doing homework more than she was. That's one of the points that I find; sometimes Judith isn't pushing herself hard enough. . . .
>
> When I had to do my thing, I just did it. Everything else, again, just went to the side and: "I have to do my thing tonight."
>
> I was up till midnight or one in the morning doing those papers -- I think I mentioned them [in the journal] enough times to give you the gist of the thing. I had people over whenever necessary; I was up first thing in the morning; I just excluded it and I slotted that time. That's easy to do for a little while -- well, I did it the whole term almost. But that's only one subject.
>
> But I made a point of making sure that that took the priority. I have to get that done, I'm taking this course and I don't want to waste that money and my time. I'm going to make sure I do it and pass it, and all the rest.
>
> Whereas, sometimes I find that Judith doesn't give it that . . . focus.

Judith had a somewhat different perspective:

> See, I was going to say that usually in a relationship too, I find it's the woman that cares more? -- to make sure that they stay together. It's sort of a stereotype thing.

> The man does what he wants, when he wants -- not that I'm saying that you do that all the time -- but I think part of it is that.
>
> Another point I wanted to make too is that, I feel sometimes that when you [Michael] tell people -- or even talking with you -- that most of my subjects are in music, it sounds like I've got it really easy, that I don't have to do anything.
>
> Granted, most of [the courses] are practical. I admit the music side of it, right now, is kind of a little bit easier than the other part for me. But it's hard work!
>
> Michael sometimes will go: "I never hear you practicing."
>
> I practice a lot when he's not home -- sometimes I don't always sound that great.
>
> That's why, when sometimes you say: "You're not putting the time in" -- you actually don't see it. And also it's because I'm not putting in a lot of reading time, note-taking time. Because I don't have to. It's practical!

In the face of Judith's position on the matter, Michael refined his earlier statement:

> What [his admonition] was meant for was sort of helping to -- I don't know -- get the stick out and saying: "Work, work, work, work" sort-of-thing. "Are you practicing, are you doing this?"
>
> I was trying to prompt her to keep working and to save her from just sitting there. I couldn't see her practicing much. I'd say, "Well, I haven't seen you practice your clarinet for a while -- your violin, or whatever."
>
> I would say that to her and this is when it came out that she practices when I'm not around; which, you know, is fine. It was nothing to make comments on how good you are or bad you were; it was the fact that I didn't see you doing it.
>
> If I don't prompt you, then you might think I don't care, and maybe you do need a little prompting sometimes.

Registering some agreement, Judith had the final word on the matter:

> Sometimes I do. Yeah, I do. . . . I tend to fluctuate up and down. There's people like Michael: You set your sights; the goal is there and you walk towards it.

I don't! It's because I doubt myself a lot. . . . To help keep me on track, I periodically need somebody like Michael to give me encouragement.

There was also evidence of a form of contract or understanding between Gloria and Doug. Again, the terms and conditions were probably best illuminated through their dialogue:

Doug:

I don't mind the way that things are going now. We're not wealthy; we're not rich. We don't have a lot of things that we might like.

If it comes to my pay cheque paying for university, I don't mind doing that at this point. It'd be nicer if it came from somewhere else, like a loan.

The money coming from Gloria's Dad doesn't bother me. And the money coming from me -- if we had it -- wouldn't bother me either.

Gloria:

Unless of course, I was pissing it away. If all I was doing was going to school and pissing it away, getting lousy marks and not working, then, it would probably bother you.

Doug:

Yeah, but you probably wouldn't do that.

At another juncture, Doug made his expectations explicit, when I asked, hypothetically, if he would be unduly concerned if Gloria had been getting only modest grades but had really been enjoying the university experience.

Doug:

I would like you to work hard -- which is what you're doing. Just pass all the courses. I'm not expecting 9s & 10s, although I must admit, at first, I was sure that 9s and 10s would be no problem. French will be a problem but . . . .

I don't think the marks are as important as just the learning experience and, perhaps, getting some sort

of degree. I don't know if you get a degree with 5s & 6s.

Gloria:

You know, I think that's part of the cynicism -- that you could just as easily coast through it and not work too hard, and still get your degree.

I'm surprised though, the idea that, if I was having a <u>really good time</u> but only pulling off fives and sixes.

I am having a really good time. I'm also surprised that that would be acceptable because I would not find that personally acceptable. I was about to interrupt you and say, "Oh, there's no chance of that." Just because I don't see that as being a possibility.

Doug:

I was just going to interrupt you now and say, "No, there's no chance of that." Because you wouldn't let yourself go down to a five or six. You would probably work harder?

Gloria:

If a five or a six was the best I could do, given a fairly full-out effort, then I probably wouldn't spend a great deal of time in that discipline. Would finish off that course and that should be it.

No -- just the idea of shrugging off a five or a six and not worrying about it too much -- no, I couldn't do that. I couldn't do that.

<u>Spousal educational plans</u>. At the outset of the term, several of the spouses indicated their own intentions to attend university at some point. Some of the spouses expressed a concern that the students' educational experience might cause them to be "left behind." In one instance, Steven suggested that Pam was jealous. Pam agreed, but explained what jealousy meant for her, and under what circumstances it arose:

I am [jealous]! -- like, if he would run off with another woman. Not that I'd ever say anything if he did. But I am jealous, yeah -- unfortunately.

I'm concerned about the people he might meet there that might fit more into his category. Therefore,

> making me inferior -- right? That's what I'm concerned about. Not the teenyboppers and that kind of stuff.
>
> I only have that fear when I feel insecure or when everything comes to a head -- when everything bothers me. It's not something that bothers me daily.

Pam's "category" was apparently related to the fact that she had not yet completed grade ten. This, she felt, meant, "I don't think that I [will] know of things academically that Steven'll know." This was a persistent undercurrent of concern in their relationship -- apparently sometimes expressed in the form of jealousy of other women -- but the implicit contractual condition was that Steven should not change so much that Pam would feel left behind, in her own academic category.

Pam's concern extended to the fact that she might never have the opportunity to change her own educational category:

> Maybe when it's my turn, I won't be able to do it.
>
> I'm just saying that that's how I feel. Not that I can't do it. I know I could do it, but it's just that insecurity. "Oh my gawd!"
>
> Even trying to start this course -- this grade twelve course -- has just got me hanging off the ceiling. I've been working on it. I've really been thinking about it; so I will do it! But I have to say, "Ok, this is it, I'm gonna do it." I'll go and I'll get it and I'll do it!

At the beginning of Steven's university term, Pam was intent upon finishing her high school, so that she too could enter university. But by the end of his first term, there had been a dramatic change in Pam's educational plans:

> Actually, I've decided not to go to university. I just said I've decided not to go! Because I don't want to meet him [a particular professor] and I don't want to suffer the confusion. It's not for me. It's too

scary. I'll go someplace else. Maybe I don't need to be whatever I was going to be.

No doubt, many factors contributed to this dramatic reversal, but it seemed clear that the kinds of university experiences that Steven was reporting were a major contributing factor in Pam's change of mind.

Mary expressed something of a similar concern about spousal intimidation, when she commented on the visit of a relative during the term:

> We had my cousin from Ontario visiting us on the weekend. She said, "It's so nice that Joe isn't threatened by your going to university."
>
> It hadn't really occurred to me. Well, in a sense, maybe it had, but I never really thought that he would be threatened by it in any way. He's too arrogant [laughs].

In contrast, at another juncture, Mary disclosed that her concern about this matter was fairly strong:

> To be quite honest, I really wish we were both going to university. Oh, how do I say this without sounding arrogant?
>
> I don't want my attitudes toward things to change and Joe's not to change, if you know what I mean. Like, I don't want any gap developing between us in any way.
>
> We talked about that too, before. And we've -- in marriage-counselling-type courses or whatever -- they talk about the danger of one being educated and one having less of an education. And I think that that's true, except that I think we're both really open to learning.
>
> So, I don't really foresee that as a problem but I guess it's in the back of my mind a little bit.

But interestingly, Mary found that she didn't feel that she could be quite as open about the pleasures of her

learning as she might have wished to be:

> I've been getting good marks and I guess I feel quite good about it. Sometimes I have to quit talking about it. I'm excited about it and about the marks. I'm just pleased, and I guess, a little surprised at the marks I'm getting. Sometimes I think I tend to go on and on about it, to Joe, so I have to remind myself to just, "Shut up!"

Joe, of course, was conscious of her excitement:

> I think her excitement is derived from the potential. I found that when she started university, both she and I were looking four years down the road. She said, "I'll major in English and consider library science."
>
> Because of her recent Athabasca University course in English, she was thinking of English. But, of course, there were other course requirements for the degree. So, she took those the first year, and I think she found that there was much more to be learned than just English.
>
> She's gotten so excited about art history, which she thought would be: "I'll get it over with" sort-of-thing. "It's something I have to take, so I'll get it over with." And the same with computing science; it was a science course she had to take.
>
> Now she realizes the potential in knowledge in general.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Mary took many opportunities to share her new-found knowledge with her family; for example, her new appreciation of Eskimo art. Joe appreciated this, but there were limits:

> I appreciate when she shares what she's learned. Actually, what she's learned in her art classes, she's shared with me and I've been interested.
>
> She's tried to share her computer knowledge with me and I said, "Forget it! You've gotta be there."
>
> It just doesn't do anything for you. But with art, the ancient art she was studying and also the Eskimo art -- when you look at it now, you'll have maybe a little bit better knowledge.

But for Joe, like Pam, there were interesting consequences. At the beginning of Mary's first term, he fully intended to pursue a university education himself. By the end of the term he was full of self-doubt:

> After talking with Mary over the last few months -- I don't think I could do as well as she has done. She's at the top of the class. But I think that, with as much work -- well, possibly more -- I would get by with the 70/75s.
>
> I think I can do it -- I can pass -- but I don't absorb quite as much in the same period of time. It takes maybe five years to absorb what she can absorb in a year.
>
> I began to realize that it's a tremendous responsibility to go and study. It's a responsibility to do well. I feel that I couldn't do quite as well, but I could certainly grasp the knowledge.
>
> I don't know exactly what it was that triggered that. But I remember, I was really proud of Mary, for the marks that she's got; she's kept them right up.
>
> But some of the things that have come up in her courses, she's been able to apply previous knowledge that she has retained. I was thinking of the math involved in your computer [course]. I might have been completely thrown, not by the computer, but by the math that was involved. It, consequently, would have thrown me off the computer, totally frustrated me, and I would have to work that much harder to make all this relate.
>
> Even as she was putting her program together -- I don't know what takes place during the lectures, but I'm not a great note-taker. If I don't have it explained to me --in some cases step-by-step -- I won't grasp it out of a text.
>
> So, when I saw what she was doing, I thought I would have to work an awful lot harder to achieve that same thing.
>
> Of course, I think of myself as being quite average. My desire is there to learn, but the ability is average. I think I could hold my own in the class, but I wouldn't be a "shining star," so to speak.

Mary rejected Joe's claims:

> I think, if you didn't do as well as me, it would only be because of the difference in our backgrounds. You were never interested in school; I was always a student.
>
> — Just the fact that I finished high school. There would be no question of my quitting school in grade

> ten; my parents would never have allowed it.
>
> Just a whole different background -- the fact that I would have had that much more experience with taking notes and studying, and so on. It's not a question of ability, just attitude maybe, or background. . . .
>
> I think that Joe's experiences have been really positive too. When he took math or physics, at Alberta College, he was just whizzing through it -- he was at the top of the class. He got 80 on his Athabasca University course; and that was after blowing the exam because he didn't study! So, his marks were good enough that he still ended up with 80. So, I think he's being a little modest.

But Joe did not feel that he was being modest: "No, I think I'm being realistic!" He was finding his job to be "more of a grind than it ever has been," but now his educational plan was less oriented to a university education. They were directed more to simply changing what he did for a living:

> If [Mary] were to successfully complete this course and get a job, that may allow me to change jobs, even at a lower rate of pay. So that I could maybe enter into a different line of work.

At the beginning of the fall university term, Doug had also expressed some interest in attending university:

> I would like to go to university. I had plans to go to university, as late as last year -- just before university was starting. I had great designs. If I didn't get my job back, I would go.
>
> But then, I had the feeling that I would be the oldest in the class; that I would be the outcast; I would have a hard time finding people to talk to.
>
> But yet, I decided that I would enjoy it. That I would learn. That I would use my mind a great deal more than being at work.

He had a particular vision of what university might be like:

> I don't have any university experience but, from what I can envision, it's very a lively place. People walking

briskly between classes, a lot of conversation at higher levels.

The reality of Gloria's experience with university contributed to Doug altering his educational intentions. On one hand he was intimidated by some of the negative experiences Gloria was having, but on the other hand, he was enthusiastic about some of the joy she had discovered in her learning activities. In the end, he enrolled as a part-time student in the Building Technology program at NAIT:

> At the first interview I said that I was interested in going back because I had been laid off. I couldn't see going anywhere at the time. I didn't have a job, we didn't have the money to go to school. I still wasn't sure about going to university, although it did excite me that I had the opportunity.
>
> Then, when I got my job back, it was a more secure thing again.

As we have seen, Gloria was not as quite as confident about their economic security, but once Doug felt more assured about it, his educational rationale seemed to be as follows:

> I'm just getting more fired up now, because Gloria's having such a great time at university. . . .
>
> NAIT seems to fit in really quite well. Because, to do university would probably be three or four years, full time. NAIT evening classes would probably be a little bit less stressful.
>
> I think that I would enjoy that particular [NAIT] program, more than an engineering one or something with social sciences attached to it. Simply because I did enjoy my experience working as a carpenter. And seeing everybody else working and seeing the big buildings downtown go up.
>
> I've always been intrigued by the whole process. That's why I say, I think I'd be more interested in this Building Engineering Technology program. Because I just have a built-in-kind-of-thing for it. And as far as the time goes, it would take a couple of years.

I find it particularly interesting that all three spouses who had initially expressed interest in ultimately attending university themselves, had changed their minds by the end of their student spouses' first term at university. This phenomenon, I feel, requires further study.

But returning to this study, Doug's comment raised the matter that economic security may have been an influential aspect in his decisions about education. Let us now examine in some detail, the economic circumstances of these non-continuous students.

Financial Circumstances

In examining the financial context of the participants of this study, it seems clear that the direct costs of undertaking a university program (tuition and books) were usually of much less concern than the effects of an altered or more complicated lifestyle. Of course, choice of lifestyle was not unrelated to financial situation. In some of the families, "real" financial hardship was evident. In others it might be suggested that often the reality of hardship was a constructed meaning ascribed to the situation on the part of the participants.

In presenting this material, however, I take the position that, as far as the participants' everyday life was concerned, their construction was their reality. The feelings, attitudes, decisions and actions revealed in the following section are intimately related to the participants' personal understanding of their financial

situation, aside from any "objective" measure one might wish to apply. In Chapter 6, I return to this matter again.

Turning to the participants' statements about their financial situation, the statements of individuals were often complex and invariably replete with apparent contradiction. For example, Gloria gave her assessment of the costs of attending university: "It's a lot of money and it's a lot of time and I just don't want to mess around with this [opportunity]." And on another occasion she stated: "On Friday, half of my classes don't show up. I can't believe that people are paying this incredible amount of money and are missing these classes." Yet in another instance, she seemed to indicate that the costs were not that significant: "Sure, it costs. It costs a great deal, but nowhere in relation to what you're getting for it."

Sam also displayed contradictory feelings about the direct costs of attending the university:

> I don't feel too bad. Like I say, to me, the student fees are just a paltry sum -- I think.
>
> I don't even know how much, out of that $700, I pay for Student Union and all this other rubbish that I never use and don't get any benefit from.
>
> It would be nice to have more student discounts, through the university retail outlets. But that's getting selfish and greedy, under the pretense that all students are poor.
>
> But then, because the student tuitions are so cheap, I don't know why students would be all that poor. Most students have parents and stuff, who are paying their way. They've got student loans on top of that.
>
> There are lots of hardship cases. But I think, for the most part, students have got it pretty easy.

On another occasion he might have been considered to be expressing the point of view of one of those "hardship cases:"

> I guess I'm lucky because I didn't have to buy all that many books. The cost of books in that blasted book store. What a joke! Man, what a rip off! I bought a book there -- some slimy Shakespeare thing I think -- five dollars! Good grief! Just a little paper back -- no, it wasn't Shakespeare; Shakespeare was cheaper. It was some Canadian author; maybe that's it.
>
> Five dollars for a little book. And the reading was grade-nine level. It wasn't very philosophical or deep -- no large words, even, for your five dollars. Couldn't believe it!

To the degree that contradictory comments such as these, were typical of the way the participants viewed their situation, it appeared that an understanding of their financial experience ought to involve an examination of a more broadly based range of data.

Financial statements. All of the participant families from whom financial data were gathered for this study indicated gross family incomes well in excess of $25,000 (A family income level above which, apparently more than 50 percent of the University of Alberta mature student families stand -- Report of the Task Force on Mature Students, 1983:11).

But from this study, it appears that income level alone gave an incomplete understanding of the influence of financial circumstance on the educational experience of the non-continuous student. Other factors apparently ought to be considered, such as: family history and attitudes,

family size, fixed financial commitments and the like.

As stated in Chapter 2, using only income level as a measure does tend to indicate the families involved in this study were economically average or above average. In fact, a recent Clarkson Gordon study (Tomorrow's Customers - 19th Edition, 1985), indicated that Canadian families earning more than $48,900 would be considered to be in the top 20 percent of all Canadian households, in terms of earning power. Therefore, on the basis of income alone (Appendix B), one might conclude that the participants of this study lived in relative financial comfort.

In spite of this assessment, for all the families -- with the exception of the Eleys -- financial concerns frequently emerged in journals and interviews. Of course, some of the comments were likely elicited as a direct result of the study design -- the requirement to prepare financial statements -- but many of the concerns also emerged, unsolicited, as part of the ongoing interview or journal process.

An examination of the financial statements immediately reveals that the degree of family material attainment varied considerably among the participant families. The profiles indicate, however, that regardless of the level of attainment, generally, the participants had arrived at their current financial and material station through hard work and, sometimes, through difficult circumstances.

The modest financial information collected in this

study made it very difficult to make meaningful comparisons across family financial situations. But on the basis of net worth alone, it was clear that the Sharpes evidenced the least financial reserve, and therefore, the least financial flexibility. As we shall see, this assessment was reflected in their own comments. It is important to note, however, that their financial position probably represented a pre-existing condition. It was more a reflection of the impact of the construction of their new home -- which occurred before Steven commenced university -- than it was a reflection of the cost of entering university or remaining in university. As we shall also see, though, expenses related to university did not improve their financial situation.

Of the other participants, those who mentioned financial matters least often were the Eleys and Sheskeys -- from whom no direct financial data were collected -- and the Bakers. As mentioned, the Eleys did not discuss financial matters at all, except (as described in Chapter 3) when I once casually remarked about snowmobiles parked in their drive.

In terms of mentioning finances, the remainder of the participants seemed to fall between the extremes represented by the Sharpes situation on the one hand and the lack of concern expressed by the Eleys on the other.

Another factor which the financial statements revealed was the very limited cash reserves of some of the families.

It is clear that many of the families were very dependent upon some form of regular income, some might even be seen to have been living from pay day to pay day. Three of the six families from whom statements were taken (Baker, Sharpe, Thompson) revealed that they had less than $1000 cash on hand, including funds for immediate expenses as well as savings. In relation to the amount of cash on hand, these families also revealed significant levels of immediate debt, in the form of charge and credit card accounts. These factors all indicated that they might have experienced relative difficulty coping with current expenses and any unexpected expenses, including educational costs or emergencies.

The financial statements of the other three families (Makowichuk, Maunder, Lynden), in terms of cash on hand, displayed a more flexible financial position. But, as we shall see, even for these families, concern about finances was a significant and ongoing part of their daily experience.

For almost all the families, wealth was locked into some form of fixed asset, usually residential property or automobiles. For a number of the participant families, if one sets aside the questionable valuations placed upon personal effects, such as clothing, furniture and jewelry -- and hypothetically used the remaining equity in other assets to pay the outstanding borrowings -- little family wealth, which might be available to finance the expense of

undertaking a university education, would remain.

I hasten to add that the above notion of liquidating fixed assets, is not intended to suggest that it makes sense that families ought to sell their homes, etc. in order to finance a formal educational undertaking. Common sense would seem to suggest that there would be many short-term costs and human problems related to such a financial strategy. There might also be many longer-term social implications as well. For example, to what extent would it be beneficial for society to encourage families to liquidate retirement savings as a means to finance current educational activities? However, examining the financial statements by thinking in these hypothetical terms, does develop a more detailed understanding of the financial context of these non-continuous students. It also creates a sense of their ability to pay for their educational undertaking, beyond simply depending upon income levels.

Employment patterns. The most apparent aspect of the participants' economic circumstance was their employment situation. Both male students (Steven and Sam) were employed full time during the term. In addition, Sam maintained a part-time job, shovelling sidewalks. The spouses of all the female students were employed full time. But of the female students, Brenda was the only one employed, working very reluctantly at a part-time job -- about ten hours per week. It almost goes without saying that, to a greater or lesser degree, all of the participants

also worked at the ongoing non-paid housekeeping duties.

Against their stated desires, both Sam's wife, Ellen, and Steven's wife, Pam, worked outside the home. Ellen was employed full time; Pam, part time.

The male students reported that they continued to work, primarily because their wives would not be able to generate sufficient income to support the family. With regard to the other male spouses, during the conduct of this study, none seemed to question their role as family bread winner.

Ellen had apparently arranged Sam's part-time snow-shovelling job, through her employer, prior to his getting full-time employment. After he started his full-time job, it appears that they simply did not want to give up the part-time employment income. Curiously, as already mentioned, this choice sometimes necessitated the assistance of Ellen or other family members to keep up with the shovelling.

At one point in her journal, Ellen questioned why they continued to shovel the walks; she acknowledged that they did not need the money the job provided. But they, like many of the other families, put a great deal of emphasis on ensuring ongoing financial security. As for Ellen, we have seen that she did not really wish to be employed. She had originally planned to be at home with her child. She found coping with the demands of employment and their family situation very difficult. Notwithstanding this, she and Sam did not seem to wish to take the decisions necessary to

change the situation:

> [Sam's] mentioned that I should quit now. But I don't think I can do that. Because, in two year's time, he may need the time to go to university without working and I don't want to take my finger out of the pie, so to speak, because it will be tough to get back in at the same wage.

Apparently Ellen's salary of just under $20,000 per year fell about $200 a month short of meeting their regular monthly expenses. Consequently, Ellen, the family "bookkeeper," saw a continuing requirement for both of their salaries:

> We need that. Even part-time work would have put us through. Financially, we're OK now. Even with UIC, we were OK. But we can't do it on my income alone.

Sam, however, could not see them carrying on with their existing employment arrangements for the full term of his university program. They had a contingency plan. Ellen described something of the longer-range financial backdrop, against which they felt they were operating:

> We have a lot of potential if the market turns around and we can sell the condo. Then we can afford the risk of my quitting and picking up a job later.
>
> Even if I was only working part time, I think that that would improve somewhat. Because you wouldn't have the pressure of all the . . . well, I'm working for two people really -- housework and stuff. [Sam] helps out when he can but that's not really that often, in comparison to what he was doing before.
>
> I can see you really burning out doing this full time for a while.

Ellen really wanted to realize the intent she had originally held forth, of being at home with her daughter. But Sam also expressed some hope of his being able to work

only part time within the next couple of years. Within these competing desires, Ellen raised another element of their situation:

> We've actually toyed with the idea of having another one [child] within the next couple of years. I think we're asking for suicide. But otherwise, [Kelly] will be four or five by the time . . .

The conclusion to her statement was cut short by the flow of conversation, but they both acknowledged that a partial resolution of all these financial matters probably depended directly on that uncertain sale of their condominium.

Brenda also indicated that she would rather not have been employed. As described earlier, at one point she was trying to decide how to make more time available and the job seemed to be the best candidate for elimination:

> There are some options. One is the work. Maybe I just go and get a bank loan and pay my school that way and say, "Screw the work." Like, maybe I'll have to do that. I'm more ready to do that than I am to cut off my kids completely, or hire a sitter to be here 24 hours a day or something like that.

But she kept the job. Her journal revealed that the "working problem" remained with her throughout the term:

> Nov. 6 - Working is still the part of the puzzle which provides the most problems for me. I'm not clear about what I should be doing, and quite honestly, I'm not sure I want to be working on a part time basis. I do need the money.

In the Sharpe family, although Steven was the student, the need for his wife Pam to work created difficulties not unlike those experienced by Brenda. But Pam also raised an interesting issue. She felt that the problems related to

both spouses working probably had something to do with the kinds of employment patterns to which a family was accustomed:

> This time business, is a bit of a problem for [the children]. And that's because Steven is going to school and I'm working more. Had I been working full time, and it had always been like that, it would have been easier.

Steven, much like the Maunders, saw the ultimate sale of their house as a key to their financial problems:

> If we get out of this house and into one that's cheaper, she won't have to work. And that'll make it a lot easier. It's just that damn job . . . it's so necessary, and yet, it's such a pain.

For many of the participants, then, their setting included a constant pressure created by the clash between the desire to provide financial support and security for the family, along with attempting to meet the other demands of their situation. And, interestingly, at least during the first university term, there seemed to be a good deal of reluctance to move away from the income security provided by almost any existing earning opportunity, regardless of how difficult these might be to maintain. My assessment is that this reluctance did not seem to be motivated by greed, so much as a desire for some degree of financial certainty. Understandably, none wanted to release their existing financial foothold without having another foot firmly planted.

Student loans. For four of the students, requesting a

student loan represented a major element of their financial strategy. Steven, Gloria and Sam applied to the Alberta Student Finance Board and received student loans; all on the condition that no portion of the loan would be forgiven when they successfully completed their studies (In Alberta, as part of the Canada Student Loan Program, there is provision for forgiveness of portions of the loans).

Steven applied for $1700:

> I got $1300, which covered my tuition and the books. That's beating the system, right?
> I'm trying to remember what I paid. I've already paid about $250, for books, and tuition was $914 -- I paid half. I borrowed it from my Dad, so I paid my Dad back. Paid the university their other half. Or, I guess, the bank pays the university the other half. Then I paid the bank account back for the books I'd used our money for.
> Which will leave me about a hundred bucks for books in the second term. So, it worked out just about right on.

Steven reported that his original $1700 loan application was for less than the amount for which his calculations indicated he might have qualified. He had apparently decided he ought not to be greedy in his application. He was fairly stoical about the fact that his approval was $400 short of his request:

> But you have to see their point too. It may not be their fault that I have over-committed myself here -- with my wage -- if I'm staying fully employed and . . . Well, it's hard to say. Maybe they should have paid for it. In Sweden they pay for it don't they? I think they do.

Steven indicated, however, exactly what receiving the loan meant to him: "That was a big load lifted off; (He was

under a great deal of pressure] just thinking where that other $454 [tuition] was going to come from in January. It was kind of nice."

Gloria received approval for a $1400 loan. She quickly pointed out: "They didn't 'give' me; they 'lent' me. This is a distinction I am constantly drawing."

She also had some observations to make about her financial situation -- in relation to the nature of an ideal student loan program:

> I would like to be assured that I can borrow my fees and my books, until I finish. Major university costs: fees, books, parking.
>
> The rest of it, we are not in a position to bitch about. For other people, the addition to their living expenses might be important. It's not for us; and I can't bitch about it. Because we're in an entirely different situation from a lot of other people.
>
> But the whole idea of the fees, the books, and major expenses like parking or what have you -- I would like to know that I can borrow that. I'm not going to be able to borrow that next year. I'm not going to be able to borrow that because we have money in the bank, and we own our home, and all those other kinds of things.
>
> That bothers me. Because I'm not asking that they give me the money; I'm asking that they lend me the money. I see them give money to people, in situations where it's a lot of money, and I don't know that it's making a significant difference. I'm not asking to be given it. I'm only asking to be loaned it.
>
> When it comes right down to it: No, it's not going to make the difference between my having an education or not. There will be other ways that we will get around it.
>
> If I wasn't in the position I'm in now, financially -- because of my father's help -- I would not be going to school. We'd still have to make payments here, we'd still have our little money in the bank, we'd still drive two cars -- but the Student Finance Board wouldn't help us. In that case, student loans would have made the difference. So that frustrates me a little bit.

Gloria reported that, in her loan application, she was

apparently not completely candid about the family's assets -- this, she thought, was why she got the loan. She did not, however, anticipate making application again in the future, partly because she did not wish to be in a position again, of avoiding disclosing personal financial facts.

Sam didn't recall the exact details of his loan application:

> I don't remember exactly. I didn't think I'd get it in the first place. No, I don't think I got everything that I asked for. I think I asked for $3400/3300, something like that. I got 28 [hundred] -- which, I guess, is reasonable.

Sam made his application prior to obtaining his new full-time job. He was not aware of a continuing requirement to advise the Student Finance Board of material changes in his financial situation, such as his new job.

For Sam, there was no question that the loan approval might cause him to forego his new job. In many ways, for him, the loan and the job were unrelated. Ellen and Sam knew what it was like for him to be without employment. The security of a job was paramount. Sam, it appeared, was firstly a person who was employed -- even though his current job might not have had any long-term career potential. He was secondly a person who was attending university.

The strength of the Maunder's desire to feel secure was revealed by an interesting observation Ellen made, during our discussion of their financial situation and the possibility of both losing their jobs: "We have enough food

in the house -- if you don't take bread and milk into consideration -- to last us a year. So, we wouldn't starve."

Because of their previous experiences with economic and employment vagaries, the Maunders had obviously considered and planned for a "worst-possible financial scenario." They apparently viewed as very real, the possibility of having to live through a personal financial siege. The student loan was simply one more element as part of the family financial reserve. It did not seem to materially affect their perception of their financial situation. As Sam indicated: "Mostly because we have to pay it all back. So, we're not going to do anything with the money, unless an emergency happens."

Brenda Thompson also had applied for a student loan, although she could not quite recall the amount of her request: "I can't remember. I worked it out two or three times; it might have been a couple of thousand dollars -- twenty-eight hundred, or something."

She detailed her reaction to the notice from the Student Finance Board:

> I got a big one: Zero! The number one [consideration] mentioned [by the Finance Board], is that my husband has adequate funds with which to support me.
>
> And a little thing with an appeal procedure. I don't know whether to go through the appeal procedure or not. I just wonder, realistically, what would it benefit?
>
> The system really is . . . . There are people whose fathers are making enormous amounts of money -- students in my class -- who are getting student loans. That really ticks me off!

> What it means is that I have to continue to work. What I'm finding, is working and going to school and family, is really, really hard. If I didn't have to work, it would really help. It would take a big pressure off.
>
> There was a guy the other night who has a $10,000 outstanding loan from student loans. I think: "Shit, I want a thousand bucks, and they won't give me any."
>
> As an individual student, I don't even have a dime in the bank. I really resent . . .

Brenda's comment trailed off. I suggested that the Finance Board's view was likely that the responsibility for financing her education was a family responsibility. This was certainly not Brenda's view:

> Don't tell me: Because I'm a woman? That makes me want to take that on. That really pisses me off!
>
> Well, I really resent it, because in terms of assets, I don't have a lot of assets. I, personally, do not have a lot of assets.
>
> I really resent the fact that I know of young students, who are on their own, who are getting loans and who have socked it away, and aren't even using it -- for pete's sake! We're going in debt for me to go to school -- this is ridiculous.

It was not clear as to what Brenda was referring to by her final statement about the family going into debt. She made no other comments about borrowing from other sources. However, for her, the link between the loan and the speed with which she could complete her education was direct:

> The question is, how thin you can spread yourself. I've thought about taking five courses next year. If I'd got my student loan, in January I would have taken five courses. I would have spread myself that much thinner. Because I think I could have handled it.

But the specific loan matters aside for the moment, it was clear that within her family circumstances, Brenda considered it important to have some sense of personal

financial independence. In this regard, in terms of other female participants, particularly those that had been previously employed, she was not alone.

Financial independence. The matter of financial independence introduces a complex, but I feel, important aspect of the financial context of some of the participants. Three of the female students, Brenda, Gloria and Judith, had been employed prior to entering university.

As already mentioned, Brenda's remarks gave strong indication of her desire for being somewhat economically independent. In my judgment, admittedly, based upon a very sketchy sense of her financial affairs -- a primary reason for her continued part-time employment was not so much that the direct university expenses were a terrible financial burden upon her family (although their cash situation was probably one of the weakest of the participating group); but rather, our discussions lead me to believe that her continued employment had more to do with a desire to earn her own way. As a student, she did not appear to wish to be an economic extension of her husband, or to surrender the personal autonomy that an increase in economic dependence might entail. In fact, on one occasion, both Brenda and Brad acknowledged that they found little to agree on in terms of financial matters.

However, more direct evidence of this type of "independent" financial orientation on the part of some of the female students was probably more readily accessible

from the comments and actions of Gloria and Judith -- the two students who temporarily, but completely, set aside their former income-generating activities.

In the process of discussing her clustering activity, Gloria raised the issue of the family's "relative poverty," a notion which, as we will recall from the beginning of the chapter, she connected to a pervasive but formless "resentment" of "everything and everybody." When she did give form to her resentment, it focused on her husband:

> Doug is now talking about taking classes. There is a great deal of resentment. I panic at the idea of Doug throwing up his hands and saying, "I want to do this too. I don't want to work and earn that money."
> The idea totally panics me. I suppose I could have drawn in PANIC [in the cluster], but it didn't occur to me. Again, it's part of that there's-no-place-to-dump-it kind of feeling. There's kind of a panic and a resentment and stuff like that. It's all connected to money and the relative poverty that's going on here.

As indicated earlier, dependence upon some "objective" assessment of the various families' financial positions does not seem to begin to come to grips with the way in which individual participants appeared to experience their particular economic settings -- the "relative poverty." For example, "objectively," when compared with some of the other participant families, the Makowichuk family would appear to have been in a reasonably secure (possibly even comfortable) financial position. But Gloria certainly didn't have those feelings. The following are portions of three of her journal entries from the month of October:

> Oct. 1 - We are perpetually one step ahead of bankruptcy. Ah, well!
>
> Oct. 10 - We discovered yesterday that we were more broke than we realized (insurance, insulation, two car tune-ups, etc.) So I must not start buying food on campus. I have lost thirteen pounds in the last two months, and I'm sure that half of it is because of missed lunches.
>
> Oct 30 - We are suffering from what is known in business circles as "cash flow inadequacies." I tell myself that we are not really broke, just stretched. If we do not buy a nail file, T-shirt or bottle of wine between here and 1985, we might survive. Why do I feel so doomed?

Gloria also described her sense of relative poverty orally:

> I don't have to explain that one too terribly much. You start getting just sort of generally, feeling deprived. Just this sort of niggling feeling that you . . . There's nothing that you really want, that you haven't got, but you just feel that if there was something, then you wouldn't be able to get it. So, you're relatively poverty stricken, and you have this kind of niggling resentment.
>
> That's all it is. It isn't anything overwhelming. I mean, good gawd, we're not having trouble paying our bills -- far from it.

But Gloria acknowledged that there was more to the feeling of relative poverty than just not being able to purchase items that she desired. She indicated that she felt like her own educational activities were a drain on the family.

It is important to recall that this was not the first time she had not been earning an income, but being in university was the first time her lack of financial contribution had been combined with personal cash demands such as tuition, books and other expenses.

