GRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS: COPING

MECHANISMS AND THE JOURNEY TO THE

IVORY TOWER

By

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PREFACE

This study was conducted to explore coping mechanisms regarding graduate student success. It is noted that fifty percent of doctoral seeking graduate students achieve their goal, while fifty percent do not. Therefore successful coping mechanisms needed to be found and explained so that future students may use those coping skills so that they may succeed. Specific objectives of this research were to (a) add to the literature on doctoral student success, and (b) identify successful graduate student coping skills.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Table of Contents

THE STUDENT

Student, student, burning bright
In the middle of the night
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy dissertation?

In what distant web based sites
Are etched the articles to bring the light
On what hope I dare divine
What computer dare incline
To answer all the images?

At what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the synapse of my brain?
When my brain began to think,
What dread thought, my brain did speak?

What the question? What the frame?
In what furnace is my brain?
What the theory? What dread grasp
Dared its mysteries thoughts collapse.

When the student put down her fears
And watered heaven with her tears,
Did she smile her work to see?
Did those who wrote before make thee?

Student, student, burning bright
In the middle of the night
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy dissertation?

By Jennifer Reneé Smith
Based on The Tiger by William Blake
April 22, 2002 (paper)
April 23, 2002 (computer)

Chapter 1

Research

Stress is a part of graduate school. Fifty percent of doctoral students fail to finish their program (D'Andrea, 2002). However, 50 percent of doctoral students succeed. The question is posed, what allows 50 percent to succeed? It is imperative to find the successful coping strategies used by successful graduate students (D'Andrea, 2002). It is hoped that this information will help other students succeed.

The earliest definition for stress is attributed to Hans Selye (1956). He describes stress as a physiological reaction to different agents or stressors. Rick (1997) agrees with Selye and relates that most stressors follow environmental cues. Stress is defined as an emotion that results from the desire to escape or avoid an event (Howard, 2000). In other words, stress occurs when something interferes with goal attainment. An individual's perception of stress plays an important role in their interactions with the environment (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998). Students have named numerous stressors that befell them during graduate school (Wolniewicz, 1996). These students cite institutional demands, time constraints, office politics, and lack of mentoring as the causes of their failure or perceived failure in graduate school (Stewart, 1995). The question remains of how students who succeed in obtaining their degree cope with this stress?

Stewart (1995) discusses three developmental stages in the life of a graduate student. He proposes that these stages provide a lens for identifying stress related issues. The first stage is that of entry. In the entry stage, beginning graduate students mirror the

1

stress experienced by freshman students at university: maintaining motivation, academic achievement, and a sense of purpose. All graduate students confront these stresses (Cao, 2001). However, the freshman student has orientation, social activities, and resident hall advisors to offer support (Ulku-Steiner, Kurtz-Costes, & Kinlaw, 2000). The graduate student, in general, does not.

The second stage of engagement is marked by several years of self-preservation and achievement. While Stewart (1995) notes that most graduate students have become routine oriented, the concept of martyrdom now emerges. Students have been working on research and thus sacrificing other life events that occur (Wolniewicz, 1996). Stress now moves from a cognitive process to that of a physical and cognitive process with both having equal impact on one another.

Stewart (1995) states that the final stage, the exit stage, is when most serious crises occur. During the years of graduate work, students have long been out of the reality of non-academic life and a reorientation to reality must occur. They must finish their work, look for employment, and pick up lost social relationships (Azuma, 2000). In effect, they must re-emerge into society. Some students use the belief that the perfect job will be waiting for them after school to motivate them to finish. When this job does not manifest itself, many fall into stress related illnesses such as depression (Hockey, 1994). As a result of there stress, time in school can increase, the student may fail, and scholarship for the institution may be lost (Leatherman, 2000; Stewart, 1995; Hockey, 1994; Cao, 2001). "Stress, either continual or in more moderate amounts, creates the conditions for failure" (Bates, 1999, p.130).

<center>Problem Statement</center>

The journey to achieve a graduate degree is paved with tremendous investments including time, money, personal sacrifice, and effort (Austin, 2002). These activities result in a successful completion of the degree 50 percent of the time (D'Andrea, 2002). On the other hand, 50 percent of the time students do not complete their degree. Many students and researchers would base this anomaly of success and failure on stress and different coping mechanisms (Bray, Braxton, & Sullivan, 1999).

<center>Purpose of the Study and Research Objectives</center>

The purpose of the study is to explore the successful graduate student experience focusing specifically on stress, its influences, sources, the various ways students cope and expected outcomes. In this study the following will be accomplished:

1. An examination of graduate student stress through the eyes and experience of successful students.

2. Analysis of the graduate student experience through the lens of coping (Bray, Braxton, & Sullivan, 1999).

3. Reporting of other realities revealed.

4. Assessment of the usefulness of the coping lens for understanding the success of graduate students.

<center>Orienting Theoretical Framework</center>

Bray, Braxton, and Sullivan (1999) propose that stress is the main factor in student departure from higher education. In their study they also state that students who used various coping mechanisms were more likely to succeed. In their study three methods of positive coping skills were examined; Acceptance, Positive Reinterpretation,

<center>3</center>

Growth and Active Coping reduced student stress that allowed students to achieve social integration, which is a necessary success trait in college. However, students who utilized negative coping skills such as Denial and Behavioral Disengagement are more likely to fail because they are less likely to integrate with their peers.

"Because challenge can produce stress, the growth and development of students who use such coping strategies as denial and behavioral disengagement may be hindered, whereas the growth and development of students who use positive reinterpretation and growth may be enhanced." (Bray, Braxton, & Sullivan, 1997, p. 656) Ultimately it was found that social integration positively affects subsequent institutional success (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997).

Procedures

This section will address the researcher and the experience that is brought to the study. It will also discuss data needs, collection strategies, research questions, and presentation of the data.

Researcher

To present results that are valid the trustworthiness of the study must be assessed and the biases of the researcher must be taken into consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). They must be acknowledged and subjectivity discussed (Punch, 1998).

The first bias that I bring to this study is that of being a graduate student writing her dissertation. I began my graduate school journey in August of 1995. I moved from my home of 20 years to another state with my husband of two days. It was the first experience of living away from home, in an apartment, and at a university where I knew no one. The professors were daunting, the department unyielding, and the altitude

4

literally breathtaking. I went from 720 feet above sea level to 6500 feet above sea level. I have asthma and it took me three months alone to adjust to the altitude.

In addition to the above factors, I should add that I was entering a graduate program in a field that I had studied only for a year, my last year of undergraduate education. I took 46 hours to complete a degree in Letters. I was a Math major until the fall of 1994. The drastic change in degree programs had as much to do with my dissatisfaction with the Math department as with my desire to get married. I promised my grandmother, parents, and family that I would finish my Bachelor's degree before I married. I intended to keep that promise. In order to accomplish that, I would have had to spend two more years in math, whereas, I could spend one year obtaining my Letters degree.

While I value my degree in Classics, it was earned at an extremely high cost to my health and self-esteem. I was not prepared for the rigors of the program I entered. I had the stress of being away from my family, my friends, and the support of my undergraduate professors. The professors at my new university had an office hour, once a week. They did not desire to visit or help me with my questions. I was alone. I felt stupid. I believed I had arrived under false conditions and completely lacked ability.

The women in the department were treated poorly. We had no mentors. It was this poor treatment that allowed my feminist side to appear. I remember the head of the department making fun of a student who couldn't read Latin very well. He humiliated her in class. I later talked to him about it and pointed out that she was dyslexic. His response was, "oh." This experience further motivated my ire. I was going to finish the degree if for no other reason than to return one day as his boss.

I finished my Master's degree. I remember returning to Oklahoma and calling my mother when I finally received my diploma in the mail. I cried. I had just spent two years and $45,000.00 to get a piece of paper. My first job when I returned was as an adjunct at a community college and a Latin/Math teacher at a small private school. I earned $1250.00 a month. I felt that I had wasted my time.

However, I made a promise to myself when I was 11 years old that I would get my doctoral degree. So, I enrolled in the Ed.D. program in Education Administration. I thought, "why not?" I have gone this far I might as well finish. Besides, there was always the hope that I might be the boss of my former program administrator. This could be fun! What I did not consider was the cost of the graduate program emotionally, physically, and financially. I had forgotten everything I had experienced in my previous program. What I didn't realize is that the pursuit of the highest degree is even more stressful and taxing. I had again made the jump from one field to another. I had been a teacher but never a student of education. The cost of higher education is priceless and the pursuit of doctordom is relentless.

It is seemingly more difficult with each passing year. The more I learn, the less I truly know. I walk through this journey with more than most. I have a supportive spouse. He has edited my work, laughed with me, and listened to me cry. Yet, this is still the most stress filled journey I have taken. I can't imagine what it is like to do this without the support of at least one person. It is during this process that I revisited a poem given to me by my high school counselor. He told me I was one of the 'black sheep' people. I would forever be running against the rest of the crowd in pursuit of acceptance. He hoped that I would give up on acceptance and attempt uniqueness.

Perhaps this research stems from my desire to know what drives us, the black sheep of the university campus, to obtain the title of Ph.D. or Ed.D. While I can never be completely unbiased in my analysis, I think that the coping mechanisms that allowed me to arrive in this place need to be examined. Perhaps through analysis, more individuals can achieve their goal of being a scholar. I, as a teacher, believe that most people can achieve. However, not every person believes that. If there are techniques, skills, and tricks that allow for staying power, they need to be found.

<div align="center">Data Needs-Boundaries</div>

Doctoral students, both male and female, from soft science programs will be studied. The data are first person interviews of the perspective of the graduate school experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The sources of data will be male and female doctoral graduate students of varying backgrounds and ages from Clinical Psychology, History, and Education. These subjects will be from a doctoral granting higher education institution in the state of Oklahoma. By limiting the research to one university, the extenuating factors of economic, social, and communal issues will be the similar for all participants (Creswell, 1998).

Students who are completing a degree will be the focus of this study. Their tenure (time to degree completion) in school will vary. By exploring various times to degree completion (2 years, 4 years or more), it is hoped that coping skills will be found that define a developmental process in graduate school. This developmental process relates to continuous re-evaluation by the student and how they assess this process in order to succeed. That is, how the process of coping and time may be related (Bray, Braxton, & Sullivan, 1999).

Participants are from the previously mentioned programs of study. I sent an e-mail solicitation to the department heads of ten different units at one university requesting the names and e-mail addresses of individuals in their department that have recently finished or were about to finish their doctoral program of study. I then contacted each individual and invited him or her to participate in the study. I interview respondents until there was no new information found. This consisted of eight interviews.

<center>Data Collection</center>

Two different method of data collection were employed: responses to visual prompts and the participant's interviews (Creswell, 1998). The response to the visual prompt is a base line for experience; the interview is the ladder to understanding. Howard (2000) states that visual prompts can help recall memories of experience and enrich the explanation of emotions that were involved in specific situations.

> The use of words to convey a mental image of an event, a piece of scenery, a scene, an experience, an emotion, or a sensation; the account related from the perspective of the person doing the depicting. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15)

These methods provided a view of stress on a personal level. They allowed for individual experience to be introduced and explanations given to their experiences (Austin, 2002). Perception is a fact of research life, what I perceive to mean one thing, may indeed not hold that meaning for the individual who wrote or stated it (Hancock, 2000).