> There's some guilt. I contribute no money. I

> drain a great deal of it. Yesterday I felt very very guilty because I went to Incredible Edibles and had a bowl of clam chowder for a dollar seventy-five! That's expensive!
>
> And I came home and confessed and said, "I'm really sorry, but I was hungry and I had a bowl of soup. It was a dollar seventy-five and I'm really, really sorry."
>
> And Doug said, "Don't be sorry, if you're hungry, have a bowl of soup."
>
> But I felt really badly about that dollar seventy-five bowl of potatoes.

Interestingly, because of financial contributions by her father, Gloria was able to rationalize her status within the family financial situation:

> The thing about the financial statement is that my Dad doesn't give us $500/mo. all the time. He just started this in September, when I started going to school. He's very keen on this idea and that's his way of supporting it. I had asked him for $200, but he's fairly wealthy, and so that's my father's idea of making $200/mo. payments.
>
> I don't actually feel that I'm not contributing. In a certain way, I almost feel like -- this is terrible, all my feminist friends would jump all over me for this one -- the money that my father sends me, that I put into the bank, is MY pay cheque. Yes they would, they would jump all over me for that one. I'm just gonna be killed for that one.
>
> I consider that $500/mo. to be my pay cheque, and that's what I contribute. Except that I feel very ambivalent about that, and there's where the guilt comes in.

Turning to another family, by virtually any measure, the Lynden's financial statement probably represented the strongest financial position among all the participating families. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I had not intended to take a financial statement from the Lyndens, but their ongoing comments about their financial concerns suggested that, for comparison purposes, their position ought to be a

matter of record.

The ongoing financial concerns expressed by the Lyndens seemed to be related to a number of matters: loss of Judith's salary, mortgage interest rates, and unexpected or uncontrolled expenditures. But the item of primary concern for both spouses was the loss of Judith's salary -- the creation of a state of "relative poverty." An early journal entry by Judith read as follows:

> Sept. 22 - We did a bit of grocery shopping this morning and I must say that our finances are working out pretty good. We haven't really got a proper budget, as such, but we have a kind of table worked out, and so far, things are working out fairly well. I thought that without my income, we would end up struggling for the first little while. Maybe we'll keep our fingers crossed, just in case it was "beginner's luck."

But several of Michael's October journal entries indicated that the family's financial situation was soon perceived as being somewhat out of control. The entries also provided a good indication of Michael's understanding of the nature of the financial situation.

> Oct. 9 - Car's in the garage & needs a clutch, ouch! I sure miss Judith's salary. Going to a wine seminar tonight. Thank goodness it's prepaid.
>
> Oct. 10 - Now we need two new tires! We expected some experiences with the Capri, but we hoped to have a few months clear first. I'm hoping that handling my new financial situation will get easier as time progresses. I can see how much fun Xmas will be this year.
>
> Oct. 16 - As we stated at the outset of our first meeting with you, financial considerations were right up there with personal cares, when Judith discussed her returning to school. One of our biggest concern was my ability to handle our financial needs alone. We calculated that this would be possible, assuming as few "surprise bills" as possible. But also assuming that

> our mortgage payments would not increase appreciably.
>
> With our present mortgage at 10.25%, due on December first of this year, and current rates at 12.75%, the situation does not look encouraging. I have the ability to pay a portion down, but this supposes that the stock market, at least, maintains its current levels, which, with the talk of increasing rates, does not look promising.
>
> Rather than mention my concern over this every day, I thought it would be better to table it now. Although, I'm sure I'll reference it later.
>
> We both agreed to sacrifice, monetarily, to our present level; but to ask more of us both, might be more than we're willing to give. Although, with positive attitudes, there is always an acceptable solution.
>
> Of course, all of this was not totally unforeseen. We were gambling that it wouldn't happen.

Well into November, Michael continued to report difficulties related to the loss of Judith's salary: Nov. 14 - "It seems that we run out of petty cash much quicker these days. Sure miss Judith's salary."

Judith revealed that, initially, she thought that the loss of her income would change her status in family financial decisions, but she felt this fear had been unrealized:

> So far it hasn't. It was obviously a major topic when we were deciding if we could handle my going back to school. I know all the times we discussed it, I felt really . . like: "I can't!"
>
> Sometimes I would feel like: "Michael is expecting me to work and bring in this money.
>
> We use this money!"

One of the previous uses for Judith's income was apparently to maintain a regular housekeeping service. This was discontinued when she began university. One of Michael's journal entries reflects this change:

Nov. 21 - It seems, the longer we're into our routine,

> the more it falls apart. Housework is being neglected, and I can never get around to finishing some of the jobs I begin. I don't know if it's laziness, the extra activities we're involved in, or a combination of both. I wish I could afford a housekeeper again.

Judith suggested that their former lifestyle had left them spoiled; Michael agreed. They planned even more financial cuts. However, Judith indicated:

> As it turns out, we're still doing the same things, even though we shouldn't be. Another thing that's hard to break, is not spending the money like we used to.

As mentioned earlier, during Judith's first term, they maintained such elements of their lifestyle as their wine tasting activities, tickets to the Oilers' hockey games, tickets to theatrical organizations, activities during Grey Cup weekend, dining out, etc.

In addition to the financial impact, these activities also had an effect on their study time. Even Michael, since he had also decided to enroll in a university extension course, reported having difficulty finding his own study time.

Juxtaposed against the Lynden's expressed feelings of financial constraint was a curious financial episode, described in Judith's journal:

> Oct. 20 - We did a crazy thing today. My birthday is coming up and Michael was out shopping around. I was home doing some studying. Michael phones me from Southgate and asks me to go down and meet him, because he wants my opinion on something.
>
> So I go racing down to meet him. He takes me into the Clock Gallery. We've been looking at grandfather clocks for the last two years. They're having a sale -- 12 months, no interest. Anyways, we bought one. I

> think we're crazy! There goes our Canada Savings Bond for next year. It's a neat clock though!

The clock was beautiful; I noticed it as soon as I entered the house for an interview session. The down side of the purchase for the Lyndens was that they later discovered that the twelve-month-no-interest arrangement they had signed for purchase of the clock was actually a loan from a finance company (see the financial statement - $2000).

As outlined earlier, throughout the period of the data collection, Michael's concern about the mortgage renewal rate was a constant theme of his journal entries, until the mortgage was renewed in December, at 11.75 percent. Judith's journal was essentially silent on the matter of interest rates, until the ultimate moment for renewal:

> Nov. 29 - I know Michael is worried about the interest rate -- it's renewal time. It's funny, since I've been back at school, I figure that Michael will take care of things. That's not good and I know. I hadn't really intended for things to work out that way.
>
> The interest rate isn't bad, but it's slightly more than our last rate.
>
> After Christmas, I guess we will have to sit down and reassess our situation. Michael really wanted to go away in February, but I'm not so sure we'll be able to do that.

In a fashion similar to Gloria, Judith was concerned about her direct personal expenditures and lack of contribution to family finances: "I guess I feel guilty because I'm not bringing in any money. Whereas, I used to -- before." Her journal read:

> Oct. 19 - Considering that school is supposedly full of

> poor students, I find it expensive. I had to fork out $25 today for this ugly choir uniform, that doesn't fit properly and looks the pits on me. I have to pay $30 for instrument rental. I had to pay $60 for that remedial reading [Writing Competency] class. What is my tuition fee covering?!

Judith was also surprised to find the food at the university very expensive. Judith tended not to take a lunch to university, and interestingly, like Gloria, she avoided buying lunch; also like Gloria, her rationale was that she was on a diet. As a curious contrast, Michael usually bought his lunch at work; he indicated he usually did not take a bag lunch unless he motivated himself to make it the night before. The study data did not include information on the lunch routine for Gloria's or Brenda's spouses.

But interestingly, a number of the other female participants in the study also reported skipping or postponing lunches: because they were too busy, the lunches at the university were too expensive, the eating arrangements at the university were inadequate -- crowded, noisy, unclean, etc., or they were dieting.

Balanced and regular nutrition are important aspects of a student's ability to learn. To me, the lunch-time eating habits of some of the participant students, particularly the women, indicates that the general matter of married student nutrition ought to be studied further. Is there a problem? If so, is it related to time constraints, concerns about physical image, economic perceptions, or some other factor(s)?

When I asked Judith about other personal purchases, as already mentioned, she indicated,

> I haven't bought any clothes, but it's not because I don't have any money. I gained quite a bit of weight over the summer time, and as punishment, to try and get myself to lose weight, I've been wearing these jeans since the summer. Thinking that I would embarrass myself into losing weight. That's the reason why I'm not buying clothes.

In her journal, Judith reported another curious personal experience -- of finding herself at the university, with insufficient money in her purse to return home by bus -- I asked if this was a sign of simply having forgotten the funds or their tight money situation. They both laughed and Judith explained her situation as follows:

> Uhmm, it's really hard, actually, for me to say. The last couple of years I was working out at the site, and I didn't really use a lot of money there either. I rarely had money on me. There was no cafeteria; there was nothing to spend money on. So, I was pretty well without money anyways, then too. Now I'm noticing it more because I have to spend money to do things.

With regard to the family bank account, Michael explained:

> She has access but not convenient access. I mean, she can go in and get money out, but she doesn't have convenient access to it. I'll generally ask: "Do you have money?"
>
> And if I haven't asked, then she'll tell me: "I don't have any bus money" or whatever.
>
> So no, she doesn't just go and take out twenty dollars, and that's hers or something. She actually has to come to me, just because the banking that we do is right in the building I work in. It's a convenience factor there. But she could go get it herself.

As far as university-related financial matters were concerned, my final image of Judith came through a chance

meeting very early in her second term -- January 1985. She was entering the Student Union Building, in a hurry to get to the used textbook sale. She indicated that she preferred new books, so that she could mark -- highlight -- them herself, but she was checking out the used selection, in hopes of cutting family expenses.

The earlier comments of Brenda and Gloria, along with this more detailed description of the Lynden's financial experience indicates that a non-continuous female university student who was employed prior to entering university, may have a quite unique -- and yet not unreasonable -- way of viewing her financial circumstances. This understanding appears to raise matters such as: relative family power, financial independence, personal status and self-esteem.

All of these factors, in themselves, would seem to have the potential to influence a student's learning situation. The comments of some of the participants involved in this study seem to indicate that this aspect of the student situation, particularly with regard to female students, is worthy of deeper examination.

Ongoing financial affairs. The Bakers and the Sheskeys were the two families in which the female students had not been employed outside the home immediately prior to entering university. Although the Sheskey family was slightly larger than the Baker family, on the face of it, the families appeared to be in very similar general circumstances, particularly with regard to housing, occupation of the

primary bread winner and history of family mobility. However, as mentioned elsewhere, financial information was not gathered from the Sheskeys.

The Baker's financial statement revealed a fairly tight cash situation, but they generally felt that their income level was sufficient. They indicated that the university costs had been anticipated and that they had saved in order to provide for the expenses. They had never considered applying for a student loan. However, as Joe's journal revealed, financial matters did come up for discussion:

> Oct. 2 - We lightly discussed our financial position and agreed that some belt tightening was in order.

In view of their earlier comments about their stable financial situation, I was somewhat surprised to see this notation. When I made inquiries about the substance of this "light discussion," Mary advised that it had generally related to a plan to build some savings and get used to living on a lower income. In essence, the discussion did not relate directly to university expenses.

Joe was concerned about his employment vulnerability. He was not really happy travelling out of town to work, and he was not happy at work. His company provided no pension plan and he considered his work to be vulnerable to layoff. There was some thought of Joe looking for a job in Edmonton, which might very well be at a lower income level.

At another point Mary and Joe were casually considering membership in a privately operated family recreation center

near West Edmonton Mall, but they were concerned about the expense. I suggested the university facilities as an alternative. Mary felt the idea had merit, but I understand it was later rejected due to the inconvenience of distance.

For the most part, the participants generally made little use of the university services and facilities, other than to attend classes.

Mary only made two other references to family finances. During the preparation of the financial statement, she expressed some dismay at the low value of their vehicle in relation to their bank loan. The only other time was a journal entry:

> November 5 - I read through the section in the U of A calendar about scholarships last night. I've decided to really aim to win some kind of scholarship for the personal satisfaction of winning, but also for the money itself. Although we can afford for me to attend university, it does put a bit of a strain on the budget. A scholarship would certainly help out.

The Sheskeys also made little mention of financial matters. As we have seen, it appears that, for Edna, the personal resource of "time" was a more critical issue than finances. Edna did make one reference in her journal, in relation to buying school supplies for her son. But the situation might have been typical of any family with school age children:

> Oct 23 - Gene is not pleased with the books I ordered on the school book order form. I was trying to get value for the money we were spending, but he does not understand.

In early October, the Sheskey's did purchase a new,

used car. Two of Frank's journal entries described the process from his perspective:

> Oct 9 - We went car shopping today, as our cars are shot. Some people love buying new cars, I think I will mail order my next one. But since Edna said she would rather walk than use either one of our present vehicles, I guess we are getting a new car..
>
> Oct 10 - Talked to bank's loan officer - got my car money. Read my horoscope, it said: "Don't spend money, you're going to need it badly shortly."
> Can't take it too seriously though, last week it said the boss would see my abilities in a positive light and I would get a promotion.

Edna's journal indicated that the arrival of the car was reason for a family celebration:

> Oct. 11 - Collected new car - Arrived home at 3:40pm. Boys were home from school. We all went to MacDonald's to celebrate.

Three families undertook automobile purchases during the data collection period. The other two cases were the Maunders and the Sharpes. Invariably, a key factor in purchasing a new vehicle was the need to have relatively reliable transportation, in order to meet the increased demands of a more complex lifestyle.

The Maunders already had two vehicles, but Sam, due to his involvement in the minor traffic accident mentioned earlier, was able to describe what it was like trying to operate without one:

> Trying to get to and from work without a car is a little bit interesting sometimes. Because you're off at 12:30am. I found out that the last bus runs at 12:38am. I have eight minutes to run and catch my bus.

The alternative, of course, would have been to call Ellen,

but she had to get her sleep because she was employed full time.

In any event, in early October, they bought a new K-car and were planning to sell their truck. Sam's journal indicated that they must have been considering the purchase for some time. It also revealed his perception of their financial position:

> Oct. 2 - Decided to buy a new car as the price was dropped another $500. Will pick up car on Thursday. We are now officially broke.

Ellen's journal indicated that the car purchase itself involved them in a full evening of activity, as they had to approach her parents "to borrow money for the car."

The Sharpes also purchased an automobile. They had been driving an old Oldsmobile, but it was no longer in safe operating condition. The replacement vehicle was a used Volvo, which they purchased for $100, with Steven's September overtime cheque. Steven did the refurbishing of the vehicle himself. He borrowed some $300/350 from the Credit Union in order to buy new tires, etc.

Through our discussions, Steven indicated that he would probably have purchased a $100 car regardless of whether he was attending university or not, and regardless of his financial position. He indicated he does not believe in fancy automobiles. His journal, however, revealed some sense of his financial quandary:

> Oct 3 - On a bit of a sour note, the issue of money has popped up, in conjunction with the car and my lack of time. It seems that, with exams coming up, my time is

> becoming very limited. So much so, that we feel that it might be wiser to find a car that works. Rather than fix one that doesn't. Money being so tight, however, it may not be a viable solution. We'll have to see.

Steven put the Volvo into running condition, but Pam's journal revealed that he was spending precious time fixing the floor of the car on October 14 and they were having more unspecified trouble with the car on November 13.

Unreliable as it might have been, the car was an important transportation element for the Sharpes. Steven took it to university and work every day. When possible, he dropped Pam off or picked her up after work. Pam would like to have been able to use the car to come home for lunch (a 10 min. drive) because this would have allowed her to be home for her children, but they could not afford two cars.

From a wider economic perspective, Steven conceded that financial issues were often a catalyst for other family problems:

> Money is the chief problem; money has always been the chief problem. And then, just to say that -- it's not really the money that's bothering me, you dredge up all the other little problems that are floating around.

His journal made it even more explicit, raising once again matters which were raised earlier in this chapter:

> Sept. 26 - Tonight my wife finally admitted feeling that I may "outgrow" her by way of education. That is one of several reasons she has given me to explain her poor mood lately. Some others are: we see less of each other; our money hassles; problems with the kids in school; problems with her mother; my lack of punctuality and so on.

As mentioned earlier, the Sharpes saw most of their financial difficulties as related to the solar home, which was heavily financed. Over the term, they had no success in selling it, and furthermore, each time the real estate agent showed the home, the children became upset about where the family was going to live. All of these things caused a continuing sense of strain.

Not all of the families, however, found themselves in the position of having to be concerned only with day-to-day finances. There was also evidence of longer-range financial planning. Gloria & Doug and Sam & Ellen sought financial advice regarding planning investments for their children's education. In addition, Gloria and Doug worked out new life insurance arrangements. Gloria's perception was that these activities had little to do with her entering university, but that the loss of a second income might have made the two of them somewhat more sensitive about planning longer-range monetary matters.

Housekeeping assistance. The matter of the participants employing part or full-time housekeepers has already been mentioned in several instances. Edna and Frank, as we have seen, talked over the possibility, when considering future strategies after Edna dropped her courses. Frank's assessment was that they might be able to afford the expense:

> One of the problems I guess we don't have is the money part -- paying for tuition and all that sort of stuff. I don't know. Probably, [a housekeeper] will be a

> border line, but I think it's still being considered. It's not ruled out totally that we can't afford it.

Edna added:

> Some people, though, wouldn't be able to consider something like that. We, at least, feel that we're in an income bracket where we could possibly consider having a live-in babysitter. But there must be people who can't. Unless there's some kind of subsidy for that sort of arrangement, which I'm not sure about either.

Brenda and Brad also considered the matter, hoping to bring a sense of order into their lives. Sam and Ellen, who felt that they did have the money to pay for assistance, decided on a novel approach. In Ellen's words:

> You have to tidy to have a housekeeper come in. Well, we figured that we'd have to spend the money one way or another, so we would use Saturdays. Every second Saturday, we would do major-clean-up, and then, laundry the following Saturday. Then, we would just eat-out all weekend. That would be our money that would have been going to a housekeeper anyway.

At one point or another, all of the families with children were faced with having to arrange for some assistance in child care, to cover those periods when both spouses were busy. The services required varied arrangements such as: regular paid day care ($240/mo.), regular paid after school care ($215/mo.), regular care during lunch periods -- provided by neighbours, family or friends and casual babysitting services.

In summary, then, the preceding descriptions led me to understand that most of the participants felt that their family financial situations were less than comfortable. It was also clear that the financial setting, as construed by

the various couples, had a significant influence over many matters which had the potential to affect the totality of the students' university experience. As one of the participants put the matter of the student financial situation: "It gets to be a point where you can't restructure it. But it is a psychological thing, and it does wear at you." Some of the implications of the sense of financial hardship are discussed further in Chapter Six.

In general, the descriptions included in this chapter reveal students and their families, during the first term of university, facing a very complex array of challenges and problems. It is clear from the descriptions that the family setting required more than just a modest adjustment at the beginning of the term. Most of the families appeared to have experienced a major rending of the fabric of their former reality. New roles came into being, relationships were renegotiated, there was a dramatic increase in complexity, and along with all this a sense of frustration and being overwhelmed.

But, of course, to this point, we have really only been told half the story. We have little sense of the student and family as a direct part of the university setting. Now we turn our attention to that interrelated aspect of the non-continuous student experience.

# CHAPTER 5

## University Setting

Although a guiding notion of this dissertation is that the married, non-continuous student experiences his/her expanded personal context of university and family as a relatively continuous setting, for purposes of reporting the study, I have chosen to report aspects of each setting more conventionally, as separate but interrelated parts. This chapter, then, moves away from the immediate backdrop of the family circumstances and more directly explores the student experiences of the university setting. It seems to me that the participants' understanding of the university setting was significantly influenced by factors already outlined in Chapter 4. I trust the influences will be evident in the descriptions which follow.

As in Chapter 4, this analysis begins with the presentation and discussion of a variety of figures of speech which the participants used extemporaneously in conversation and in their journal writing. In addition other interesting thematic elements are included in order to round out the sense of the university setting I gained from the participants.

Interestingly, the use of figures of speech was most predominant as the participants referred to aspects

directly related to the university setting: activities at university, student colleagues, courses, professors and the like. There was much less use of imagery with regard to the family setting. Also, in the process of collating the remarks, I was struck by the negative tone evoked by many of the images used to describe the university experience.

It may be that the participants tended to make more extensive use of images when they were referring to the uncomfortable aspects of their experiences. It could also be that difficult experiences were more inclined than the positive experiences to stir the emotions. Maybe, within the constraints of our language, the use of complex imagery is the best way we have of conveying strong feelings. Or finally, the participants of this study may have had a particularly cynical orientation, although the profiles did not seem to suggest this.

It is also possible that my own perceptions may have influenced the tone of the images I discovered. In searching the data, I might have been blind to more positive uses of images. Or, it is possible that the first term of university experience for these people was, in fact, to a great degree, distasteful.

Beginning

At the outset, the students experienced a good deal of uncertainty about their admissibility to university. The idea that the opportunity to attend university is a

"privilege" was raised by most of the students. Gloria, near the beginning of her term, probably created this image most clearly.

> The idea that you can walk onto a campus and you can walk down wide halls, with big windows and sunlight, and nice areas to sit -- you go out and there's people sitting on the grass and reading books, and things like this. . . .
>
> I think that's the notion of privilege: The privileged often don't think about it -- simply because they are privileged. You only think about it if you're on the outside looking in. You know, your nose pressed against the glass.

She went on to describe what it was like to have "your nose pressed against the glass."

> They speak a whole language, even going down and picking up a calendar becomes somehow part of the rite. People speak to you in "universityese" and assume that you know where buildings are. You don't understand what they're saying and you feel very silly asking them. It's like a private club. Very definitely, you get this feeling that you're on the outside looking in. Hanging around, looking bedraggled and poor outside of the doors.

It appeared that Brenda also had her nose slightly flattened in the process of gaining entrance:

> Because of my eclectic background, I didn't fit any of the forms. So I needed to talk to somebody about getting the most credit for what I already had. So I pushed to see [a person in the Registrar's Office].
>
> He told me I could take eight courses if I really wanted to finish it in a year and a half. I could just take eight courses in a semester -- why couldn't I do that, if I really wanted to do it. I think he was out to lunch.
>
> I think it would be really helpful, instead of having those women behind that little thing -- that you can't get past the door, they hand you a piece of paper -- to have some real human contact with mature students coming back.

Interestingly, there were very few strong images presented about the actual process of registration. Criticism, however, was expressed about four aspects related to registration. The frustrating and dehumanizing experience of buying books was vilified most frequently. Secondly, several of the students, faced with family commitments, had difficulty with the implicit -- and seemingly unrealistic -- expectation that, during registration week, students could easily make themselves available on the campus for a variety of orientation and registration activities.

In the same vein, the fact that many university operations, including departmental offices, closed over lunch hour created very real scheduling problems for the students operating on severe time constraints because of family commitments. This time-pressure problem was compounded by the fact that some of the students who had attempted to get departmental course counselling prior to registration week, had been informed that those services were to be provided only during the registration process.

It was also apparent from our interviews that, for most participants, the inatitutional face of the university system was not a pleasant one. This theme will be expanded upon later; however, near the end of his first term -- after his mid-term exams -- Sam revealed that "university has slowly lost its hideous head." It seems that, for him, the vision of a hideous head had involved his concern, early in the

term, about facing large class sizes and dealing with an "impersonal, faceless mass."

In the end, what apparently caused the head to lose its fearsome form was the fact that the size of Sam's classes turned out to be relatively small and he experienced the opportunity over the term -- before and after class -- "to sit down and just be able to talk to somebody." By "talk to somebody," Sam was referring to having conversations with fellow students. This experience, he suggested, was "not very much different than high school. You tend to mold together and carry on." Later, we shall also return to this notion of university-as-school.

In a statement made earlier in the term, Sam seemed to suggest that, for him, there were two aspects to the university experience -- a formal educational component and a relatively separate personally-created experience [conversation falling into the latter]. But he hinted that a great deal of his effort was directed at maintaining the personal agenda in the face of a powerful institutional presence:

> University, I think, is such a . . . sort of a grey cloud. You have to get into that cloud . . . and when you're in it, the cloud doesn't change. It's still there -- it's still that big ominous thing -- but you sort of work within the corridors of that . . . and extract something positive from all the stuff that is happening there. Something positive, I mean -- outside the realm of getting the education.
>
> University, to me, is still a scary, not a pleasant, environment. And that's why I am very careful to do things exactly the way I want to do them, when I want to do them, how I want to do them. Just so it's more of what I want to do.

In an effort to clarify Sam's latter statement, his wife, Ellen, placed it into more concrete terms:

> I think he's just trying to find a familiar ground. He's got to study in a particular little lounge, and I can't see him varying from there as long as nobody comes in and interrupts by being extremely loud or something. He will probably stay there and he won't move on. He will move on grudgingly if somebody does come in and disrupt it. So, familiarity is what he's trying to get -- just be familiar.

Sam agreed with Ellen's assessment, indicating that his daily personal routine gave him the feeling that "[I] have my place."

Sense of Place

A sense of place seemed to be extremely important to these students. Often, it appeared that the students gained this sense of place at the university, by establishing and maintaining routine personal patterns of activity, much in the fashion that Sam described.

For Sam, routine meant something that was "comfortable" for him. He liked to arrive at the university about an hour before his classes started. He avoided the "rubbish" of the "whole row of these damn [coffee] machines." Opting instead for "coffee that's perked," a "friendly smile" and "a little small talk" from the woman who ran the snack bar in the Fine Arts Lounge. He then spent his time "preparing for the morning, reading through notes, etc."

Gloria, like Sam, also reported an experience of building a personal routine:

> Monday, Wednesday, Friday: I have the same pattern of classes. I have a class, then a three-hour break, then two more classes.
>
> I go to class, then I spend two hours in the library. Then I go somewhere for lunch; be it, joining Doug for lunch or going to the cafeteria for lunch, or just finding a quiet spot -- going to HUB for lunch, whatever.
>
> Then, I usually head up to my second class of the day -- which is at 1:00 -- a little early and just read for a few minutes. Fifteen minutes before class. That's solidified now. It's not just a pattern, this is [redacted]ttern in stone.

Both of these reports are but variations upon what appeared to be a common theme of experience for the students during their first term at the university. Expressed again and again, was the need "to feel comfortable." One of the first entries in Steven's journal stated that during registration, "I felt out of place." Steven eventually discovered a garden spot, to which he would retreat for peace and quiet. Judith said, about her first day of classes, "I felt like I didn't belong." Her sense of unease had apparently not lessened, when later in her first month at university, her journal stated: "I feel like a baby bird trying to learn how to fly."

For some, the feeling of being out of place persisted, or was even enhanced as the term progressed. Brenda found that as the term moved on, she became "less focused" on the idea of graduating as quickly as possible, and more intent upon enjoying what she was doing -- "getting stuff that will expand me in some way." This experience, however, apparently presented her with a difficulty as she declared: "I don't fit any place that's comfortable."

No doubt, some of Brenda's difficulty with a concrete sense of place also related to the fact that she felt she had "gained some freedom" from her family responsibilities. She frequently mentioned that since starting university, she had more "space" or "personal space," primarily because her husband had assumed many family responsibilities.

While Brenda relished her sense of expanded personal space, it was also obvious that this change, to some extent, compounded her problems of "place." Brenda in a somewhat similar fashion to Sam, referred to attending university as a "pretty personal kind of journey."

In an effort to make sense of the nature of university, Sam tried to relate his university experience to his previous employment experiences. At first, he suggested there might be no difference, but he ended on a somewhat cynical note:

> I suppose there is no difference. Usually, I didn't view my job as a job. It was something I did with friends and that type of thing. It was almost a country club affair. That's how I would like university to be too, sort of a friendly non-competitive thing. I would like to enjoy university that much.
>
> I don't expect to. People seem to be too busy to enjoy very much there. Now, I keep running into the exception, which I really am grateful for. And I wish I could find a lot more. And I'm sure I could if I took the initiative to do that, but I can't bring myself to do that yet. I mean, I'm not even comfortable there yet -- not as comfortable as I have to be to take initiative on those type of things.

Sheila was prevented from finding her place by what she referred to as "the big atmosphere" -- the size of the campus, the numbers of students, and the crush of people.

She referred to a "cat-eat-dog atmosphere," in which masses of people "push in front of you and darn near knock you over, trying to get two steps ahead." Sam's perspective was not much different. He observed, "I find myself to be one of the slowest people on foot on that campus. People just: Voom! Voom! Voom! on either side of me."

In a similar vein, Gloria suggested that the producers of the film "Animal House" probably got the idea for their movie by having lunch in the Central Academic Building cafeteria. In an uncanny parallel comment in his September journal, Frank made a similar comment about his wife's experience:

> Edna came home about 12 noon. She said her Chemistry class was noisy, as people around her were all carrying on private conversations and acting up. I thought that was left behind in high school. I think these people have been watching the movie "Animal House" too often, and it went to their heads.

Obviously, mixing with "the rabble" was of some concern to these more mature students, and the necessity to do so had some negative effects on their experience.

Gloria acknowledged that she was originally "hung[illegible] on the fact that she felt out of place because she "was much older than everybody else." Over her first term, however, the feeling that she was "very much like everybody else," developed as "a creeping, gradual surprise."

Mary, near the end of the term, expressed similar feelings of developing integration:

> I feel like I belong. When I look around -- in fact, I was thinking about it today, as I was lining up

> to buy my coffee -- just looking around, I thought, "Well, I don't look like a freak or an odd ball. I really am just one of the crowd here."
>
> I felt quite comfortable with where I was and what I was doing, and so on.

On the other hand, this integrative "creeping surprise" did not appear to establish itself for Edna or Steven. Edna, it seems, never was able to successfully position herself. Edna's particular situation will be discussed in more detail later, but briefly -- as was already made apparent in Chapter 4 -- the reasons for this difficulty seemed to relate partially to heavy domestic demands and the fact that she never felt a part of her program. The one course she was taking in her agriculture program (a communications course) gradually turned into a personal fiasco. She declared, "It's just scattered off in all directions -- never able to bring everything in and sit down and get it done."

In mid October, her journal read as follows:

> Have been undergoing an identity crisis lately. I don't seem to fit anywhere. I think the move away from Portage has affected me more than I thought. Left a comfortable life style and good friends behind. Must try to put some of the pieces back together.

Over the term, it seems, Steven also may have moved further away from finding his personal place. In our final interview he described his experience of entering university as "culture shock -- a severe shock." He explained the meaning of this:

> That's back to all the guys with pink hair, bad manners, radical attitudes, and the whole thing. You

> come from out here, where everything is nice and easy -- the worst thing you see is on the six o'clock news.
>
> There it is! And walking all around you! You're surrounded!
>
> Gawd dang! It's a different culture!
>
> As far as I'm concerned, that's really a conservative university: not little 'c' conservative -- Progressive Conservative., Government, University, Big Business-all-the-way kind of thing. That's the way I see it.
>
> I guess there's the little NDP party and those guys around too.
>
> I could be wrong, but everything seems . . . The Law Faculty is all based on oil and gas. Business -- Vroom! If you got an MBA, you're everything.
>
> I never liked to think that way before -- business rules the world sort of thing. I always thought people were kind of important.
>
> That's part of the cultural shock.

As we discovered earlier, Steven also took home some of his concerns about this university culture.

Throughout the term, Sam also was bothered by the people with pink hair. Curiously, none of the female participants ever mentioned a concern over that particular aspect of the university culture. They did not seem to feel threatened by it.

However, returning to Steven's situation, it must be kept in mind that he was dealing with particularly strong personal forces in trying to establish his sense of place. Not only was he working through the family/university contrasts -- as were all the other participants -- he was faced with the additional powerful dynamic of his continuing employment situation as a fire fighter. Steven gave some sense of the impact of this:

> There was another fellow from the Fire Department, that went through Law. He started out and maintained all his friendships and everything else, until he got into Law School. Then he was steadily in the Watch Box

-- studying all the time.

Pretty soon he got to the point where -- he was just as good a fireman as any of them -- they got to resent him for doing that all the time. That'll happen with me too.

There's not much mercy in a fire hall either. Once you've gone over the line, that's it -- over! There's guys that have been over that line for 20 years. I don't know how they can stand working there.

Not only did Steven's work situation have its own strong ethos, the conduct of his work involved experiences which insinuated themselves into every other aspect of his life:

> I don't come home and tell Pam every time somebody dies or gets "crispy crittered," but you can't get that out of your mind.
>
> [Emergencies] are all bad, but some are so bad that they don't bother you. Like car accidents, where it's just "shovels and bags." For some reason, that's so bad that it doesn't really sink in. But when a fellow's actually alive when you get there, and you work on him, and he dies anyway -- that bothers you.

In another instance, Steven mentioned an experience related to his political science course:

> The odd thing that [the professor] said in that class has always struck me. Like once, he said that the army uses eighteen to twenty-five year olds because [people in that age group] think they can't be killed.
>
> As soon as somebody says something like that, well -- you know damn well that eighteen to twenty-five year olds can be killed! You "scrape" lots of them up!

It was not too surprising, then, that Steven had some difficulty gaining a personal sense of place in the university setting. His particular circumstances necessitated that he flip-flop between the situations of university, family and the profound experiences of his particular form of employment.

In terms of understanding who he was, where he belonged and his status as a person, how was Steven to reconcile the experience of struggling unsuccessfully for half an hour, to revive a heart-attack victim, and a short time later attending a university class in which the professor stipulated that all the students sit in the same seat, so that attendance could be checked and that five per cent of the final grade assigned for class participation. No doubt, for Steven, it was a difficult balancing act, attempting to reconcile contrasting expectations, values and patterns of activity.

In the case of most of the students, it was interesting to note that often, when they were feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping, they would dream about, or actually revert to some activity that was familiar to them. In a classic instance of this kind, when Edna was feeling the most pressure from all the demands she faced, she wrote in her journal in late October:

> Attended [son's] Cub Investiture. Gee! I sure enjoyed myself. Great to have contact with other adults who have children. I am thinking of getting involved again with scouting. I need another outlet to keep in touch with the "real" world.

I suggested to Edna that the last thing she needed at that point was to take on additional responsibilities. She agreed, but the desire for a piece of familiar ground, in the sea of chaos in which she was floundering, was very attractive.

Edna was not an exception in this regard. During the times of extreme personal pressure, other students often reported drawing solace from undertaking familiar activities, such as: baking, ironing or even rearranging the furniture. But many times they would judge these activities to be procrastination and this assessment would contribute to a cycle of guilt feelings.

Student Colleagues

In general, a sense of alienation was particularly evident in the participants' feelings about their younger student colleagues, en masse. Some suggestion of this was hinted at in the previous section, but the feelings were not only hinted at, they seemed quite explicit. For the most part, the participants displayed a strong disdain for the majority younger-student group.

Steven described some of his feelings:

> But one thing that always stands in my mind is at that MUGS orientation, they said don't let yourself become an island. But you don't have much choice.
> I'm telling you, you have to be careful of what you get involved in [at the university]. You can just get in with a bunch of fools, it seems like. Not fools; I shouldn't say that. What would you say? I call them morons, I think.

Brenda suggested that the "kids" had some advantages over her. In a fashion that her circumstances did not permit, the younger students were able to spend time together; for example, talking about what might be on the exam. In Brenda's words, these students were in a position to "hone it down to a science." They took classes together

and they socialized together. Brenda, on the other hand, felt she was left to her own resources. As one might expect from older students in general, the friendships Brenda developed tended to be with other mature students, but not necessarily in her courses or program of study. She, therefore, missed the nonformal opportunities to share student concerns which related directly to the material she was studying.

With regard to exams and courses, Brenda felt that the younger students liked "things that don't build," for example, multiple-choice exams. She went on to indicate that the "kids" probably found her philosophy course (a course she particularly enjoyed) to be difficult, because there were no absolutely right or wrong answers. "[The course] requires that you do some thinking and reflecting. [The younger students] don't seem to feel very comfortable about doing that."

Gloria also felt negatively disposed toward her younger student colleagues. She referred to them as "cabbages;" an image that, when presented to the other participants, struck an immediate resonant note. Edna, however, felt that "cabbages" was not descriptive enough; she used the same term as Steven used -- "morons." It appeared that the "morons" in her communications' course had created many difficulties for her.

She described a conversation with her communications'

professor, about this problem:

> In fact, [the professor] was joking with me: "Some days," she said, "I think you and I should just get up and leave."
>
> So I thought, "That's good! These kids are driving us both out. Why doesn't somebody step on them, or do something, or change the attitude or atmosphere in this class?"
>
> She said, "You have to look at it -- you're spending money for this course."
>
> I said, "Yes. I <u>am</u> spending money for this course, and I'm getting quite frustrated that this class is going nowhere."
>
> And I don't know if I've wasted my money, or if she wasted my money. I didn't confront her with that.

On the other hand, Sheila expressed some sympathy for her younger colleagues -- those whose homes were in smaller rural communities and were away from home for the first time -- "the little country bumpkins," as she referred to them. She was concerned about the problems that the university "atmosphere" -- exemplified by her French class, in which no one seemed to have time to speak to one another -- must create for these younger students.

In any event, notwithstanding the participants' negative images of the young student mass, over the term, at an individual level, most of the participants were able to develop enjoyable acquaintanceships with individual students, both young and old. Interestingly, many of the female students found themselves giving counsel to younger students. They expressed particular sympathy for the young people's "love-life" problems. And at some time or another throughout the term, almost all the female participants were referred to as "Mum" by some of their younger colleagues.

Regardless of whether the participants were dealing with young or older students, acquaintanceships most often seemed to emerge from the process of establishing a "personal place" in the classroom. The participants were usually in their second or third week of classes before they would begin to converse with others who regularly sat nearby and had, therefore, become familiar faces. The student journals invariably revealed that the first "real" or "human" conversation represented a major personal turning point -- a truly human contact while immersed in a sea of humanity. The human contacts seemed to represent a further stage of integration into the total university culture. However, by the end of the first term, few of the participants reported that any of their acquaintances had become good friends.

In terms of locating themselves in classrooms, the students reported that when circumstances permitted, they tended to seat themselves in the first two rows of the class -- often along with other older students. As Sam called them, "the keeners." The younger students reportedly tended to sit to the rear of the class, or at least behind the first two rows.

More than one participant, when forced by late arrival or classroom over-crowding to sit behind the first two rows of the class, described that they experienced a qualitative reduction in their learning experience. Often what they meant by this different experience was a feeling of reduced

engagement, resulting from such factors as lack of eye contact with the professor and noise interference from conversations among other students.

Courses and Professors

The actual course experience was another aspect of the university situation which evoked strong images for the participants. Before moving to their specific comments, however, it seems worthwhile to discuss what I will call the "tyranny of the full load." The notion of "the full load" emerged frequently in our conversations.

Full course load. In contrast to ignorance the students and spouses might have displayed about many other matters pertaining to the institution of the university, all participants generally understood that a "full load" meant that the student would be taking five half-courses per term. Regardless of the existence of other university designations such as "full time" and "part time," the implication of the participants' image of the full load was that involvement in anything less than five courses represented a reduced or sub-standard academic effort. In short, the meaning implicit in the notion of a full load seemed to be: "Real students take full loads."

The strength of the undercurrent of student and spouse expectations created by this notion can hardly be overstated. The roots of this idea were not clearly revealed in this study, but there is little doubt that most

of the student participants were driven by an ever-present personal ideal of wishing to structure their situation in such a way as to attain and carry a full load of courses.

It is interesting to note that this desire for a full load contains some aspects of contradiction. Most of the students had deferred attending university for many years; now, even though they were looking forward to this new opportunity with great enthusiasm and some idealism -- they were also pushing to complete their program of study as quickly as possible. Their rationale: some reasoned that they were getting too old; others were concerned about the family pressures and expense.

In any event, as a general matter, it was certainly clear to me, from the experiences described in this study, that the students who chose to carry the minimum number of courses to qualify for full-time status (three courses), were the least traumatized by the whole first-term process. Yet, it is also clear that, when viewed in terms of their other responsibilities, three courses represented a very "full load" for almost all the students.

Notwithstanding this, as these students experienced the reality of attempting to balance university lives with employment in the home and/or outside, the desire to participate in, or approximate a full academic load was repressed, but it probably was never eliminated. For example, after the trauma, anxiety and difficulties of juggling all their responsibilities in their first term, one

might reasonably have expected these students to cut back their course loads and extend their programs, or that they might have chosen to pick up courses in the spring and summer terms. However, student comments at later times, as well as their enrollment patterns in the second term and second year (although this information does not rightly belong to the period covered by this study), indicated a continuing orientation to bite off, academically, as much or more than they could chew.

After successful completion in the first term, a number of the students apparently chose to increase their course load and enroll in inter-session courses as well. This approach apparently resulted in a number of the students having to drop some of these courses. It seems that student wisdom in this regard comes very slowly, if at all.

On the other hand, in speculating on the students' intentions, it may very well be that their concerns of age, family, etc. had remained as imperatives. It may also be the case that they simply found that university -- while providing some positive aspects they had anticipated -- in combination with their family situation, was an experience which they discovered they wished to make as brief as possible.

Of course, this speculation flies in the face of some of the students' original espoused reasons for attending university. It also flies in the face of the fact that one or two of the students described very positive experiences.

But for many of the students, their descriptions of their first term led me to believe that university may have turned out to be something less than the original ideal they had envisioned.

Learning experiences. The manner in which the students referred to their programs of study were revealing of their experience. Gloria looked for a university experience which would "build" her, rather than "shatter" her -- she wished to learn things, not to be personally transformed.

With regard to engaging in their courses, other students spoke of their "plans of attack." Brenda, for instance, wanted to find enough time to "attack" her courses, otherwise, she felt she was "throwing all of this down the drain." For Sam, trying university again was a "make-or-break-it proposition." For most, getting to the end of the term meant having "survived."

As the term commenced most of the students revealed a good deal of self-doubt. Judith found that her brain was "rusty," and before her mid-terms, Brenda's head was apparently "marshmallow-like." She declared, "nothing stays in!"

For some, the self-doubt was reinforced by the actual learning experiences. In describing her large psychology class, Brenda alleged:

> Nobody's interested in where I am; they're interested in getting their point across. You just gobble it down.

In a more positive vein, Gloria also used an eating image to describe the potential of the learning experience:

> It's like going to a smorgasbord. When you go to a smorgasbord, you don't know what you're going to have eaten at the end of it. You just know that you're going to go and eat as much as you want -- of the different things that you want to eat. You can't say that all you're going to eat is the shrimp curry because there are lots of other things there. So this is my smorgasbord.

But, in contrast to the idealized potential for the university experience, Edna's journal revealed that the eatee could become the eator:

> Attempted once again to formulate some ideas for English assignment. I know I shouldn't allow this, but it is consuming me.

Regardless of who or what was doing the eating, Brenda's and Edna's experiences appeared to represent cases of educational indigestion.

Steven -- who, at the beginning of the term had been absolutely gleeful about his computing science course -- later in the term described it as: "One of those empty ones. When you come out of that course," he went on, "you'll have nothing." Apparently the professor was so absentminded that Steven was certain, "He's got a string tied from his office to that [class]room -- so that he can get [to class]."

In referring to her Agriculture/Forestry communications course, Edna described it as a "chicken outfit" -- she wondered what she was doing in it. In another instance, she also talked about "getting her knuckles rapped" in her

English course, because in a written analysis of a poem, she had cited an outside source -- contrary to instructions for the assignment.

In the end, after she had dropped most of her courses, Edna's husband Frank suggested that one of the reasons was that she had found herself "running against a wall." Edna, herself, complained of "no control" and having to "roll with the punches."

Gloria enrolled in a particular French course which, late in the term, she realized an advisor had erred in counselling her to take. During the term, she described the experience as "a mess" and suggested that she was "hopelessly behind." In contrast, at the same time, she reported enjoying the challenge of the class. Her descriptions were too colorful to resist repeating:

> The French class is fifty minutes of like being in the water with Jaws. You know: Bum! Bum! Bum! Bum! Bum! Bum!
>
> My heart rate goes up, my adrenaline just flows, and I get this tremendous tension headache -- it's horrible; I wonder why I do it.

During another discussion she described French as: "More like a roller coaster ride: Rather than just being buffeted slightly, it's whoa!" At another juncture for Gloria, French was like "bouncing off rubber walls" or "rapid fire." She reported that when she emerged from the class she was "a limp rag" -- because of the "intense feeling" in the class.

I should make it clear that, for the most part, Gloria

meant these images to be taken in a positive way. She found the class exciting. For Gloria, in French, "[the professor] set the pace. The students set the tone."

The French class differed markedly from Gloria's political science course experience, which she described as "talking heads" and "one-directional:"

> He stands and speaks, and speaks, and speaks, and speaks and speaks. You do a whole teaching hour and by the end of it, you're just longing for some other little glimmer. He answers most questions without you asking them. You just wish that there was something else that could be done to break that awful monotony of one person standing and talking the whole time.

This latter description seemed to parallel Brenda's experience with her psychology professor [mentioned briefly in Chapter 4], until -- for an hour or so after class -- that same professor personally spoke with six or seven students, including Brenda. That hour established what Brenda called "a two-way kind of communication." Brenda declared that occurrence as "really important!"

Brenda, however, remained critical of this same professor -- over the fact that he had used the services of an "assistant" to teach half the course. The assistant was apparently "the pits." In the end, the professor requested the students to evaluate only his own half of the course. Brenda's reaction: The assistant's half was "crap -- really crappy." She was concerned that, because of the manner in which the evaluation was conducted, the course would come out "smelling like roses."

In terms of his relationship to professors, Sam

preferred to call them instructors. This, he reported, was a "psychological crutch" he gave himself. An instructor, for Sam, was somebody "a little more personal -- even personable -- than a professor."

Sam frequently referred to his micro economics professor as "a bit of a rambler." A rambler was apparently someone who "makes the most simple idea mind boggling." Interestingly, in spite of his uncertain feelings toward professors in general, two professors made such a positive impact upon Sam -- through competence in class presentations and in knowing his name -- that he sought out opportunities to converse with them. Sam felt some reluctance in doing this, however, because he did not want to be viewed as a "keener."

For many of the students, it seems that a major factor in developing a positive attitude toward a course and professor often involved the professor having referred to them by name, or at least having had the professor recognize them as individuals -- separate from the student collective. This was not surprising, particularly in view of the low esteem with which the participants regarded the student mass.

But as Sam's dilemma indicated, being known by name presented its own set of problems. All of the participating students, from the outset of the term, were very reluctant to be viewed by their student colleagues or professors, as manipulating their situation -- "sucking up," as Judith put

it. In fact, in their descriptions of the activities of other students, the participants often seemed to place themselves at a disadvantage by holding fast to their principle of not talking to the professor.

This principle meant that most were very tentative about any interaction with professors, not necessarily because they were in awe of the professors -- although, as Sam's feelings indicated, there was an element of that -- but because they did not wish to be seen as currying favour.

Mary described one experience in this regard:

> I'm very upset with one professor today -- art history. I got my essay back and I felt that she really placed too much emphasis on style in the essay. She really marked the essay for style rather than content; which would have been fine if it was an English essay or an assignment on essay writing, but it wasn't. I just resented some of the comments she made in my essay because I didn't think that they were valid. They didn't have anything to do with the subject of the essay.

Even though Joe prodded her to do so, Mary did not speak to her professor about her concerns. Her reasons for not discussing the issue seemed to relate to both a perceived power relationship and her concern about being labeled as a complainer:

> Joe was telling me tonight that I should. And I told him that I'm really intimidated by her because I think she knows a lot about her subject. But she's sort of overstepping her bounds -- trying to teach essay writing and English grammar and spelling, all at the same time.
>
> I got a reasonable mark; I got 80 on the essay. So I also feel that if I go and complain, I'll seem like a cry baby. I have a feeling that I probably didn't do too badly, compared to some others.

In deference to the fact that her marks probably placed her among the top students in her class, Mary felt she should let the matter pass. She was not the only participant to express this rationale for avoiding taking a personal stand on perceived injustices. For example, Sam thought that inquiring about his grades would be "chintzy somehow."

Most of the students desired good marks but they did not wish their pursuit to be viewed as greedy. Over the term, most of the students remained reluctant to negotiate with professors about assigned marks. Gloria was a notable exception. On the basis of her own reports, it was clear that, for some of her professors, she was a student force to be reckoned with. At the same time, in terms of future grades, she also expressed a concern that this practice might eventually create problems for her -- she also was leary about the power relationship between professor and student.

Another example of not wishing to take unfair advantage was the fact that, it was only later in the term -- and then very reluctantly -- that most of the students would even consider using the student-operated Exam Registry. At the outset of the term, if the participants were even aware of the Registry, its use was almost universally viewed by the participants as a form of cheating.

Systemic sexism. Some of the female students had gender-related concerns about their first-term experiences. On occasion, for instance, through interaction with professors, Brenda found herself "pushing the system." This was particularly the case with regard to her concerns about sexist references within course content or in delivery. Brenda indicated that she found this practice of pushing, "really scary." But her husband, Brad, declared that she loved the challenge:

> It's like John Tonelli getting hammered in front of the net all the time: It's still where he goes. It's still where he likes to play.

Brenda, however, described in more detail what it was like for her to push the walls:

> Today in sociology, he said, "Let's pretend we're in this airplane, and we fly over all these houses in so-and-so survey. We look, and people are getting up. The mother's going to stay home -- she doesn't work. The father works and is going off to work. The little kid goes to school."
>
> And I said [stage whisper], "Doesn't work!!" But he would completely ignore it. I had to go up after and take him on. But with 350 students, what are you going to do? Do you let things like that pass?
>
> There's not a class that goes by that that doesn't happen. My philosophy professor constantly says "men." When I ask him, he says it means men and women.
>
> I say bull shit! Because I know that in Aristotle's time, that wasn't the case; they're talking about leisure related to men. I know that! But how do you take on a professor?
>
> At the first of this year, I started thinking that I wasn't going to raise that issue. I didn't care; I wasn't going to raise it; I couldn't get sidetracked on that.
>
> But as I go along, I don't know, I can't just let it go. It becomes more and more important, because it reflects a knowledge base that isn't total somehow. It doesn't acknowledge me, as a person in that class. And I have some difficulty with that.

> The language thing for me is really hard -- in terms of "he" and "she." I'm having some real difficulties with people's language -- in terms of the various disciplines.
>
> I made a choice early, not to say anything. I haven't stuck to that, because it's such an overriding issue.
>
> In fact, in terms of the historical perspective, it's causing me real difficulty; because I don't know -- when they use "Man" -- whether they mean female man or male man. There are points in history where it's different. It really, honestly is different -- which gives me a very different perspective.
>
> When they can't clarify that, or don't, then I have a skewed idea about what they're talking about. The language thing in all classes is a real problem.

Brenda also described another incident, but this time she also gave some indication of the reaction of her student colleagues:

> Did I tell you about a film that we used in psychology? It was a very sexist film. In the middle of it, some woman took off all her clothes and walked through. The camera was on breasts the entire time. It was a terrible film. It was made in the 1950s. It was terrible. So at the end of it -- I didn't have enough nerve to stand up with 220 kids -- but at the end of it, I went down to the professor and I said, " I think this is an inappropriate learning tool. I don't think you should be using this."
>
> And he said, "Well, it shows such and such a thing. And I think you're over-reacting."
>
> I said, "I don't think I am over-reacting. Number one, the film stereotypes EVERYONE -- men and women. Secondly, it's very sexist."
>
> He said, "What else would I use? I would have to speak for 20 minutes."
>
> I said, "I think that you explained the same situation quite well, prior to the showing of the film. You didn't need to use the film. I'm really disappointed that the Psychology Department is using such outdated, outmoded kinds of learning supports."
>
> Anyway, I took him on.
>
> I'm just overwhelmed by what gets taught, that doesn't get taught -- examples. Oh! It's quite phenomenal, and it supports all of the old stereotypes! Quite interesting.
>
> Anyway, the one little girl -- little! -- she's nineteen; she was a graduate with high honours. She got a scholarship and all that kind of stuff. Anyway,

she said, "Oh well, it doesn't matter. If people in that class take [the stereotypes] on, that's their own problem. I know that I don't have to be stereotyped like that, and I'm going to go through this university and I'm going to have one of those professor's jobs. So I don't really care about how that happens."

And I said, "Well, that's fine for you because you're strong and you probably will do fine. But what about all the rest of us who aren't so strong, that don't have such a strong direction and purpose in our lives? What are we picking up around that? Why don't we talk about that for a while?"

That was kind of interesting.

In spite of the fact that Brenda felt she didn't have "a whole lot of time," she attended a MUGS group session in order to discover how she might make a formal report about her concerns about the psychology film. She was apparently satisfied with some assistance she received from the coordinator of mature students, but I have no further details regarding this matter.

Edna was not quite so fortunate in her efforts to come to grips with a similar issue. The following journal entries outlined her problem:

Thursday, Oct. 25/84:

- Grow more disgusted with Ag. For. as time goes on. Forced to sit through videos of mock job interviews. Very unprofessional attitude of participants in this course.

  During some interviews, my own included, sexual harassment occurred (some questions asked by the young punks had sexual meaning involved). This is really beginning to bother me. Tomorrow I intend to speak to an ombudsperson, as to whether I have a right to bring this up in class. I don't know if the ombudsperson is the correct person to see in this case, but perhaps they can refer me to the proper person.

  At any rate, it might help to put it into perspective.

- Spoke with Frank as well tonight (by long-distance telephone). He encouraged me to try and sort out the things about Ag. For., which have been upsetting me.

Friday, Oct. 26/84:

- Tried to contact ombudsperson, but no one in the office on Fridays. Took down the phone number and will try to contact someone on Monday (office hours: Mon. 3:00 - 5:00pm and I won't be able to see them personally as I will be home at this time). I would like to settle the problem before my next Ag. For. class on Tuesday.

In the end, Edna spoke with her professor about the matter, but she was not happy with the response:

> I was more dissatisfied after I spoke with her. She felt the kids were just high-spirited, and we should just overlook it.
> "They'll outgrow it someday."
> I felt they needed some guidance, but it wasn't my place to give it to them.

In the end, Edna's solution was to drop the course:

> I had pretty good marks. I had originally planned to stay in the course. But because of the dissatisfaction, I just couldn't face another day in that group.
> Which is really probably not the best way to handle it either. Because it was only another month or so that I had to go. But it was just getting to the point where everything was building up, and I thought: Gotta pull out!
> I wondered why I was in that course. Because actually, when I was talking to the instructor, she, herself, admitted, "I bet you feel like you're not getting anything out of this." She said, "I can tell by the look on your face, that you're wondering why you're in here."

Edna did not feel that the lack of control within the class should be attributed to the fact that the professor, herself, was female:

I think a woman with a different attitude would have been able to . . . . It's hard to summarize, but she seemed, in some ways, to be insecure in what she was doing. Maybe it just came across that way; maybe she's perfectly competent for that job, I don't know. But it didn't seem like it from the way things went.

She said she had another class earlier in the morning that wasn't at all like that group. She said they were a tad more serious. She said they're not like this bunch at all.

Gloria also ran into a problem where she felt powerless in the face of overt sexism:

I missed an English class today. I missed an English class because, today and on Monday, we were discussing a particular essay called "Sexism in English: A Feminist View."

It was a mild, very mild little feminist tract on sexism in English -- which exists. I don't know any thinking rational person who would deny its existence. My instructor, however, surprisingly enough, walked into the classroom and started to rip this author to shreds, with a vindictiveness that just amazed me.

Now, I consider myself . . . I don't just consider myself a feminist -- I am a feminist! I was horrified! My initial reaction was to jump at him and argue the issue of feminism.

My second and more sober reaction, was to say, "It's his course; it's his lecture time; he decides the marks. Ten years from now, will it really matter what I've said? Ten years from now, will it matter what mark I got in English? Do I want to shut up or do I want to talk?"

I shut up. I muttered under my breath; I pulled in my arms; I shifted around in my chair, but I didn't say anything.

I came home and I was furious, I was really angry. I was angry at him and I was angry at not being able to say anything -- by being constrained by the consideration of marks and future and all those kinds of things. But I decided something else, I decided that for the second day of the consideration of this essay, I was not going to go to class.

His reaction was right off the wall. It was an unreasonable reaction. It wasn't a studied one. At the risk of sounding racist: He is a black male, and he kept referring to the author as "that white woman!"

Now, I felt that that somewhat coloured his perception of the whole thing, and I did not need any more hassles, so I didn't go to my English class.

It's the first class that I have -- on purpose --

> missed. I covered the grammar that we were to cover in class. I reviewed the essay to my own satisfaction, came to my own conclusions about it and what-have-you. But I purposely withdrew because I don't need the aggravation. But I have to play the game.
>
> The old "me" would go to class, argue with him and say: fuck the mark!
>
> I shouldn't have said that on the tape.

It seemed clear to me that the above stories were not the ravings of revolutionary feminists. These situations were experienced by essentially ordinary people; but as older, more-experienced women in the university milieu, these students were also on the margin -- outsiders. They were operating with a raised level of consciousness about who they were and what was important to them. Their stories give the sense of the sighted turned out in the land of the blind. Surely, some of this sense could be attributed to having known what it was like to be a wife and mother.

As an example of what I am getting at, Mary reported no experiences of overt sexism at the university, but she was certainly conscious of some of the issues. When I questioned her about the first entry in her journal: the pleasure she had reported about being at the university and "part of the 'real world' again," she was somewhat defensive. But she also indicated a personal struggle, born of life experience:

> When I say that "that's the real world," it's like saying that being home with the kids is not really real. But it is. I believe it's real and it's important. It's important and of value.
>
> I get mad at myself when I fall into that kind of stereotypical thinking -- that a housewife's work is of no value, or she's not really doing anything. I know from experience that that's not true.

The institutional experiences these women described seemed to give evidence that there was a general lack of responsiveness to the issues they were raising. In a number of cases, the women quite simply didn't know where to turn to initiate action about their concerns. They were, therefore, faced with the prospect of withdrawing from the situation or dealing with professors directly -- an action which they felt might jeopardize their academic standing.

It almost goes without saying that the male students reported no parallel experiences in relation to problems with the issue of sexism. As students, the males did indicate feeling somewhat powerless and frustrated, but the above experiences indicate that the women were frustrated by a dual problem of powerlessness: that of being students and that of being women.

Grading and success. Notwithstanding the students' general reluctance to negotiate for marks, take unfair advantage or confront, it was clear from the interviews that gaining good marks was an extremely important goal for all the students. In many instances, the participants fully recognized when they were learning and when they were finding personal value in the learning experience, but marks remained their ultimate external verification of "success." In order to build self-confidence, they wanted the marks early and they wanted them to be good.

Interestingly, regardless of whether the mark was acceptable institutionally, the very high levels of personal

expectation the students had for themselves created problems when their expectations were not met. The student participants were seldom satisfied with grades of less than seven. Mary described being "crunched;" Sam and Judith "bombed." Judith also felt "yucky" after her exams.

In her journal, Judith described the situation of a clarinet exam. She performed before her professor, who had never heard her play solo before. First of all, she was concerned that he had no base against which to judge the progress she had made. After the experience, she suspected that she would not get a grade of more than five:

> When I was finished he said it was a "good effort." To me, that means, "you stink, but it was a good try."
> Oh well!

Grades higher than seven were often viewed as fortunate flukes, creating a concern within the student that s/he might not match it again. Also, when the students received what they felt were good grades, they often expressed serious reservations about the stanine-like approach to grading. The students and spouses were much more likely to look at their success or failure in terms of "real grades" -- percentage grades.

In this regard, I suspect Joe was not alone in his feelings when he suggested that the university grading system was a "snow job," which seemed to him, "just like you're pushing people through the system." From Joe's perspective as spouse, he suspected that the rationale

behind the grading system might have been to make students "feel good, whether or not they know the material."

The period prior to mid-terms seemed to represent an extremely long and uncertain wait. Confirmation of their decision to attend university usually awaited their mid-term exam results in late October or early November. Regardless of success or failure, there was a tangible sense of release after the mid-term exams. Good grades gave a lift, lack of success meant that the uncertainty was over -- worst fears were confirmed. But again, the meaning of success was often judged in terms of the students' own sense of a good grade, which tended to be higher than the official published scale. To the students, the good grade seemed to be confirmation of having some aptitude for the educational project they had undertaken. Successful passage through the mid-term period seemed to represent a turning point in at least temporarily solidifying their attitude about their potential to succeed. For example, on November 16, Judith talked about feeling pretty good because she had gotten over "a bit of a bump."

This study revealed very little about that mid-term period itself, partly due to the study design (interviews were scheduled to avoid that period); but as indicated earlier, also because, during mid-terms, most of the participants found they had little time or inclination to record their thoughts and feelings in their journals. This fact in itself may provide a circumstantial indication that mid-terms represented a period of even greater demands on

personal resources.

My own notes revealed that, in making my interview visits just after the mid-terms, the image I used to describe what I sensed about most of the families was that they were like " a large angry red welt, an open sore." The participants were obviously exhausted, their spirits were dulled. By the time their grades were known, this "abrasion" was healing over. Good results on the mid-terms gave them new courage; but they continued to report feeling tired and worn out as the term drew to a close.

In contrast to activities conventional university students expect to be involved in over Christmas, for the participants, anticipation of the Christmas break was filled with the usual plans, preparations and demands for a family Christmas season. Christmas, for most, did not seem to represent a break as much as just another set of commitments to be worked into their busy schedules.

Self-confidence. At this point, it seems important to make some mention of the effects of the Writing Competency Test. It is difficult to overstate the negative impact this requirement had upon all the students. The University requirement for this test came to the fore in interviews very early in the term, and I think it would be fair to say that all of the students, regardless of their particular level of self-confidence, feared and/or hated the thought of the Writing Competency Test.

If, during the term, they had not taken the test, they

feared it as the Ghost-of-Christmas-Yet-to-Come. If they had taken the test and were awaiting results (which seemed to take an inordinate length of time), they were angry about the actual experience -- the physical arrangements, the time limits, etc. -- and feared failure.

If they had taken the test and passed, their first experience of university had been very intimidating and they were generally left with a very bad taste in their mouths. The experience was viewed as a "trial by fire" -- hardly a supportive way to be introduced into a personally risky educational adventure.

If the students took the test and failed, they had commenced their university experience with failure. This resulted in an almost irreparable rending of their delicate fabric of self-confidence. The specter of having to go through the same experience again was constantly with them during the term.

In addition, the students who failed became involved in the compulsory remedial course. The participants remarks indicated that the course was viewed as poorly organized and delivered, devoid of worthwhile content and usually an unplanned imposition on their already strained personal resources of time and energy. Sheila, who required three tries to finally pass the test, used the word "garbage" to describe her remedial classes.

Sheila's experience appeared to be the most profound of all the student participants. Even in the early stages of

Sheila's first term, she seemed to generalize much of the strength of her negative feelings about the Writing Competency Exam to her attitude about the total university experience. Sheila's situation differed from that of some of the other students in that she was a transfer student from a college directly affiliated with the University of Alberta. She had been given transfer credit for first-year college courses, including English.

But Brenda's concerns were equally strong. Brenda also had successfully completed a number of courses at the University of Toronto, and from the outset of her first term, she indicated that she was intending to boycott the exam. Both women were very bitter about the nature and form of the Writing Competency Test, and the philosophy behind it.

While the particular details of the difficulties with the exam and the remedial course were too extensive to be addressed in this study, it seems safe to say that the problems the students experienced and the resulting generalized negative feelings, were common to most of the participants and, therefore, made up an important component of their university setting.

Turning to other matters related to confidence, as I have already hinted at with regard to marks, maintaining self-confidence was tremendously important to all the students, but it was a very fragile entity. Steven described a "rough day" as an "insecure day" -- a day in

which "they ask a lot of questions and you don't know the answers." He also revealed that requirements for class participation meant, "I can stick my foot in my mouth pretty good."

Much of the first term for the students seemed to entail an effort not to appear silly, not to stand out any more than they already felt that they did.

During the term, the primary organizational and study strategy for the students appeared to be "not to get behind." Certainly, Sam expressed this orientation on many occasions. In one instance, Steven lamented that because he got behind, his second set of mid-terms were "absolute murder." He indicated that during that period, he "just went all to hell" -- he reported he was sick and had headaches all the time.

At one point or another through the term, most of the student journals or interviews revealed that they had serious thoughts about quitting. For instance, Steven reported that he found himself thinking, "What the hell did I do this for? What do I need this 'headache' for? I've got a good job. I've got a nice house." As he plunged forward, he apparently avoided directly answering these questions for himself.

University-as-school. As a concluding matter with regard to the university setting, let me deal with two possibly interrelated and dominant images which seemed to

emerge during the data collection process. The first is the notion of the university-as-school and the second is the perception of the university as an oppressive "system."

Very early in the data collection process, as I was transcribing and reviewing interviews, I was struck by the fact that all of the participants, myself included, overwhelmingly made use of the word "school" as a substitute for the word "university." In our conversations, we all talked about the idea of <u>returning to school</u> or <u>going to school</u>. This type of phrase occurred time and time again.

William Barrett (1978:193) suggests that: "Every word in our language is memory at work for us." Why were we using the word school rather than university? For the participants, was there a difference between university and what one would call a school? Were the understandings of school and university conceived of as similar or equivalent in meaning? What were we talking about when we used the term school as opposed to university? For the participants, were they different experiences?

After approximately the first month of the term had passed, in the normal course of our interviews, I asked several participants to speculate on the matter of why the word school seemed to be being used so frequently. Understandably, the responses tended to be off-the-cuff rather than the product of deep reflection. And the responses once again reflected the diverse range of

experiences present among the participants.

For example, Sam's earlier schooling experience had reportedly been a rather pleasant and comfortable experience for him. His earlier attempt at university, on the other hand, had been quite terrifying, causing him to assign university the "hideous head" referred to earlier in this chapter. His creation, the hideous head, involved anticipating having to face large class sizes and "the impersonal, sort of, faceless mass that was [at the university] before."

Hence, even though he used the terms interchangeably, for Sam, university at the outset of the term, was not interchangeable with school. By the second month of the term, however, much of the difference had disappeared:

> Well, I think now, even the last week or so, university has slowly lost its hideous head. You know, to my way of thinking, it's becoming more like school and less like what university really was like for me before. Now it's becoming more like school.

Steven suggested that he had some difficulty remembering what his schooling had been like, but he made the following comparison between the two experiences:

> There's no difference. [University and school are both] some place to go to learn something. The only difference is that [at university] the teacher isn't teaching.
>
> When you're in high school, you do what he says. [At university] they don't care if you pass or fail. Who cares? They have their little stanine system that guarantees it's . . . you know.
>
> They don't teach you; you learn there. Where, in school, they attempt to teach you -- make sure that you're going to learn it -- in grade school.

Interestingly, as Steven summed up his assessment, he made a slip of the tongue, of which Freud might have made much:

> School is some place where you go to learn something. I'm going to university to lose something . . . er, learn something, not lose it [laughs]. So [university] is school.

Mary, it seemed, justified her use of the term school because, for her, it was a generic label, used primarily to differentiate her educational experience from other significant life experiences:

> I don't really know [why I use school]. I guess it's like school to me. I mean, school as opposed to working, or being at home -- just being at home. It's still a . . . what would you call it? -- a classroom situation, with a teacher and the lectures and -- not like high school, but a similar situation.
>
> It's different because I'm not as intimidated by the teachers. I feel more like they're equals, not something way way up. They're more educated and whatever, but I don't feel really intimidated by them, like I might have in high school. I don't idolize them like I might have in public school. So, it's different.

For Gloria, even though she and Doug almost invariably used school in place of university, she indicated that the experience of each was very different:

> No comparison. No comparison. By school, I'm assuming you mean high school.
>
> We do use [school]. And I know that I do use it when I say, "good day at school." And refer to it that way. So, a return to school. . . . No, there would be no comparison between my previous schooling experience and my present schooling experience. None whatsoever.
>
> The element that was missing before was choice. And that's basic to [university]. You're right when you say that you sense that this first year is sort of a "going through the hoops." But that doesn't mean that I'm not quite happy to be there. There's the element of choice.

> There's also a certain amount of . . . I would even go so far as to say, disgust, with the lack of rigor in some of my classes. But that doesn't mean that the basic choice question has been shaken. The choice issue is a big part of it.

In our further discussions, it seemed that by "choice," Gloria was referring to two aspects of choice related to her university experience. The first was the fact that her attendance at university was the result of her own personal choice. Secondly, she was very pleased by the idea that university offered her a vast array of options; in her words -- "a smorgasbord."

For the most part, when I examined the statements of these students carefully, the respondents usually seemed to differentiate between university and school, primarily on the basis of the personal attitudes and expectations they, themselves, had brought to the situation. For example, Gloria's feeling of choice, Sam's concern about hideousness, Mary's pleasure to be free of the relative confinement of homemaking. Brenda and Steven's seeking to expand.

On the other hand, there had also been a strongly negative tone to the students' remarks about many of their experiences of the institutional aspects of the university, its size, structures, operations and requirements. The institutional aspects of the university might very well have been perceived as being much like the institutions these students remembered as school. The institution was often referred to by the participants as "The System."

The System. The participants' anger and frustration about the oppressive nature of the system -- next to comments about "laundry" and personal feelings of "guilt" -- were probably the most common thematic elements revealed in this study. There seems to be little question but that, at one time or another throughout the term, the presence of the system was very real to, and an object of frustration for, all of the students; but the form of the system remained insubstantial. When I requested the participants to directly identify the system, most were hard pressed to give it substance.

It seems that, for the students, the system was a complex cluster of attitudes, feelings and experiences. A fundamental aspect of the notion of the system seems to have been an early attitude, expectation or understanding that the participants, themselves, developed about the nature of the university environment. For many, this shared understanding (typification) appears to have been "planted" at the time of the students' early contacts with the university. In some instances, it seems that this rather negative understanding was often initiated for the new students by contact with more experienced members of the university community. In other instances, the idea seemed to develop directly out of the experiences of early contact with the institution. But it is also clear that the attitude continued to be strengthened throughout the term, through a relatively broad range of ongoing [illegible]

day personal experiences.