Comic strips that relate to the various steps in the doctoral process were presented. Allowing the participant to respond to the visual prompts allowed time for thinking about the experience (Howard, 2000). It allowed greater meaning to be derived through a careful review of the words chosen to relate their coping skills. Once the

graduate has responded, the interview questions were adjusted to gain reflection of their experience.

By using the interview process, I was given the unique opportunity to listen to what was said by the person who was successful in completing their degree requirements. The participants' reflections gave depth, insight, and emotional experience to their experience of stress in graduate school, which needs as much definition as possible. By following up with an interview, the meanings of experience were explored through conversation.

Graduates were asked to explain how they were successful in their degree completion. They related their understandings of stress as part of the success process and the coping mechanisms they used. This provided their experience of stress, which in turn, provided cues to successful coping strategies that the students used (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998). To find the coping mechanisms that the participants used the following questions were asked and analyzed. Question 1 will be used to begin the interview and to break the ice.

1. Why did you decide to pursue a doctoral degree? How did the reality meet or not meet your expectations?

2. How did you handle the transition to graduate school?

    a. What was easy or difficult about it?

    b. What made it easier?

    c. Think back to how you felt when you sat in your first class. How did you feel? Anxious, excited, overwhelmed?

3. How did you handle managing a career, personal life, and school?

4. What problems or challenges did you have in graduate school?

    a. What coping strategies or mechanisms did you used when you experienced a challenge?

    b. What helped get you through?

    c. Were support systems important?

5. How did you handle the coursework?

    a. Reading, assignments, library work, team work?

6. Any general advice you have for making it work?

7. What do you know now that you wish someone would have told you when you first started?

Data Presentation

By writing the research in the form of a narrative, the individual journey was related and a depth of understanding provided that allows the readers to experience the process of graduate school (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data can be presented in linear form, narrative analysis, non-narrative forms, and digitally. Through image and narrative, each individual's journey through the Ivory Tower was related and analyzed for similarities and differences. The work explored positive change, ideas, and revelations in the coping skill used by students trying to reach their goal.

Data Analysis

Since the data is presented in the form of a narrative, the journey of each person was written and conceptualized. Within this process similarities were noted, differences noted, and extraneous information evaluated (Creswell, 1994). Representation was

assessed and hypotheses were posited (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). The goal of this research

is to provide possible methods of coping and succeeding in graduate school. By

developing abstract, hypothetical theories the study offers the ability to generalize

findings that can be applicable to the greater population (Punch, 1998).

The questions of what methods were used and how they were applied were

discussed and studied for similarities and differences. Then they were related to active

coping literature to define, analyze, and provide solutions for overcoming stress in

graduate school and succeeding in the academic endeavor.

Research Criteria

Guba and Lincoln (1989) recommend three criteria to evaluate a study: 1)

credibility, 2) dependability, and 3) confirmability. Credibility is based on the

perceived realities of study participants and the representation thereof by the

researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

To establish credibility, peer debriefing, progressive subjectivity, and member

checks will be used. A peer with no ties to the research participants listened to

information gathered and helped add an outsider view to the research, providing

questions and possible alternative explanations. The peer, a Doctor of Industrial

Psychology, provided an objective and informed view on the journey of the graduate

students. She related both to the graduate student experience as well as that of a graduate

student teacher and an institution view (she is the head of Institutional Advancement and

Research at a sister institution in Oklahoma). A journal of expectations was kept and

archived to help frame any preconceived notions prior to interviewing participants. This

will work in conjunction with the peer debriefing. Both will provide a credibility check to

ensure that the research remains on track. Finally, member checks were employed to allow the participants the ability to check that what was said was correct and their interpretation of the information presented.

Dependability assesses the study in terms of process. The data is looked at in terms of stability over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

> But such changes and shifts need to be both tracked and trackable (publicly inspectable), so that outside reviewers of such an evaluation can explore the process, judge the decisions that were made, and understand what salient factors in the context led the evaluator to the decisions and interpretations made. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 242)

Dependability allows for shifts in methodology and conclusions through case study's ever-emergent design. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It allows the researcher to present the unique qualities of the case, while allowing for a baseline of research that can promote future study. Through the member checks, journal entries, peer debriefing, and continual visitation and analysis of data collected, dependability was established.

Confirmability is a hermeneutic, dialectic process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It involves data information review upon receipt in the form of comment, restatement, member checking, and other feedback methods that allow for participant inclusion. This allows for errors or misunderstandings to be found quickly and assessed accordingly. Fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity are all factors in confirmability. Fairness involves open negotiation, which is the involvement of the participants. Consent is obtained before any interaction and the boundaries are clearly stated. Ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical

authenticity all involve the extent that the participants understanding of the topic is enhanced, informed, and empowered. Informed consent, review of interviews, follow-up interviews, and open discussion of concerns of all parties accomplished confirmability of the study.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

The data that were gathered and analyzed provided a theory that can be applied to finding stress solutions for graduate students.

> The analysis of the qualities of the social world is a rich source for theory construction. New concepts are more likely to be invented when new phenomena are experienced. When such invention occurs, another tool is added to the kit of the qualitative researcher. (Eisner, 1998, p. 237)

In other words, this analysis provided a unique opportunity to find new theories for the support of successful coping strategies for graduate students.

The opportunity that this study provides for research is out of the norm for most qualitative studies (Eisner, 1998, p. 209). Graduate student success has been overlooked. The rate of attrition is well documented but the successful students are not as well studied. Since this study addressed the issue of stress factors and successful coping strategies of students from different disciplines, it contributes greatly to the applicability of stress management solutions. The information may be applied to stress management solutions for graduate students from any field.

The central aim of this research is to find successful coping strategies used during the graduate school process. It provides avenues for further research, ways to support

higher education, and achievement of the students the institution is serving. This in turn provides scholarship and recognition for the institution. The possibility that this research will provide insight, humor, and a less stressful experience to any graduate student in any program is my desire. If the institution knows the problems that exist in their program, they can find ways to reduce or eliminate them (Austin, 2002). This might result in students completing programs quicker, less time lost, and more robust research being generated. All of this provides a win/win situation for the parties involved. The students find the support and resources they need and the university obtains the scholarship it desires. It is my hope that this study will provide some techniques for change in stress management, both as how it is viewed and what can be done to help the institution and student achieve scholarly work.

Summary

The ability to endure and finish a process as difficult as the doctoral process is an amazing feat. To be able to identify what allows for this success will help those students in the future whose goal is to be a scholar. James (1903) discusses the failure of a brilliant scholar who could not pass through the doctoral process because of the difficulty (stress) of the dissertation process. A writer who had produced numerous papers and was noted as brilliant by Harvard professors failed. Perhaps on that day great scholarship was lost. The fate, other than his failure, is not related in the article. However, even then, the idea that the university graduate process had failed him was posited. Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931) is quoted as having said that genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.

Those who complete the doctoral process have stress coping skills in their repertoire. If those skills can be identified imagine what will be found if the genius is supported. It has been stated by Austin (2002) that if we are to strengthen the new professorate that more attention must be paid to the socialization of graduate students. I propose that to strengthen the future success of graduate students is to analyze the coping skills of the recent graduates.

"Listening to the reported experiences and thoughtful suggestions of those who wish to enter the professorate is a good place to start" (Austin, 2002, p. 118). If voice is given to the stress that students experience and the successful skills that were used to address stress, the experience of graduate school can be improved for all involved.

Reporting

Chapter II contains a review of the related literature.

Chapter III presents the data collected from interviews, interview notes, and illustration.

Chapter IV provides analysis and interpretation of the data through the use of coding and theory about coping strategies that emerged from the data.

Chapter V provides the summary, conclusions, discussion, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Stress and coping are complicated constructs to define. According to Crotty (2003) the ultimate definition of stress and coping lies within the experience of the individual. This experience is also defined by the coping mechanisms that a person has developed. Given this, literature exploring Erikson's (1950), eight developmental stages which detail, the conditions that shape an individual's ability to manage and cope with various stress experiences will be presented as well as Stewart's (1995) three stages that a graduate student experiences during their tenure in school. In this literature review these topics will be explored.

Stress Definitions

The word stress has become embedded in our culture and that of most cultures throughout the world today. This is a phenomenon in that it originated only a half century ago and was coined by the Swiss scientist Hans Selye. Hans Selye first used the term stress in 1935 to describe a common condition that affected animals that were exposed to several different agents or stressors. According to Rosch (2004), Selye was fluent in at least eight languages and conversant in at least six more, he chose the English word stress to describe the non-specific physiological response syndrome he discovered. This was an engineering term that was used to describe elasticity in strength of materials. That is the ability of an object to return to its original state after deformation. Selye eventually was noted as saying that had he better knowledge of the English language, he would have

16

termed stress as Strain Theory to more closely align with the physics concepts. The word stress caused confusion in its translation into foreign languages since there were no comparable words that related its meaning. It more closely resembles the concept of strain not the engineering concept of stress. Stress is the force and strain is the result.

Rosche (2004) also noted that because there was confusion between the cause and effect of stress, Selye created the word stressor to distinguish between the stimulus and the response. "Stress in addition to being itself, was also the cause of itself and the result of itself." In other words stressors are simply the stimuli and stress is the response.

Searching for a new hormone through experimentation on lab rats in the 1930's led Selye to contend that these same physical responses exist with animals when they are subjected to stressors. He proposed that changes exist in organisms that cannot be caused by any known sex hormone and the results led him to discover the concept of stress. He explains stress as a physiological reaction that is characterized by arousal and that there are changes in the central nervous system that trigger fight or flight response. In fact he proposed that stress is a factor in the development of every disease and failure of the organism to cope with the stressors can result in diseases of adaptation. In humans this can manifest as ulcers and high blood pressure. Further he proposed that it is not stress that harms organisms but distress (Gabriel, 2004).

Selye (1956) describes three stages of response to stress in his description of General Adaptation Syndrome (G.A.S.). The first stage is alarm. At this time, an individual's central nervous system speeds up. Individuals in this stage show an increase in metabolism, a loss of appetite, ulcers, and headaches. The second stage is an extended period of resistance. While the time length of this stage may vary, it is the body's way of

numbing itself to the alarm stage. When stress has taken all of the psychological energy of the person, the final stage of exhaustion begins. It is in this stage that extreme behavior can occur if an individual fails to adapt to the situation. Hence leading to distress.

Similar to the concept of alarm is arousal. Arousal is the capacity with which one can cope. Yerkes and Dodson (1908), proposed an inverted U-shaped function between arousal and performance. Lower levels of arousal can motivate a person toward higher performance. Each individual has a maximum amount of arousal that will cause peak performance. However, too little arousal does not motivate performance and too much arousal impedes performance. For instance, many students wait until a week before a project is due to initiate optimal arousal, which results in peak performance. However, those students who wait until the night before the project is due not only run out of time but their performance suffers.