Well into her first term, Judith described her understanding of the nature of the system and some of its affect upon her:

> I'm getting a little bit of a taste for [the system]. I guess it's more than one thing; the system is learning how to survive in the university environment: how to make the grade, how to sort of suck up to your teacher so that you will get a good grade, even though you may not deserve one. That sort of thing.
>
> I've never been one to be like any of those things. I'm finding that it would probably help me if I did. But I don't like doing it.
>
> I've heard from so many people: "Get to know your professors."
>
> When we went to this Mature Student Orientation, somebody said, "Sit in the same seat every class. Doesn't matter what the topic is, ask a question -- even if it's a dumb question, make sure that you ask a question."
>
> To me, that's sucking up. In some courses, that's not going to help you. If you're taking these computer exam things, he can't do anything for your grade.

In her introduction to the university, Gloria seemed to receive a message not dissimilar to the one Judith experienced:

> That's the message; that's simply what you do: You go to university and you get a degree. Nobody ever went into it any deeper than that.
>
> I'm not quite as cynical about it as some people are. I think I mentioned to you a fellow who said something about, "You're not here to get an education, you're here to get a degree." It was at a MUGS lunch. It disgusted me!
>
> He told the woman that was sitting next to me not to take courses that she was interested in, if they weren't all working towards her degree. On the day she graduated, she was to go to the bookstore and buy the books for those courses; and maybe, if she was lucky, five years from when she graduated, she would have a chance to look at those books.
>
> I was appalled! I'm not quite as appalled now [laughs]. I'm a little older and wiser -- I can see his point. I think he's a third year student.

And just to add substance to the notion, Steven also revealed feelings on the matter.

> I was worried, before, because it didn't seem like anybody really cared. It was "beat the system, beat the system. Don't worry about the education; you can get into Law; you just have to get a B.A., and any fool can get a B.A."
>
> That's the general attitude of some of the kids that are there and some of the professors that are there. That professor that we know -- that friend of ours -- that just retired. . . . He didn't say that it was worthless, he just said it was easy.

For Steven, the general attitude revealed by these comments were a disappointing revelation:

> I don't want to go and just kind of have an easy get-through-that part. I want to learn something! I want it to be worth something! I don't just want a piece of paper that says I have a B.A. or that I'm a lawyer. I want to learn something; I want to know something!
>
> Everybody tells you, "This professor expects this and this and this. And, if you give him this you're gonna get through it."
>
> Computing science is a good one for that because you have eight labs to do. You just go get the labs from somebody whose done them. Copy them all into the computer.
>
> Like I was telling Pam, in computing science, the labs are worth over 50 percent of the course. If I get a 100 percent on all the labs, I have to pass! I'm not worried.
>
> I'd love to have a nine average or an eight, a 7.5 at the least; but if I have to take a six in computing science, I will. What I'm getting at is -- and it's a factor at the beginning -- people seem to want to get through there with the highest marks possible, and to hell with learning anything. Maybe that's fine; maybe it's not.
>
> I haven't cheated the system yet -- when I could have already. I could already have copied and things like that -- and given them exactly what they want to hear.
>
> Now, I know that I can just go there and anything I learn is something that "I" learn. It's to my own benefit and to hell with what anybody else thinks. I don't want to be one of those everything-for-me people,

but a lot of guys over there just go there -- I think -- because they got a student loan or something and they couldn't get a job.

Gloria was more stoical:

> This is the game and these are the rules. You have to play by the rules if you want to make it to the end of the game. That's exactly it. There are a lot of things like that that have come up.
>
> Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying [an atmosphere of learning] is not there. I'm saying I haven't found it yet. I would be severely disappointed if it was not there. It would seem like a total waste of everybody's time if there was not an atmosphere of learning. I don't think, though, that you're going to run across that in your first year -- unless you're extremely lucky.

Gloria indicated that her experience of "the game" had not made her cynical, primarily because, even before entering university, she had suspected she would face having to play the game. She admitted, however, to feeling some anger because she had never had to deal "head-on" with game playing before:

> Somehow you have the feeling that when you get into those hallowed halls, and sit around with those pure-minded academics, that you're going to be able to overlook all that petty sort of stuff. And it isn't that way at all.
>
> It's a machine; it's a large machine! There are large classrooms full of people being marched through the machine by various instructors -- some good, some bad; some great, some terrible. Fortunately, none of mine are terrible!
>
> But it is; it's a machine. And to look at it, at this stage, as anything else would be naive.

Brenda's judgment was equally harsh:

> I don't think [the university] really gives a damn about their students at all -- whether they're young, old, whatever. I think that's their general attitude. Even though they say that they do, I think they probably don't.

Something of Edna's experience at registration might have been an example of the attitude Brenda was pointing to:

> Just scheduling my courses was beyond my capabilities. I got kind of upset with that. There were faculty advisors there, and that kind of thing. Actually, since registration day, I've discovered that I'm in the wrong chemistry., So I suppose, in some ways, it wasn't that great an experience for me, because it sort of got me steered off in the wrong direction.
>
> I felt that I knew what I was doing at the time, but now, when I look back on it, I guess I should have gone to sit down with one of the advisors -- although they seemed to be extremely busy with other students at the time. And I felt that I knew what I was doing.
>
> On top of that, I was under some sort of pressure -- which was ever-present -- because they were going to close their offices at noon, as I was trying frantically to find a space for a lab or whatever.
>
> We heard about that in the orientation, that if you draw a bad time of registration, well then, you've just got to stand in line over the lunch hour. Which seems like a terrible waste of time. But that's the way it is.
>
> So I feel I've wasted an entire year, because of a -- well, I don't know whose fault it would be altogether. I had wanted to speak to someone in plant sciences before registration day came up, but they said they wouldn't see me then; they would see me at registration day. But [at registration] there wasn't anybody who was in that discipline, who was in the room where I was registering. So, they couldn't tell me any more than what the prescribed courses were. That has gotten me a bit upset, but next year, I guess.

Problems such as Edna's and other student remarks, led me to conclude that institutional size -- the bigness of the University of Alberta -- was also very much an aspect of their notion of the system.

With the relative distance of the spousal perspective, Jon Baker recognized size as a part of Mary's difficulty in feeling comfortable through getting to know other people:

> I'm pretty sure that -- even after the first few days -- you get on a campus with about 40,000 people, and you don't know anybody -- it's a little bit intimidating.

Sheila, from the student perspective, put it even more clearly:

> The physical size of the university is just massive. The more I venture to take this little hallway or that little hallway, I just can't get over the size of it! And everyone's in their own little niche. Everyone's just plugging along.
>
> Actually, I would say that the massiveness of the university, would probably be included in the frustrations too. It's just too big.
>
> I don't like the system. I still haven't learned to have it work for me.
>
> I hate crowds. That is why, I think, I don't like the university. There are too many people. You can't even quietly go and have a cup of coffee. There's always people! Always people! All the time!
>
> I haven't found a quiet spot. I've tried the library and there's still people walking all over. It just really bothers me.

How did she cope with this? Her only solution seemed to be to yield:

> Well, you get used to it. You just go with the flow.
>
> My French class -- my first-year class -- nobody spoke to anybody. Which really bothered me. But no one seemed to have the time. Which is really shameful because that isolates people even more.
>
> I just go with the flow.

Sam expressed his feelings about size in terms of difficulties he experienced in finding a comfortable place to eat:

> I like to go some place and get something to eat. Not go some place and wait in line, be given some food, then stand up and eat it. That's a real zoo.

Gloria described similar "day-to-day" experiences:

> The walking and the crowds, and the quiet places to study, and the crowded places to eat, and things like that. Just the sheer volume of humanity there, means that there aren't a lot of private places.

Sheila, as we will recall from the profile, also hated lines:

> I hate standing in line for a cup of coffee. I hate standing in line to grab a hamburger. You're always constantly standing in line. I hate standing in line. I've walked out of stores when I've had to stand in line -- put down my purchases and just left them.

Interestingly, when I asked Sheila if standing in line had anything to do with the the descriptors -- "The System; Rigidity and Conformity" -- she had raised in her clustering activity, she claimed not:

> It's just a little complaint I have: That you're constantly standing in line.
>
> To go into a classroom, you're standing in line; to leave the classroom, you're standing in line. To go up to another classroom, there are masses of people.
>
> I enjoy it once I can get into my classroom and I can just sit there. At least I have my desk!

Edna found that size and numbers also created problems in her classroom setting:

> But you can't hear nine tenths of what's going on, and some of the professors just seem incapable of keeping a handle on some of that chatting that goes on.
>
> There was one feeble effort made. And I think he did it in response to a complaint I lodged -- sometime around the middle of September.
>
> I tried [to move to the front of the class]. And I did get a friend of mine -- who did get in there earlier sometimes -- to save a seat. But often, she'd be stuck in the back row too, so it didn't work out too well, that way.

Brenda, however, found that the impersonal nature of the institution's size could be ameliorated. It appears that her difficulties were relieved through the warmth of personal, caring human contact -- something she attributed to the characteristics of a particular university administrator, but also to the fact that she became the student within a smaller university department:

> My own personal experience has been that when I've approached professors, not the administration, but when I've approached professors, they've been very helpful. The relationship has been quite positive. So, I've really valued that. That's been really quite nice.
>
> But in terms of the administration, I went out of Arts because it was so terrible -- how they were treating me as a student. I left!
>
> My saving grace has been being in that small Faculty. That really has helped. I can go to [Beth] and she makes everything better -- when the administration's all a mess, she really can. She just gives me a straight answer, and that's the end of it. She's one of the few people in the administration that has been able to do that.
>
> The professors are available, and they're there. The people in the office are helpful and concerned. That small little place has really been pretty important.
>
> I don't know why they don't have a college system or something similar, that gives people a place to belong. I'm just amazed.

The problem of bigness also seemed to be a factor in how the students related to the university's library system. Most of the students mentioned approaching their initial encounter with the library with feelings of fear and trepidation. Some, such as Sam, put off the contact as long as possible. Astonishingly, some were able to avoid the encounter all together, simply by virtue of the fact that their courses did not necessitate their use of the library

resources.

Sam put his fears this way:

> I haven't gone to the library yet. I have this dread of giving them my card and it's not valid or something. And I don't need that! Just leave me alone! I don't need any complications.
> I just like being in control and anything that's not in control, I'll just forget about and go on to something else.

Brenda found the library organization on campus to be unduly complex and confusing:

> Well, [the library system] is a necessity. I think the idea of learning how to use the system -- any system -- and mastering that in a way that you'll be able to use it in other situations, is a good thing to learn. But it's not like it's the kind of system that will be applicable to any other university or any other system. That system is in transition; they've got three systems there. Their books are all over the campus. It's in quite a mess.
> The U of T system, I really felt like I had mastered something in terms of -- by the end I had a sense that I knew where to find stuff when I needed it, and I felt good about that. I came here, assuming that I could apply that, but it's not true. It's just like learning from square one all over again, it's a completely different system.

Sheila's first encounter with the library resulted in her fleeing, in search of more familiar territory:

> The first time I went by [Rutherford], I was looking for some books; I used that little -- I forget what -- microfiche!
> Then I went to look for the books, and I didn't realize that the library took up multi-floors. So I didn't find the books I needed.
> So that was fine, I decided I knew the library cut at the county, here [Sherwood Park]. So I'd go there and see if they had any books I needed. I took the chicken way out. So that suited me fine.

Of course it didn't suit her fine. As mentioned

earlier, in the end she sought the services of a friend to orient her to the library system.

In fairness, it must be noted that all of the students who took advantage of the services of the reference librarians, had nothing but good things to say about their helpfulness and professionalism, but in spite of this fact and attendance at library orientations, some of the students remained intimidated by the process of using the complex library system. Noise and the existence of multiple locations and multiple catalogue systems seemed to be the major problems identified by the participants.

Turning to other aspects of the university system which the participants seemed to run up against, there were some difficulties with the requirements of programs and courses. Sheila was uncertain as to why, "at her age" she should be required to "conform." When asked to explain what she meant, she was a little uncertain:

> I don't mean that I feel you should just flit here, there, and everywhere. It's just "the system." I feel, probably, that the rules should be a little bit more flexible -- under certain circumstances.
> I can't think of any specific thing right now, but I'm not speaking of not attending classes or going at a specified time. That doesn't bother me. That's necessary.

Eventually, however, she referred again to her difficulties with the Writing Competency Test:

> I don't feel anybody can do their best work in two hours anyway. I can't work under pressure, so I have a fair amount against me right there.
> I can see their justification in saying: No you can't take your paper home. Because I know what would happen.

> But, if you've gotten through the classes, they know what you can do, by your doing it in the class. They could certainly tell if somebody else had done it for you, just by the sentence structure and word usage. So, that's why I say it's very rigid.

Steven, as mentioned earlier, also ran into some rigidity in that his political science professor required that the students sit in the seat they had chosen in their first week of classes: "He passed a paper around. You signed your name and now you stay in that seat." While Steven was fairly philosophical about the seating plan requirement in political science, he was less patient with the academic consequences of the French requirement in his program area:

> I'd like to learn how to speak French. I would have taken it anyway. I'm disappointed that you <u>have</u> to take it. I don't think there's any reason why you have to take it, and why it counts for so much credit.
>
> That's not coming out right! It's such a tough thing -- a language. In a year, you have to learn . . . the book is pretty thick. There's a lot of things to learn in a language. They want you to learn that in a year, plus they're going to give you the credit for it; but if you don't do very good, it's going to lower your average.
>
> It's the one course that I really would like to do well in -- or like to really have a handle on -- but I struggle with French. It's tough. It's just funny that it's the one that I would like to learn. Of everything I'm taking, it's the one I'd like to learn the most of.
>
> I would rather take it out of school -- on my own, somewhere else. When there's no pressure on you to get the mark. They're going to give me this French 105 because I didn't have grade twelve French -- I had grade eleven. So you take 100 level -- grade twelve level. You take it for a year, and it's going to fry your brains, as far as French is concerned. And you'll never look at it again.
>
> It's turning people off of it, instead of on to it!

At another point, Steven reminded me of his feelings about the conflict between his own educational objectives and empty institutional requirements:

> I didn't go [to university] to beat the system. I went there to learn something. That puts you right back at that damned computing science! There's nothing in that course; but it's a requirement.

Edna also found program requirements to be part of the problem she experienced. As stated before, none of the courses she took in her first term really interested her; she took them because they were required and she wanted to get them out of the way. She did, however, assume some personal responsibility to the path she had chosen:

> Yeah, well, in some ways, that was the way I set things up too. I needed these courses, so I felt that I should go ahead and get them done, so that I could get on with things. At the same time, it was discouraging, because they weren't what I really wanted to be taking.

In the end, she essentially blamed herself for her lack of success. She felt that she had simply not displayed the patience to complete what the system obviously required of a good student.

Along with courses and program requirements, a frustrating part of the system was the examination and grading process. Brenda -- the student who found that she had to "gobble" knowledge -- resented examination regurgitation:

> I really resent having to <u>blurt</u> back, especially on multiple choice. I'm trying to be more positive about it because I don't like those [mid-term] marks and I really want to do better. And I think that through practice, I might do a little bit better.

From her experiences, it would seem that Brenda now understood that her grades [success] depended as much or more upon developing the art of writing multiple choice exams -- an experience essentially peculiar to institutional education -- as it did upon more classical forms of intellectual achievement. To Brenda, this type of activity seemed silly.

Steven also had difficulties with multiple choice exams. He was confused by the fact that he could demonstrate his knowledge in practice but not on the exams. This caused him to be frustrated with the process, and it also enhanced his feelings of self-doubt. What else could he conclude: he was deficient or the system was absurd:

> That's what ticks me off [about computing science]. If I know what's going on there -- can do so well on all those labs -- why is it that I can't answer some multiple choice questions? It doesn't make sense. There's only one right answer in computing science, but there can be several right answers in political science. And [political science] is right-minus-wrong. [Computing science] is right-minus-half-wrong.

During our last interview, Judith was despondent about an economics exam. She had found that it was "tough." But what seemed to bother her most was the fact that she had made a strategic error in her studying. She had decided to focus on studying the course material rather than a previous examination. The message she seemed to get from the experience was that when she decided to study the curriculum, she had made the wrong choice:

> Last night I was doing the final [exam] from last year -- [today's exam] was basically the same. I didn't spend a lot of time on the exam from last year, I was reading the book and my notes and things like that. Whereas, I should have probably been concentrating on the exam from last year.
>
> Oh well! Forge ahead [laughs].

Sam, like Sheila, found difficulty with the fact that being examined meant working under time pressure:

> Well, the thing that bothers me about the first [exam] was, we didn't have enough time -- just didn't have enough minutes to write. I wrote like a banshee for the full 45 minutes or so that we had, and I just barely finished writing. They were all long essay questions. If I had another ten minutes or so, to go over some of my answers, I would have got ten, maybe fifteen percent more. Some of the things I wrote down were, to me -- even at the time -- I knew that I should expand on this. But no, I've got to keep on going. I didn't have the time to go back.
>
> I think one person was finished early, everybody else was sitting there writing.

The test seemed to have been about his ability to perform under time constraint rather than a test of his knowledge or understanding.

Gloria reported similar concerns about timed work.

> The work that I can take time on and spend time at home, is the work in which I get the 80s and 90s. It's high 80s and low 90s. That, I am tremendously relieved by. However, under rapid fire test conditions and exam conditions, it's the mid 60s range. And that is what I'm going to be marked on.
>
> Obviously, my assignments will have some bearing on it. But I actually worked it out according to the weights that are assigned all the different things, the oral tests and all the rest of it. If I keep going the way I am going, then I will end up the year with about a 67 percent. However that goes on the stanine -- I don't know, but it will be about a 67 percent average.

Even though, because of the nine-point grading system, Gloria was uncertain about the precise final grade she would

achieve, she indicated she was not unduly concerned because she felt she was in the upper third of all her classes.

As earlier excerpts have suggested, many of the other students felt much more uncertain in the presence of the university's rational-but-strange grading structure (most often referred to by the students as the "stanine system"). In discussing her clustering activity, Judith puzzled,

> I don't know why I put "Exams" after "The System." I guess the stanine and that kind of stuff is part of the system. And Exams -- how they're being marked.
>
> How it's funny that, as a percentage grade, you can be getting a 60 percent, and you'll get an 8. In another class, you'll have a 60 percent, and you're getting a 3. That kind of stuff is kind of hard to swallow sometimes. Because they can put percentages to certain stanine grades and I find that hard sometimes.

Judith's puzzlement was strongly shared by her husband, Michael, and he, no doubt, acted as a catalyst in her sustained questioning of the actual meaning of her grades.

Even Mary, generally the most positive about her university experience, found problems with the grading system:

> The marking system! I hate it! I just don't like the stanine system at all. In one course, they give you an outline saying: 86 to 100 is a nine; in another course, they say: the top mark is a nine -- the bottom mark is a one, everything else is between. I find it really sort of an arbitrary way of marking. And I don't like it.
>
> I think I'd prefer a percentage. I don't know what their reasons were for going to the stanine. For example, this fellow I was talking to yesterday, he said it really bothered him -- he got 49 on his mid-term and he got a five.
>
> He said, "How can I fail the test, and still pass with a reasonable mark?"
>
> I guess it's a completely different way of looking at marking. You have to look at it in a different way

all together, and it's tough to do.

Sam described another variation of the institution's "standardized" approach to student grading:

> Music is on a stanine system as well but not with everybody else in the class. It's with everybody else for the last five or six years or something. So, they post the stanine marks right out in front of the class; if you get an x percent, that equals that [grade] -- regardless of what test, what exam.

Gloria described one of the lessons she learned from the system, as exemplified by institutional grading practices:

> When I get a nine, it's tremendously gratifying to me, but [the essay is] a piece of shit! It really is. The piece of work that I did, to get the nine, was the most self-serving piece of bull shit I have done in a long time.
>
> It's exactly what [the professor] wanted, and I gave it to him!
>
> The nine pleases me. But it doesn't mean that I'm going to think that, because his standard exists, that my standard should change. I don't think it's as good a paper as the paper I got the lower mark on, previously.
>
> I don't think [the grade] really matters that much in the scheme of things. If I was failing the course, it would matter. I'm not going to compromise to that extent. I'm not that much of a do-my-own-thinger.

Steven, when faced with "absurd" aspects of the system, seemed to feel that the best defense was a good offense. He apparently came to this conclusion in conjunction with his realization that certain educational elements of the university were involved in perpetuating an economic ideology which he found personally distasteful. His comments harken back to some remarks included earlier in the chapter:

I have definite opinions, and one of my opinions is that there's no need to lay people off. They're only moving them from this hand to this hand -- unemployment here because they lay them off there.

Keep everybody working. Keep 'em happy!

But everything seems to work on profit. Even the city of Edmonton. You see the mayor charging around trying to get oil business from Lloydminster -- charging around with these toll war deals. Laying off another fifty-nine firemen because they don't have the money. But damn! everybody gets a raise.

They're spending six million to paint the curbs down Jasper avenue; or build this new building. Restraint; restraint; restraint; restraint! And out go all the bucks.

"Oh no! But this is the Capital Budget. The Personnel Budget is different."

It's not different! It's just that that's the accepted attitude. And I know why now!

I can see that [the university] is training people to think like that!!

That's one of the reasons I went [to university], because I think that's wrong. But I didn't realize at the time, where it comes from.

All of a sudden, here, I find myself in the very institution that seems to . . . .

I shouldn't say that. Because every faculty is probably different. I went and looked particularly at Law, and I noticed that it's all oil and gas. They don't make any bones about it. They come right out and say that it primarily concerns the oil and gas industry.

You can go there, but you're going to get a lot of oil and gas. If you learn something about family law, that's good; but they don't say that.

Well, the business is just that. It's all profit this/profit that, expenditure here, profit this/profit that.

I'll overcome that too. Yeah. I want to take law. Obviously, it can't be that bad because lawyers come out of there with a completely different attitude. I mean, there must be some labor lawyers coming out of the U of A. There have to be. And I would assume that they are more people-oriented than business. Maybe not. I could be wrong on that. I don't know. I don't know any lawyers.

If you go in with definite views, maybe they leave you alone. I don't know.

In this statement, the influences of Steven's life beyond the university setting can easily be observed affecting the position he was taking with regard to his experiences at the university. In addition, in view of the fact that he had experienced personal issues, such as potential lay-off from his fireman's position, it would not be surprising if he -- or other non-continuous students in similar circumstances -- occasionally displayed somewhat intransigent positions in the face of institutionalized attitudes which ran counter to his very real personal experiences.

In contrast to the other students, in order to "succeed" at the university, neither Sam or Mary felt that they had to "play the game" or "learn the system." Mary, however, was certainly aware of others who did:

> In one of the courses I'm taking, it's fairly easy for people to get full marks without doing the work or understanding it at all -- in the computing science course, in their labs.
>
> It was frustrating that I spent the time thinking these things through, I really did them on my own, and I got full marks for them. But another person that I know -- had no idea what they were about -- had somebody else do the labs for her, and got full marks for them.
>
> I thought that was kind of unfair, in a sense.

Judith also attributed less-than-upright motives to the actions of some of her student colleagues. Like Steven, she found herself struggling to make her own moral choices when surrounded by evidence that learning was not the only way to get ahead in the university setting:

> In some of the classes you can tell that [students] go out of their way to find the lecturer, the instructor, or whatever. I don't know why [the students do that] -- I can't say they're looking for him just because they want to get a good mark. But you can tell -- especially in a smaller group -- these seminar-type classes -- the ones that have spent time with the instructor. And their grades reflect it, I feel.
>
> Sometimes I would like to talk to some of my teachers: the choir conductor guy, even my violin [professor].
>
> I really enjoy that class [violin], but I find it really hard to just go up and start talking to him about nothing. Because I'm afraid that they're going to start thinking: "She's sucking up."
>
> I probably like him because I don't have to suck up to him to get a good mark. I'm still getting a good mark. Maybe I respect him for that -- that he can judge you on what you are really doing. Rather than what stimulating conversation you can come up with -- I don't know.
>
> Can't teachers tell when people are doing that? And yet they let them do it; and yet they give them good marks. Sometimes, I can't figure it out.

Even though she was annoyed by the activities she perceived, in the face of the system, Judith laughingly conceded, "I'm not going to do anything about it." For her, the thought of attacking the system was a frightening prospect, the personal consequences outweighed the benefits.

Brenda, as we have seen, also observed systemic matters which disturbed her; for example, the sexist attitudes she mentioned. She was more willing than Judith to take issue, but as she admitted:

> For me, it's really scary to go push the system -- to say that you can't do something, or you might not be able to. Somehow you're supposed to meet all those expectations that they put out there.
>
> I'm very frustrated with that because the system does not allow me, as a student -- I mean, if I'm going to get anything out of it, I have to just push and push and push. Sometimes I feel like the pushy student who is raising all these questions -- not a very comfortable position to be in.

> Now, with 300 people in the class, I don't have to worry about his mark, because it would be gotten some other way. But in a small class, that could create some difficulty I think. I'm either going to be learning to be very diplomatic or I'm going to learn to shut up.

Although she often did battle on her own behalf, Gloria also appeared to yield:

> I've found that there are adjustments and changes and things -- in my expectations and my day-to-day activities -- that are very much typical of somebody that I never thought I would be.
>
> I'm "playing the game" because of things like: marks, getting along, just getting by, and all those kinds of things.
>
> In one respect, I feel very wise and worldly. If I can use the word that has been used to death in the last little while -- very "mature." It's almost as though the rest of the world has been doing this and hasn't let me in on the secret. And I have finally cottoned on to the secret!

While Gloria was obviously somewhat uncomfortable with her role, she became a skilled player. She was able to secure a parking spot for herself. She did this by having her father, a physician, write a note indicating that she had a medical problem which required that she have access to a parking spot:

> It's a problem for me in that I had to do some fairly underhanded kinds of things to get a parking space. I'm not really comfortable with that.
>
> That's a little on the far side of "playing the game." That's just a little distasteful, when you have to stoop to those kinds of lows. I don't think that's part of playing the game. But it's certainly not something I was not going to do.
>
> I suppose that's very North American isn't it? -- a chicken in every pot, a parking space for every student.

Steven also solved his parking problem. On the

surface, his approach was not as "underhanded" as Gloria's, but he obviously was developing his game-playing potential -- a potential that he was apparently not particularly comfortable with:

> Actually, I worked it right out. It's perfect. If I'm there every morning at quarter after nine; there's a parking lot right beside Fine Arts Building -- I think it's the Fine Arts building -- and Health Services. That parking lot, right there on the corner. I get right in there, every morning at quarter after nine. I have an "arrangement" with the [parking attendant].
>
> Well, he's done it himself. He doesn't open up his visitor parking early, because everybody else does. So he saves his visitor parking till quarter after nine. So, if you show up at quarter after nine, he lets in about twenty cars -- in you go. But then I got to know him. I chat with him and that. So, even if it's not open, he lets me come in now.
>
> He's a friendly guy too. He doesn't really care. I don't know how we got going. Just did.

When I suggested to Steven that this activity might indicate that he was learning to use the system effectively, his response was, "Is that what it is? I hope not. I never want to know!"

When I described Gloria's parking arrangement to Judith and asked her to comment, her reaction was: "I guess, if she can do it, more power to her." Judith didn't, however, think parking was an important enough issue for her to initiate similar tactics. But she did go on to reveal that other temptations had passed her way:

> Today, I was thinking -- actually this whole week -- I was thinking of hiring somebody to write this economics exam for me. But I don't think, if it came right down to it, I would be able to do that.

She also added that she did not know any students who did

that sort of thing, and reinforced the fact that she would not really have given it serious thought.

In any event, the above excerpts seem to indicate that, for these students, the university experience included a hidden agenda, another curriculum. They were under pressure from the time they enrolled to learn to play the game. Even though the rules often seemed irrational and absurd, and seemed to encourage questionable behavior. The large machine that was "The System" demanded compliance. The wise response was to "go with the flow."

Turning to another aspect of the students' relationship with the system, there were examples of the students being in situations in which they actually were made to feel stupid. As we saw earlier, this was certainly the case when Gloria reported feeling silly when people spoke to her using "universityese." And, although Brenda had good things to say about her professors, she also alleged:

> I really feel that I'm taking their time. They're not interested, we're undergraduate students. We're just bothers, in a sense.
> That whole structure, I think, is not terrific.

She seemed to feel particularly stupid when, just prior to an exam, she finally visited her professor's office to get clarification about a particular problem, she was amazed to discover that the professor "had had all the students in the class, all afternoon -- walking in, checking out things." Her assessment: "I didn't know that. Somehow that seemed unfair. Somehow, to me, that wasn't what you

would do. So I learned something from that."

Through operational insensitivity or poor organization, Sheila also was made to feel uncomfortable. She also learned a lesson:

> I went to a French lab -- it's completely up to you whether you want to go or not; it's not compulsory in this class -- but they had lost the tapes. They couldn't find the tapes I required.
>
> So she said: "Here, take this one."
>
> Well, I'm sorry lady! It was my first month at school and I could hardly understand French to begin with. I was given this tape and she said, "Oh, just turn to chapter three." Well, I was lost as it was. So I couldn't turn to chapter three. I was just completely frustrated with the whole process.
>
> I never went back.

Judith was small in stature and appeared younger than he years. A number of times she found herself treated with condescension:

> I think sometimes I get treated as an eighteen year old. Just recently, a couple of times, up in the music office, I went to ask for something, but the way [the secretary] talked back to me!
>
> I feel like an equal when I'm walking in there; by the time I leave the place, I feel like she's talking to me like I'm her kid or something. That does bother me.

Mary found similar difficulties in the classroom setting:

> My only dealings with the institution are with the professors, I guess. I find that the fact that they tolerate all this noise, it's almost like treating us as children.
>
> I have one professor who I find is very condescending; she tells us to eat breakfast before our exam, and this kind of thing. I don't need to be told that.

In fairness, with regard to the issue of breakfast, it

appeared that the professor was trying to be helpful. Mary, however, felt that she was being stereotyped, along with the student mass, as an irresponsible youngster. In this regard, Mary stated that she would definitely rather be in classes composed solely of older students -- the assumption being that she and other mature-age students would be treated differently to what she had been experiencing over the term.

Edna, as referred to previously, ran into difficulty when she cited outside sources in an English essay:

> I felt pretty embarrassed and kind of under suspicion, from that point on. Actually, I felt that some of the ideas that I put on the paper were mine, but he wasn't willing to take them as mine, until he was sure that I hadn't copied them from somewhere.
>
> I didn't get a bad mark. Actually, what bothered me -- during the interview, he looked at me -- and I guess he quickly made this summation: "She's not just out of high school, so she probably wouldn't plagiarize."
>
> I was insulted for my fellow students, because I thought: "Why should they, or I, be under any more or less suspicion because of our age, or so-called position or station in life.
>
> I was annoyed with that attitude: "Oh, I can see you're too old to bother to plagiarize."
>
> It was an interesting situation.

In the end, it seems that regardless of how or in what form the students ran up against absurdities of the system, they came away frustrated and having lost a little of their self-esteem. In drawing this section to a close, Brenda's remark about grades gives a brief glimpse of what I think I generally understood from the student remarks about the system:

> But I think there's a feeling there that: I got a low mark; I mustn't have studied properly. You never think: I got a low mark; the teacher must have been a twit, because he didn't teach it properly. You never think about those things. You always go back to yourself.

While at the outset of the term, many of the students -- having had a reasonably wide range of personal experience in other life situations -- held fast to many of their individual convictions; in the end, their statements revealed some evidence of a pragmatic yielding or surrender to systemic pressures. At least to some degree, the "educational end" -- obtaining the credential -- seemed to replace the earlier idealized vision of what the learning experience might be.

In essence it seemed, to face "The System" may have been more problematic for older, more experienced undergraduate students, simply by virtue of the fact that they had a broader field of experience than younger, more conventional university students. They had knowledge of another world. In some ways, they were not so easily cowed, intimidated, or domesticated. On the other hand, for many of the students, by the end of the term there were definite signs of a domestication process well begun.

## Personal Growth

To attend only to negative images of the participants' university setting would be to misrepresent their experience. The participants also related very positive kinds of experiences; but spontaneous references to positive

experiences were infrequent and often seemed to await direct questions on my part. A substantial portion of the positive comments set forth below emerged only through the clustering activity, during our final interview. But since this clustering activity directed the students to reflect retrospectively upon the whole of their term, I was not surprised to find a positive dimension to this summarizing process.

Notwithstanding this, a cursory examination of the clusters included in Appendix I confirms that for most (Mary and Brenda are notable exceptions), positive descriptors relating directly to the university experience, were relatively sparse. Even in summary, there did not appear to be a balance between positive and negative aspects of the first-term university experience.

My assessment is that the joy of learning experienced by most of the students often appeared to be self-induced or internal; and these experiences frequently seemed to be sustained under the constant pounding of the more negative aspects of the setting described earlier in this chapter. There was a "sweet and sour" aspect to the experience.

Brenda's comments seemed to demonstrate these contradictions. She talked about university as being "expanding," and described one aspect of the experience thusly:

> I have a couple of professors that come about things in a very different way than I do. And while I disagree totally with where they are, they are very good at clearly stating where they're coming from. So that

> makes me reevaluate where I am and move a little -- begin to think about some other alternatives. So, I'm getting some depth, and I find that quite exciting. I quite like that.

On the other hand, she was very critical of her psychology course, in which, for her, the material was presented as having a "sense of hierarchy" -- a "steel trap in the mind, everything-has-its-place."

At one point, mid-way through the term, Brenda expressed some reservations about what was happening for her educationally:

> In a sense, I haven't got to the point where I'm thinking critically about it -- as a whole. There are certain situations where I sort of had some time to analyze the situation, or the class, and then have tried to input where I thought was important. There are some that I write off -- like planning -- I just write it off completely, and I'm not even going to expend my energy in trying to do anything there.
>
> In terms of content, I'm not sure, I feel like I'm memorizing a whole lot of stuff but -- I'm not sure that there's a whole lot of learning, in a sense, going on. Or if there is, I'm not aware of it right now. I'm sure it's going on; I probably am just not aware of it.

In contrast, Brenda apparently discovered that the exciting part of her learning process resulted in the "whole thing that's thrown up in the air." She found herself engaged in a personal struggle -- for her -- a "torture of ideology." She laughingly remarked, " I was much surer about a lot of things before."

Ultimately, Brenda began her own process of synthesis and declared, "It's really quite lovely the way it all fits together -- the ideas. I really think it's neat."

Later in the term, Brenda had definite opinions as to why matters came together for her:

> I've really begun to find a direction. And I think that started by getting out of arts and going into leisure studies, in recreation administration. It's really helped me to focus. Now, I've changed my idea somewhat, about what I wanted to do. I just wanted to finish the degree and be off. I'm now kind of caught up around leisure, and turned on to some possible study in some particular directions around leisure. That's beginning to take shape. That's really pretty exciting.
>
> I was very lucky because I had a professor who I could talk to about that. It helped me formulate that kind of thing. Again, I don't think that's the norm at [the university].
>
> The thing that's really exciting is this whole thing -- I think it's just beautiful, the way I'm taking a psychology course, and a philosophy of leisure course, and a little bit of sociology I guess. But I can start to tie the connections. The things I'm talking about in philosophy, I'm also talking about in psychology, and I'm also talking about it in sociology. The same terms come up, but from a very different perspective. So you begin to be able to pull -- and that's really exciting for me. I really like that part of it. It's really neat. . . .
>
> It's been frustrating the last three months; particularly around big classes, one-way communication, and presentation of certain perspectives without being clear about what that perspective is. Not giving alternative perspectives to the same kinds of issues. . . .
>
> I've got an opportunity to do an individual learning program. That feels really free: that this awful institution has a place where I can do what I've been trying to do -- probably for years.
>
> Even at U of T, I took religion courses, political science courses, urban studies courses. I think I've been trying to put together this kind of pattern for a number of years, and there was no place or no one who could help me do that. I didn't have the skill or the ability or the knowledge to know that you could.
>
> Here, I've really been given -- I think -- a gift, an opportunity to be able to do that.