Furthermore, Clark (2000) explains that optimal level of arousal is affected by difficulty of task. Lower arousal is necessary for optimal performance with more difficult or intellectual tasks. For example, a student learning how to add matrices the night before the final as opposed to learning the concept three weeks previous, will produce significantly lower levels of performance. Higher arousal is necessary for tasks requiring endurance and persistence or lower cognitive abilities. For example, playing football in front of a crowd as opposed to playing in front of friends will significantly increase performance. Below is a graph representing the Yerkes-Dodson law of arousal.
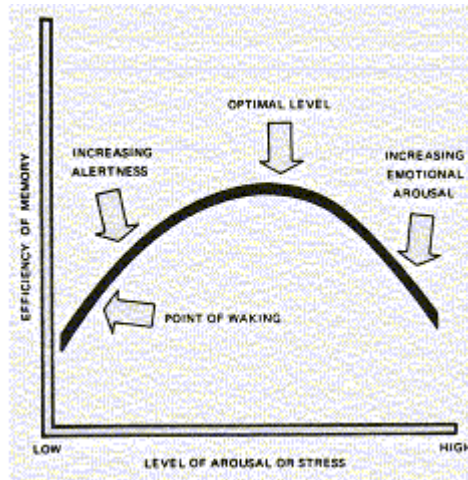
(Clark, 2000)

Walter Cannon in the 1920's first described the fight or flight response, also called the acute stress response. People react to threats with a general discharge of the sympathetic nervous system. Either a person reacts with electrical impulses throughout the neo-cortex, hence the flight response. Or a person receives an electrical spike up the brainstem, hence a fight response. If this response is continuous, that is it is never resolved, a person can develop multiple health concerns including exhaustion. The chronic stress can result in energy depletion, depression, insecurity, apathy, emotional withdrawal, confusion, insomnia, chronic fatigue, helplessness, anxiety, lack of concentration, and poor memory (Howard, 2000, p. 390).

Other research in stress and stressors includes the difference between life events stressors and day-to-day stressors or daily hassles. Holmes and Rahe (1967), defined stress as any emotion in its extreme form. They also found a connection between stress and illness. In their research they compiled a list of 43 life events that people commonly associate as stressful and require psychological adjustments in order to adapt to the event. They had subjects rate the magnitude of stress perceived for each of the 43 life events

with a benchmark of 500 for marriage. The result of their work was a stress-measuring device called the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS).

The importance of this research is that it defined a method for measuring life event stress. The death of a spouse or close family member as well as divorce topped the scale for stress. Whereas even minor events such as holidays, vacations, and speeding tickets provide some low levels of stress. These life events when occurring close together result in a high score on the scale and predict greater susceptibility to illness in their immediate future.

Research has also indicated that daily hassles can have a detrimental effect on our physical and emotional well-being. There is a correlation between the number of daily hassles a person experiences and physical and psychological well-being. Lazarus (1982), states that daily hassles are lower for people with high self-esteem and good support systems versus those with lower self-image and poorer support systems.

Brantley, Waggoner, Jones, & Rappaport (1987) developed a daily hassles scale designed to measure perceived stress with daily life events. They include such day to day experiences as being stared out, feeling embarrassed, experiencing car trouble, or being exposed to upsetting TV news. If an individual's score is consistently high chances are that daily hassles are a problem and therefore associated with poor emotional and physical health.

Erikson's psychosocial theory of development relates that everyone experiences a crisis during each of the eight stages of development. If one emerges from a critical period of development with negative potential outweighing the positive, that is not having dealt with the situation, additional stress is felt by the individual during each

subsequent stage of development. Until that particular crisis is resolved, the individual will continue to revisit the stressor time and again. It can impede growth over time and cause negative reinforcement. Erikson's theory is discussed in depth in the section on development.

Stress can be categorized in terms of its impact: specifically on psychological, physical, cognitive, and spiritual development. Certainly Selye and Yerkes-Dodson discussed the major physical and cognitive responses. For instance, the Yerkes-Dodson law specifies how cognitive versus physical responses are affected by increased levels of arousal. However, much research today focused on psychological responses.

Literature related to the psychological effects of stress is extensive, which much focus on the construct of emotional fatigue. This includes irritation, moodiness, fear, exaggerated emotion, and loss of confidence. Stress manifested in its extreme psychological form is seen as depression, hyper-vigilance, and loss of control. As was previously discussed, the third stage of response, exhaustion, is most apparent in this stage (Rice, 1987).

Research suggests that personality can also have an effect on how stressors are perceived. For instance, Type A behavior, a cyclical type of hostile behavior cycles through cynicism, anger, and aggression. In other words, it is the fulfillment of negative emotions. This is contrasted with Type B behavior, which is associated with calmness and more stable emotional affect. Consequently, Type A personalities are more sensitive to stressors and respond more negatively to stimuli than do Type B (Howard, 2000).

Stress can affect a body's immune response. Shiraldi (2000) states that numerous clinical studies have shown a negative relationship between stress and resistance to

infection. These studies found that people under stress were more prone to health conditions such as the common cold. Additionally, there were increased instances of cardiovascular irregularities, digestive disorders, sleep disorders, fatigue, migraines, and physical aches and pains.

Dossey (1993) relates that stress can also take a toll on an individual's spirituality. The discouragement, hopelessness, and despair that are felt by a person can hurt his or her communal bonds. The tendency to sever ties with friends and family in cases of extreme stress result in an increase in stress response and further complicate the situation for the individual. Social bonds increase a person's ability to cope with life stresses. If this bond is lost, the ability to cope can decrease as time passes.

Rick (1997) defines stress in terms of environment, relating that while most researchers define stress in terms of the individual, environment is the largest contributing factor. If the context of the problem is analyzed, a working solution can be found. The term stress is used to exert control over a situation that is considered uncontrollable. An individual can exert control by acknowledging that stress is the culprit for the current level of discomfort.

In lay terms, stress is used on a daily basis to mean almost anything. Everyone will have their own understanding of the word, but it becomes very confusing and very difficult to understand what a person means when they say that they are stressed or that something is stressful. General consensus is that stress is something we suffer from, but what it is exactly remains very unclear. (Rick, 1997, p. 22) While an uncontrollable situation can result in stress, the analysis of the individual and their response to stress define the magnanimity of the situation.

Coping Definitions

Coping is a management device used by individuals to adapt and understand their environment. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as a constantly changing cognitive and behavioral effort to manage specific internal and external demands that are perceived by an individual as exceeding their personal resources. That is, there are four elements to coping: (1) It is an ongoing process of evaluation of the success of strategies; (2) Strategies are learned as situations are encountered; (3) It requires constant effort; and (4) managing stressors is more efficacious than attempting to master stress.

Within the effort to manage stressors, there are positive and negative aspects of coping in relation to personality.

Two general coping strategies have been distinguished: problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events. (MacArthur, 1998, p. 1)

If an individual has a positive coping style, they tend to have the characteristics of hardiness, optimism, psychological control, high self-esteem, conscientiousness, ego strength (dependability, trust, and lack of impulsive behavior), and be self confident and easy going. Jarry (2002) states that successful coping is comprised of positive belief. The ability to cope is enhanced when an individual believes that he or she can successfully achieve the desired consequences. Also, Jarray (2002) notes that good problem solving skills, social skills, and social support enhances coping abilities. Taylor (1998) describes this type of coping as active and problem-focused.

In contrast to positive coping, negative coping style is characterized by higher distress, more health comprising behaviors, predisposition to disease, and greater impact of events due to differences in perception and reporting of events. This individual will have a pessimistic explanatory style. Taylor (1998) describes this type of coping as avoidant and emotion-focused. Jarray (2002) adds that the goal of emotion-focused coping is to avoid or minimize the impact of the stressor and is most often employed when an individual feels nothing can be done to improve the situation.

<div align="center">Coping Strategies</div>

Coping strategies vary by region, community, social group, household, gender, age, season and time in history. Despite this, the common factor among these strategies is that they are deeply influenced by an individual's previous life experience. In this study, the coping mechanisms of successful graduates from doctoral degree granting programs are explored.

According to Folkman and Lazarus (1985), students cope with negative events in three stages: (1) primary appraisal of the situation or realizing the threat, (2) secondary appraisal or bringing to mind the potential responses that can be made, and (3) coping or the execution of coping responses. (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000, p. 582) Using these three stages, there are two styles of coping that are discussed within the literature, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

Meichenbaum (1985) relates key elements to problem-focused coping. The first looks at changing the situation it is also known as direct action or problem confrontation. Through this method, the individual looks at and assesses the stressor. After defining the situation possible alternative solutions are explored. Then there is evaluation of the

alternative solutions. Last is the implementation of the best solution. Each of these points relate to the original four elements. These strategies focus on the cognitive domain.

The second style of coping is emotion-focused. It is used when an individual feels that a situation must be endured. The characteristics of emotion-focused coping involve attempts to control and possibly change an event. There are also tendencies to avoid or minimize the event. The goal of the individual is to reduce emotional distress. Folkman and Lazarus (1980) state that emotion-focused coping involves thoughts, actions, and strategies that are aimed at reducing emotional pain associated with a traumatic or threatening event.

While both of these styles of coping have distinct characteristics they share commonalities. The elements of support seeking or information gathering are involved in both processes. In addition there is a form of emotional regulation (self-control). However, the degree of emotional regulation varies from situation to situation and individuals who are problem-focused tend to have more success. While emotion-focused individuals find distraction, escape, and avoidance through negative coping strategies such as substance abuse, disengagement, denial, and self-distraction. A positive or problem-focused style of coping also elicits self-esteem, affirmation of successes, a sense of humor, and acceptance of self-limitations. In addition to acceptance of self-limitations there is a sense of situational, personal, and existential responsibility (Rick, 1997).

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2004) states that there are some differences in female and male responses to stress. Females are more likely to select a coping response based upon protecting themselves and their offspring. It is proposed that these responses build on the bio-behavioral attachment caregiver responses.

Developmental Stages

Erikson (1953) addressed the psychosocial development process in his eight developmental stages of life. According to Erikson, there are eight developmental stages that an individual will journey through during their life. The first stage is trust vs. mistrust. The second stage is autonomy vs. shame. The third stage is initiative vs. guilt. The fourth stage is industry vs. inferiority. The fifth stage is identity vs. role confusion. The sixth stage is intimacy vs. isolation. The seventh stage is generativity vs. self-absorption. The eighth stage is ego integrity vs. despair. Erikson (1950) relates that if an individual failed to resolve a crisis during one of the eight developmental stages it will continue to pose problems throughout life until the initial crisis is resolved.

Erikson, who was a student of Anna Freud, built on Sigmund Freud's five stages of psychosexual development. While Sigmund Freud was concerned with bodily functions, Erikson studied the psychological impulses and development. He increased Freud's five stages to eight, decreased the focus on sex and the unconscious, and detailed the experience and consequence of each stage of development.

In the first stage of development, trust is developed. A child takes in the world in relation to what a caretaker provides. "What is most important in these interactions is that babies come to find some consistency, predictability, and reliability in their caretakers' actions" (Crain, 1998, p. 249). If a child finds this consistency a sense of basic trust develops. This leads to the basic coping mechanism of hope. Erikson (1982) defines hope as the expectation that despite frustrations, rages, and disappointments, good things will happen in the future. Hope enables the child to move forward into the world and take up

new challenges. If a sense of hope is not established or issues of trust are not resolved the 'energy and vitality' may not be as strong for other stages of development.