Mary indicated her experience "feels like doors are opening to me." But once again, it appears this feeling was part of a very personal process of change. Let us return

again to a comment presented earlier in this document:

> I feel like my learning doesn't just take place at university. That really helps, and maybe it's like a catalyst or something, but, for example, I was telling Joe yesterday, I really feel the urge to do more reading again. I read a lot anyway, but I sort of got out of just reading novels, or poetry, or whatever. And I've been feeling lately, that I really have to get back into that; sort of being aware of what's happening in Canadian literature, right now. Which doesn't have anything to do with any of the courses I'm taking right now. So, I suppose, it's more than just the classroom. What was this catalytic effect like? For Mary:
>
> I find that I go through periods where I'm enjoying . . . like when I was doing the labs in computing science, I just enjoyed it so much, I thought: "Oh, I'm really gonna pursue this; I'm gonna take more computing courses."
>
> And art history, it's so fascinating! I was thinking today: "Boy, I just can't wait to take more of these courses!"
>
> And French, of course, I always wanted to take more French courses, so I'm gonna be at university for a long time I'm afraid, if I do everything I want to do.

There were essentially two elements of her experience that Mary described as being positive:

> I've found my classes really interesting. Really feel like they're making me think about things or see things differently, or whatever. So I've enjoyed that -- been stimulating, been fun.
>
> I just enjoy getting out during the day. That in itself is sort of fun. It's different, riding the bus, being with people and so on.

Steven reported that an experience in planning an essay, while not exciting in the more general sense that Brenda and Mary had described, was satisfying. He was having trouble getting to sleep after studying:

> So, for about an hour, it was just churning around in there and then, all of a sudden -- like a one arm band -- just went click, click, click.

He jumped out of bed, jotted down the idea and then went to

sleep. He referred to this experience as like "magic." To Steven, "that felt good."

When I asked Steven to comment upon the positive aspects of his university experience, he responded:

> The lectures. I like English the best. Then, probably, French. That's about it. Nothing else there really turns my crank.
>
> I don't enjoy walking through the HUB Mall or hanging out in the HUB Mall. Or the libraries -- I don't care for the libraries. I'm gonna have to, I guess, but I don't really . . . . Although [the librarians] were sure helpful when I was doing that first essay. But like I said, the noise is unreal in there.

In contrast, Brenda found that as she became more involved in what she was learning, browsing in the library, or through historical documents, became one of the most positive aspects of her experience:

> More and more, I want to spend more time in the university. I mean, I like being in the library, I like writing papers, I like spending time there. That's my whole thing.

Interestingly, when Brenda described herself at the university, delving back into the historical and philosophical roots of some ideas, she frequently felt guilty about this practice, because, to her, it was evidence of her tendency to procrastinate and not get down to the real work of completing her course assignments.

In identifying positive aspects of her experience, Sheila was short and to the point: "The professors are super; at least, I've had no difficulties with them. They're all very receptive."

And as we observed earlier, Gloria was probably most enthusiastic about her French class (descriptors which appeared in the cluster are indicated by underlining):

> Very much a participatory sort of class. In fact, so rapid fire and participatory that this is how it feels, this little panel here [in her cluster]: joy, achievement, amazement. Because, when I get through one of those classes, I'm just amazed at all the things that have transpired. That's how that class is. Some of the other ones do that a little bit.

Of all the students, Sam was probably least inclined to fully embrace the experience of his courses. But it was interesting to note that over the term, Sam discovered himself reluctantly becoming someone for which he had held an initial contempt -- a "keener."

For example, Sam began the term by registering in music -- a "mickey mouse course." To his surprise and pleasure, he reported that the course was anything but "mickey mouse." He found it to be interesting and rigorous -- the concepts and ideas, he discovered, had "exact meanings." This was also one of the courses, as mentioned earlier, in which he developed a desire to interact more with the professor.

Earlier in the term also, Sam had expressed apprehension about the expectation that his English course might require him to "unbridle his imagination." In this regard, he explained that he was somewhat reluctant to "pull out all the stops." Even though he found the English professor supportive, he didn't want to "go rampant," and then find out he had gone "too far -- losing everything." Late in the term, he laughed when he revealed that in an

English essay, for which he received a good mark, "I just let her rip!"

When I asked Sam to describe his major pleasures as a student, he responded:

> Major pleasures? Good grief! There's got to be something. I s'pose, just learning things. I'm learning things this year that I hadn't known before. I can see myself becoming . . . or I can fantasize myself becoming very eager about learning -- excited about learning things. Although I don't think I can see myself actually doing it all that readily. Because it just takes too much time. But I can sort of understand where some people would do that. Because it's sort of exciting and it's a little bit of constructive escapism, I think.

Again, early in the term, I had asked Sam to suggest words that might describe his experience to that point. One of the words he used was "exciting." Fully expecting him to reveal the richness of his new university experiences, I asked him to tell me more about what he meant by exciting. I was surprised:

> The job is quite exciting because everything is new. I have to learn maybe in excess of forty to forty-five . . . routes. And all the little towns each route encompasses and drops freight off, picks up freight . . . and everything else. I have to start to get to know seventeen, eighteen, nineteen people who work with me. And that's just at work. Also trying to get to and from work without a car [laughs] is a little bit interesting sometimes.

Later, in his clustering activity near the end of the term, Sam used the word "accomplishment" as one of the descriptors of his "three months as a university student." Again, accomplishment, to Sam, meant:

> Just with what I've done at [work]. I've worked out really well. I know Alberta quite well. So I've

> been able to catch on to all their systems, probably quicker than most.
>
> I know what it entails to load a [vehicle] correctly, and how to sort freight -- the three or four hundred places you have to know. At the beginning, it's definitely not a very mindless job. There's a lot of thought and a lot of memorization -- stuff you have to learn. And it's hard physically. So at the beginning, it's a tough, demanding job. Much tougher and more demanding than the technical job I had before. . . . Almost every hour or every two hours, you get that feeling of challenge and accomplishment, by having to do that.

But, interestingly, Sam's cluster included two "legs" leading to the word accomplishment. The second leg, Sam stated, was directly related to university. This second leg included other descriptors such as: order, relaxation, tension and frustration -- all connected to accomplishment. Sam's comments about the university leg were as follows:

> I'm thinking now, of [when I started] university. That's order. I thought the most important thing -- going into university -- was to try and get a sense of order and saneness. And I think I've done that, for the most part.

The contrast between the kinds of feelings Sam expressed about the learning experiences involved in his new job and those experienced in his new university venture leave much for a university educator or university policy-maker to ponder.

In her clustering activity, Judith described university as an "adventure" and indicated that she was "enjoying learning," but through her elaboration of these descriptors, it seemed clear that her positive feelings had more to do with the attitude she was bringing to the situation than factors which emerged directly from the university

experience. In describing adventure, she enthused:

> This is something new. This is something that is exciting.
> I guess I've always thought of it as a goal, actually, an unattainable goal. Now I'm working towards one of my unattainable goals.

And as far as enjoying learning was concerned, she seemed to echo some of Gloria's thoughts about choice:

> When I look back to my high school years, you're there because you have to be there. I honestly can't remember things that I learned back then -- nothing! I don't remember important things. . . . Once I learned it, it was gone, and that was it.
> Now, because I'm doing this thing because I want to do it -- I'm there because I want to be there -- I'm getting a lot more out of it. I'm enjoying the things I'm interested in. I'm enjoying picking up these different things.

Grading University

In my attempt to use an alternative approach to arrive at a more detailed understanding the setting of these students, my own tendency to attempt to reduce and quantify matters died hard. The several hundred pages in this document seem to attest to the fact that it would be extremely difficult if not absurd to attempt to reduce an understanding of these students' situation to a simple statement, let alone a single measurable quantity.

In any event, at a certain point I found myself asking some of the students to rate their overall experience on a scale of one to ten (ten being highest). Brenda made an appropriate if reluctant response:

> Oh shit! You really want me to rate this don't you? Oh, it depends on what level you're talking about. That's really hard to do. I guess, at an

> overall feeling level -- I would rate it pretty close to ten. I still am really excited about being there and the whole process and all of that.
>
> But I think there's another, more realistic level that sets in. That probably wouldn't allow it to be rated quite so high.

Sam, the ultimate pragmatist among the participants, also found difficulty reducing the experience to a numerical measure:

> If I just isolate university, I'd probably put it at, maybe a seven -- seven and a half. Maybe seven, that's what I'm doing [in terms of grade point] anyways. There's always two ways that I look at things. [University] is probably better than I expected, but about the same as what I had hoped for.

Steven's rating revealed a little less enthusiasm, but he also suggested that he felt that the passage of time could change how one feels about these things:

> It's hit about five and it's going up. It's getting better, because it started pretty low. I was pretty worried. You know, you want to go [to university] so you have to give it a one -- a one for desire.
>
> I may never feel really good about it. When you have the goal, once you start getting close to the goal, you're gonna start feeling better and better about it all the time. The ten might come when I do graduate.
>
> The good old days always seem like the good old days when they're in the past. Always the pits when you're going through them.

Although her husband, Joe, thought Mary might have rated her experience at eight or nine, Mary indicated she would give her experience a seven or an eight. She went on: "Probably about what I'd anticipated. Maybe even a little better. It's been good. I really enjoy it."

Notwithstanding Mary's rather reserved rating, since she seemed to sustain the most positive feelings throughout the term, let me leave her with the last word in this chapter. On December 12, she wrote in her journal:

> I have been thinking, especially since our last interview with Don, about my experience so far, as a university student. I wondered if I have been truthful in what I have said -- has it really been as positive, and have I really enjoyed it as much as I indicated?
>
> I listened closely to some of the comments made at the last MUGS brown bag lunch. Some of the group were discussing what they plan to say at the mature student orientation in January. Most of the comments were negative -- problems with administration, problems with professors, problems with other students, problems with reconciling university with home life or social life. I really don't remember one positive thing being said; and I was shocked. The prevalent attitude seemed to be that "I'll get my degree in spite of the university, not because of it."
>
> I'm sure that each of these people who spoke would have some good things to say, if I asked them, which I didn't. And maybe they feel a special need to warn new students about all the possible problems.
> Nevertheless, I came away wondering if I've been honest with myself and others, about how great it's been for me. My final conclusion has got to be yes!
>
> I truly enjoyed last term as a student. I have been challenged, encouraged and excited about each new thing I learned (And I feel I have learned much). I thought the instructors were all knowledgeable, interesting and, with the exception of one small incident, fair.
>
> If I was disappointed with anything, it was with the "I could care less" attitude of some of the other students.
>
> I feel I have been given a great privilege -- the ability and opportunity to learn -- and I don't want to waste it. I'm sure problems will arise, and I may get very frustrated and angry with professors or administrators in the future. But I'm not looking for trouble. I just want to enjoy and take full advantage of being a university student now.

## Participant Epiloque

As referred to in Chapter 3, during November, December 1985, the participants of this study reviewed some of the contents of a draft of this dissertation. My contact with them at that time allows me to make a very brief statement about the status of each student's university undertaking.

Mary and Joe were very proud of their new daughter, born during the fall 1985. Even though Mary had thought that she might be able to return to university in January 1986, in view of her increased family responsibilities, she had decided that plan was impractical. She still plans to finish her degree one day, but the plans were indefinite.

Edna had not returned to university. She was apparently involved in two courses directed toward upgrading her high school math and science, but she also had no definite plans regarding returning to university.

Gloria had returned to university in the fall of 1985, but, although she did not make her reasons clear, early in the term she dropped out. A rationale which she presented was that her father's situation had changed and he now required a great deal of her attention. But she also mentioned that she didn't know if she would ever return to university.

The other students were all continuing their university programs; and as I visited each of their homes, I was struck by a sense that all the families were more settled than had been the case a year previously. All of the students

commented that their particular student situation a year later was quite different, but the difference involved both positive and negative factors.

Sam and Ellen were both still employed full time and Sam was pleased with his academic progress, although he had found he had to settle for taking less than a full load of courses each term.

Sheila was beginning to speak of finishing her program and looking forward to the opportunity to seek employment so that she could feel a sense of financial independence.

Judith still seemed to be struggling somewhat with her self-confidence and some frustration, but she was doing well in her fall courses.

Steven also seemed to be pleased with his educational progress in the fall term, although the untimely death of his father, combined with the due date for a final essay, caused him to drop one of his favorite courses.

Brenda continued to be thrilled with her program of study, and was forging ahead with unbridled enthusiasm.

# CHAPTER 6

## Reflections

The approach I took in reporting this study does not lend itself to reducing the findings to a neat theoretical model or collapsing the material into only a few isolated issues. As a piece of exploratory research, I have intentionally tried to avoid closure. I have avoided tying the package together neatly and shied away from eliminating loose ends or partially developed ideas. In short, the objective of this research project was not to present a tidy conceptual framework for assessing the behavior of adult university students.

Enough of what this chapter is not. The study was primarily intended to explore the reported experience of a select group of married non-continuous university students during their first term at the University of Alberta. Through their narrative we were to gain a sense of their social ecology, particularly the combination of family and university setting. Like refinishing fine furniture, my desire for this undertaking was to peel away heavy layers of conventional thinking about undergraduate university students and to reveal the distinctive wood grain of the non-continuous student experience resting beneath.

Through the researcher role in this process --

documenting and preserving the experience -- my challenge was to apply the fresh varnish in such a way that it would preserve the detail of the grain, knowing full well that this preservation process had the potential to heighten the contrasts and enhance some aspects of the grain while causing others to recede. Notwithstanding this, throughout the preservation process (Chapters 2, 4 and 5), I tried to avoid imposing my own will too heavily upon the material.

From a more philosophical perspective, this study represents an effort to sustain an alternative way of understanding human organizational phenomena. I feel that this study differs from others in the field of Educational Administration in that, first, I consciously set out to identify or adopt a particular philosophical or epistemological stance. I then brought this stance into conjunction with a particular social setting, hoping to allow the situation to be revealed in a somewhat less conventional manner.

Through the conduct of this study, I have tried to marshal an argument that for research dealing with social phenomena, contrasts can be as important or interesting as regularities, and understanding can be enhanced through a research process which is participatory, involves interpretation, and is oriented toward holistic description. This dissertation, then, contains many elements of description which do not fit into specifically articulated categories or themes. Many interesting elements of the

students' experience do not lend themselves to being neatly summarized. This chapter, then, represents something other than an executive summary of the first five chapters of the dissertation.

Let me hasten to add that through this reporting process, I did not intentionally set out to be obscure or sloppy. I did my best to be otherwise, but in the end, the material -- particularly Chapters 2, 4 and 5 -- must be explored by each individual reader. Through this exploration, s/he may also become a participant in the study -- directly engaging in the narrative on her or his personal terms. There is, therefore, some obligation upon each reader to arrive at a level of personal understanding, to find her/his own story line among the various events outlined in the narrative.

In conducting and reporting this study, the approach seemed to lead me through what Robert Ornstein (1972:23) refers to as a "scruffy" experience of hunches and insights. In reporting (particularly in Chapter 3), I made no attempt to disguise the unkempt nature of this process. Outlining the fits and starts of the research process is somewhat contrary to much conventional research writing, which, in my experience and according to Ornstein, is laundered of the messy aspects prior to public presentation. This act of sanitization, of course, enhances an image of objectivity -- an image of science.

As this study progressed, some of the descriptive

material allowed me to pursue some of my own speculations to a more abstract level of synthesis. While the propensity to abstract might represent personal baggage left behind from another research paradigm, I saw no reason to avoid this process entirely; hence, these more abstract speculations are included as part of this chapter. In this vein, what follows is the result of my own engagement with the study, and should be understood as such. It represents personal reflections about the research process and about the participants' setting.

This chapter is divided into two major sections. The first is an assessment of certain aspects of the approach I took in being a researcher in the world of a select group of non-continuous, married undergraduate university students. More specifically, it represents my comments upon the way in which various elements of the data collection, analysis and reporting worked or didn't work; and, in retrospect, outlines aspects I might have done differently, had I known at the outset what I understand now. While some aspects of this may sound defensive, they are not intended as such. For the most part, I have simply attempted to make an honest assessment, partly to guide others who may choose aspects of this approach.

The second section deals with what some might call the findings of the study, including some of my thoughts on the general aspects of the participants' situation as I felt they were revealed through the study. Bearing in mind the

very select sample, this second section also includes what I viewed as some potential implications of this study for university policy makers. Many of the issues remain in the form of questions which might guide further reflection or research. I also present several concrete ideas which came to mind during the study and which might be considered as potential elements in a process of institutional action.

Research Approach

In plunging into an assessment of the general approach of this study, I wish somehow to avoid presenting my conclusions about the details of method or technique as necessarily generalizable to other research situations. For me, the methodology of this study emerged very much from the mix between the particular nature of the research situation and my own general research orientation (Chapters 1 and 3).

In taking a somewhat improvisational approach to methodology, I found reassurance in the comment of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983:6), regarding the "stuttering quality" of his own approach to interpretive social science. This stuttering quality, he argued, is a result of not being driven by a "settled" view of how one ought to go about constructing an account of society. Or, as Geertz stated it directly, "It is a result of not knowing, in so uncertain an undertaking, quite where to begin, or having anyhow begun, which way to move."

The consequence of this uncertainty, Geertz tells us, is that, "argument grows oblique, and language with it,

because the more orderly and straightforward a particular course looks, the more it seems ill-advised." I must admit that after the experience of this study, his statement resonates with personal meaning for me.

Geertz also maintains that works of interpretive inquiry are never finished; in the end, they are abandoned! Again, as I write on page 448, this remark also makes a great deal of sense. Part of my understanding of his statement is that the interpretive research process ought to remain open-ended; I hope this one has.

For the most part, given the constraints of the research situation, I am reasonably well satisfied with my research experience. In the research process, however -- which included conceptualizing the problem and the approach, collecting the data, analysis and reporting -- it was aspect of reporting the study which I feel has been least effectively realized. But let me deal with each in its turn.

Conceptualization. For the most part, my case for the conceptualization and the approach used in this study is included in Chapters 1 and 3. Let me simply add that having attempted to operationalize the orientation, to the extent that this study adhered to the principles of that approach, I am more convinced than ever that a situational-interpretive orientation to research has a strong potential to deepen our understanding of complex social situations. Through the actual conduct and reporting of the study, I

gradually came to understand when I was consistently working within the principles of my guiding orientation and when I was slipping into aspects of inconsistency. The report, itself, as a record of a learning experience, displays my successes and failures.

Data Collection. While this study was not intended to represent a definitive attempt at using multiple methods to gain a richer understanding of social phenomena, in the end, it represents an effort to apply several data collection and analysis techniques which were informed by a situational-interpretive perspective.

As a preliminary remark, I feel that this particular study might have been better served by a smaller, more manageable sample (five couples or less), all of whom would then have been exposed to an equivalent data collection process. This change would have placed all of the participants on an equal footing as far as the opportunity for input was concerned. This change would have avoided the uncomfortable perception of a pass/fail participant selection at the beginning of the study. This change might also have allowed for one more formal interview, possibly during the participants' second university term. Later conversations with the participants indicated that valuable insights might have been available from the students' reflections which took place after the Christmas break.

A related concern of equal importance, which I will return to later, is the length of the dissertation. To a

great degree, in reporting, I found myself trapped by the research design -- the combination of sample size and the intention to be holistic. Again, a smaller sample size might have ameliorated this problem without, I think, compromising the description. In fact, it might have assisted in providing better focus.

Interview process. The interview process was, of course, the key data collection element of the study. I feel that the iterative interviewing approach worked very well, in that it allowed a trust relationship to develop between me and the participants. It appears that the process was not unduly intrusive, and it allowed for various issues to be explored in more detail than one would expect from a one-shot interview. In addition, the iterative process made it possible to discuss matters of interest over an extended period of time, as the participants' attitudes changed.

The most valuable insights seemed to emerge when the interviews operated on the level of conversation rather than interrogation. In this regard, it was extremely important for me to avoid being judgmental about what the participants were expressing. Ironically, however, in order for conversation to take place, it seemed that I had to be a full participant in the dialogue, which meant exposing some of my own thoughts and feelings. This process may have served to reveal aspects of my own judgment about matters under discussion. Maintaining a balance in the interview

situation, between engagement and restraint, was often difficult.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the joint interview process was both helpful and a hindrance in getting at the understanding and feeling the students had for the nature of their experience -- it was very much a double-edged sword. It was clear that the presence and participation of the spouses often assisted in clarifying matters; but there was also evidence that on some occasions, the dynamics of the joint interview process prevented feelings about some matters from being fully explored or disclosed by the individual participants.

On balance, however, the joint interview approach seemed to present fewer ethical difficulties in the final reporting process than might have been the case if spouses had individually discussed their circumstances. For example, in this study, statements about family relationships were rarely made in the absence of the other spouse.

On the matter of ethics, in reviewing a draft of the final document, Judith expressed concern about the fact that I had included a remark based upon a chance meeting we had at the university. She felt somewhat disturbed by this, since she felt we were chatting simply as acquaintances; she did not realize we were "on the record." In this regard, even though Judith kindly agreed to allow the remark to remain in this report, I may have overstepped the ethical

boundaries I had tried so carefully to establish in the beginning. There seems little question that I ought to have made it clearer at the outset that all of my contacts would involve data collection. In general, this study raised many ethical issues and it has become clear to me that an interpretive approach to research calls for the development of highly sophisticated level of understanding related to these matters.

This incident, however, raised another issue which I will mention only in passing. If Judith's concern related to the fact that I caught her unaware -- with her guard down -- what does that say about the nature of our formal interviews? At this stage, I will leave that an open issue.

As I now reflect upon other elements of the interview process, there seems to have been little real value in providing the participants with the transcriptions as a regular ongoing part of the interview process. The transcripts were valuable to me in formulating my approach to subsequent interviews, but the transcripts did not serve to elicit any unsolicited comments from the participants, partly, I think, because of their lack of personal time. If anything, the participants' having immediate access to the transcripts may actually have somewhat inhibited subsequent participation.

Were I to be faced with similar circumstances again, I think I would wait until completion of the interviews prior to distributing the transcripts. I continue to feel,

however, that transcripts should ultimately be distributed to the participants, because the transcripts represent the only manner in which a participant can confirm what was recorded and reported. This kind of confirmation is important, particularly when the researcher is editing and placing his/her interpretation upon the remarks. From an interpretive perspective, however, "verification" of the transcript would seem to be much less important than discovering what the participants reported they experienced and then attempting to clarify the meaning, relevance and logic-in-use they applied to that reported experience.

Through my experience of this study, there is little question but that the insertion of various kinds of data-gathering activities into what would otherwise have been a rather conventional interview situation, enhanced the richness of the data. The interview activities served this purpose in at least two ways: through the direct information collected and through acting as a catalyst to encourage a conversational mode.

Timetable activity. The timetable activity served to give me a general understanding of the broad patterns of family life. For me, the timetable acted like an orienting device; it served to clarify such matters as transportation methods, class schedules, family responsibilities, etc. During the writing stage, I found I frequently referred to the timetables to refresh my memory about certain of these matters.

Although this study was not originally intended to enhance inter-spousal communication and understanding, the timetable activity proved valuable in assisting the spouses in clarifying to each other the breadth of their time commitments. For married students, with the kinds of personal resource limitations described in this study, the process of timetabling might be an effective activity to be used in a joint counselling setting.

As the university term progressed, most couples agreed that their timetables-in-practice would look different from the idealized one we developed at the outset of this study. As part of another research project, it could be interesting and informative to examine in detail the changes in the students' family time allocations.

Financial statement. The process of developing a financial statement for the families also represented good background information for assessing the families' economic situation. The major accomplishment, however, was to find that, within the context of some established level of trust, people would reveal information which, in our culture, is often considered to be very private.

This study's dependence upon personal valuations for such items as household goods represented a weakness in the data, particularly if one wished to make direct comparisons to traditionally gathered statistics. But at a gross level, the financial statements did allow for some interesting comparisons, and more importantly, they revealed the

participants' personally held financial attitudes; and they gave us a window through which to examine how the participants understood or gave meaning to their financial situation.

Of course, what would really have enhanced our understanding of the students' financial setting would have been a more detailed examination of revenues and expenses. In this case, it would also have been of interest to examine changes, if any, in spending habits, which might be attributed to the educational undertaking.

Symbolic drawing of family life space. My general feeling is that the idea behind using the family life space drawing activity, as a way of clarifying family relationships to a stranger, has some merit. The approach used in this study was certainly helpful in this regard. The activity was, unfortunately, somewhat confusing for the participants. Its usefulness in differentiating among the participants -- as judged against other activities undertaken as part of the study -- was probably modest.

Clustering activity. In my estimation, by far the most interesting interview activity was the clustering process. Most importantly, in concept, clustering appeared to be the data collection activity most congruent with the general research stance represented in this study. Clustering, for the most part, permitted the student participants, themselves, to establish their viewpoints as the focus of

the inquiry.

In general terms, the completed cluster represented a construct of each individual's unique viewpoint. Categories or themes were clearly represented and could then be further explored through more conventional questioning. Relationships between ideas were clearly established by the lines individuals used to connect the ideas represented in the various cluster elements. Through examination of the location of elements in the cluster and through questioning, some judgment could be made about the relationship between particular issues and the central idea of the cluster.

In drawing the clusters, particular interests of the individuals emerged and were enhanced by the addition of related cluster elements. Through additional questioning, some assessment of the logic-in-use could be revealed. Finally, the clustering activity did not prevent contradictory ideas from emerging. In fact, the activity may have served very well to expose dialectical processes working within the minds of the individuals.

In short, the clustering activity may provide a very effective approach to structuring an in-depth interview process. The key factor in this process was that the interview structure was provided primarily by the interviewee, not the interviewer. Hence, this process had the potential to move the inquiry process closer to the experienced-world of the interviewee.

The full potential of the clustering activity was by no

means explored in this study, and therefore, it is difficult to make further assessments on its potential as a research tool. For example, it would be interesting to attempt to use clustering as the primary method of structuring iterative interviews over a sustained period of time. Possibly, the central idea for each subsequent cluster could be based upon an idea which emerged in a previous cluster.

In terms of analysis, once a number of clusters were obtained (as they were in this study), the clusters themselves might be open to some form of detailed comparison, analysis, or interpretation.

In another vein, if one accepts the notion that human institutions are essentially shared mental constructs, this interviewing approach might be useful in "getting at" the nature of such constructs within the minds of various organizational participants. If this approach were effective, it also could be used as a useful starting place for bringing about organizational change.

A couple of potential difficulties seem to be inherent in the process. The first relates to what I would call a "parlor game" sense of the process. Because of the nature of the activity, some interviewees might not consider the process to constitute a serious research tool. From the experience of this study, it seemed that this potential difficulty could be overcome by clearly explaining the rationale behind the process and using it within a context of mutual trust.

Another potential difficulty, if the clustering process were to be used iteratively, is that a developing lack of novelty could lead to interviewee "fatigue" and, hence, disinterest in seriously working at the activity. Or, worse yet, familiarity could lead to overt manipulation by the interviewee (although manipulation, in itself, might be of interest to the researcher).

Participant journals. Most of my significant comments on the process of data collection, using the journals, were included in Chapter 3. At this point, I wish simply to reinforce the fact that the journals represented a very valuable source of ongoing data, most of which would not have been available through the interview process alone. In a number of ways, the journals also often were more introspective than were the interviews.

My primary concern at the outset of the study was that the participants might not sustain the journal-keeping process. My assessment is that, for the most part, the process was sustained as well as, or better than I had anticipated. I feel that there were at least two reasons for this. The first was probably related to the mature nature of these participants -- having made a commitment to the study, they were prepared to carry it through. Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 3, the participants, themselves, derived personal benefit from the process of keeping the journal.

It was also clear, however, that I could not depend on

journals as a source of data during those periods when participants were under severe time constraints or high stress. My only regret with regard to the journals was that I did not have the resources to be able also to include this material in my computer files. As a result, in reporting, this material had a less central place than might otherwise have been the case.

Researcher as research instrument. From an alternative research perspective, the dependence upon a single primary researcher may be viewed as representing one of the strengths of a research approach. As I stated in Chapter 3, the human scale aspect of the study permitted one researcher to be totally immersed in the data collection process -- to become the primary research instrument. I feel this approach presents very tangible strengths.

It also seems to demand that the researcher include in the report, something more than a superficial statement about who s/he is within the context of the research situation. For this study, I am not at all certain that the particular content or style I chose was the most effective way to approach this issue. I do know it was my very best shot.

One recommendation regarding this researcher-as-instrument approach which I feel merits consideration, particularly within the context of dissertation research, is that during the research process, it might be helpful if the

researcher were part of a formally-established and ongoing support group of research peers -- colleagues moving through parallel research experiences. The role of this support group would be different from that of the supervising committee -- which has an evaluative role -- in that the support group would operate to allow informal sharing of concurrent research experiences, ideas and concerns.

Almost by definition, the approach of researcher-as-instrument and/or researcher-in-the-world must be a highly personal process and, to a great degree, it involves an effort temporarily to set aside the conventional boundaries which one normally maintains between "self" and the phenomenal world which is under examination. This research act places "self" at some risk and hence, my feeling is that a support group of congenial colleagues could assist in maintaining the lifeline to "self," while one attempts to plunge into the life-world of others.

I would even go so far as to suggest that a support-group approach might be appropriate for most forms of interpretive research, regardless of the experience level of the researcher. But I hasten to add that I do not envision the role of this group as acting to "validate" the researcher's conclusions in the conventional sense. Rather, in this "stuttering" and "scruffy" research undertaking, the role would be one of self-conservation, to assist the researcher in maintaining touch with her/himself.

Returning to the research stance outlined in Chapter 1,

the study was focused on illuminating the viewpoint or interests of a particular sector of organizational participants. My assessment is that in human science research, particularly as it relates to organizations, we cannot -- nor should we try -- to avoid the political dimension of social reality. In this sense, this and many other studies in social science, have an advocacy role to play -- viewpoints need to be expressed in order to be understood. Since they express a viewpoint, such studies may not appear to be totally objective, in the conventional use of the word.

Data analysis. For me (maybe for other researchers also -- I have little way of knowing), the data analysis process involved me in three relatively concurrent activities: reading, inspiration and perspiration. The reading took place throughout the sixteen months I spent on the study -- usually at bed time and on weekends -- and it was generally related to "sniffing out" sources which might deal with alternative ways of approaching research into social situations.

I hesitate to reveal this, but the inspiration came most often while I was driving my car or standing in the shower. More times than I like to think about, I found myself at my desk, dripping wet, writing myself a note, so as not to forget an idea or phrase which, between the shampoo and the rinse, had suddenly become important to include or reflect upon further.

The perspiration, of course, also covered the entire period of the study. Before this undertaking, I had no real understanding of what it would be like to spend six to seven months of "trench work" -- five days a week, six hours a day -- collating, editing and writing. Now, I understand.

There were two basic processes of data analysis. The first, and most fully explored, was the identification and synthesis of various thematic elements. This thematic development was assisted through the iterative interview process and, ultimately, by compiling interview and journal excerpts using coding and a micro computer. The analytical task, in the end, however, was very much a matter of reviewing and editing the material until it took a form which seemed to communicate a tone or meaning.

Interestingly, I found I was often surprised by the nature of the final form of the material. From my ongoing contact with the data, I would often set out gathering the material for a particular thematic element, assuming -- from my own recollections of the interviews -- that the material would lead in a particular direction; only to discover that in the end, the material was making an unexpected statement.

Through the assembling, editing and organizing process, I eventually learned to reserve judgment, to attempt not to impose my preconceptions on the data -- to try to allow the narrative to speak for itself. I suspect, unfortunately, that to many readers, much of the material presented in Chapters 2, 4 and 5 will appear like data in a fairly "raw"

form. To my mind, nothing could be further from the truth, even in the case of long excerpts. But I will have more to say on this matter in the following section.

For this study, the shortcoming of using a thematic analysis, it seems to me, was that themes naturally led me to patterns and regularities, and the thematic process tended to ignore the unusual, incidental or contradictory. This was where the second process of analysis -- that of language analysis, using figures of speech -- became very useful in providing some balance.

The rationale for this latter approach was outlined in Chapter 3. Let me simply add that for an interpretive study such as the subject of this dissertation, this approach to data analysis seemed to offer significant potential. For example, applied in other research situations, in all likelihood, it could be combined closely and very effectively with the clustering process of data collection.

Once again, however, in the exploratory format of this study, I do not feel that I exploited the language analysis process to its fullest potential. For example, it would probably have been more effective to have had more than one person search the interview and journal materials to uncover the various images and figures of speech used by the participants. Many times the figures of speech we use and share are transparent and, therefore, may require the concerted effort of more than one mind to uncover them. Further, in practice, deciding whether words and phrases are

being used in a representational manner often is very much a matter of individual judgment.

On the matter of the participants' actual use of imagery, one of the things I noticed during the interviews was that it was relatively unproductive to ask the interviewees directly to describe images they would relate to their experience. It was almost always the case that the direct request seemed immediately to cause the images to disappear. If this experience can be generalized, the search for images, it seems, almost demands that it be approached obliquely. Fortunately, the natural flow of the regular conversation of most of the participants in this study was replete with an unconscious use of imagery.

Reporting. As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, it is in reporting that I feel the process of this study reveals its weakest link. This written document is flawed, but as such, it may be worthy of some examination. For me, the dissertation is only a partial realization of my own half-formed vision of what human research might be. As an artifact of human experience, it fails to convey even my full sense of the students' setting. In the end, the dissertation is but a husk of the essence of the reality experienced by the various participants. On the other hand, given the multitude of constraints operating within the research situation, the document may be the best that I could accomplish. It represents a step toward an alternative way of seeing, but it carries a good deal of

baggage which belongs to another way of seeing.

1. In particular, I had hoped that the style used in Chapters 4 and 5 would reveal more of the variances, individual differences and contradictions I found as I spoke with the participants. These unique elements -- the knotty spots -- were, I think, in the wood grain of the narrative, but to me, they seem to have melded into the swirls of the grain, more than I had intended. When I read the material, I no longer get stopped short by the contrasts -- not in the manner I often felt in the interviews. This may only be a function of the fact that I have been engaged with the material for a long time. But if true, this, in itself, represents a problem of reporting.

I feel there must be a more effective way of presenting the original voice of the subjects, a way that maintains the multiple views, the context, the differences, the patterns, the flow -- I don't think I found it this time. Unfortunately, at points, the excerpts seemed like so many thematic pearls, simply hung on the string of a neat (or not so neat) segues. After a time, one pearl begins to look like another and interest wanes.

Possibly, a study of this nature would have been enhanced by photographs (if only at the data collection phase). Understanding might have been deepened if some of this report had been written in the form of a poem or a fictional story, based upon some of the students' experiences. Or, for example, the whole dissertation might

have been constructed in the form of a dialogue between two "composite" spouses.

In any event, at the very least, I hope that the reporting of this study gives some sense of a student-centered viewpoint of the experience of the first term at university and some assessment of a non-continuous student problematique as defined by these participants. In a broader research context, however, it seems to me that there is a broad range of communication devices available to the interpretive researcher, and they ought to be utilized. For me, next time! This problem raises the thought, however, that maybe research methodology courses in the area of human research ought to focus some attention on creative or innovative ways of communicating findings.

2. Turning to a related matter, as I prepared the profiles and other elements of the description, I was not unmindful that the participants would be reading what was reported. I was aware that each of us would have a somewhat different understanding of the data, of what was said and what was intended. On occasion, during the preparation of the report, this realization caused me some difficulty in terms of how candid I ought to be.

To my mind, this discomfort was not over the issue of my possibly ignoring or colouring facts; for in an interpretive study, the notion of fact becomes very slippery. But rather, it was an issue of unequal power. As the researcher and documentarian, in many ways I structured

the data collection, and now I held virtual control over what was to be reported -- the form and the context in which the information would ultimately appear. As I think back to the outset of the study, it is unlikely that any of us was in a position to fully appreciate the personal consequences of being exposed in written form.

Even the act of merely transcribing the interviews began to create the potential for differences of interpretation. In transcription, the words, ideas and experiences of the participants -- elicited in a private, face-to-face context -- were being rendered irrevocably public. The feelings, memories and experiences expressed in private -- through the give-and-take of conversation -- were suddenly detached, removed from the context of the original time and place. In the end, excerpts have been re-framed by me and set against the narratives of others. They have possibly been given new meanings in the process.

To the participants, my choices may appear incomplete, inaccurate or unfair; I hope not. My feeling is that what is presented in this document becomes representational; in reporting, the experiences and situations of the participants tend to become archetypes. My hope is that as this transformation took place, the decisions I made were made with some sensitivity about how the participants would feel. This is only one example of the ethical concerns I alluded to earlier.

I was often faced with significant editorial choices.

Should I add my own observations, or remain silent? Would additional adjectives or personal observations make the data richer -- deepen reader understanding -- or merely add reader interest at the expense of moving one further away from the original phenomena? To what degree should the verbatim comments of the participants be edited? Would editing increase clarity, or violate the essential nature of the original expression?

The passage of time itself may represent a problem in terms of how what is reported here was understood by the participants. This document represents the crystallization of a moment in time. For them the passage of time will, no doubt, have softened the remembrance of some of the hard edges of their reported experiences. In the period since the data collection, other experiences have intervened, possibly reinforcing original understandings, but just as possibly, contradicting them.

Inevitably, then, through the reporting process, the actuality of the participants' <u>own</u> particular student experience has become somewhat distorted by my decisions. My paramount concern in this regard was that the participants might feel betrayed (although early general remarks do not indicate this to have been the case). I will be less distressed, but still disquieted, if they simply chafe over the fact that the picture is incomplete, or they feel that the picture I have presented misses a particular concern which they might otherwise have chosen to emphasize.

On the other hand, from a broader perspective, the very reporting process may be viewed as an element of the ongoing process of social reality construction (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Through the presentation of the data -- the patterns revealed, the ordering of description, the quotations used, the editing, the manner in which events have been juxtaposed -- begins a process of "typifying" these real people and their lived experiences. Moreover, through the sharing of this material -- by formal documentation -- the typification of their experiences becomes a small part of the broader fabric of shared social meaning and understanding.

In any event, as I engaged in the process of reporting and description, consideration of the thoughts and feelings of my fellow participants was constantly before me. Otherg and description, consideration of the thoughts and feelings of my fellow participants was constantly before me. Other readers, as they examine the narrative should keep in mind the above concerns and constraints, along with the fact that the participants did review major portions of the descriptions included in this document prior to finalization.

3. Returning to an issue which I briefly mentioned earlier, as a report of a conventional piece of research in the field of Educational Administration, this dissertation is far too lengthy. For me, the length of the document gave a whole new meaning to the notion of "thick description." But from a practical (functional) point of view, who is

going to read it? Does it matter if anyone does? Is it enough that all who participated were involved in the inquiry process or is it the product, the report, which is the measure of research achievement?

Regardless of the responses to these questions, I suppose my feeling is that a report of this length can have a broader appeal, and that it will engage those who are inclined toward viewing complex social phenomena holistically and who are interested in having the totality of the study speak to them.

In a narrower context, as a special kind of research report -- a dissertation -- representing the end of a traditional student career and the beginning of what I trust will be a lifelong scholarly orientation, the document doesn't seem long or thick enough. Sometimes it barely seems to have touched the surface, like a flat stone skipping across the face of a deep mysterious lake.

At other times the report seems like an excellent launching pad for further explorations, a base for further study; to mix my metaphors, a primordial soup of ideas and thoughts about adult students, institutional education and how one might better understand the particular social and institutional world the participants represented.

In an interpretive approach to the study of human phenomena -- leaving aside conventional scientific notions -- would there be a difference between what one might call basic research and applied research? If so, how might each

be characterized? Could the wide-ranging, long-winded, exploratory style of this study represent a form of basic research in the interpretive mode, or am I just verbose?

To some degree, I feel the length of the dissertation also resulted from my experience of conducting this research within an institutional context oriented toward relatively conventional research approaches. I was continuously feeling very defensive about what I was trying to accomplish through this dissertation. In particular, the writing process involved me in the sustained feeling of peering into the dark shadows of philosophical and methodological uncertainty, but continually looking over my shoulder, mindful of the hovering presence of a skeptical community -- a community which, in the end, holds the magic fairy wand which turns common folk into Ph.D.s.

It is one experience to work with and write about matters along the well beaten paths of a commonly held research paradigm; it is quite another to strike out, machete in hand, into the tangle of new territory. But then maybe, to earn a Ph.D. means to learn to be somewhat alone.

## The Participants

This section begins with very brief comments about characteristics of the student participants which seemed to parallel some of the features of Wilson's Outsider Type (Appendix L). As I stated earlier, my synthesis of Wilson's construct was not a guiding notion for the conduct of this study, rather it was something I stumbled across during the

process of the study. I include these comments, primarily because I feel further investigation of the idea could deepen our understanding of the nature of the non-continuous university student as a type, and the inclusion might point toward the potential for further research.

After these remarks, the bulk of the remainder of the chapter will then focus on my comments with regard to some of the other aspects of the student situation which I found to be of particular interest, including student finances, the spousal contract, an attitude change experienced by the students, as well as the curious pleasure-pain experience of many of the students. I will conclude the study with remarks about implications for the university and suggestions for further study.

Outsider. The students described in this study seemed to parallel a number of the qualities of Wilson's outsider. For example, with regard to the manner in which these students took up their university education, they obviously rejected the conventional path. Through furthering their education, they appeared to have made very conscious choices to be active participants in the social world, and undertaking university education seemed to be the path of choice, regardless of conventional social norms and practices. Some of the students were even guided in their educational choice by a personal vision. Several of the students showed evidence of having thought deeply about their place in their social world and were seeking to give

their life a deeper meaning, partly through the university experience.

None of these students were neutral in their general approach to living and most became very critical of many of the structural aspects of their university setting. Within the context of the university, the student participants reacted very negatively to what Wilson would call the "chattering, sniveling" student mass. The system-like demands of the university setting were often viewed by these students as trivial; and much of what went on around them was perceived as rush and chaos. They felt as if they were on the margin; they were older, had attained some level of wisdom, and desired that these personal attributes be recognized, but also wanted to blend in -- find their place in the new setting.

In spite of their negative experiences, most of the students probably agreed with the principles expressed in the credo of the outsider (Appendix L, p.586). As a consequence, even though they acknowledged the difficulties of the educational path they had chosen, they proceeded because they had a need to test themselves in order to feel alive.

Even these few characteristics, I feel, indicate a strong flavour of the experience of the outsider, as Wilson presented it. No doubt, for a number of the students, being an outsider may have been a transitory experience, related primarily to their entering a new social situation. On the

other hand, there was some evidence to suggest that the outsider characteristics were more fundamental to their nature, ran more deeply than to be merely a superficial response to a recent change in their social setting. The very pattern of their lives -- their critical stance and their choices in the face of adversity -- suggests something beyond the ordinary.

While I feel that even superficial comparisons such as these offer an intriguing potential for better understanding of the non-continuous university student, because it was not the original intent of this study to "test" constructs such as the outsider type, I did not actively pursue my own comparisons much beyond this level. Having said this, it is likely, however, that some of the remarks which follow could be framed within a more elaborate understanding of the outsider type Wilson was attempting to set out. But aside from this, further examination of the non-continuous student-as-outsider might best be undertaken through a study specifically designed for that purpose.

Student setting. In general, I feel the narrative of this study supports the notion that we may be served well by attempting to understand the married non-continuous student from a contextual or ecological point of view, particularly as it relates to the interaction between family and university. It seems to me, to separate one setting from the other is not to understand the experience of these students. From the students' perspectives, they were

centered in a context of personal meaning and relevance which included and mixed university and family. It is with this notion of a continuous setting that we may better begin to understand the form of their attitudes, interests and priorities -- their being-in-the-world.

If the participants in this study were in any way representative of their student colleagues, university policy makers, counsellors and instructors might be advised also to consider conceptualizing the non-continuous student family/university setting as a single continuous setting. This conceptualization could assist in focusing on the student problematique -- the university experience would be seen less as two distinct structures between which the student moves, and more as a continuous field of experience.

In suggesting that consideration be given to a re-orientation such as this, I am not arguing so much on the basis that this study indicates significant levels of physical contact between the family and the university (although there was evidence of this), but rather that it seems clear that at a conscious level -- in the minds of the students -- the two settings lost many of their independent characteristics. In fact -- from the students' points of view, in terms of attempting to cope -- maintaining a distinct separation of the settings may have represented an arbitrary and somewhat dysfunctional social construct. Such a separation might preserve the "institutional rule" at the cost of the individual student.

A major implication of such a reorientation is that university policy makers would need to become much more concerned about the impact of institutional activities on the totality of the students' setting. And as such, matters such as the effects of institutional demands and constraints upon the students would no longer remain a problem for the students to work through alone.

Student finances. In attempting to understand the financial situation of any of the participant families, the notion of a personally-defined (or family-defined) feeling of "relative poverty" seemed very informative. Obviously, even among this small group of students and spouses, there was a wide variation in their actual financial circumstances; but the descriptions included in this study suggest that it may be more important to realize that each participant's personal understanding of her or his financial circumstance was based upon a unique rationality. This rationality was built upon previous experiences, current attitudes and demands, future plans and expectations, and ongoing commitments -- not to mention the delicate and always-novel inter-spousal dynamic.

In general, it seemed that financial security and a sense of stability and family financial control were obviously very important aspects of the economic setting of most of the participants. In the normal course, most of the families were operating within a financial time horizon which extended well beyond the current university term.

Generally, the family was concerned with more than simply paying the current year's out-of-pocket university expenses. On the whole, there was strong evidence from most of the families of a very tenacious effort to continue an existing economic lifestyle.

The participants' comments and actions evidenced a general reluctance to sacrifice their material possessions or established levels of income, solely to fund the process of one spouse gaining a university degree. They were not about to cash in their "hard-earned chips" on one project. From this study, it was easier to understand why erosion of the family's material lifestyle might be "downwardly sticky" if one considered that family lifestyle changes also generally affected family members other than the student.

Even the participants who evidenced somewhat higher levels of personal worth seemed to display little inclination to use their accumulated personal worth to "buy the education." For example, it seems unlikely that most of the participants would seriously have considered a suggestion to liquidate fixed assets, such as selling and accepting a lower standard of housing, liquidating pension funds, savings or investments. Most were also very reluctant to live within dramatically lower income levels -- either by not working or by hiring domestic assistance.

In particular, the financial sensibility of the female students seemed to represent a very complex situation. It often involved strongly-expressed attitudes toward economic

independence within the family setting, and demanded an acknowledgement of this independence from external agencies such as the Student Finance Board. It seems to me that the aspects of student finances, in particular from the female perspective, demands much closer study.

But returning to the family financial situation in general, it was interesting that when cash resources were very tight, as in the case of the Sharpes and the Thompson/Potters, the participants simply crossed their fingers and stretched themselves to the limit. They operated on good faith about the economic future, but with a good deal of personal uncertainty and accompanying personal and family stress.

For the most part, two financial choices seemed to be more generally acceptable than dipping into savings, investments or selling assets.

1. The more common choice was that the marital team seemed to be prepared to sacrifice their "present." What I mean by this is that without evidence of too much deep reflection on the matter, they seemed to be willing to spread themselves (or their time resources) very thinly between housekeeping and university, or housekeeping and paid employment. Sometimes, all three.

Unfortunately, very quickly, this tactic ran into conflict with the commonly espoused value of "family first." Many of the participants faced deterioration in their family situations -- hence, once again, overwhelming feelings of

guilt and related tension developed.

2. The second preferred choice -- if circumstances permitted -- was to borrow against their uncertain economic future, by way of the student loan program. Of course, some of the students never considered this route; others did not know how to use it effectively; others were apparently "shut out" of the borrowing situation by Student Finance Board regulations. These regulations, one assumes, were designed primarily to meet the needs of the more conventional university student. In any event, because of the fact that requesting a loan for educational purposes appeared to involve some form of "means test," some of the participants faced and succumbed to a distasteful choice of misrepresenting their family financial circumstances in order to meet Student Finance Board criteria.

Guilt. For me, the most powerful and pervasive element of the reports of the student participants in this study was the overwhelming sense of guilt they related to almost every aspect of their new student life. Some experienced feelings of guilt about the fact that they had given up solid careers for an uncertain future. There was guilt about not contributing to family income, and more guilt about spending money. There was guilt related to the fact that educational demands prevented children, spouse and extended family from enjoying the usual degree of attention, but, then, there was also guilt about not studying enough. Standards of

housekeeping and laundry deteriorated, regardless of which spouse was attending university. For most of those to whom it was important, there was evidence of guilt related to being unable to maintain important religious or church commitments. The list of matters about which the participants felt a sustained level of guilt could go on and on.

I think, however, it would be a mistake to focus on the guilt feelings as a key to understanding the difficulties of these mature-age, married students. It seems to make more sense to understand the guilt feelings as symptomatic of a deeper problem -- their frustration experienced in having limited access to, or having poorly marshalled, the personal resources that were necessary to deal with their relatively rigid situational constraints and demands.

Of course, this study revealed evidence that a number of the situational constraints were self-inflicted and related to the participants' efforts to sustain aspects of life style which they had grown to value. For example, many of the choices about family organization were taken within the context of strong personally-held norms about what it means to be a good parent and spouse. As a consequence, among other things, these choices affected family scheduling and other decisions such as whether or not to "buy" domestic assistance.

But family choices such as these were also influenced by strongly-held attitudes about access to or allocation of

the family's financial resources. In this regard, it seems clear to me that the educational undertaking called for some difficult economic choices on the part of some of the families, but there was little evidence -- during the first university term -- of these factors being dealt with in an overt and systematic fashion.

It may be overstating the case somewhat, but, in terms of family choices, the most frequent strategy seemed to be to assume that the educational undertaking could simply be "absorbed" into the pre-existing family operation and financial structure. "Fine tuning" was to take place as matters progressed.

On the other hand, having suggested that the participants were to some degree victims of their own choices, it would be unfair to infer that these students' difficulties rested simply in the fact that these participants, themselves, had chosen to attempt to juggle too many balls at one time, or to spread their personal resources too thinly. In fact, they also appeared to face significant systemic barriers, many of which were very rigid and/or, in the eyes of the participants, poorly justified.

To me, a punitive social attitude seemed implicit in that the vast majority of the structural elements and supporting systems relating to the university, such as program requirements, Student Union services, Student Finance Board regulations etc., seemed to be indifferent to the fact that these students were in a fundamentally

different learning situation from those ascribed to conventional university students. For instance, most of the participants' references to their experiences with counselling -- program or otherwise -- indicated that the process had been something less than adequate in meeting their particular needs.

In light of the relatively large numbers of students who might be in similar circumstances to those of the participants in this study, it seems strange that virtually none of the services they reported encountering within the university setting appeared to acknowledge their special circumstances. For me, the implication was that students such as these would have to find their own fit. In a sense, because these students had chosen not to take the conventional well-beaten path to a university education, the message seemed to be that they ought to expect some level of personal discomfort related to the educational "privilege" they had now decided to pursue.

My sense was that, to some degree, in their renewed effort to attain a postponed educational objective, these students seemed to have been, at least tacitly, assigned to the place of educational truants. This attitude seemed evident through the reported institutional indifference of "the system" and through many of the comments the participants made about themselves, as well as the reported attitudes of extended family members and friends: If the students had done things properly -- gotten their university

education when most other people chose to -- they wouldn't have had to experience all the problems they now described.

While, as I acknowledged earlier, it is probably inappropriate to generalize the experiences of these few participants as necessarily being typical, one should keep in mind that these students were drawn from a very large segment of the University of Alberta undergraduate student population. For me, it seems possible that many of this over-25 student group might face learning situations which are closer to the experiences described in this study than they would be to those of a conventional undergraduate student -- whatever the reality of that other student experience might prove to be. Certainly, my own contact with the MUGS group suggested that a good deal of frustration and anger was prevalent among the mature-age student group.

In this regard, I return once again to a sampling issue, the manner in which the purposive sample for this study was obtained. In fact, the participants of this study might represent mature-age students who were generally in a better position to cope than many of their other mature-age student colleagues. For instance, after conducting this study, I am very curious about what the first term of a full-time, single-parent university student must be like.

In any event, it seems that in order to undertake a university education, the student participants were placed in a position, vis-a-vis the university, in which they had

little alternative but to submit to a "fracturing" of the existing structure of their personal and family setting -- family "disruption," as referred to by the Report of the University of Alberta Senate Task Force (1983) and mentioned in Chapter 1.

In effect, for many of these students, as their first term progressed, attending university meant significant personal compromise -- operating against some of the very strongly held personal principles they espoused (Chapter 2). For example, in attempting to deal with the contextual rigidities of their educational undertaking, some found that they had to make choices about disengaging from their religious and community activities. Most family members functioned in revised roles or took on more extensive responsibilities. Stress related to finances was evident in almost all the families, regardless of the family's financial circumstances. Profound and sustained feelings of guilt, it seems, were the symptoms of an almost overwhelming student problematique.

In the end, institutional support structures reputedly established to deal with student concerns, seemed to be less than adequate to deal with the non-continuous student peculiarities revealed in this study. The participants found that they had to learn to depend on their own survival skills, their own personal resources and their family units. Their problem, faced with rigidities in terms of personal resources, was how to cope with the demands inherent in the

combined family-university setting.

Social contract. For me, an aspect of the student family setting which emerged with the most clarity was the apparent "contractual" nature of the "educational arrangement" between many of the spouses. Depending upon the particular family setting, the terms and conditions of the contract seemed generally to include some or all of the elements outlined in the two lists below.

The first list -- those contractual elements relating to the various undertakings of the spouses -- is arranged in what I understand to evidence an ascending degree of spousal commitment:

1. So long as it was not unduly disruptive to the family routine, the spouse agreed not to stand in the way of or object to the student's educational undertaking;

2. The spouse and/or the immediate family members -- explicitly or implicitly -- accepted that some personal sacrifices were necessary in order to accommodate the student's educational undertaking;

3. Verbally or through action, the spouse agreed to encourage or be positive about the student's educational undertaking;

4. The spouse agreed to assume increasing levels of family responsibilities, most of which had not been part of the family's operating procedures.

In return for these commitments -- again, within the constraints of each unique set of family circumstances -- the student might have agreed to some or all of the following undertakings. (Since no particular hierarchy was evident to me, these commitments are listed in no particular order.)

1. To disrupt the family routines as little as possible;
2. To complete the educational undertaking as quickly as possible;
3. To study assiduously;
4. To use time efficiently;
5. Not to undertake "frivolous" courses;
6. Not to engage unduly in the social activities related to the university setting;
7. Not to appear to enjoy the university experience too much;
8. To try not to change radically as a person;
9. To the degree that circumstances would permit, try to spend time with the spouse;
10. In future, to be prepared to reciprocate the spousal support in some form.

To the extent that the above contractual terms and conditions fairly represent an aspect of the spousal relationship of the married students in this study, one can clearly see that there might be many implications for the educational experience in the university setting. In short, the contractual arrangements could affect significant aspects of the very nature of the student's learning experience.

A university educator faced with a student operating under such contractual conditions, would not only be dealing with the sensibilities of the student in the classroom, but might also be dealing with the sensibilities of an unseen spouse. As a very superficial example of what I mean, in order to meet the terms and conditions of such contractual

arrangements, a student might be inclined to alter the pace of his/her program of study. To a professor or counsellor unaware of the possible existence of a spousal contractual understanding, the behavior of a student in the university setting might appear to be inexplicably at odds with what the educator feels is that student's individual capability.

Aside from any specific contractual element, at the very least, thinking in terms of the potential existence of a spousal social contract makes it clear to me that the university educator, in dealing with a student who might be operating under any or all of these contractual conditions, would be dealing with a student who is likely operating under contextual (ecological) influences significantly different from those of a recent high school graduate.

Attitude change. For me, the most dramatic process of the students' first-term experience, yet the most difficult to capture through the particular reporting format chosen for this study, was the apparent transformation in attitude toward university education which many of the students seemed to experience over the first couple of months of their university term. As I viewed it, there was a move away from a degree of idealism about their impending educational experience to a mood of cynicism, disappointment or frustration about having to deal with the intransigent structural aspects of the university setting -- "the system."

In order to make the point, let me begin by

intentionally mixing the institutional metaphors which seemed to be revealed by the student descriptions included in this study. University-as-system, university-as-factory and university-as-school seemed to represent aspects of what appeared to be a general mechanistic metaphor which framed their university setting.

It seemed clear to me that most of the students in this study -- during their first term at university -- found themselves locked in a power struggle with this mechanistic system. The spoils of the struggle would establish whose role it would be to determine the nature of these students' educational experience.

From the point of view of this study, the negative feelings produced by this power struggle made two issues immediately evident. One was to make visible and open to examination, what to me appeared to be the relatively transparent and invisible fabric of social control which operated within these students' university setting. The second was an awareness of the fact that the social control aspects of the university situation, as presently constituted, seemed to be a significant contributor to the sense of rigidity reported by at least a number of this select group of students.

As I have already suggested, the student reports seemed to indicate that the institution of the university, in its monolithic nature, was apparently indifferent to many of their individual desires and needs. In this regard, keeping

in mind the participants' continual references to university as school, I interpreted that "the system" was perceived to be operating as an extension of some aspects of the public school system.

In seeking to come to grips with what might be meant by this, I discovered Jules Henry's (1963) attempt to understand and convey the nature of the institutionalized school experience in North America. He suggested that, as far as children are concerned, schools are great cultural conserving forces. He argued that "the function of education has never been to free the mind and spirit of man, but to bind them." He went on:

> Throughout most of its historic course *Homo sapiens* has wanted from his [students] acquiescence, not originality. . . . Contemporary American educators think they want creative [students], yet it is an open question as to what they expect these [students] to create. And certainly the classrooms -- from kindergarten to graduate school -- in which they expect it to happen are not crucibles of creative activity and thought. . . . The function of education is to prevent the truly creative intellect from getting out of hand (1963:286).

Judging from the feelings and experiences described by the participants of this study, if Henry was correct in his assessment, for most of the participants in this study, the University of Alberta-as-school was perceived to have operated very much in this limiting role. Who knows, this control function may even be a necessary mode, when dealing with younger students. But such a control function might be doing a disservice to the growing segment of the student

population, part of which was represented by the participants of this study.

My assessment is that at one time or another during their first term, most of the students involved in this study met the social control system head on. Most "survived these confrontations." But in the context of institutional education, Henry also had something to say about institutional survival and its potential costs:

> An intellectually creative [student] may fail, for example, in social studies, simply because he cannot understand the stupidities he is taught to believe as "fact." He may even end up agreeing with his teachers that he is "stupid" in social studies. Learning social studies is, to no small extent, whether in elementary school or the university, learning to be stupid. Most of us learn to accomplish this task before we enter high school. . . . The [student] with a socially creative imagination . . . will simply be unable to fathom the absurdities that seem transparent *truth* to the teacher. . . . But the [students] who do tend to *become* idiots, and learning to be an idiot is part of growing up! Or, as Camus put it, learning to be *absurd* (1963:237).

This is strong stuff! But maybe not too strong for the case at hand. Certainly, within this study, the participants' journals and the interviews were replete with evidence of the students railing at systemic absurdity and ending up feeling uncertain, inadequate and even stupid.

For example, they found themselves involved in classroom situations and testing and grading procedures which seemed totally at odds with what their own common sense and world experiences suggested ought to be the case. They became disturbed by what I might call an Alice-in-Wonder-Land experience, such as multiple choice exams which

I would judge might represent a "Trivial Pursuit" (Barrett 1985:14) version of evaluating education. In some cases, their self-confidence was totally shattered. They began to look for ways to beat the system.

Yet, the evidence seemed to clearly indicate that these people were not malcontents or inherently lazy. The narrative certainly indicated that they were not trying to avoid hard work or shirk personal responsibility.

If there is any truth in my assessment, the change experienced by some of these students represented an educational tragedy. This study appears to reveal evidence of the students yielding to the system, or engaging in instrumental behaviour which "paid off," but at the cost of stifling their creative intellect. To me, all the participants appeared to have the potential to succeed intellectually and academically, but by the end of their first term, most found themselves yielding to a sense of "the system," playing the game, engaging in or considering underhanded tactics which might allow them to attain the grades which would lead to survival and a credential.

Does the fact that these mature students -- initially filled with good intent about their education -- found themselves tempted to yield to manipulating institutional elements to their own advantage indicate a "weakness" or "imperfection" in their characters, or is it an indication of people chafing under ill-conceived institutional constraint? At this point, I leave this as an open

question.

Participants compared. My earlier comments might lead one to believe that all of the students had essentially negative experiences. This was simply not the case. As with the more particular aspects reported in this study, overall student experiences varied greatly among the participants. Hence, while keeping with the contextual or ecological orientation of this study, in summarizing, there seemed to be some value in attempting to arrive at a somewhat more abstract understanding of the contextual backdrop behind the range of student experiences represented by the participants in this study.

I very much hesitate to make this further reduction of the student experience, primarily because of the concerns I expressed earlier in the chapter about the already too-superficial nature of the narrative included in this report. I acknowledge the roots of what I am about to do as being part of my earlier way of seeing. However, I offer the following as another experiment in the effort to communicate the range of the first-term experience of the participants.

By setting the situations of two of the students, one against the other, I hope to form a dichotomous relationship in the mind of the reader. An abstracted understanding may emerge from placing the reported circumstances of two students directly against one another.

As mentioned earlier, my assessment was that the student who described the most positive overall experience

seemed to be Mary. I drew this conclusion, notwithstanding the fact that she experienced many similar problems of coping as those reported by other participants. But her remark, with which I closed Chapter 5, led me to suspect that she might very well have described the experience of her new university/family setting as a scholastic opportunity, or at least as an opportunity for personal growth and expansion.

In contrast, it seemed clear that Edna's experience was probably the most negative of all the participants. In contradiction to Mary's experience, her expanded personal setting seemed more like the equivalent of an astronomer's black hole. This whirling vortex of disappointment, unrelenting demands, responsibilities and feelings of guilt seemed to swallow her idealism, personal energy, thoughts and feelings. Every stray bit of her personal situation seemed to be inexorably dragged toward the gaping maw.

It was only with great personal effort and the support of her husband that she undertook the decision to withdraw from its grip -- a decision she was reluctant to share with anyone, including extended family members.

One of the very interesting aspects of attempting to place the experiences of Mary and Edna against one another was that, on the face of it, their pre-existing family settings appeared to be the most similar among all the participants. While they were obviously very different people, in my mind, they were both bright and articulate

individuals. They both were matriculated students, and neither had difficulty passing the University writing competency exam.

They both had the same number of children, of relatively similar ages; both spouses worked out of town at similar jobs; both families had relatively similar histories with regard to mobility. And both families appeared to occupy a relatively similar socio-economic position. Neither family indicated that they had a well established support system of friends or relatives in Edmonton, although Edmonton was the home of many of Edna's extended family.

There were also differences. In the case of the Bakers, although during the term of the study he was not concurrently involved in upgrading his own education, Joe had undertaken some university courses, and at the outset of the term he had some plans to continue his education. He strongly disliked his job. Frank, on the other hand, had no specific educational plans for the future and was well satisfied with the kind of work he was doing, although the specific job and location were not necessarily to his liking.

Both spouses were very supportive of their wives' educational undertaking. Joe made an overt commitment to be responsible for all domestic operations when he was at home. Frank (these data were limited by the reduced level of interviewing in the case of the Sheskeys) took responsibility for significant aspects of the domestic

situation, such as grocery shopping, and planning and preparing of evening meals during the week, but it was not clear that he undertook the full range of domestic duties and responsibilities in the same way Joe had done.

The Sheskeys seemed to display some regrets at having made the move from Manitoba to Edmonton. They, like Brenda Thompson and Brad Potter, seemed not to have found their place within the community. The Bakers for the most part, seemed to feel comfortable in their new setting. Their close involvement with their church seemed to assist in this integration.

Edna had been a "successful" full-time university student in another university setting and, therefore, had a university experience with which to make comparisons. For Mary, this was her first experience (other than distance delivery courses) and she felt a great sense of freedom as she moved from the domestic setting to the university setting. Edna, it seemed, was less able to block her family responsibilities out of her university setting, even when she was in class. Much of the reason for this seemed to rest on factors such as her particular family's demands and the degree to which she judged the child care arrangements to be satisfactory and, therefore, the extent to which she felt she could responsibly relinquish supervision.

We should also not ignore the fact that Edna's program of study involved essentially no courses in which she was directly interested. Mary, on the other hand, was

delighted with almost every course in her program. Edna, as outlined in Chapter 5, had some very unfortunate experiences in her classes; Mary mentioned no equivalent problems in the institutional setting.

These brief summary remarks are not intended to establish a direct relationship between any of the above contextual aspects of these two individuals and their very different academic outcomes. Rather, keeping in mind the more detailed narrative of the study, the similarities and contrasts between personal settings and personal stories will allow us to frame the experiences of the other students.

In this regard, if I were to make a comparative judgment about the situations experienced by the other participants described in this study, my own feeling would be that the majority described experiences which tended to be more like those of Edna than like those of Mary.

As I have already discussed at some length, an educational undertaking which for a number of the students began as a dream-come-true and a privilege, soon became the experience of a very real battle for personal "survival." To a greater or lesser degree, most survived, but the participants' attitudes about the nature of a university education were permanently changed in the process. The idyllic vision was transformed into an experience of coping with the logistics of family life, but maybe even more significantly, also coping with the more intransigent

aspects of the university setting -- institutional attitudes, relationships, demands and rituals.

Fortunately, Brenda's university experience seemed to offer a sort of middle ground, between the two extremes set out above. Brenda seemed to move from a certain idealism about what she could accomplish, through a period of intimidation related to the impersonal nature and size of the university, to renewed enthusiasm and idealism. Brenda's experience may provide some insight into how this student problem might be ameliorated through institutional action.

If my own assessments are accurate, Brenda entered the university feeling somewhat jaded and alienated by her personal situation. This feeling was enhanced by various institutional factors within the university, not the least of which was the experience of being enrolled in what she viewed as the huge and impersonal Faculty of Arts. But almost by chance, she discovered a place for herself within the university setting. A personal transformation took place when she switched to a small, apparently friendly and warm, interdisciplinary university department.

The department apparently had structured its program of study in such a way that it took full advantage of its interdisciplinary nature and gave Brenda the opportunity to work out her own long-term individual learning program -- a program which met her espoused needs and aspirations, but also apparently conformed to more conventional university

academic standards. (In this process, Brenda apparently received close counselling, and the formal program review and approval seemed to be taken very seriously by the department.) At the point of having her individualized program proposal approved, even though many of the original problems of her setting continued to face her, Brenda was inspired to move forward in her educational project. As mentioned in the Participant Epilogue, this feeling of inspiration continued and has grown.

Through this study experience, it seemed that institutional responsiveness -- played out through a combination of the warmth of personal contact and a program structure which provided her with a level of personal control over an individualized learning opportunity -- played a major role in overcoming other negative aspects of Brenda's setting. For Brenda, these factors made a very significant difference. Members of the university community challenged her rather than compounding her original sense of alienation. The note in the Epilogue indicates that Brenda's student experience would now probably be described by her as being more like that of Mary.

If the contents of Chapters 4 and 5 represent evidence of the university experience for most married adults, and if I am correct in my assessment that most of the students in this study had experiences which were closer to that of Edna, one might well pause to question why the process of increasing one's education must take place at such a high

personal and family cost. Why, to gain an education, did the students have to pay such a price in terms of personal life? What is the underlying pedagogical rationale which justifies the frustration these people described? Can or should the university operate in a fashion which might change an experience like Edna's into an experience like that of Mary?

Pain and pleasure. It was interesting to me, notwithstanding the strongly negative student experiences, that almost all of the student participants retrospectively reported that their first-term university experience was positive at some level. For some time, I struggled to understand and reconcile the apparent contradiction. I was not without the personal recollection of some contrasting feelings as part of my own student experience; but my own recollections were not immediately helpful in arriving at a conclusive personal understanding of this phenomenon. I am left, primarily, with speculations.

In any event, at the risk of slipping into efforts to explain, which I have already suggested is not a primary concern of this study, I will at least raise some speculations about this matter -- acknowledging that I continue to struggle with this conundrum.

1. It is possible that one of the reasons that some students appeared to chafe less than others under some of the controls within the university setting was related to

the fact that their pre-university experience had tended to be highly constrained. If this were the case, the movement into the university setting might still have given the students with this more restricted experience a feeling of personal growth and expansion, without regard for limitations apparently imposed by the university system.

In her clustering activity, Mary seemed to lend some support to this notion:

> Feelings of <u>accomplishment</u>, <u>satisfaction</u>: I've been getting good marks and I guess I feel quite good about it. . . .
>
> I would say they are new feelings. In the past, say, ten years -- basically, what I've done is been a housewife, so there hasn't been a lot of really challenging things to do. You know, if I try a new recipe, well, that's my excitement for the day or something. So, it's new for me to be in a situation where I have to sort of prove myself, prove that I can do it.
>
> That's given me a lot of satisfaction, just knowing that I can do it.

For me, however, the simple cause-effect relationship suggested by this idea feels like an oversimplification and seems essentially unsatisfactory; or as Geertz (1983) might suggest, it is too "orderly, straightforward" or "ill-advised." At the very least, this notion would require further study.

2. Another somewhat more convincing notion, although also a little too straightforward, was my speculation from Chapter 5 that many of the negative student experiences seemed to relate to "external" factors, the constraints of

university rules, demands of the family or other social norms, while the positive feelings generally seemed to relate to more personal processes of individual change, or an altered "inner" state.

As I studied the student descriptions, it seemed as if the meaningful and positive changes they experienced were something apart from the conventional institutional pedagogical demands. In fact, much of their negative experience seemed to flow out of an implicit institutional pedagogical stance -- that somehow university education was given to or done to the students.

Student satisfaction, on the other hand, seemed to flow from the spontaneous opportunities to engage in personally meaningful learning, for example, Brenda's browsing in the library. Now, obviously, the distinction was not always as well defined as I am representing it here, but there appeared to be strong evidence of aspects of this kind of schism -- one learns to play the game, and, as an adjunct, one engages in the joy of becoming educated.