Stage two is marked by development of will. Erikson (1982) describes this as the struggle of autonomy vs. shame and doubt. Autonomy comes from within; biological maturation fosters the ability to do things on one's own while shame and doubt come from social expectations and pressure. This is a time of self-determination. If it is not met, that is shame and doubt prevail, then reliance on self will not develop. The individual will rely on others assessment of life to guide their efforts. "Will is the unbroken determination to exercise free choice as well as self-restraint" (Erikson, 1964, p. 119). Crain (1998) remarks that Erikson included self-restraint in his definition because he believe it is important for children to learn to control their impulses and to renounce what is not worth doing or what cannot be done. The child is in charge not external forces. If an individual did not develop the ability to assess a situation in terms of what can or cannot be done, then there is a failure to resolve crisis that affects judgment of future interactions.

While stage two is marked by development of will, stage three is development of purpose. In general terms, Erikson (1982) characterized this stage as initiative vs. guilt. Individuals pursue dreams only to find that they are unrealistic or unattainable. According to Crain (1992), the individual's naive exuberance and daring will be offset by self-observation, self-control, and self-punishment. However, the individual at this stage of development also channels energy into socially useful pursuits (Erikson, 1963, p. 258). If a child is supported and guided by parents, the child can learn to overcome the crisis at

this stage and gain a sense of purpose. If not, the child can have difficulty finding direction later in life.

Stage four of development is marked by industry vs. inferiority. This is the time when important cognitive and social skills are learned. It is also the time when the most learning is occurring. Erikson (1963) refers to this stage as the development of steady attention and persevering diligence. Also during this period is a chance that a feeling of inadequacy and inferiority may develop. Since this is the age of school, competition within the group can develop and an individual that does not meet personal or environmental standards may fail to cope with the challenges. The individual may feel left behind. It is during this time that competence occurs. "Competence is the free exercise of intelligence and skill in the completion of tasks, unimpaired by excessive feelings of inferiority" (Erikson, 1964, p. 124). If competence does not develop an individual may forever be compensating for a real or imagined loss of self.

While stage four is concerned with the cognitive domain, stage five is physical and psychosocial in nature. Puberty marks a tremendous change in personal development and Erikson describes this time as identity vs. role confusion. An individual in this stage is searching for their place in society. What makes the search for identity so critical at this period are the dramatic body changes, the sexual maturation, cognitive changes, and emancipation from one's family.

To understand identity-formation, it is important to recognize that it is a lifelong process. In part, we form our identities through identifications. Although we are not necessarily aware of it, we identify with those who appeal to us and therefore become

like them. Each person's identity, then, is partly a synthesis of various partial

identifications. (Erikson, 1959, p. 112-113)

Therefore, an individual is shaped by various interactions within the environment in

which they interact. Smith (1998) states that if an individual does not develop an identity

there may be difficulty in commitment in the future. This commitment can be in personal,

educational, and work related environment. According to Chin, Monroe, and Fiscella

(2000) the ability to develop a strong social support network (or fidelity) may be

impaired. Therefore ability to respond to stress would be diminished if this

developmental stage were not fully met.

In young adulthood, stage six; the search is for the attainment of intimacy.

According to Erikson (1959), real intimacy can only be found if one has developed a

reasonable sense of self. If not, isolation will develop. If there is no sense of genuine

mutuality, and a lack of the strong social support network is prevalent, a failure to

develop intimacy will occur and the individual becomes isolated as to their place in

society. This stage is also important in developing coping strategies. If one emerges from

this critical period with a negative potential outweighing the positive, he or she has not

developed a network of friends which are know coping strategies. Instead, he or she lives

in isolation and is left to cope with stressors all alone.

Stage seven is adulthood. Erikson (1982) calls it generativity versus self-

absorption and stagnation. Crain (1998) defines generativity as a broad term, which refers

not only to the creation of children, but also to the production of things and ideas through

work. It is during this time when creative work is fostered and developed. The world of

ideas forms into theory, creative work, and accomplishment. Michie, Glachan, and Bray

(2001) discuss the impact of age, gender, past experiences of school and motivation for students in higher education. If a student has not developed strong skills in earlier stages their psychosocial problems may conflict with their generativity. Thus if there is a failure to resolve an earlier crisis, success at production of ideas may be difficult.

Ego integrity versus despair marks the eighth and final stage of development for Erikson. This is the time when evaluation of life occurs. It is acceptance of the order of past events. This inner struggle tends to make the older person something of a philosopher, and out of the struggle grows the ego strength of wisdom. Wisdom may be expressed in many ways, but it always reflects a thoughtful, hopeful effort to find the value and meaning of life in the face of death (Erikson, 1976, p. 61-62). While the reflection process is a valuable part of the developmental stages the concern of the study will predominately reflect the first 6 stages of development and their impact on the seventh stage through stress and coping skills.

<u>Student Stress and Coping Skills</u>

One model that is useful in understanding stress in among students is the person-environmental model. According to Lazarus (1966), people see stressful events as either events as either challenging or threatening. So when a student evaluates his or her education as a challenge they tend to feel more competent and increase their capacity to learn. When education is seen as a threat, stress brings feelings of helplessness and foreboding.

Explanations of student performance can be categorized as hyper-vigilance or premature closure. Hyper-vigilance is excessive attention to a stressful situation resulting in panic. An example would be a student over studying for an exam. Premature closure

occurs when a solution to a stressful situation is chosen too quickly. An example of this would be rushing through an exam. Both of these responses are ineffective means of responding to student stress (Whitman, 2004).

In understanding what is stressful for undergraduates, Whitman (2004) found that students react to college in a variety of ways. College can be stressful for some students because it is a major change from high school. It is stressful for other students because of separation from home and family. Although some degree of stress is necessary for all personal growth, too much stress can overwhelm students and affect their ability to cope.

According to Hirsch and Keniston (1970, p. 2) one measure of excessive student stress or distress is the use of mental health services. Statistics indicate that students are using mental health services more than they did just 20 years ago. A second measure of distress in college students is the dropout rate. Approximately 50% of college freshman do not finish college four-years later. Falk (1975), reports that college dropout is associated with the fight or flight formula. In other words, if a student does not feel like he or she does not fit with the college, the student may put distance from the source of stress and drop out.

Solutions suggested for reducing distress in college students include stress inoculation such as informing students in advance of difficulties they might face in college and helping to develop strategies to achieve their goals. Other solutions include better access to campus mental health services, peer counseling, and self-help groups (Hirsch & Keniston, 1970).

Hartshorn (1976) reported that graduate students perceived that faculty exerted excessive power over them, leaving them feeling powerless. Further, difficulty achieving

31

social intimacy in graduate school as well as the lack of time to develop interpersonal relationships can add to a student's response to distress. This accentuates the importance of resolving the critical period in Erikson's seventh stage of psychosocial development, resolving the identity versus isolation crisis.

<div align="center">Graduate Student Development</div>

As with the personal developmental stages of life, there are stages of development within a given stage. Stewart proposes the idea of developmental stages in graduate students. Within each of these stages, there is a link to previous stages from the past that causes re-evaluation of the present. The development of the graduate student is characterized by three stages. The first stage is the entry stage. Baker and Siryk (1984) maintain that beginning graduate students mirror incoming freshman students in areas such as maintaining motivation, meeting academic demands, and developing a clear sense of purpose. While the freshman student has orientation, Stewart (1995) relates that graduate students do not have the time or are too intimidated to attend orientation opportunities. In addition to the psychological ramification of lack of social support in the entry stage there is a loss of autonomy that is seen in graduate students. While it may seem that there would be more, the increase in responsibility for research, grading undergraduate's work, teaching responsibilities, and keeping up with coursework adds to less autonomy.

Any sense of dependence at this stage also creates distress for the graduate student insofar as it reactivates issues of individuation that may have been successfully resolved at an earlier personal development stage (Stewart, 1995) Thus, a reversion to dependency versus independence occurs and failure to resolve crisis is revisited.

The second developmental stage of the graduate student is the engagement stage. During this stage the primary focus is on self-preservation with a secondary focus on achievement. Stewart (1995) states that students become complacent and new challenges and opportunities are avoided because of the threat of disruption to the status quo. The possibility of change in routine is threatening because of the time and energy used to arrive at this point in the student's career. In addition to the possibility of change disruption, students begin the process of isolation.

Stewart (1995) mentions physiological reactions in developmental stage of engagement of the graduate student.

> The concern is that unhealthy patterns for survival in graduate school may become guiding principles of the student's lives and lead to the adoption of similar unhealthy practices (e.g. poor eating and sleep habits; long hours; mistrust of colleagues) in situations where they are not indicated or adaptive. This can take a toll of both the students and their significant others. (Stewart, 1995, p. 4)

According to Selye (1956), continued stress on the body results in exhaustion. Crotty (2003) notes that individuals under high amounts of stress tend to be unproductive. Any complex tasks prove to be difficult and are generally avoided.

"Graduate students develop the notion that continuous and significant personal sacrifice are necessary for success in other areas of life, and make decisions accordingly" (Stewart, 1995, p. 4).

Thoits (1991) states that social support is a necessary tool that helps in coping with stress. Social support allows appraisal support, tangible assistance, information resource, and emotional support. According to Edwards, Hershberger,

Russell, and Markert (2001), the effects of social support reduce psychological distress, physiological stress, lowers risk of illness, enhances recovery from illness, and promotes positive health benefits.

The notion of self-sacrifice is increased in the exit stage or a reorientation to reality. Stewart (1995) relates that during this stage the most significant difficulties occur. Students begin the job hunt and find it difficult to have interpersonal relationships. Because the students lost or sacrificed relationships in the engagement stage, Stewart (1995), the social abilities to relate to anyone outside of their discipline is missing. The student finds difficulty in re-establishment of meaningful relationships and finding the social support network to help during the transition time. In order to facilitate transition, Chen (1999) states that the level of role adjustment (transition) is an individual's sense of social connectedness. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) indicate support is a vital part of psychological strength to help individuals in transition feel positive and confident in taking on new challenges.

<u>Summary</u>

In this chapter the definitions of stress and coping mechanisms have been presented. In addition the developmental stages of Erikson and Stewart were related. A further explanation of graduate student development into the sub-categories of social connectedness, motivation, time management, and stress response were relayed through the literature.

<u>Chapter III</u>

<u>Presentation of the Data</u>

Here begins the stories of those who came before: the tales of the talented few who dared journey to the Ivory Tower in pursuit not only of knowledge but also of title. With each passing hour, day, and year they edge ever closer to the goal. Those pilgrims few, who allowed me moments of their time, have this tale to relate for those of the future. In the style of Chaucer before me I offer up, "Before I speak more of this tale, it seems to me accordant with reason to inform you of the state of every one, of all these pilgrims, as it appeared to me, and who they were, and what was their degree, and even how they arrived in the land of Middle America." And so we begin.

In a land not so far away, in Middle America, where farmland stretches out far and wide, a select few lived amidst the concrete structures of a small town with a land grant university. These few were chosen by various programs of study to be graduate students. In a relationship that grew and blossomed over time, whether voluminous or miniscule, they achieved what they were after, the title of doctor. They made it to the Ivory Tower, slew the dragon, and walked away to embark on new journeys with new twists and turns. This is their story, the story of their journey with the highs, lows, and experiences in between that allowed them to complete their journey.