I should make it clear at this point that my notion of the students' positive feelings or feelings of satisfaction does not refer to what I would call a frivolous or self-centered sense of fun. It was something more deeply motivational, something borne of idealism, joy, self-fulfillment and accomplishment. It could almost go without saying that these students did not undertake the university experience in order to have fun.

In any event, during our interviews, the students rarely seemed to link their more positive feelings directly to a specific institutional influences -- a class, a text or a course. For example, in most of our discussions about courses, the students' comments tended to focus on the problems with student colleagues, tests, marks, professors, etc. The university was too big, the classes were too full, other students were viewed as a disinterested faceless mass, time was too short.

If anything, these structural factors tended to get in the way of much of what several of the students came to view as opportunities for learning. Interestingly, as they began to accept the norms of the institution, many of the students came to believe that they were wasting time or procrastinating if they pursued a subject about which they were curious -- rather than working at required assignments or studying previous tests in order to pass the next exam. Very quickly university education came to be a means-ends process: completing assignments and tests as required, was the path to good marks.

On the other hand, the students' motivation to explore intellectually appeared to be enhanced or developed through opportunities they "chanced upon," opportunities to engage in the act of learning as a process of personal exploration. In many instances, the students' explicitly desired educational experience was this opportunity to "expand" (as Steven and Mary put it) or to explore -- with some guidance

-- one's areas of interest.

Hence, it appeared that the aspects of the students' experiences which were perceived as positive had less to do with the instrumental gaining of the institutional version of a body of knowledge than it had to do with a feeling of personal transformation, personal change -- the adoption of a fresh perspective or a new understanding (although, as the narrative revealed, some of these transformational experiences had the potential to come into conflict with shared family sensibilities).

In summary, these individual personal acts of "being" a student -- being curious, challenging ideas, questioning, meeting others with differing perspectives, entering into verbal or written discourse, sharing -- appeared to be the factors which evoked the greatest satisfaction and enthusiasm to learn. My assessment is that, with some notable exceptions, many of the formalized instructional aspects of the institution worked against these student desires.

There were exceptions. As I have pointed out, Brenda, of course, found guidance, a place, and a sense of personal meaning -- even within the constraints of the existing institutional structures. But unfortunately, because these non-continuous, married students seemed to be operating under some systemic disadvantages, the positive learning experiences appeared to emerge only through somewhat serendipitous opportunities -- rare opportunities to

interact face-to-face or personally with individual student colleagues and/or professors, or sometimes to explore a new idea with a spouse.

I suspect, however, that by the end of the term, when all the institutional demands were overcome, the opportunity to reflect allowed the students to remember their positive feelings, related to some personally-meaningful learning opportunities, and to put the negative feelings behind them. Our mistake as educators, I think, might be to confuse the source of their positive feelings with some of the institutional "educating" done to these students.

3. Let me turn to a final speculation about the bitter-sweet student experience of pain and pleasure. Colin Wilson (1965:30), in a publication subsequent to The Outsider, raised an intriguing cultural proposition about "western" mankind's "indifference threshold." This threshold, he posits, is apparently "the margin of human consciousness that can be stimulated by pain, but not by pleasure."

To Wilson, western mankind, in the conduct of day-to-day living, suffers from a loss of vitality. An intensely negative social experience, he suggests, can restore personal vitality. It is this particular cultural characteristic -- "that pain and inconvenience stimulate . . . vitality far more than pleasure" -- that he found worthy of note. For Wilson, a measure of the indifference threshold is "the extent to which [individual] vitality is asleep"

(1965:30).

As an example of what he was attempting to describe, Wilson referred to personal engagement in war as a setting within which there is the possibility for personal vitality to emerge from pain. Most would acknowledge that war is horrible; it is clear that many will suffer or die, but "those who are going to survive will have real life, with the mind awake" (1965:30).

Is war another metaphor which reflects some aspect of the university setting? Was the university experience, for these non-continuous married students, like experiencing war? Some used war-like images. Could this vitality that the experience of war provides, be at least a partial explanation of the fact that many of the students had positive things to say retrospectively about their first-term experience?

Is it possible that the social control aspects of the university experience, along with the requirement to balance the demands of courses with the demands of everyday family living, created sufficient discomfort to restore a personal sense of vitality in the survivors? Did their retrospective feelings of vitality rest on the shoulders of having survived the first-term experience of an educational conflict?

Institutional Implications

On the basis of some of the matters raised in this study, let me draw the dissertation to a close by turning to the matter of some institutional implications. For me, one of the most profound aspects of the participants' first-term university experience was the sense of an overwhelming personal struggle. To a great degree the struggle related to matters other than course content. This observation naturally led me to question to what degree the struggle represented an appropriate part of a university student experience.

The university-as war metaphor -- in the fashion of others raised in this document (system, factory, machine) -- leaves us with an organizational, pedagogical, and possibly a moral question: In assessing the first-term university experience for non-continuous married students, if there is any credibility to this image of struggle, how does the educator balance the social benefit of the re-vitalized institutional survivors (bloody but unbowed) against the cost of the institutional casualties?

I suspect, from the point of view of university policy makers, there might be a range of opinion about the social costs and benefits. Some (as I do) might see the non-continuous student struggle against the situational problematique as a barrier to learning, and the resulting loss of student idealism and enthusiasm as the loss of something precious. Others might have a different

viewpoint, and understand the struggle of these students as assisting them to develop individual mental toughness. The process might be seen as helping the students to attain, under fire, the mental discipline necessary to be considered to be well educated. From this latter perspective, the student "running up against the wall" of the institution might be viewed as the beginning of a good lesson in the pragmatics of living within our institutionalized culture.

I see these two hypothetical positions as representing a polarity in terms of a philosophy of higher education. In the end, the very structure of the university learning experience depends upon which of these perspectives informs the institutional policy-making and the decision-making processes. The viewpoints will, of course, also influence individual educators in the structuring and conduct of their classroom processes.

What I conclude to be a dominant aspect of the culture of the university, as revealed through some of the metaphors brought to light in this study, seems to represent a student setting experienced by the participants as essentially mechanistic, and I would judge, generally indifferent to the particular circumstances of these individual students. The university setting -- perhaps not surprisingly -- seems also to owe allegiance to a medieval, discipline-based educational perspective. The emphasis on "getting educated" seems to be related to a process of assimilating an identifiable and pre-determined body of knowledge. The

reported student setting also revealed evidence of a very instrumental educational goal -- akin to what I might label a mercantile orientation. The ultimate goal on behalf of the students seemed to be: good marks, certification and, finally, remunerative employment.

The question is, does this represent the appropriate pedagogical orientation for non-continuous students? Are these the appropriate objectives of a university education relating to recurrent learning?

If technological and economic change in our industrialized society is going to result in significant social dislocation, and necessitate adults engaging in processes of lifelong or recurrent university education, then the university community will very seriously have to consider the nature of its future role with regard to an altered clientel. At the very least, university educators ought to expect that the students who find themselves seeking new educational experiences in an institutional setting will demand that structural elements be responsive to their particular circumstances, attitudes, beliefs and needs.

Much of what I have judged to be institutional indifference apparent in the experiences of the students involved in this study may simply indicate that the voice of the non-continuous student has not yet been heard; the student problematique has not been effectively outlined from the student point of view. It may be that within this large

university, there may not be effective lines of communication from the older student to the university policy makers.

Due to the many issues raised in this study, I am of the opinion that the policy makers within the University of Alberta -- particularly due to the large size of this institution -- need to do everything in their power to discourage and move away from the mechanistic/competitive metaphor which seems to have shaped the educational experiences described by the participants of this study. Significant efforts need to be directed toward re-introducing the human face to the institutional context. University policy makers and all university community participants need to begin a collective search for a new guiding educational metaphor. A metaphor which will more effectively point to a responsive teaching/learning, research and community service structure.

If the non-continuous university student undertaking is going to be effective in terms of a society in transition, there must be a point at which the students and their families should no longer have to carry the burden of the student problematique alone. Furthermore, as representatives of a segment of society which includes fully-functioning adults, with some well-established values based upon very real life experiences, I doubt that non-continuous students such as the participants of this study will long accept an off-the-shelf educational structure

which does not meet their needs. They cannot afford to.

> When people look back at this time, the one we are living through, I think they will be astonished at one thing more than any other. It is this: there has been this great explosion of new information about ourselves, our behaviour and aptitudes, about how we function as individuals and in groups, but very little of this information has been put into effect. Our ways of governing ourselves have not changed. The operation of our political systems remains the same. Our institutions continue to operate, under capitalism, communism, socialism, and so forth, just as if we had not been given this new information which could make us much more effective and efficient. Our social evolution has put into our hands means of transforming our anachronistic institutions, but we continue blithely, as if this has not happened.
>
> Doris Lessing (1985)

Questions. The foregoing thoughts led me to a number of fairly general summary questions which point to some of the institutional implications which have been raised through examining the setting of a number of married, non-continuous undergraduate students. For the most part, these questions in summary are presented as an open-ended challenge to the university community -- an effort to encourage debate among the stakeholders.

In addition to the questions set out below, however, many of the more specific issues related to the student problematique remain embedded in the text of the dissertation itself.

> 1. What should be the fundamental nature of a university education? In terms of structuring the university teaching-learning situation, whose interests ought to be served? Who decides?

2. Is it the case that the student situation and experience as described in this dissertation represents what educators feel a university student experience needs or ought to be? Is there an intrinsic value in university education being a personal ordeal, and if so, are the student difficulties described in this document the specific challenges university educators wish to have the students work through? To what end?

3. If university education is to continue to be an institutionalized process of higher education, what, if any, fundamental and specific institutional changes ought to be undertaken in order to lead to or reflect the more broadly-based transition to an information society -- a transition which seemingly is increasingly presenting the university community with students having a well-established patina of life experiences?

4. If necessary, how might an institutional renewal process be initiated and carried out?

Ideas. Having elaborated on some aspects of the institutional issues as I see them, and having posed a number of questions, it would be presumptuous of me (solely on the basis of a study of the first-term experience of only eight students) to suggest that I, alone, have the answers or the best vision for institutional renewal. As I have indicated, for the most part, I feel that the institutional responses need to be worked through participatively, using processes of further research (uncovering other viewpoints and interests) and community debate. In concluding this document, however, I have taken the liberty of including some ideas which emerged directly from my own engagement with the situation of the married non-continuous undergraduate student.

Before discussing more specific ideas, let me reinforce

a primary theme raised in the preceding section. If the experiences of the participants of this study were typical, it seems clear to me that a university-wide change of educational attitude and vision may be called for. Such a change ought to involve a systematic effort directed toward challenging and rethinking the existing attitudes of the people who currently constitute the university community.

The various stakeholders need to be challenged individually and institutionally to acknowledge that mature-age undergraduate students are a very significant and growing university element -- that these students are different in kind from the conventionally-held image of the traditional undergraduate university students, and that it is unlikely that their presence is a temporary aberration.

It is the presence of this emergent-student segment which challenges us to engage in a fundamental, participative, rethinking of the nature of university education -- a rethinking of the structural elements which ought to be in place to support students seeking university education. The result of this sustained process, I hope, would be a new institutional vision, brought forth through participative, longer-term reflection and adjustment.

In light of the above, at a more concrete level, what follows represents a list of specific ideas for consideration. They represent potential aspects for direct and indirect institutional action:

1. Members of the University of Alberta community could begin to seek ways in which to ameliorate the problems of institutional bigness. This institutional characteristic appeared to be particularly alienating to the students. If the first-term experiences of the participants of this study were representative of the more general mature-age student university experience -- and the kinds of experiences shared in MUGS meetings suggested that they were -- then most of these students seem to require more direct and personal support, at least during the transition period of their first term.

Direct institutional action might include developing policies which limit, prevent or reverse institutional growth. This might call for budget and planning orientations which seriously review the potential consequences of further growth, and developing unit-review and evaluative measures which emphasize effectiveness from a human-scale perspective rather than on the basis of increased student numbers.

As one of the participants suggested, the university might examine the implications of breaking the internal structure into college-like units which, from a student perspective, could be mandated to put a more personal face on the institution. The idea would be to ensure that the students more quickly found a <u>place</u> within the institution. Or, as another suggested, when students first enter the university, they might immediately be matched with a more

experienced "student buddy," a specific person with whom they could talk, share experiences and from whom they could learn about their place.

2. Better student support could also take the form of better program and personal counselling at the time of admission to the university. In one form or another, most of the students expressed concern about the lack of adequate and timely academic counselling.

3. The mature student orientation sessions could encourage the attendance of the spouses of married students. In this regard, child care services would probably be required for all orientation presentations.

4. It seemed clear from this study that the university's mature student orientation process may be playing a role in contributing to some of the negative feelings expressed by the participants. The reports of the students and my own observations of some of the orientation programs and regular MUGS lunch meetings, led me to believe that these institutional activities may actually be contributing to negative student feelings rather than offering support. These activities appeared to have a relatively persistent focus on personal "horror stories," related to the attempts of various individuals to cope with "the system." This tendency may have been playing a role of reality construction, establishing the context for new students to experience a self-fulfilling prophesy.

While it seems that many of the "horror stories" may

have had a very real basis in experience, and that many of the systemic difficulties related to them very clearly needed to be addressed; it is also possible that the mature student orientation process, itself, requires careful examination by the organizers. Possibly these sessions need to ensure that a balanced view -- or even a more positive view -- of the impending educational experience greets the new students. Achieving a balanced image, between paradise and the abyss, is a difficult accomplishment.

Let me quickly add, however, that it is my intuitive assessment that the task of achieving this balance is best left in the hands of the student members of the university community, much as it is at the moment. It may be the case, however, that the MUGS group needs more resources and somewhat more sophisticated or senior administrative assistance.

5. For a variety of reasons, a majority of the mature-age students appeared to enter the university as general Arts students, it seems that it might be possible to introduce a first-term program element -- for course credit -- which would take the form of small group seminars. These seminars could have a multi-purpose objective: to establish a sense of place for the students; to provide peer support to the participants; and to provide an opportunity for shared and self-reflection regarding each student's new educational undertaking.

This type of program element, then, could provide an

immediate opportunity for student dialogue and formative evaluation. This undertaking might be structured and overseen by faculty members, but the seminars could be chaired -- also for credit -- by more advanced undergraduate students.

6. While a number of the student participants appeared to be quite content with the prospect of following fairly standardized programs of study, it appeared that some of the students might have welcomed the opportunity, in close consultation with a faculty member, to design a relatively individualized personal study program. Since Brenda's experience indicated that operational models for this approach were currently in operation at the university, opportunities such as this might be made more widely available.

7. The first-term experience of a number of the students involved in this study indicated that they might well have profited from some strong encouragement to keep at least their first-term course load to three or four courses. There seemed to be strong evidence for a need to systematically enhance the notion that three courses do generally represent a full study load for students with significant outside responsibilities, particularly during their first two terms. If there were to be direct counselling intervention in this regard, however, it would require judicious application, based upon adequate information about each individual student's personal

context.

8. To personalize the learning experience of students, the structure of the student's learning experience could involve a "whole person" perspective. For example, daily aspects of the family or employment lives of mature-age students could be more effectively folded into the formal university learning activities, intellectual pursuits and/or scholarship.

As a case in point, why did the birth of Mary's child necessitate her total withdrawal from university? Why was there apparently no institutional interest in maintaining contact with a student of her caliber? What did "the institution" know or understand of her university/family situation? Once enrolled, was the institution indifferent to her successful completion of a program of study?

In an educational setting which displayed more support for the individual student and in which there was more personal contact, there might be an opportunity for a student such as Mary to combine the experience of the birth of her new child with a project of independent study within the context of university units such as Family Studies, Sociology or Education. Inter-setting learning opportunities parallel to Mary's existed in most of the students' situations described in this study. The availability and use of such educational opportunities might serve to integrate the non-continuous student into the university setting, to increase spousal communication and to

reduce some of the students' pressures caused by lack of congruence between settings.

From an academic point of view, would it be possible to fail in such an (whole person) experience? Would it be possible, from an academic perspective, to evaluate such an educational experience? How? Would any evaluation deficiencies which might arise in undertakings such as these be any more problematic than those university educators face at the moment?

9. The students involved in this study seemed to cry out for quiet, comfortable and permanent personal study space at the university. At the graduate student level, this type of student need seems to be readily acknowledged, but for undergraduate students, in times of scarce resources, assigned and supervised study space seems to be very difficult to secure.

10. The non-continuous students, themselves, need to take responsibility to address a number of their specific institutional interests, but they require the resources to do so. The Student Union, through its policies and organization, could take a greater role in acknowledging and supporting mature-age student interests. Or, alternatively, the mature-age student interests might better be served by a separate student organization. The present MUGS organization lacks the resources and institutional legitimacy accorded other student organizations, such as the Graduate Student Association which has a separate fee levy

and formal recognition on university governing bodies.

11. Finally there are several aspects of the student problematique which fall outside the direct mandate of the university, but over which the university might be in a position to exert influence or mobilize resources. These relate to the financial needs of the mature-age students, and issues related to the matter of child care.

This study seemed to indicate that a more detailed understanding of the financial situation of married students, particularly women, is required. This could lead to the design of financial support systems which would more appropriately serve the needs of this student group. The university could be instrumental in encouraging the appropriate government agencies, first of all, to see these students as different in kind, and secondly, to undertake the necessary research and policy development which would result in action based upon these differences.

From the information included in this study, it was also clear to me that the university may have at least two roles to play in terms of child care. The first is the more direct role. To some extent, some married students with children might have been assisted by access to continuing child care at the university itself. But, more importantly, this group of parents seemed more to require access to child care during special periods. My sense was that these special periods would be during the first two weeks of a term, including registration and the book-buying period, and

during the final exam period each term. It was when irregularities such as these occurred in the students' schedules that most of the parents had difficulty adjusting their established child care arrangements.

A more indirect role of the university, in terms of child care, would be to actively support the provision of child care services in the general community. With the exception noted above, most of the parents involved in this study required accessible child care arrangements in their own community setting, rather than at the university. This was particularly the case for out-of-school arrangements. Obviously, the university, itself, could not meet these needs, but it certainly could play a role in clarifying the need and supporting political action directed at establishing and maintaining such services.

As indicated at the beginning of this section, these comments are presented more in the form of ideas than recommendations. My hope is that this study has allowed us to glimpse the world of the married, non-continuous undergraduate student, and to gain some understanding. This understanding might serve to inform creative institutional action.

## Suggestions for Further Study

The issues raised in this study provide many ideas for further research. While many of the ideas remain embedded in the preceding chapters, some of the matters which I feel might be useful starting points for pursuing further

research are listed below.

1. One of the most intriguing ideas for further study would be a follow-up study examining the later university experiences and/or post-graduation outcomes of the group of students involved in this study.

2. It would be valuable to have an ecological or situational understanding of other segments of the university student population, for example: (a) conventional undergraduate students, (b) single-parent university students, (c) couples in which both spouses choose to be university students, (d) childless couples in which one spouse chooses to attend university.

3. A number of matters related to general affairs of student families seem worthy of additional investigation. A detailed examination of the financial situation of non-continuous university students could be undertaken, with particular emphasis on family members' subjective understanding of their personal wealth. A more detailed examination of the experience of social isolation of married student families could also be valuable in providing a more complete picture of social context of the student family. From a longitudinal perspective, an examination of changes in planning and organizing activities and time allocations of families of students would be particularly valuable to institutional counsellors.

4. This study raised very preliminary insights into the specific relationship between student and spouse in the

student family setting. The notion of a spousal contract between student and non-student spouses appears to be worthy of more detailed exploration. It might also be worthwhile to examine communication patterns and barriers between the student and non-student spouse, and changes in communication over time. Certainly more complete information about the nature and extent of spousal role changes in married student families could be valuable information.

5. In terms of assessing the kind of support that may be available to older students, family and personal resources which are considered to be valuable to non-continuous university students ought to be identified and assessed. More information is required relating to the employment patterns of full-time non-continuous university students. Related to this, the child care needs of non-continuous university student families requires close examination. The same might be said with regard to assessing student access to cost efficient and effective transportation.

6. This study raised interesting matters related to the mature-age student situation directly within the university setting. The educational and social attitudes as they affect relationships between non-continuous undergraduate university students and continuous undergraduate university students seems to justify more detailed examination. From a slightly different perspective, a comparative assessment of the classroom,

study and social behaviour of continuous and non-continuous university students might raise valuable insights into the structuring of more effective classroom interaction. Related to this, an examination of the social and teaching-learning relationship between non-continuous university students and faculty members would be valuable.

7. From a more individual perspective, but within a large institution, a more detailed understanding of the meaning and importance of the student's sense of "personal place" seems worthy of further investigation. Also from a subjective student perspective, we could profit from a deeper understanding of aspects related to the older student's feelings of self-confidence and concern for personal image. In this same vein, a number of the students in this study were dieting; some were missing lunches ostensibly due to expense or demands on personal time. Hence, student nutrition as an aspect of the married student experience might also be worthy of study.

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# APPENDIX A

## Related Literature

Within the domain of public school education, much research has been conducted to assess the interrelationship among school, student, and student family circumstances. At a postsecondary level, there has been less research -- although still a significant amount -- examining the traditional 18-24 year old student, the influences of his or her family of origin, and the relationship to the student's educational experiences and educational success.

It was not until after the Second World War, with the influx of veterans into universities, that researchers turned attention to older married students and concerns related to their unique situation as students with family responsibilities (Reimer, 1947; Thorpe, 1951).

An identifiable research thrust relating to marriage and the student began in the late 1950s and continued into the decade of the 1960s. The primary issue over this period seemed to relate to the question of whether the marriages of young university students on campus were "healthy" or not. In some instances, the characteristics of young married students were compared with characteristics of young unmarried students (Chilman, 1966; Richek, 1969). In others, student couples were compared with non-student couples (Williams & Womble, 1966). Some studies focused on student opinions of their marriages (Mohr, 1965), while others sought to establish the characteristics of married students,

in order to determine what their marriages were like (Chambliss, 1961). Often marital adjustment was the concern of the researcher (Aller, 1963; Price-Bonham, 1973). Occasionally families were studied on the basis of student outcomes (Badgett & King, 1970).

These studies were more complex than indicated by these brief comments, but generally, they were conducted by researchers less concerned with educational issues than with examining the marriage experience of young couples involved in postsecondary education. Often the studies examined very limited sets of psychological or sociological variables, thus, making useful comparisons across studies difficult (Marshall & King, 1966).

Another thrust in the literature dealing with family/student concerns emerged in the 1970s and continues into the present. This research deals with issues relating to female students. Some studies dealt with matters regarding institutional responses to the ascribed needs of married female students (Davis & Bumpass, 1976; Hooper & March, 1980). Others examined the marital disruptions created by married women taking on the role of student (Hooper, 1979; Horseknecht, 1980; Ballmer, 1981). Educational outcomes have also been studied (Sales et.al., 1980).

There is, of course, a large body of general "adult student" literature, but much of it is concerned with the individual biological or psychological characteristics of

the adult learner. Usually, only passing reference is made to unspecified family influences or constraints upon the learner.

It is really only in the more recent research -- particularly that related to mature-age female students -- that an interest in the family situation of adult students began to emerge. A limited portion of the literature, also reflecting the mature female student perspective, has dealt specifically with the effects of the educational experience upon the spouses of students (Brunn, 1966; Wilson & Hasterok, 1975).

There has also been some research dealing with married graduate students (Graff & Horne, 1973; McKeon, 1980). For example, Larsen (1984:291), in her study of nurses with doctoral degrees, acknowledges family/student issues when she stated that:

> The relationships the women had formed with husbands or male companions, children, and friends are extremely important. Husbands, male companions and/or female companions are their source of intimacy and emotional support, enriching their lives, supporting and at times facilitating their career programs.

Larsen (1984:291) went on to indicate that these same manifest consumers of education actually "established a pattern of going back to university as a way of initiating change in their lives or sorting out problems."

This statement gives credence to the notion that the student's experience of university may have a significant effect upon the family situation as well as upon the student. Students, therefore, might be viewed as a

proactive force, initiating change, not only in themselves, but in the family setting as well. Carol Aslanian and Henry Brickell (1980) argued that the reverse may also be true. They suggested that life changes -- what they refer to as "transitions and triggers" in the adult's social situation -- can cause adults to seek out educational experiences.

Regardless of whether the individual or the social situation acts as the "mover," it seems clear that a useful perspective for understanding the nature of the adult student ought to include an examination of the relationship between student and aspects of her/his social context.

Several authors have apparently found a "systems perspective" to be useful in understanding the situation of the married student (Hepker & Cloyd, 1974; Hutter, 1974; Gilbert, 1982). The systems perspective may be useful in guiding the researcher's consideration of the complex and dynamic interaction among the roles and processes which constitute the student's family system -- with the student understood as a subsystem. A systems perspective seems to facilitate the examination of the various roles that the adult assumes, as both student and family member.

Kaplan and Kaplan (1978:197), in discussing individual and family growth, seem to add support to the notion of using a systems approach as a way to understand the individual operating interactively within a context:

> While it seems helpful to understand how a person carries her/his own structure of enmeshed feelings, attitudes, and behaviors, the individual's "system" is viewed most clearly and validly in terms of integration

> within a social context. . . In an interactive system, the responsibility for behavior does not lie solely with the individual or with the environment. Rather, the system, of individual in context, operates interdependently in a self maintaining manner.

Gilbert (1982:131) also made explicit the value of using a systems perspective when he stated that:

> Systems theory indicates a dysfunctional family system can . . . contribute to academic failure as much as academic failure can escalate family stress.

Dell (1982:31), in dealing with family/individual interaction, argued for a notion of "coherence" in which nothing more is implied than an interdependence in functioning, whereby all the aspects of the system fit together. More explicitly, he indicated (1981:32):

> There is coevolution of the individual's coherence and the coherence of the family network and other social systems to which he or she belongs. The coevolving coherences of the individuals and of the larger system are a complementarity . . . .

The systems perspective, then, may be useful. My concern however was that a systems approach often involves the application of reasonably distinct, and often pre-defined boundaries to the social phenomena. Aspects are then, by predefinition, interpreted to be "internal and external" to the family situation. Unfortunately, as De Shazer (1982) pointed out, it is possible for a theoretical conceptualization -- in this case, the "systems template" -- to either enhance or unnecessarily restrict the researcher's understanding of the social phenomena being investigated.

# APPENDIX B

**BAKER**
**Family Financial Statement - September 1984**

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASSETS** | |
| Cash on Hand | $ 600 |
| Common Stock | 500 |
| Sundry Personal Effects | 3,000 |
| Home Furnishings and Appliances (Estimated Realizable Value) | 6,000 |
| Vehicles | 9,000 |
| Home and Property | 65,000 |
| Total Assets | $84,100 |
| **LIABILITIES** | |
| Credit Cards and Charge Accounts | $ 2,000 |
| Bank Loans | 10,000 |
| House Mortgage | 52,000 |
| Total Liabilities | $64,000 |
| **FAMILY NET WORTH** | $20,100 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Worth | $84,100 |

ESTIMATED GROSS ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME $43,000

LYNDEN
Family Financial Statement - December 1984

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASSETS** | |
| Cash on Hand | $ 400 |
| Bonds | 5,000 |
| Common Stock | 81,000 |
| Retirement Savings Plan | 5,500 |
| Sundry Personal Effects | 25,000 |
| Home Furnishings and Appliances (Estimated Realizable Value) | 20,000 |
| Vehicles (2) | 15,500 |
| Home and Property | 150,000 |
| Total Assets | $302,400 |
| **LIABILITIES** | |
| Credit Cards and Charge Accounts | $ 500 |
| Finance Company Loan | 2,000 |
| House Mortgage | 121,000 |
| Total Liabilities | $123,500 |
| **FAMILY NET WORTH** | $178,900 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Worth | $302,400 |

**ESTIMATED GROSS ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME** $62,000

MAKOWICHUK

Family Financial Statement - October 1984

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASSETS** | |
| Cash on Hand | $ 500 |
| Term Deposit | 10,000 |
| Sundry Personal Effects | 10,000 |
| Home Furnishings and Appliances (Estimated Realizable Value) | 15,000 |
| Vehicles (2) | 8,000 |
| Home and Property (includes a rural property) | 73,000 |
| Daughter's Savings | 3,500 |
| Total Assets | $120,000 |
| **LIABILITIES** | |
| Credit Cards and Charge Accounts | $ 400 |
| Student Loan | 1,450 |
| House Mortgage | 47,000 |
| Total Liabilities | $ 48,850 |
| **FAMILY NET WORTH** | $ 71,150 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Worth | $120,000 |

ESTIMATED GROSS ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME $36,000
(Includes family allowance and $500/mo. from Gloria's father)

MAUNDER
Family Financial Statement - October 1984

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASSETS** | |
| Cash on Hand | $ 7,000 |
| Cash Value of Life Insurance | 800 |
| Common Stock | 50 |
| Retirement Savings Plan | 8,000 |
| Sundry Personal Effects | 200 |
| Home Furnishings and Appliances (Estimated Realizable Value) | 6,000 |
| Vehicles (2) | 8,000 |
| Home | 70,000 |
| Rural and Revenue Properties | 79,000 |
| Resort Property | 10,000 |
| Total Assets | $189,050 |
| **LIABILITIES** | |
| Credit Cards and Charge Accounts | $ 2,000 |
| Bank Loans | 10,000 |
| House Mortgage | 50,000 |
| Total Liabilities | $ 62,000 |
| **FAMILY NET WORTH** | 127,050 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Worth | $189,050 |

**ESTIMATED GROSS ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME** $45,330
(Includes family allowance and rental income of $200/mo.)

**SHARPE**
Family Financial Statement - October 1984

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASSETS** | |
| Cash on Hand | $ 350 |
| Cash Value of Life Insurance | 1,200 |
| Sundry Personal Effects | 2,500 |
| Home Furnishings and Appliances (Estimated Realizable Value) | 2,000 |
| Vehicles | 200 |
| Home and Property | 89,000 |
| Total Assets | $95,250 |
| **LIABILITIES** | |
| Credit Cards and Charge Accounts | $ 1,400 |
| Bank Loans | 500 |
| Loan from Family | 500 |
| House Mortgage | 83,500 |
| Total Liabilities | $85,900 |
| **FAMILY NET WORTH** | $ 9,350 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Worth | $95,250 |

**ESTIMATED GROSS ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME** $43,400
(Includes family allowance)

THOMPSON-POTTER
Family Financial Statement - October 1984

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASSETS** | |
| Cash on Hand | $ 54 |
| Sundry Personal Effects | 13,000 |
| Home Furnishings and Appliances (Estimated Realizable Value) | 5,000 |
| Vehicles (2) | 7,500 |
| Home | 100,000 |
| Revenue Property | 125,000 |
| Total Assets | $250,554 |
| **LIABILITIES** | |
| Credit Cards and Charge Accounts | $ 1,200 |
| House Mortgage | 90,000 |
| Revenue Property Mortgage | 70,000 |
| Total Liabilities | $161,200 |
| **FAMILY NET WORTH** | $89,354 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Worth | $250,554 |

ESTIMATED GROSS ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME $45,000
(Includes family allowance and rent of $760/mo.)

# APPENDIX C

# INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

| Sharpe | Lynden | Thompson |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 5, 1984 | Sept. 6, 1984 | Sept. 7, 1984 |
| Oct. 7, 1984 | Oct. 10, 1984* | Oct. 3, 1984 |
| Oct. 29, 1984 | Dec. 13, 1984 | Nov. 8, 1984 |
| Dec. 2, 1984 | | Dec. 5, 1984 |

| Baker | Maunder | Sheskey |
|---|---|---|
| Sept. 7, 1984 | Sept. 8, 1984 | Sept. 11, 1984 |
| Sept. 28, 1984 | Oct. 1, 1984 | Oct. 9, 1984* |
| Nov. 1, 1984 | Nov. 5, 1984 | Nov. 3, 1984** |
| Nov. 29, 1984 | Dec. 4, 1984 | Dec. 5, 1984 |

| Eley | Makowichuk |
|---|---|
| Sept. 17, 1984 | Sept. 15, 1984 |
| Oct. 10, 1984* | Oct. 4, 1984 |
| Dec. 10, 1984 | Nov. 7, 1984 |
| | Dec. 7, 1984 |

* - Interview to prepare timetable only - no transcription
** - Unscheduled meeting - discussion of circumstances leading to withdrawal from courses.

# APPENDIX D

# FIRST INTERVIEW

## CHECKLIST

1. Introductions.

2. Speak generally about the project.

3. Review agenda in detail.

4. Confirm Data Base Information.

5. What is in this process for the family?
   - opportunity to discover if others share your experience
   - opportunity to assist people experiencing the same thing in the future.
   - opportunity to be involved in a different experience.
   - opportunity to learn something about self and others.

6. Get confirmation of interest in continuing.

Tape Recorded Session

7. Please give me an indication of your history as a family and as individuals.

8. Describe why & how the decision was made that "X" should attend university.

## First Interview

## Agenda

A. INTRODUCTION

- personal information sheet

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary questions to be addressed by this study are:

1. What is the reported experience of being a mature-age, married, undergraduate university student attending the University of Alberta?
2. What is the social ecology of the non-continuous university students examined in this study?
3. What is the student's sense of social place within that ecology?
4. What is the student's sense of his/her family's social place within that ecology?
5. In what ways do the student experiences of family and university interact? Is there an indication of commonalities of experience and social meaning among the group of student families investigated?
6. What, if any, implications might there be for the university institution, faced with dealing increasingly with non-continuous, mature-age, married students?

C. RESEARCH PROCESS

- Interview # 1 - 10 families - information & commitment.
- Interview # 2 Sept. - 5 families - family description & researcher questions.
- Interview # 3 Oct. - family description & researcher questions.
- Interview # 4 Nov. - family description & researcher questions.

- Possible request to comment of draft report in spring
- Individual Journals - between Interview #1 & #4.
- Researcher Journal
- MUGS participation

D. RESEARCHER'S ROLE

- Collector of information.
- Analyst.
- Communication facilitator.
- Not a judge or a therapist.

***** Do not feel you need to do special things for the interview sessions (eg. clean house). The interview timing should fit into your family schedule - feel free to cancel if problems occur.

***** If you have any questions or concerns please call me:

Home 435 - 1717
University 432 - 4909
(I expect to be most available at home, but usually someone will answer the telephone at the university, to take a message)

E. ETHICAL CONCERNS

- Your family will be affected by the experience.
  - getting sense of family situation.
    - process of observation
    - inclusion of children?
  - "normal family" research - positive communication.
    - psychotherapy last three years?
    - good physical health?
    - sensitive subjects (right to refuse to respond).
    - your right to discontinue at any time.
- Need for trust.
- Your anonymity vs confidentiality.
- Tape recording and transcripts.

# APPENDIX E

## VOLUNTEER SUBJECTS REQUIRED

Are you: - over the age of 25,
- legally married and living with your spouse,
- entering a full-time undergraduate program?

Don Chapman (ph. 435-1717), a Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Administration, is researching the experience of being a mature-age, married, undergraduate, university student. His study is directed toward gaining a detailed understanding of how several mature-age university students (possibly you) and their families cope with the university experience.

The study will take place over the next four months and will involve you and your spouse in approximately one interview per month, plus the keeping of an ongoing record of significant experiences. Your participation may assist educators in developing a better understanding of the nature and needs of the married university student.