The pilgrims of our tale are of considerable interest in terms of understanding the journey that is theirs and how it can add to our knowledge and understanding of the standards of success that fly with them. As we enter their domain, the selection of

35

pilgrims comes to mind. Each individual was invited to participate in the study through email. Having responded to the email, they were then contacted to set up a mutual pilgrimage time, whereupon we discussed their journey to the Ivory Tower. Each pilgrim was journeying under the banner of Arts and Sciences. Within the protection of their banner they were part of individual units- Clinical Psychology, Education, and History. The cohort from Clinical Psychology was four. The others were individual, while some shared discipline; they journeyed on their own to the Ivory Tower.

Clinical Psychology

To study under the auspices of Clinical Psychology is to embark on a five-year journey. The first year of study is just that, learning the trade. The next three involve client work, research, and continued study. In addition the dissertation is written and defended. However, true arrival at the Ivory Tower does not occur until the pilgrim successfully completes a yearlong internship. This internship occurs at a place other than Middle America. The pilgrim must interview and compete for a placement somewhere in the Americas. This competition begins in the last four months of residency in Middle America. Even if the student has a position in or around Middle America they must leave and internship in another region for that year. Once all of this is complete then the pilgrim will receive the lofty title of doctor and truly be on their way from the Ivory Tower.

Lucy. "In the beginning I had always planned to go to graduate school. I just didn't know quite what to expect (Lucy, Dec. 2003)."

Expectations, a word that resonates throughout her being, with a laugh, Lucy proclaimed her expectations for graduate study. In her mid-twenties, after a year off between

undergrad and graduate school, she decided to enter the field of psychology. "How hard could it be," she said, "I just spent a year working in a lab with graduate students and I can do anything they are doing." Originally interested in the field of special education, psychology fell into her lap early on in her studies. "It was a natural progression," she said since she was working with a special population and decided she could make a difference. So she applied to and was accepted into a dual M.A./ Ph.D. program in Clinical Psychology.

Lucy attended her first class and her expectations were initially crushed. "My first semester I was a little disappointed thinking was this really what graduate school was all about." The material was easier than it had been as an undergraduate. But then it changed, after a few weeks her group started working with clients. In the beginning, there were not any significant changes to her routine. She attended class, read the material, and kept her initial social habits. "I'd been pretty focused as an undergrad so that didn't change that much. I'd never had a crazy social lifer or anything like that that I had to give up." For her it was initially easy.

Time took on new meaning for her in the second year. With two sections of Introductory Psychology, a heavier course load, client work, and actively pursuing research, her time commitment quadrupled. She only had 4-5 hours of sleep each night and no social life at all. Lucy gave up spending time with her family, a very important aspect of her life. "Either not having the time to do that or when I was spending time with them, feeling like I should be home studying." She strove to complete all her requirements and mirror the success of other students. She put schoolwork ahead of everything including herself.

After the second year she needed more balance. To obtain that balance Lucy talked with her advisor and said, "I need to slow down and take more time here." She wanted to pursue a relationship with the man who would become her husband. Up to this point she had no time to do that. Also, she needed more time with her family. She backed off on taking additional responsibilities. "I didn't have to be super student, just wanting to be an OK student who has a life outside of that." She decided to make changes. First, Lucy cut back on trying to publish articles. The next step was lessening her client load. She cut back from 80 hours a week to 40 hours. Finally, she included personal time in her schedule.

Lucy felt that, "Having a confidant, not thinking that I was the only one to deal with this," would have helped. She gained perspective by cutting back on time commitment and gained time management in the process. "I took 5 ½ years to complete my requirements." This is more time to degree completion than the standard four-year track. She also took time off from all other responsibilities to write her dissertation.

> I think that the transition between second and third year I started kind of enjoying life more than I had. It was helpful too because I felt I had more control over the situation, it wasn't something I was being forced to do by other people so just taking responsibility for myself and not working for somebody else but just working to meet my own goals and that sort of thing.

In the end, she felt good about the choices she made during her journey to the Ivory Tower. The demons of time were difficult to slay but in the end she overcame the difficulty of time by marching on with it as opposed to fighting against it.

Marvin. Urbanite meets cows and thinks to self, "what have I done?" Those are the headlines in the Ivory Tower Daily that would describe Marvin. He embarked on his journey to Middle America from a large northern Midwestern city near the Great Lakes. In a state of shock upon his arrival, Marvin quickly adjusted to the thought of study in this new place. He brought along for his journey his dog, "Dog", which "made the transition easier as I had a part of home with me." Marvin enjoyed living alone and the challenge of meeting new people, discovering a new culture, and embarking on new study was very exciting for him.

In the beginning, aside from Dog, Marvin would reach a point where he would like to go out and take a break and there was no one with whom to do that. As an undergraduate he would go out and spend time with friends, here he knew no one. "I'd say okay I'm ready to take a break now and I didn't have anybody to enjoy that time with." The first day of class Marvin sat in his desk with a mix of anticipation and fear. He was excited about embarking on his quest for his doctorate and fearful about being found out. He wanted to do well and felt pressure to do well. "I was afraid I would say something stupid."

The support system in Middle America was lacking for Marvin. Added to his present situation, being alone, far away from home, in a new college, Marvin was away from his true love. He relates that being away from her was "probably the most difficult thing (and) trying to maintain that relationship and we almost didn't." They would visit on the phone and fly back and forth to visit, but after a time, school became more involved and workload increased. Marvin started seeing clients and his project that led to his dissertation began. This led to negotiation of the relationship.

We kind of worked things out between us specifically like arrangements whereby

she agreed to come down here for the last few years that I was in graduate school.

Then when I finished she would apply to medical school and I agreed that after

my internship I would follow her after my internship.

The art of compromise extended to his other life. Marvin learned to schedule

time. This was a foreign concept for him. Before Middle America, Marvin would follow

his desires and needs. If he wanted to take off and enjoy an evening out with friends that

is precisely what he would do. Now that he was working his way through the Ivory

Tower, he could not follow his every whim. "I'm not a big scheduling person, I've had to

become one. So that was a change." Coursework, client work, project work, and finally

personal life had to find an order for Marvin.

During the middle of his journey, Marvin married his true love. While this made

for wonderful human companionship it also made for new challenges. He was very

devoted to his studies and his client work. Of particular challenge for him was separating

his home life from his client's problems. "I think you get, you know, you get difficult

clients that you struggle with. You're not really sure what to do. I think that is where

supervision comes in." His mentors were careful to guide him in the process. Over the

course of a few years, Marvin gained increasing responsibility. In the beginning, Marvin

said,

I brought in a list of things I wanted to cover, but it never seems to work that way.

So eventually, I decided when I got more comfortable being in that situation and

felt like I was, my skills had increased, I felt more relaxed and comfortable in

those situations. So I think that I switched my style or found my style with the

help of my professors.

Marvin called his sister and mother to discuss matters when he had a difficult day. Also,

he talked with his wife. This was somewhat challenging to discuss what was difficult

because he could not relate the details of client work. He did however rely on them to

help him through this stage of his journey.

When Marvin reached the final stage of his journey he encountered a roadblock.

He had written his proposal for his topic, received the necessary approval from the Ivory

Tower, but at the last moment the site where he was going to do his research decided that

he could not do it there. Also, there were no other sites that would fit this particular

design. He had to start over and this extended his stay in Middle America by a full year.

However, he felt that he learned patience. "I would say is that things take time and just be

prepared to wait on certain things because you wait for advisors to get back to you, you

wait for IRB approval. Patience, you've got to learn patience quite a bit to get ahead in

school."

Arianna. Arianna remembers the first class she ever attended. It was Introductory

Psychology. The instructor related a quote that stated you could take a dozen healthy

infants and through education you could make them be anything you wanted them to be.

"The idea was just fascinating to me." This class prompted her pursuit of knowledge that

eventually led on her journey to the Ivory Tower. Initially she had not planned on

obtaining her Ph.D. however, this "love of her work" led to the conclusion that this was

the path that she needed to pursue to obtain her goals.

Arianna is a native of Middle America. She attended her first class in a nearby city and felt that she wished to stay near family and friends while she made this journey. In the beginning the illusion of the journey was enticing. She soon found that there were more sacrifices to make. "That was a rude awakening." When she attended her first class, as a new pilgrim in Middle America, she thought that it would be "some magical things," and then it would be over. However, the workload was more than she expected. She had to read, write, and carry a client caseload. It was also a struggle to not long for what was ahead. Arianne had always been a future planner. This decision to attend graduate school was made and she didn't quite know what to expect. "In many ways it's almost as though you, feel as though you have to wait for life to begin and that's one thing that is always a struggle."

Arianna's new days as a pilgrim changed from her former life as a nine to five, Monday thru Friday, person. She was now going to class early in the morning and working late into the evening. There were many assignments that involved "massive amounts of reading." While listening to clients and thinking through solutions was easy, reading and writing about it was not. As an undergraduate, the reading and writing had been minimal. The parameters were established and the papers were all the same format, a format that was established by her professors. Now there were no parameters established, no guidelines to follow, and no cliffs notes to abridge the readings.

Since her professors encouraged collaboration, the pilgrims established a joint work system. They divided up reading among the group and wrote summaries for each other. In addition to this division of work, they built a foundation of trust upon which to

work together. Arianna and her peers shared proposals and information with each other and critiqued writings.

While spending time working towards her goal, Arianna gave up extra time that could be spent with loved ones. She has been married for five years. Her husband "is very supportive" of her pilgrimage. In the beginning, they attended school together. Once their undergraduate studies were complete they married and five years later she began graduate school. She would work sixty to seventy hours each week. When Arianna was able to be at home, she spent that time writing. While she sat in the computer room typing, her husband would spend time in the living room watching TV. She wanted very much to join him on the sofa and cuddle up with him to watch a show.

> You could be setting there twittering your thumbs watching Jerry Springer for five years or you could be getting PhD for five years. It's the same five years and it's still going to pass so it's kind of a matter of what you decide you want to do with it.

Arianna decided to draw boundaries, "I do a really good job of that," and schedule personal time so that she would enjoy everything much more. Arianna volunteers more, take on extra reading; helps out her peers, and tries to find time to be with her husband.

In her program of study, Arianna first completed her master's degree and then moved forward to obtain her PhD. It was in the middle of her journey that she had to write her thesis. "I went to write my master's project and I set down at the computer and I had no clue." All of those years that led up to her journey, Arianna had written small papers and critiqued others work. This was her first attempt at researching and writing about her own interests. "The lack of structure," there had always been a form or

structure that professors had wanted, "was just horrible." Arianna looked for ways to organize her thoughts so that she could achieve the eighty or so pages for her proposal. She turned in her first draft of her thesis only to have it sent back with red marks throughout.

It was at this point that she revisited her strengths. She felt that she was a natural clinician. She had always been able to pose, study, and answer any questions or problems that fell into her path. Arianna took these skills and applied them to her thesis work. This made her thesis flow and she successfully completed her work. She then continued on in her coursework and research. At this point her schedule was evened out. She had the groundwork for her dissertation and went on to write it. Now, Arianna is applying for internships and looking forward to her new home. After the internship is finished she will complete her journey to the Ivory Tower and embark on a new journey helping others.

Stella. It was time to move out of the house and away from Apple City in Northern America. Stella's journey to Middle America and the Ivory Tower began in a borough in Apple City. Her parents were upper-middle class and practitioners of Catholicism. Her college years were at a vastly different Militant Feminist Women's College.