The study will involve less than ten families, but if you meet the above criteria and feel you might like to participate, please check the box below and indicate the number of years you have been married. If you are selected, you will be contacted before or during registration week. You and your family's anonymity is assured by the researcher.

Yes I would like to participate _____. # of years married ____

Remarks:

# APPENDIX F

SECOND INTERVIEW

CHECK LIST

1. Introduce Format
   - taped session
   - timetable exercise
   - financial stmt. exercise
   - taped questions

2. Taped session: approx. 30 min.

   Student, free response: What images or words would you use to describe your university experience to this point?

   Probe: Explain

   Spouse, free response: Does that description agree with what you observe or feel about the situation?

   Probe: Differences/similarities?

3. Timetable exercise - all family members

4. Financial Statement exercise

5. Taped Question and Answer Session: approx. 30 min.

   - Questions, comments or concerns arising from the first interview transcript.

## Supplementary Questions

- As a result of the first round of interviews, I formed an idea that a university education was a commodity that you "went out and got" -- rather like a TV or an automobile. What is your reaction to this idea?

- Student: What are your main tasks at the moment -- why are they important?

- In this present situation, if I mention the idea of family disruption, what do you think of?

- In this present situation, if I mention the idea of family support, what do you think of?

- In what ways is "x's" going to university similar or different than if s/he were working at a job?

- Spouse: What is it like, not being the student? Do you feel like a participant in the university experience? In what ways?

- What is the university like? What is being a student like?

- Do you see your life developing and progressing in an orderly fashion at the moment? What structure or sense does it have?

- Over ninety per cent of the mature students who had an opportunity to participate in this study didn't volunteer, what makes you different?

- What effect do you think this study is having on your experience as a student?

# APPENDIX G

# THIRD INTERVIEW

## CHECKLIST

1. Introduce Format.

2. Symbolic Drawing of Family Life Space.

3. Taped session - Questions from checklist as well as transcripts and journals.

4. Introduce Clustering Format for next interview:
   - leave a sample and brief instructions.
   - mention questions about institutional responses.

-- Questions, comments or concerns.

### Supplementary Questions

- On a scale of 1 - 10 how is this university adventure going so far? What causes you to give it that rating?

- As a student, what are your major pleasures/problems?

- Describe your fellow students.

- Describe your professors.

- Describe the exam or assignment processes you have experienced so far.

- From the point of view of the university, you are considered to be a full-time student; for you, what does being a full-time student mean and in what ways do you think you are different from a part-time student?
  - Would you feel different "inside" about your experience?

- In what ways is your family life affecting your university life (positive/negative)? In what ways are the demands of being a student affecting your family?

- The interviews seem to reveal that a number of the students are working under, not only the pressure of his or her own expectations, but also under pressure of the spouse's expectations (Social Contract). What are your reactions to that observation?

- What effect do you think this study is having on your experience as a student?

## SYMBOLIC DRAWING OF FAMILY LIFE SPACE
Task-Centered Activity

Supplies - pencils
- colored pens
- large sheet of paper
- white out

Objective: Blend the cognitive and experiential aspects of the family members in such a way as to lower defenses and facilitate communication and interaction. The intent is to develop a representation of the family life space which reveals information about the structural configuration of the family, intra-familial congruence regarding spatial positioning, and a means for communicating linkages between the family and the environment.

1. Each student is asked to place him/herself and other members of what s/he considers to be immediate family, within the Family Circle. The spouse is present and interacts about the process; dissenting opinions may be indicated.

2. Are there any other people you feel are important enough to be included in this drawing (within the circle or environment)?

THESE SHOULD BE IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN YOUR LIVES - someone you would call if there was a death or you won a lottery

WE ARE DEALING IN THE HERE-AND-NOW - since starting university

3. Place in the drawing, social institutions which are significant to the family. (school, church, work, university)

4. Now I would like you to indicate to what degree you feel the members of the family communicate with the various people and institutions displayed in the drawing.

Defined by Student

- Communicate with or contact regularly _____
- Communicate with or contact irregularly _____
- Little or no contact or communication _____

# APPENDIX H

# FOURTH INTERVIEW

## CHECK LIST

1. Clustering Exercise

2. Taped Session
   - Based on clustering exercise
   - Institutional responses
   - Questions from checklist, transcripts, journals

3. Description of Further Involvement
   - Journal until after the last exam (Date _____?)
   - Final transcript
   - Write up process

4. Questions, Comments, Concerns

5. Thanks

**********

## INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

- What could the university or the people in it do to have facilitated your experience?
  eg. Schedule classes for three hours, once a week rather than three times a week for one hour.

## STUDENT AND SPOUSE'S POSTSECONDARY BACKGROUND

- At the university, do you have any sense of having to "play the game?" What do you understand by this notion?

- Looking back to the start of the term, what expectations did you have about this experience? In what ways have your expectations been fulfilled / not fulfilled?

- Looking back over the term, did you know what you were getting into when you started?

- So far, what has given you a sense of accomplishment / failure?

- Has anything surprised you?

- Can you describe a successful/unsuccessful attempt to learn something?

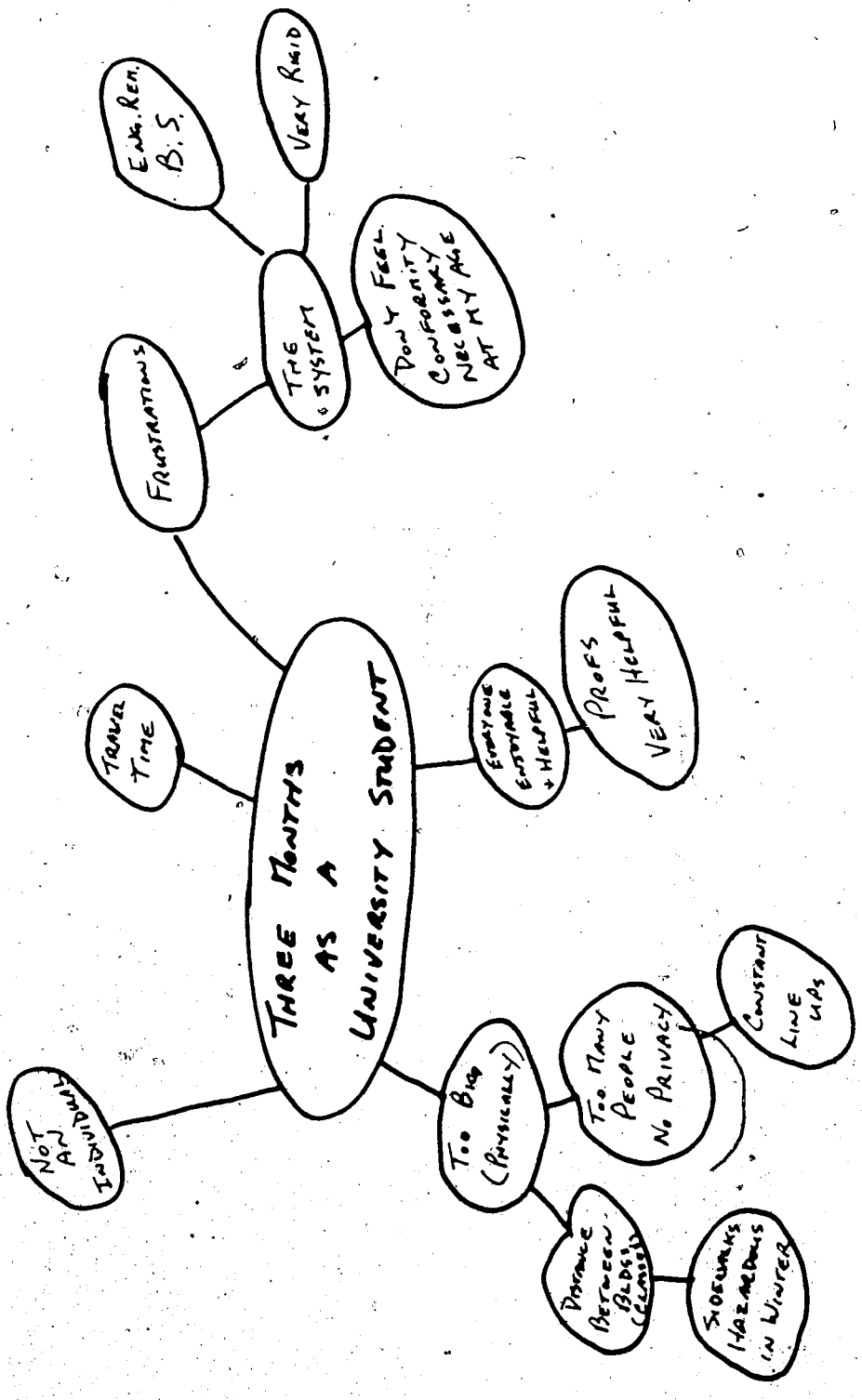
- Are you treated as a parent or a peer by other students?

- In general, do you feel you have been treated as an adult or a child?
- Describe your approach to studying, what has worked for you?

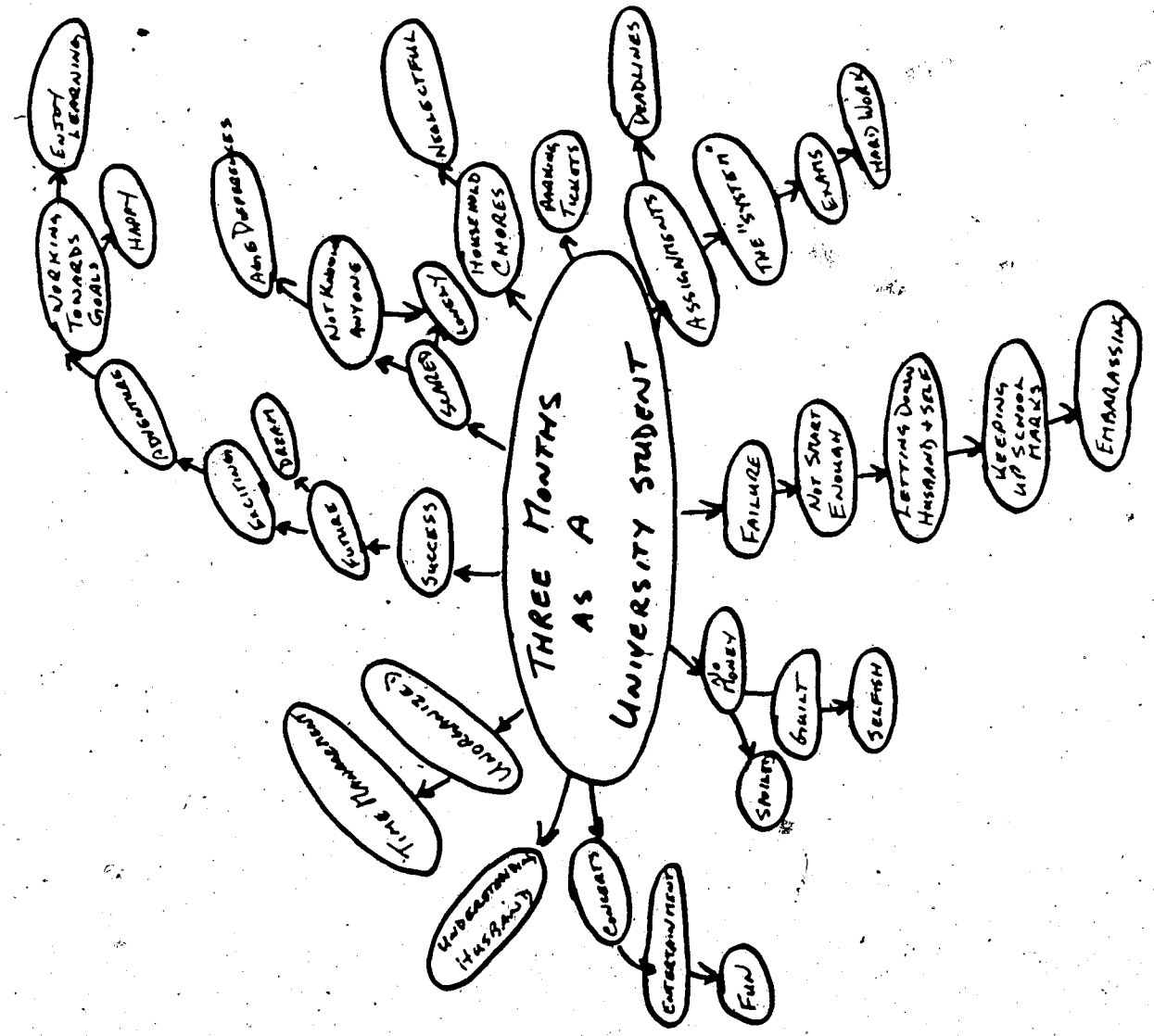
# APPENDIX I

Three Months as a University Student
Achievement
Pride
Pleasure
Satisfaction
Feelings of Accomplishment
Courage
Friendship
New People
Entertaining
Enlightening
Challenging
Social Action
Awareness
Ambition
Competitiveness
Discipline
Lack of Discipline
Inspiration
Creativity
Writing
Doors Opening
New Ideas
Dreams
Frustration
A little Guilt at not being Home

Mary Baker


THREE MONTHS AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT
NOT AN INDIVIDUAL
TRAVEL TIME
FRUSTRATIONS
THE SYSTEM
ENV. REN. B.S.
VERY RAID
DON'T FEEL CONFORMITY NECESSARY AT MY AGE
EVENTUALLY ENJOYABLE + HELPFUL
PROFS VERY HELPFUL
TOO BIG (PHYSICALLY)
TOO MANY PEOPLE NO PRIVACY
CONSTANT LINE UPS
DISTANCE BETWEEN BLDGS (CLASSES)
SNOWBANKS HAZARDOUS IN WINTER

Sheila Eley



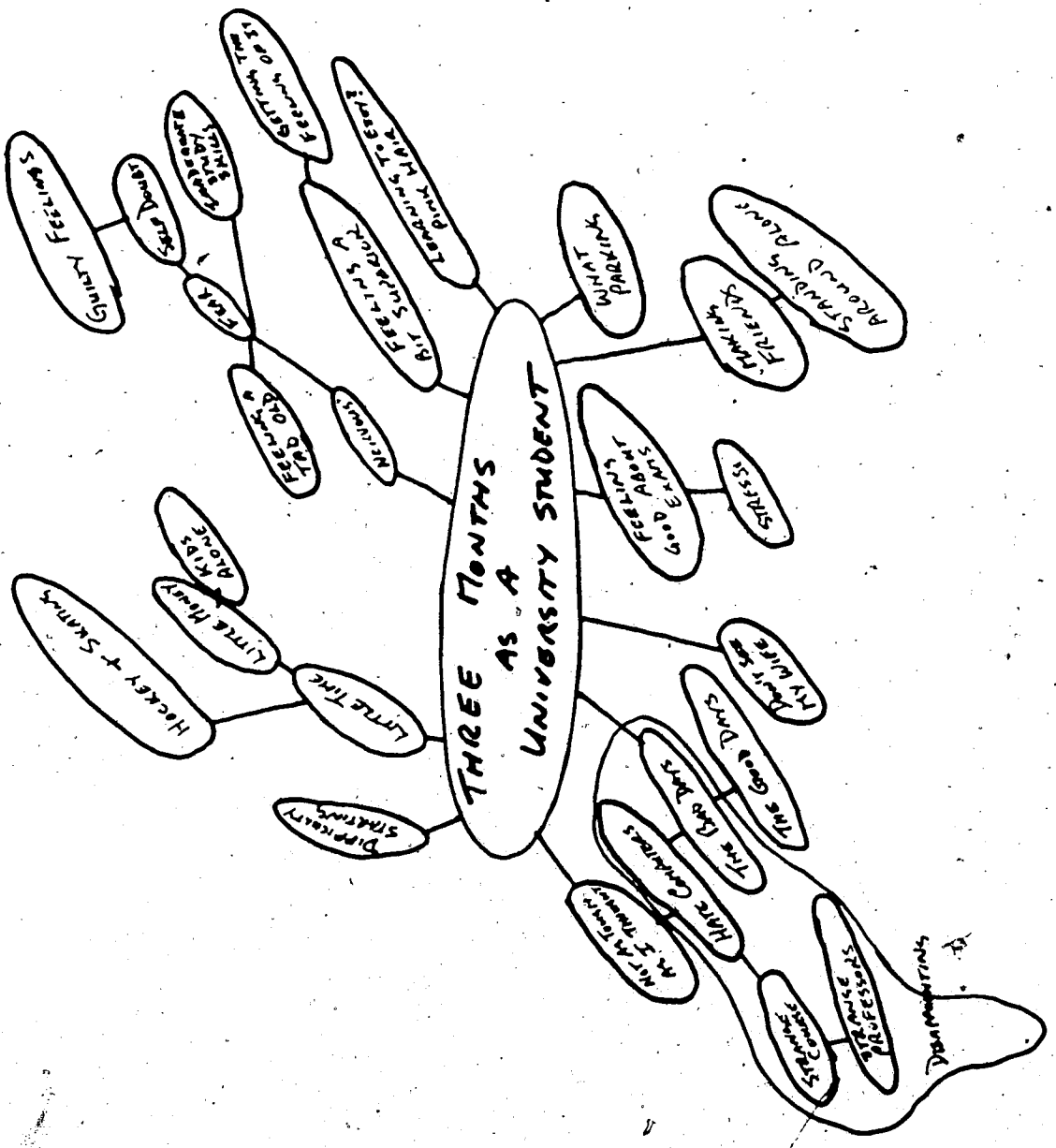

Judith Lynden

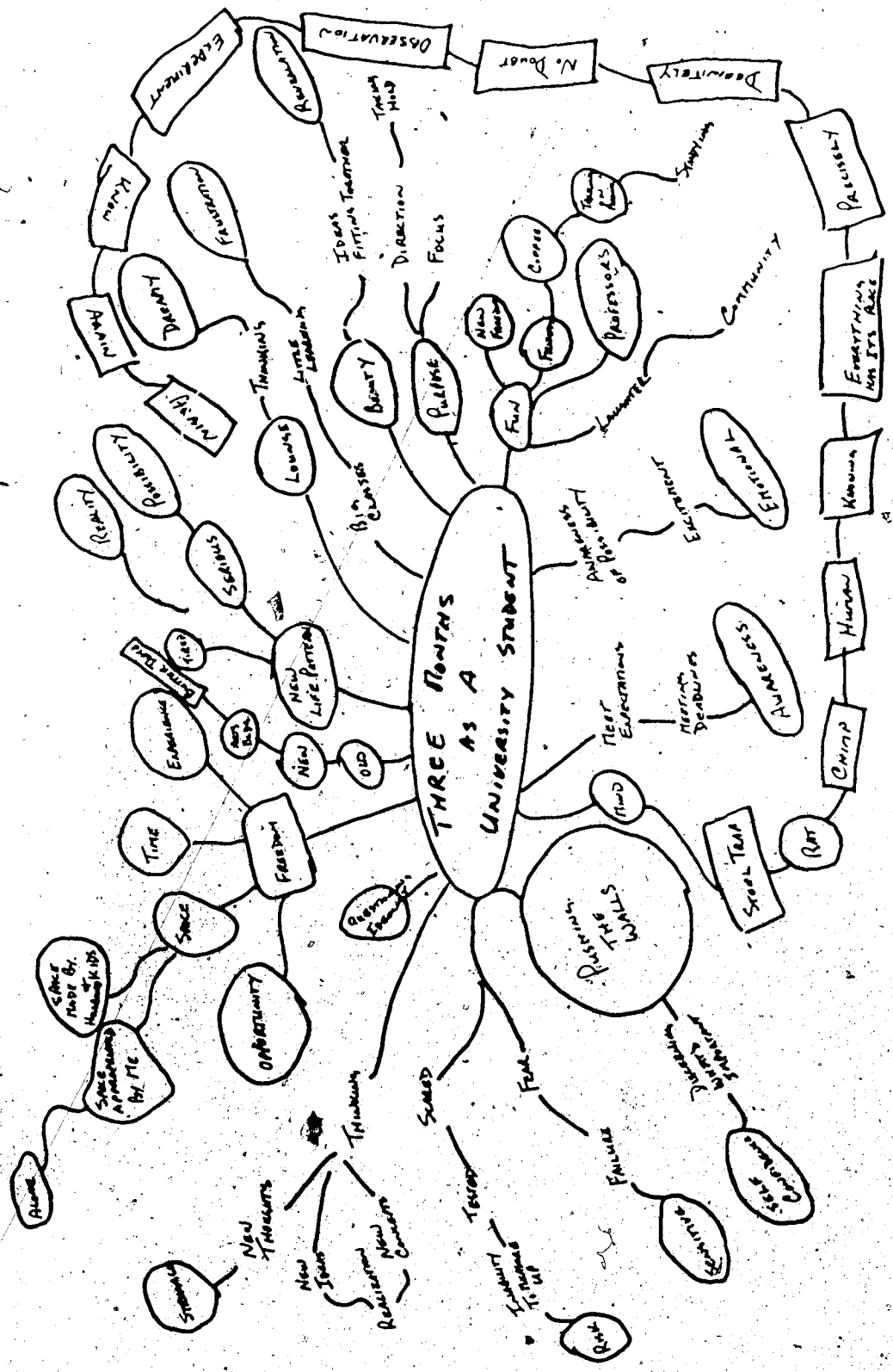
Gloria Makowichuk

THREE MONTHS AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT
UNIVERSITY
TENSION — FRUSTRATION
ACCOMPLISHMENT - CONTENT
NEW
INEXPERIENCE
EMPLOYER
RELAXATION
ORDER
MONITORED
RELATIVE EASE — NO COMMISSION
CYNICAL
CHURCH
INTRUSION
FAMILY
CHERISHED
IMPORTANCE — EFFORT
EXTENDED FAMILY
DEPENDED ON
+
DEPENDABLE
ISOLATION

Sam Maunder

Edna Sheskey


THREE MONTHS AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT


THREE MONTHS AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT
Brenda Thompson

# APPENDIX J

# CLUSTERING EXERCISE

This is a process to assist in evoking, suggesting, connecting and associating ideas or understandings.

## General Directions

You begin with a nucleus word or phrase. You simply let go and flow with any current of connections that come into your head. Write these down rapidly, each in it's own circle, radiating outward from the center in any direction they want to go. Connect each new word or phrase with a line to the preceding circle. When something new and different strikes you, begin again at the central nucleus and radiate outward until those associations are exhausted.

As you cluster, you may experience a sense of randomness or, if you are somewhat skeptical, an uneasy sense that this isn't leading anywhere. This is a sign of the logical mind wanting to get into the act, to let you know how foolish you are for not setting thoughts down in a logical sequence. Don't concern yourself with this, we all cluster mentally without knowing it; we have simply never made these clusters visible on paper.

Continue to cluster, drawing lines and even arrows to associations that seem to go together, but don't dwell on what goes where. Let each association find it's own place. If you momentarily run out of associations, doodle a bit by filling in arrows or making lines darker. This relaxed receptivity to ideas usually generates another spurt of associations until at some point, you will feel a sense of having completed the task.

# APPENDIX K

# INDIVIDUAL JOURNAL

NAME: _____

## INSTRUCTIONS

Since it is not possible or desirable for me, as the researcher, to observe the activities of you and your family on a continuous basis, I am requesting that you take a moment each day to make a brief personal record in the form of a written journal. This journal should include your own experiences or thoughts about your daily life -- particularly as they relate to being a member of a family where one of the spouses is a university student. Ideally, you will make an entry on a daily basis, or more often if circumstances warrant. Maintaining a process of regular recording will be of great benefit to the research project, however, you should not be concerned if your circumstances prevent you from making entries from time to time.

You should not feel that the information you record needs to be particularly creative, significant, or interesting. You should not feel that you have to spend great amounts of time thinking of something to write, or in recording the information. The material you choose to include is entirely up to you. The subject matter does not have to be consistent from day to day.

If you have difficulty thinking of something to write, the following represent some possibilities:

1. Events of the day. What did they mean to you?

2. Concerns, Thoughts, Ideas, Feelings — About self and others

3. Activities you engaged in during the day and your purposes for doing so.

4. Goals or objectives that you have in mind.

5. Things that are motivating or frustrating you today.

6. Family events.

At least twice each month, I will collect the material recorded in your journal. The originals will be photocopied and returned directly to you. The duplicated sheets will include only a code indicating authorship. At no time, therefore, will your written remarks display your name. This journal is intended as mechanism to collect remarks about your day-to-day life. It is your choice as to whether you share your journal with others.

# APPENDIX L

## Outsider Type

The synthesis of Wilson's description of the outsider type arises from three sources: characters drawn from literature, historical characters and characters based upon the writings of several philosophers. Hence, the outsider type is a complex, multi-faceted notion. The outsider portrait is represented by a range of characteristics; not all need to be present in any particular individual in order for the label to be considered appropriate. Therefore, I speak here of tendencies toward a character.

The fact that Wilson's idea of the outsider made no acknowledgement of the female being is somewhat disturbing; but in the 1950s, Wilson was a man living and writing in a man's world. It is interesting to speculate, however, as to what degree the outsider type applies to women today, particularly those women who have achieved some sense of a feminist perspective.

But the gender issue aside, let me briefly outline the aspects of the type which seemed interesting to me. [redacted]lthough not a phrase from Wilson, a dialectical notion of "an optimist despairing" seems to capture what I understand the outsider to be. According to Wilson, the outsider may be mediocre, may have no special genius nor message to bestow, but the fact that the outsider *sees deeper* qualifies him as an outsider type (1963:12).

This deeper vision reveals a world of chaos. "For the outsider, the world is not rational, not orderly" (p.13). The outsider is a person who has awakened to chaos and has a distressing sense that even though there is no room for hope, still believes that the truth must be told at all costs (p.14). The outsider is not "another butterfly on the surface of life" (p.106), or as Wilson elaborated:

> If you are living a very ordinary dull life at low pressure, you can safely regard the outsider as a crank who does not deserve serious consideration. But if you are interested in man in extreme states, or in man abnormally preoccupied by questions about the nature of life, then whatever answer the outsider may propound should be worth your respectful attention. The outsider is interested in high speeds and great pressures; he prefers to consider the man who sets out to be very good or very wicked rather than the good citizen who advocates moderation in all things (p. 215)

The outsider is disgusted by the mob -- it's "chattering, scolding, snivelling and cheering" (p.44). The outsider's attitude:

> Give [a person] the highest, the most exciting thoughts about man's place in the universe, the meaning of history; they can all be snuffed out in a moment if he wants his dinner, or feels irritated by a child squalling on a bus (p.47).

"The outsider is destroyed by human pettiness, human triviality and stupidity" (p. 153).

> For the outsider, the world into which he has been born is always a world without values. Compared to his own appetite for a purpose and direction, the way most men live is not living at all; it is drifting. This is the outsider's wretchedness, for all men have a herd instinct that leads them to believe that what the majority does must be right. Unless he can evolve a set of values that will correspond to his own higher intensity of purpose, he may well throw himself under a bus, for he will always be an outcast and a misfit (p.155).

The outsider condemns the middle way and is a preacher of extremes -- wishes to overthrow idols without setting up new ones (p.151). The outsider's fundamental attitude involves a "non-acceptance of life, of human life lived by human beings in a human society. . . . Such a life is a dream; it is not real" (p.16). Yet, according to Wilson, the outsider does not start from religion, he starts -- ironically -- from the world and human life (p.100). The outsider's disability is that, "he is aware of his strength, but has no idea of how to use it; he thinks instead of acting" (p.180).

"The outsider recognizes . . . that all men are dishonest with themselves, that all men blind themselves with their emotions" (p.224). "The outsider is primarily a critic, and if a critic feels deeply enough about what he is criticizing, he becomes a prophet (p.246)." But the outsider is "A prophet in disguise -- disguised even from himself -- whose salvation lies in discovering his deepest purpose, and then throwing himself into it" (p. 158). "There is an appetite for 'progress' in all outsiders; and yet . . . not primarily for social progress" (p.47).

"The outsider begins with certain inner tensions." He believes that man must live by his beliefs (p.117). Because of the uncertainty of life, he lives with constant, unbegotten fear (pp.116-121). The outsider relishes suffering (p.172). People can be outsiders in at least three distinct personal domains: Van Gogh *felt* [emotion]

too much; D. H. Lawrence *thought* [intellect] too much (p.100). Nijinsky was too much of the *flesh* [body] (p109).

But the outsider is "a half-way house to a higher type of man than the 'once-born' man; he loses more sleep, eats less, and suffers from all kinds of nervous diseases." He goes on to suggest that the outsider's state of nervous tension has an "*objective cause* in his sense of the precariousness of human life" (p. 200).

"The outsider is *not* a freak, but is only more sensitive than the 'sanguine and healthy-minded' type of man (p.116). To the outsider, life takes place in an educational laboratory. It is an "experiment in living" (p.54 & p.99). According to Wilson, when outsiders unify themselves as persons, they may rise to greatness -- they are society's "spiritual dynamos," but many remain divided and unproductive (p.63).

The outsider does not like himself (p.87) The outsider is the one person who knows he is sick in a civilization that doesn't know it is sick (p.19). The outsider chafes under the recognition that he is not free (p. 123). He underestimates himself and overestimates other people (p.99). The outsider wishes to escape himself (p.166)

<u>The Outsider Problem</u>

To a greater or lesser degree (p.162) the outsider is aware of a serious personal problem: Like the mob he despises, the outsider is in prison, but he also knows that <u>he</u> is the prison (p.168). "The outsider's problem is the

problem of denial of self-expression" (p.88).

> The outsider's problems are not . . . the problems that everyone confronts every day, and probably the average plumber or stockbroker never confronts them once in a lifetime (p.147).
>
> The outsider is a man who feels in the Chinese way. His revolt against Western standards takes the form of a sense of their futility (p.265).
>
> It is difficult for the Western man to think of the word "contemplative" without instantly thinking: "dreamy," "unworldly," "impractical." He finds it hard to realize that whole civilizations have made contemplation the basis of their culture, and have, in most respects, been flourishing, prosperous and well regulated (p.264).
>
> Ask the outsider what he ultimately wants, and he will admit he doesn't know. Why? Because he wants it instinctively, and it is not always possible to tell what your instincts are driving towards (p.243).

Interestingly, it seems all outsiders want to be understood, want someone to look into their souls and soothingly set things right. But all outsiders learn that they have to work out their own salvation. "It is the hardest message of all," according to Wilson, "that there is a final enemy whom every man and woman carries about with them, who cannot be fought vicariously" (p.230).

The outsider experiences personal "turning-points," the sudden violent experiences that rake across mental habits and place him in the position of seeing himself as a stranger (p.170). The outsider's ultimate problem is, Who am I? (p.167)

To begin to know one's self, is to plan and execute an escape from the personal prison. The answer to the who-am-I question comes through insight, and this is gained through action (p.169). Essentially, it becomes a problem of how

to live -- "Beyond a certain point, the outsider's problems will not submit to mere thought; *they must be lived*" (p.75).

The outsider's dilemma is:

> To feel the whole being groaning for some emotional satisfaction, some solid reality to touch, and to feel the reasoning faculty standing apart, jeering at the possibility of satisfaction and discouraging its approach . . . . Should he deliberately repress his reasoning faculty, accept a faith and hope that his reason will be reconciled to it one day? (p.218)

Wilson's response: No! The life of the outsider pivots around the complementary interaction of intellect and emotion; and intellect alone is not enough. The answer is in the artist-psychologist, the intuitional thinker (p.159). Wilson suggests that there are two distinct ways of looking at the same world: the "Inspired" and the "Uninspired." The artist's role is to connect the two (p.255).

"The outsider's chief desire is *to cease to be an outsider*" (p.114) but his disgust over what he observes going on around him makes social withdrawal a very attractive option. An outsider's ideal:

> Solitude, retreat, the attempt to order a small corner of the "devil-ridden chaos" to one's own satisfaction (p.244).

But, according to Wilson, the outsider cannot achieve release from his problem by simply lowering his level of consciousness. "Childlike innocence is no solution of the outsider's problems" (p.183).

> The outsider usually begins by saying, "I must have solitude to look inside myself." Unfortunately he also discovers that he often gets to know himself better under the stimulation of new experiences; and

> experiences are out to the question when he is in a room of his own (p.280).
> The release, if it comes, involves a complete retracing of the steps through the human ground; back to the essential Will to live that underlies all existence (p.204).

For Wilson, this retracing is "the way forward" for the outsider; it

> Leads to more life, more consciousness. . . . The answer to the outsider's problems: To accept the ordeal; . . . ever further into guilt, ever deeper into human life. . . . Life itself is an exile (p.263).

In the end, it seems:

> The outsider believes that by knowing himself better -- by establishing a discipline aimed at becoming personally harmonious and undivided -- he can permanently establish a *way of seeing* in himself (p.268)
> The exploration of oneself is usually also an exploration of the world at large . . . a process of comparison of oneself with others, discoveries of kinships, gradual illumination of one's own potentialities (p.238).

An outsider's moral:

> The man who thinks too much is likely to go to exhausted extremes where the world becomes a shadowy paradigm of ideas. To keep sane he must continually come back to reality (p.195).

Credo of the outsider:

> The problem for the individual always will be . . . the conscious striving *not* to limit the amount of experience seen and touched; the intolerable struggle to expose the sensitive areas of being to what may possibly hurt them; the attempt to see as a whole, although the instinct of self-preservation fights against the pain of the internal widening, and all the impulses of spiritual laziness build into waves of sleep with every new effort (p.308).

# APPENDIX M

| | |
|---|---|
| Profile | ^pfl |
| Approach/Avoidance | |
| Spouse out of town | ^spx |
| Recent Family/Personal Changes (Transitions) | ^chs |
| Long time-horizon | ^trz |
| Long process to get to university | ^lpr |
| Guilt | ^glt |
| Time Imperative | ^tpv |
| Serious Business | ^srs |
| Idealized view(Institution & Personal goals) | ^idz |
| High expectations of self | |
| Principles | ^prc |
| Interpenetration Family/University | ^iuf |
| Separation of Family/University | ^suf |
| Contrast between day-to-day life and univ. | |
| Relationship with spouse | ^sps |
| Spousal urging & social contract | ^spc |
| Envy, Empathy, Educational plans | ^spv |
| Spousal role change | ^spr |
| Relationship with parents | ^pnt |
| Relationship with children | ^chd |
| The System | ^sys |
| Sexism | ^sxs |
| Relationship with other students | ^std |
| Loneliness, Intolerance, Experience of. | |
| Relationship with professors | ^prf |
| Research Participation effects | ^ptc |
| Relationship with researcher | |
| Positive feelings | ^pos |
| Overwhelmed | ^owh |
| Lack of time | |
| Reversion to familiar activities | ^rdd |
| Super-organized | ^srg |
| Day care and schools | |
| Routine or pattern | ^rtn |
| Withdrawal from others | ^wdl |
| Isolation/Extended family/friends | |
| Outsider | ^out |
| Writing Competency Test | ^enc |
| Finances | ^fnc |
| Metaphors | ^mtf |
| Key individual story | ^kst |
| Contrasting experiences among subjects | ^cex |
| Changes over the term | ^cht |
| Suggestions for Structural/Process Changes | ^chg |
| Library | ^lbr |
| Confidence | ^cnf |
| Transportation and Parking | ^t&p |