> I grew up in (Apple City Borough) and it's pretty conservative, yuppy, upper-middle class, but pretty conservative. I had a pretty conservative high school, pretty conservative upbringing. And then I went to MFWC to find out how conservative I was just because the viewpoint, the norm shifted. I think that's where I get part of my progressive, maybe tolerance from that experience. I think

that coming here has pushed me from conservative views to extremely liberal

views.

To prepare for her new role as pilgrim, Stella planned out her approach to the

Ivory Tower. She planned on having a large workload and bought a house with an extra

room that could be used to organize her materials, books, supplies, and computer. She

placed a large calendar on the wall to keep track of assignments and when they were due.

In addition, she set the goal of completing the work two weeks before the due date. "I had

everything done ahead of time; which I like to do because I run very high anxiety wise;

I've always been anxious."

Upon arriving in Middle America, Stella was thrown into a state of cultural shock.

Before, her friends did not offer any advice or opinions on what she should or should not

do. However, Middle Americans were very different than her friends from Apple City

and MFWC. They readily offered opinions even when advice was not solicited.

I was expecting culture shock but I wasn't expecting my neighbor to come over

and oh no those lesbians who live next door and a lot of religious politics. I

definitely wasn't expecting that having God come up in every conversation. Like

I was buying a house; how does God get into buying a house?

In addition, Stella felt that she had to attend all the social events that were offered for the

students in her department and she did not enjoy visiting with others. "I did all the social

things that you are supposed to do. I hate, I hate social time and we had a lot of it."

Fellow pilgrims who had initially reached out to her and tried to include her in their

journey soon turned away from Stella as she was a heretic. Heretic? She did not follow

the norms of Middle America. She did not follow the beliefs of her mentor. She did not have a support system. Stella was all-alone in Middle America.

After one and a half years of living, working, and studying in Middle America, Stella was ready to leave and begin the journey anew elsewhere. However, she began to talk daily with her mother in Apple City. Also, she started dating a young man who was also in Middle America on his own journey. She also started to pick and choose what to attend and how long to stay at any given social gathering. Finally she moved to a new mentor. While she felt somewhat behind because of switching professors, she was still going to finish one year ahead of her cohort.

Despite all of these changes, Stella found time for herself. "I would have primetime two hours every night when I just didn't do anything." Stella found the art of latch hook and began working on a project each new month. She began reading all of her assignments, making notes on them, and to continue with her research at home. The house was quiet, it contained her possessions, and she could leave to walk whenever she wanted.

Classes that were required in her study and client work prevented Stella from having a normal sleep schedule. She would have clients starting at 8 AM and a class at 7 PM. Stella discovered that she could nap for a few hours during the day and this revitalized her for the evenings work. There were days that she would not arrive home until midnight or later. Since sleep eluded Stella on occasion, she would sleep all day on a Saturday or a Sunday. This had to change. Yet she found it difficult. So, Stella started going to sleep when she was tired and then just got up when needed to do her work.

Disappointingly, Stella realized she hated doing clinical work. While she enjoyed trauma work, seeing the general public was boring. She much preferred researching and working with Brain Imaging theory as opposed to seeing clients. Clients were draining for her mental resources.

> I love trauma work it fascinates me. Just seeing anyone in a general clinic, I think I get bored easily. If I don't have a lot of variety or I don't have people actually actively making progress I'm like I can't do anything else. I would love to be a big name researcher in the field. I want to do neuron-imaging research study (to see) how traumatic stress affects the brain. But, I'm just not meant for the one on one hour after hour it's just to, I don't have the patience for it; it just really takes too much out of me. Takes a different kind of stamina than I have.

Stella focused on completing her work and pursuing her research. The politics of Middle America and the Ivory Tower were areas she could choose to ignore. Obtaining her degree and leaving Middle America are her goal. She now has the resources and stability to do this.

As Stella prepares to leave Middle America and complete her training, she expresses concern about having to return to gain her diploma. It is not an experience that she is looking forward too. Not because her journey will then officially be complete, no, "because I have to come back here."

History

The journey of a student in History consists of a minimum of three years of studies. Most pilgrims take five years to complete their journey. The program itself consists of at least 60 hours of study beyond a Master's degree. In addition to completing

47

all of this study, a pilgrim must also show proficiency in a foreign language by passing a translation exam. Most students also take a year off after studies to read and review for their qualifying exam- both written and oral. Finally, the student must write a dissertation and successfully defend it in order to complete their journey to the Ivory Tower.

　　Zeke. Zeke took the journey eastward from the Pacific coast of the Americas to arrive in the small landlocked community. When asked why he decided to pursue a doctoral degree, smiling, he responded, "I ask myself that question everyday." The journey began with a B.A. and M.A. in History. "My bachelors and masters were pretty easy and I thought ah this is easy and I should get a Ph.D." While he did take year off to work between his masters and Ph.D. he found that the business world while providing money did not provide satisfaction. So he applied and was accepted to the history department in the not so far away land of Middle America.

　　His family offered their support. So Zeke, his wife, and their children (three at the time) moved to the small town with the concrete structures. In the beginning, it was more difficult than expected. Coursework was much more than expected.

> It was harder than I thought it would be. When, as I mentioned, when I did my bachelors and masters, a lot of that came pretty easy and I didn't have much homework. And then I came to do my Ph.D. and then I was taking two or three classes and it was all I could do to keep up so that was when reality set in about two weeks after starting the program.

Zeke was only seeing his wife for a few hours at night. He would arrive home after eight in the evening and leave before seven the next morning. Time became his biggest opponent.

Zeke remembers his first class. "I had to read a book every week and write a report on it and at the time I had done book reports and book reviews before but to do one a week and that was just for one class plus I had all the other work from the other classes on top of that so just a lot of busy work I guess." Zeke revisited the goals that he made for himself before he began the journey. The constant reminder that this is what he signed up for, that his wife and family were offering support and that he could not let them down floated in his consciousness. This was what he wanted and even though it was harder than expected he was in it for the duration.

In Middle America, the people were nice and helpful. Zeke could talk with his mentor about all things related to home and study. The mentor was very helpful and would relate numerous helpful tidbits of information to ease his journey. Zeke fondly relates all the help that was shown to him upon his arrival in this new place. Also, having his family here helped immensely with his transition. "Even though moving all the way to (Middle America) and I didn't know anyone here, I had my family. And so every night I could come home to them." There was a consistency in his personal life and though his opponent of time interfered, this consistency offered respite from the skirmish.

Once he arrived in Middle America, Zeke had to adjust to the rigors of academic life. There was always work to be done and time to accomplish it was difficult to control.

With college work there is always something to do even if you feel like your pretty good at keeping up on things, there's always more you could be doing on weekends, things you could be doing at night. So sometimes, I guess maybe the hardest part, even when I was with my family, sometimes I would feel guilty

thinking I should be up studying instead I'm here, you know, messing around at the house.

Again, the experience of balance joins the fray of the journey.

"Imposter!" That was the feeling that surrounded his early days of Zeke's journey. "I looked around the room and thought these guys know so much and here I am thinking I can get a Ph.D." Zeke had come from a small school on the Pacific coast. There was not a lot of homework required and not a huge investment of time. Here, in Middle America, this changed. Expectations were high and requirements exponential as compared to his previous experience. He had never been in a situation where he was expected to do so much. "And so I guess it was mostly the newness of the situation that made me feel that way."

To fight his feelings of being an imposter and the demons of time, Zeke developed powerful weapons. He learned to skim the books for necessary information. He also found book reviews helpful in the struggle with information management. They offered a short version that related necessary information. "I built up my confidence by doing this." At this point time became less of an enemy.

Once I felt confident about my abilities to do well in the program, that's when things were a lot easier. And that's when I was able to spend more time with my family too. Because I didn't feel like I needed to read the whole book, I could read a quarter of the book and then I could go home and spend a couple of hours with the family instead of reading books all night long.

He felt there weren't as many time constraints now. He took off a day almost every weekend to spend time with his family.

Zeke realized that he did not have time to worry about all the details. The main idea or concept became important. He found that the details usually did not end up on tests or in his papers. The other skills that were developed during his journey developed out of necessity. "My wife wanted me home more often and I realized I can't read all of these books and be home as much as my wife would like to have me." So, Zeke developed a balance between his two lives. The role of husband and father took on significance while that of student stayed important. Zeke found his balance and time.

To travel on this journey Zeke needed the support of his family.

Having someone tell you you're doing fine, don't worry about it, don't sweat the little stuff even, she would say even if this PhD thing doesn't work out we'll be fine. And so that take's a lot of stress off you because you feel like if your wife is looking over you and you'd better not screw up. You know?

While navigating through the walls of the city of Middle America, Zeke made an important discovery about himself. All of his support systems, wife, family, advisor, and friends were important in the process but ultimately his success and motivation were his responsibility.

All of those are super important, even my advisor, they're a part of the whole support system. All of that's very important, but really, to tell you the truth, what it really comes down to is, me. You know, I like doing it. I like History. I like being a graduate student and so as much support as I've had it kind of takes you to push yourself that extra mile and make it happen. And because I like it, I don't hate going to school and I don't, you know, on Sunday nights when I think oh,

I've got school tomorrow. I don't think, school, I hate school; I think all right

school's tomorrow. So enjoying it is definitely a part of it.

To embark on a journey of expectations, the journey to the Ivory Tower, is a journey that

involves more than those around; it also involves those within the experience.

Estelle. During her journey to Middle America, Estelle remembers thinking

"everything I know and love is behind me with the exception of my husband who is

beside me." She envisioned a train pulling up to a western style train station and looked

for cowboys and Indians on the horizon. Instead she landed in an airport that was a short

car ride from Middle America. Once there, she was surprised to see concrete buildings,

houses, parks, and modern looking stores around her. Estelle hailed from a large urban

windy city in the Upper Americas. While it was from the Midwest and not a coastal town

by any means, it was teaming with life. Middle America did not have the noise of home

and it had large open spaces that were disturbing in their silence. "I couldn't sleep for the

first week that we were here. It was too quiet and too barren of what I had known."

The journey to Middle America came as a result of Estelle's husband receiving a

job as a fabled professor in another department in Middle America. She, wishing to

continue her study of history, came with him and took on the role of student in History.

The department was much smaller than that of her previous school. It was certainly not

what she had in mind when she decided to pursue her doctorate. The vision of study at

the University of Windy City was much more appealing.

I don't think I had ever read anything by these professors. I remember thinking

who are they? I remember thinking I know more than they do, I learned more as

an undergraduate.

This all changed when she sat in her first class. "The professor started talking and explaining the expectations that he had for us." There were mountains of reading that needed to be done. Estelle had to read, write, analyze, and read more. She started her day reading and continued until she fell asleep with a book on her face. During all of this she had only her husband to keep her company. They had to attend social gatherings of his department. She had to play hostess as well. There were many responsibilities that appeared over night. In addition to this first semester of adjustment, Estelle discovered she was pregnant. "This was absolutely the most devastating and exciting news I had ever had. In one moment, a extremely hectic life became overwhelming."

This moment caused several decisions to be made. The first of which was to take a semester off from coursework. But how could she make this choice when she wanted to finish in four years time. Still, she had her duty as wife and mother to consider. "No one told me about this." So, Estelle took a semester off to have and care for her child. During this time she made the decision that she would finish her degree. In order to do this she began to plan. The first decision made, she looked into ways to make this work. She found a baby sitter who would keep the child for 3 hours each day while she attended class. In addition, her husband adjusted his schedule so that she could take the necessary courses and have the three hours each day to read, write, and have a few minutes to herself. She also took one day off each weekend to spend time with her family. She promised herself that this would be a day of guilt free time. Also, she could look forward to that day if she missed out on an event during the week because of her studies.

It worked both ways, I could do my work and not feel guilty because I knew that I would have Saturday and on Saturday I knew that I had Sunday through Friday to work on coursework.

When it came time to take her qualifying exams, she was ready. She didn't have to take a year off for study like the other pilgrims in her group. She had three hours a day for the past two years in which to prepare. She passed the qualifying exams and journeyed on as the other pilgrims. She did become pregnant her last year and took that time away from teaching to write her dissertation. "Since I was pregnant with twins, I decided I should hurry up and finish." Ultimately, Estelle took a total of five years on her journey to the Ivory Tower. Along her journey she became a mother three times. "I think it would have been easier without kids, however, I wouldn't change having them. They are as much a motivation as my husband."

Education

The journey of a student of education consists of a minimum of 60 hours of additional study beyond the Master's degree. Within the College of Education there are several sub specialties that are offered to the pilgrims. There are some in Curriculum Studies, Adult Occupational Education, Higher Education, and within all of these even more specific areas of study. All of these involve research components and all involve an element of teaching. This is a special place in Middle America, this is the land of pilgrims that are very much adept at being leaders and much less so as followers.

Karen. "I've always lived in Middle America and I've always known I would get my Ph.D." For Karen, the road to the Ivory Tower has been ever present. She is from an affluent family in a small town near Middle America. In fact, she has always attended

either an extension of Middle America or Middle America University itself. During her pilgrimage to the Ivory Tower, Karen will have married and divorced her high school love. In the process of receiving her degree, their journey, that of Karen and her husband, took different paths and has left her in an unfamiliar area of Middle America. She can see the Ivory Tower but cannot reach it. She asks herself "how did I arrive here?"

In the beginning of her journey, at age 18, during her undergraduate journey, Karen married her high school sweetheart. He had just returned from four years in Middle America's armed forces. They married and attended an extension college of Middle America. He became a specialized mechanic and she started her journey to become an educator. After she finished her undergraduate degree she obtained a job as a language teacher at her former extension school. While there she received a Master's degree in adult education. Then she began her pilgrimage to the Ivory Tower. It is at this point in her journey that we met.

Karen did not move to Middle America proper to pursue her pilgrimage. She has journeyed on evenings and weekends to get to the Ivory Tower. In fact, she lives about two hours from the town of Middle America. She works full time and has over the past four years taken classes and worked on research. Karen's family lives near her and offers help. "Mom comes over to cook, do laundry, and help clean up the house. We have Sunday dinner and spend holidays together." In addition to her family, her husband also helped with the daily chores of life. One thing that Karen did notice is the amount of time that she had to spend working on reading and preparing for class. After spending the day at work, she would spend a few nights a week commuting to Middle America for class. When she wasn't driving to class, she was reading a book, an article, or writing for class.

Time was very important. She learned to balance work and school. What she did not learn to take into the equation was time for her marriage. Karen would spend time with her mother and sister when she had time to spare. There was not any extra time for her spouse. " I thought that he understood what I was doing." There was separateness not only as a part time student but also as a wife pursuing more education.

There weren't any of the normal problems. I've always been a good student, always gave it everything. I was studying what I wanted to do, really enjoyed what I was doing. It never crossed my mind that he didn't want what I wanted.

She met her previous advisor in one of her weekend courses. During that class she learned a lot and liked what the mentor covered and 'believed.' However, once she began her research, she found that she was not enjoying what she was doing. Among all the pilgrims that have joined the trek, she is different. Karen has prepared and successfully defended her first proposal only to have a falling out with her advisor. So she has begun that part of the process anew. The research reflected what the professor wanted and not what she wanted. "It really just wasn't me." So she stopped working on her dissertation.

I started my research with one advisor and later decided that we had fundamental differences. This person wanted me to use their research methods and prove that their theory was right. I thought their research was bunk and so I am currently looking for a new topic. I've found a new advisor, now I need a topic.

At present Karen has plans to begin writing a new proposal during the upcoming fall season. During the mean time, she is concentrating on her new position at work, her divorce becoming final, and a new relationship. All of these are taking priority for now.

George. The journey began innocently enough for George. Initially he started on his path as a high school English teacher. His interest in incorporating technology into the classroom led him to begin working for an educational software company. This led to Middle America, and from his office window, George could see the Ivory Tower.

Sensing an advantage, George began taking courses. The first was an online class that didn't take him away from his work. Work involved travel and travel involved time away from the Ivory Tower. So, initially George started with the Internet courses, three to be precise. However, this did not satisfy his desire to have an earned doctorate. George wanted to move away from common school education and into higher education. This necessitated his pursuit of an Ed.D. Also, in order to spend time at the Ivory Tower, George had to leave his job. To do this, George consulted with his wife and gained permission "to be a bad husband."

> One thing I did and I think this was important, was I sat down with my wife and I asked permission to be a bad husband for a year. That was starting last fall. Because I knew that taking four classes in the fall, taking three classes last spring, starting this dissertation process I knew that there would be times when the laundry needed to be done, and I generally do the laundry and I wouldn't have the time right then to do it. And her response was that's what we're here for, that of course. And so that was, we've had literally no arguments about school.

George dismissed his first three courses as untrue for the purposes of the journey. That is, the course that he considered his first true class was his fourth. This is because it is the first that he attended in earnest and the first that was taken with a full semester of

coursework. His expectations of the sacred institution of the Ivory Tower were changed forever that night.

> And I think what kept going through my mind that night was I'm afraid to say anything cause I don't want to sound dumb. But then somebody else would say something and it was dumb. And nobody laughed.

The course, in point of fact, did not seem to offer any difficulty for George. The mystique of doctoral student, of professor of the Ivory Tower, and of the journey ahead were unveiled. The veil of secrecy was lifted and George was allowed into the elite.

The experiences that allowed George to teach came back to aid his pilgrimage. Organization, routine, and time management all reappeared in vivid form. These ingrained memories helped to ease his transition from the real world back to the misty reality of student life. Days were regimented for George. The first established rule was one free day each week. This happened to be Saturday. On that day, he would spend time with his wife, work on the house, and take some personal time. Sunday was reading day. George went to the library at 11 AM and found his table, the same each week, to work. He would stay until his work was finished. Occasionally, this would bring his wife to school to bring dinner. It was an adventure for her to find him and allowed a little reconnecting time. It also allowed her to see the work that George was doing.

In addition to his established routine of Sunday's in the library, George also acquired "a study buddy." Vilma worked with George over the course of three semesters. She helped him with his statistics courses and he helped her with her writing skills. In addition, they discussed their positions as pilgrims with each other. Vilma and George still meet weekly to discuss their dissertations and their lives.

I've become her confidant, she shares with me things and our friendship has gone

beyond that of school and I think she and I will probably remain lifelong friends

no matter where we both end up.

The friendship between the two pilgrims is a bond that George respects and values. The perspective that is brought in from the outside is one that truly rewarded both of them.

Self-sufficiency is an overarching influence for George. While his outside connections were important, this work, the journey to the Ivory Tower, was his responsibility. George decided that he wanted the initials of Ed D behind his name. In order to have those initials, the journey was his alone. With the exception of his work with Vilma, George worked alone.

We just, that was the way that we both got through it cause my math skills are in

the tank and hers were pretty good. I had one group project and it required,

literally it required me to drive to Tulsa one time and meet this lady in a coffee

shop and we hammered it out one Sunday afternoon, end of story. Everything

else, I think, I'm trying to buzz through all these courses that I've done.

Everything else is solo work.

"The play's the thing," learn to be a student. George feels that the easiest path to the Ivory Tower is that of least resistance. The art form of compromise proved to be a useful partner during his journey. In order to complete his journey, George found that losing some of his convictions were worth the sacrifice. The need to argue an ideological point with a professor was lost. If it was a stumbling block on his road to success, George ignored it.

Learn to play the game, It's a game; there are hoops; there are juggling acts; learn to play the game. If you learn to play the game, you'll do just fine.

He knew that professors were human and as such were prone to human weaknesses. Their ability to be insulted was just as great as his. In order to avoid this conflict, George left behind his opinions so that he could finish his journey knowing that he had done nothing to upset those above him, those ordained.

With his plans in place, George sees the Ivory Tower and is inching ever closer. He is sending applications out for positions that will help others on their road to the Ivory Tower. While there are bumps along the way, George found that the only way to continue on is to plow ahead. There were days that seemed not to end, however, there was always tomorrow. The thought of tomorrow helped him through today. There was the prospect of earned doctorate at the end of the path. The sacrifice was more than worth it. "Some days I'm thinking, you know that degree doesn't mean anything. It's just a piece of paper. But what a piece of paper!"

Chapter IV
Data Analysis

"Why the hell am I doing this?" The fundamental question that all graduate students, doctoral seeking candidates, must answer. In their quest to the Ivory Tower, all of the pilgrims pondered just this question and answered it through varying methods. During this journey the thought of Problem-Based Coping skills and Emotion-Based Coping skill probably did not cross their minds. They had a goal, an end, in sight and went towards it. However, whether or not they were cognizantly aware of what methods they were employing to obtain their goal, all used one or both to get there.

To better appreciate the journey of the pilgrims of this study, the journey of those before will help aid understanding. Two examples are presented here, one is that of a Problem -solving coping individual and the other is an example of an Emotion- focused coping individual. Both are the frames in which the pilgrims will be viewed. A brief definition is also be provided for each type to reinforce the qualities that depict each.

Problem- Based Coping

According to Taylor (1998) problem-solving coping skills involve actively seeking a solution to alleviate stressful circumstances. Jarray (2002) also relays that problem-based coping involves optimistic views, social skills, and social support. Meichenbaum (1985) reinforces that direct action or problem confrontation is used, possible solutions are explored, and an alternative is selected, and finally implementation occurs. This strategy focuses on the cognitive domain and involves a self-regulation of the individual employing it.

Azuma (1997) relates his journey through the Ivory Tower, a six and one-half year voyage with its own set of pitfalls along the way. However, he exemplifies an individual who used Problem-based coping skills. He failed his qualifying exams on his first attempt. It was at that point he had to answer the question of why he was doing this. In answering this question, he explored all of the scenarios that confronted him. The first involved time and money investment. While ultimately a Ph.D. will earn more, dollar for dollar, a master's degree in his field would make more because there would be less time lost in pursuit of a degree. In addition to this he also considered his reasons for wanting this degree. He wanted a research position when he finished his degree; a master's may or may not provide that opportunity but a Ph.D. would. Also, his coping approach was enhanced by failure not hindered because of it.

> In hindsight, I think one of the main reasons I successfully completed the Ph.D. was the fact that I didn't pass the exam on the first try. It's ironic, but life sometimes works in strange ways. That initial failure caused me to answer the basic question, providing the mental fortitude to keep going despite the hurdles and problems I would later face. (Azuma, 1997, p. 3)

While facing his decision, he also employed the support of his family and friends. They were there to listen to him talk out his thoughts. Ultimately the decision was his but the support was helpful. He also gained insight by looking at graduate school as a business. In business if a failure is experience, it is learned from and built on to achieve success.

All of these skills were employed by Mr. Azuma to achieve success and obtain his Ph.D. Instead of giving in to failure, he rose above by viewing, analyzing, and solving the

problem of obtaining the Ph.D. He applied the Feynman Problem Solving Algorithm: 1.

Write down the problem. 2. Think very hard. 3. Write down the solution.

> You don't have to be a genius to do well in graduate school. You must be
>
> reasonably intelligent, but after a certain point, I think other traits become more
>
> important in determining success. (Azuma, 1997, p. 15)

In his story, he relates the skills that he used to achieve his goal. They were initiative,

tenacity, flexibility, interpersonal skills, organizational skills, communication skills,

confidence, appropriate committee selection, balance, and perspective. Combined, all of

these are coping mechanisms of a positive or problem based coping skills.

<div align="center">The Problem-Based Pilgrims:</div>

The following tales are of pilgrims who used a Problem-Based Coping approach

to mediate their journey to the Ivory Tower. They each applied the three step process of

identifying the problem, considering possible solutions, and implementation of the best

choice. To do this, they relied on social networks, goals, and management of their

journey to fit their needs.

Lucy. After her second year in graduate school, Lucy noticed that she was lacking

balance. "That second year (was) probably not (handled) very well. I put school before

everything pretty much." It was at this time; Lucy evaluated what was important to her.

She got engaged and missed spending time with her fiancé. She missed her family, a

social life, and was running out of energy meeting all the requirements in a short amount

of time. She then had a conversation with her advisor and found a workable solution.

> Well, I had a very supportive advisor and so I was able to talk to her about that
>
> and say I can't continue to not see my fiancé. I need to spend time with my

family, you know, I just (want to know) how comfortable are you with me not taking on a whole lot. Not trying to publish all these journal articles. Cutting back the extra things that I had added to my plate. And she was very supportive and I think maybe other people don't necessarily have that support and I think that would have been difficult without. So, I think that was really the first step, just talking to her and saying I'm going to make some changes are you ok with that?

Support was also a factor for Lucy. She relied not only on her family but also her peers. To manage the reading, article writing, and client work, she worked closely with her peers. They supported each other by dividing the workload and collaborating on projects together. Also, she could share the burden of client work by discussing with them the particulars of a case and how they might approach a particular issue. She again used the three-stage approach to Problem focused coping. She identified the issue, considered several possibilities, and implemented a solution. This allowed her to control her stressors in a positive- solution focused approach. Lucy navigated the journey to the Ivory Tower by allowing herself an extra year to meet all the necessary requirements while allowing a life outside the walls. That social life was an important survival mechanism for her and she found a way to utilize it so that she ultimately succeeded in her journey.

Marvin. When Marvin arrived in Middle America, he was alone except for Dog. Initially he liked the thought of being alone, but later missed his social life. He left behind his girlfriend, mother, and sister. He also left behind his network of friends. His initial response was to attempt to take on everything.

I had much more school life than I did an outside of school life. Ah, I think I managed it okay. I had to be more disciplined in the sense of scheduling wise. I'm not a big scheduling person, I've had to become one. So that was a change. Outside of school, I tried to be somewhat active in the department, so if there were parties going on. Sometimes the guys would get together for a drink and I would try to be included or involved in that which wasn't difficult to do. So I did try to make an attempt so I had a social life but it wasn't what I was used to.

Later, Marvin negotiated a compromise with his girlfriend who lived and was finishing her Master's Degree in Biology in Windy City. They agreed that he should finish his Ph.D. and that she would wait to enter medical school until he finished. Then they would go wherever she was accepted and he would support her while she attended. After this compromise was reached, he proposed marriage. However, the solution had to be reached before he proposed. Marvin recalled how this helped add more support to his pursuit and how it relieved the stress of possibly displacing her career goals.

To cope with the stressors of moving to a new area, establishing a relationship, and finding success in school; Marvin had to employ Problem- Based Coping skills. He identified the issues, lack of time management, lack of social network, and distance between him and his girlfriend. Then he discussed solutions and found a workable compromise for all of them. He learned to plan his time; he included himself in group activities, and negotiated his relationship. All of these helped him find balance and allow for a smooth journey to the Ivory Tower.

Zeke. Zeke began his journey to the Ivory Tower after spending a year in the corporate world. He was already married, had a family, and had finished his Master's

degree. He involved his family in the decision and had their support. He also set goals for himself and ultimately came to the conclusion that it was his choice and responsibility to meet his goals.

> My parent's are really supportive and her parents are very supportive. And it came down to my wife saying, "Whatever you want to do, whatever makes you happy, we'll do it." I said I'll be happy doing it so everybody was very supportive." I think the main thing is I kind of mentally prepared myself before I started I said Okay I want to get a 4.0; I want to do this and that; I want to… I have goals for myself, not necessarily written goals, but you know, I didn't want to just come back and just do a half way job. When I started getting the homework I thought this is what I signed up for; my wife and family is supporting me and I'm not going to let them down. It was just not so much for them but for me, you know?

Before he began, Zeke identified the challenges that would lie in his path. He sought the support that he needed and included his family in a decision that would change their lifestyle. He also identified his goals and made a plan to meet them. When the journey became stressful, he revisited his goals and his responsibility to himself. In addition, he scheduled his time both scholarly and personal time to meet the demands of life. Zeke took a problem solving approach in order to cope and succeed in graduate school.

Estelle. Estelle came to the Ivory Tower with her husband. Everyone else and everything else that she knew was behind her in Windy City. She decided to pursue History because she enjoyed studying the past. Adjusting to her new surroundings,

Estelle learned she was pregnant. She decided that in order to meet her needs that she would take off a semester. During that time, she planned how she would continue her studies. She identified the problem, she analyzed the possibilities, and she chose a workable solution.

> This was absolutely the most devastating and exciting news I had ever had. In one moment, an extremely hectic life became overwhelming. So I decided to take a semester off, have the baby, and figure out what to do. During that time, we made a plan to hire a sitter for three hours a day. My husband adjusted his schedule so that he could watch the baby while I attended class, worked on assignments, read, or whatever needed to be done.

This plan also allowed Estelle to prepare for her qualifying exams. She did not have to take off additional study time like other students. She had plenty of time to prepare. Also, she implemented a time for her and her family. One day a week was guilt free and spent with them, the other six were spent working on school. Estelle planned her time, arranged for a social support network, and found time to enjoy time for herself.

George. In his journey to the Ivory Tower, George had stops on the way. He was an experienced classroom teacher and also an educational software consultant. He was an established member of the community of Middle America when he decided to embark on his journey. He began his journey by taking one online course, or testing the waters. He continued this approach for a time building up confidence. Then he collaborated with his wife to make the decision to enter into the journey full time.

> But one thing I did and I think this was important, was I sat down with my wife and I asked her permission to be a bad husband for a year. That was starting last

fall. Because I knew that taking four classes last fall, taking three classes last spring, starting the dissertation process, I knew that there would be times when the laundry needed to be done, and I generally do the laundry and I wouldn't have the time to do it right then to do it. And her response was that's what we're here for, that of course. And so that was, we've had, we've had literally no arguments about school.

By planning ahead, George problem solved before any reactionary skill would need to be used. He also used many coping skills that he had obtained before beginning this process. After making the decision to pursue graduate study, he planned a day of no school, a day of reading and research in the library (a place he knew where he would work), and days to work with a peer, write, and attend class. In addition, he would exercise each day and think about whatever assignment in which he was currently involved.

<div align="center">Emotion-Focused Coping</div>

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) relate that emotion-focused coping involves thoughts, actions, and strategies that are aimed at reducing emotional pain associated with a stressful or threatening event. Emotion-focused coping involves an effort to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful events (MacArthur, 1998, p.1). Also, Emotion-focused coping results in higher distress, poor health or more health compromising behaviors, and stronger impact of events due to perception and reporting of events. Jarray (2002) also notes that these individuals will have a pessimistic explanatory style.

"The development of neurotic compulsions, I have noticed, is a regular feature of this final phase of the graduate-school game" (Meeks, 2002 p. 4).

The constant thought that his house would burn to the ground caused Meeks, a doctoral student in Sociology, to return home several times to make sure that everything was unplugged and turned off. Upon examining this ritual, and those of several associates, he decided this was their way of coping with the overwhelming nature of their present predicament. For him the neuroses were a form of wish fulfillment so that the stress and strain would be over.

> Similarly, for myself, coming home to a charred pile of rubble that used to be an apartment, aside from signifying catastrophe, would mean the end of my dissertation, and an easy way out of the anxiety and recurring sense of failure. If my house burned down, my inner child whispers, I could just go home, recover, and live with my parents—forever and ever! (Meeks, 2002, p. 3)

He still has friends that have not come to this realization about their neurosis. One of his friends is at present a hypochondriac. This focus gives her control of an otherwise, in her mind, hopeless situation. She can find solace in that fact that she is dying from some new disease.

For his part in emotion-focused coping, Meeks has developed a sense of humor. While knowing about it does not necessarily change the behavior, it does allow a healthy sense of belonging in the madness that is graduate school. Perhaps by coming to the realization of his behavior, he is leaning towards problem-based coping. In the mean time, he relates that he and his friends are still following their ritualistic behavior in hopes that they will soon finish.

<u>The Emotion-Focused Pilgrims</u>

The following are tales of the Emotion-Focused Coping Pilgrims. These pilgrims did not apply the three steps of Problem-Focused Coping. They were reactionary to the situations that occurred during their journey. They allowed outside forces to control the situation and in many instances increased their stress level in attempts to control their situation.

Stella. While Stella always knew that she wanted to major in Psychology, she didn't expect to hate the clinical side of the work. She didn't have any social support in Middle America. In addition, she was experiencing a great deal of culture shock. Initially she slept and watched T.V. to avoid the perceived harshness of her reality. Also, she started taking on additional work and performing music again. These outlets seemed like a good outlet for her disappointment but they only added to her time commitment. In attempting to "feel good about being productive," Stella overextended herself. She sleeps whenever she feels like it; at least two naps a day, and sleeps all day on Saturday or Sunday. According to Meichenbaum (1985), these are Emotion-Focused Coping strategies. In order to stave off depression, an individual will commit time to extra sleep and thus further the cycle of negative coping by becoming exhausted due to an irregular sleep schedule.

> I really threw myself into work. I had everything done ahead of time; often a
> couple of weeks ahead of time, which I like to do cause I run very high anxiety
> wise; I've always been anxious. So at least when I first moved I did stuff really
> early so when things did come up I didn't have to worry about deadlines because
> they were already met. I did all the social things you're supposed to do. I hate, I

hate social time and we had a lot of it. So I would sleep, come to school and do work.

Stella also relies heavily on outside factors to regulate her mood. If she gets enough sleep she is happy. Producing vast amounts of work also increases her happiness. However, when Stella was interviewed, her focus was on the negative experiences, the desire to give up, and a strong sense of not returning to Middle America when all was finished. She also expressed desire to not work in her chosen field of Clinical Psychology. She instead wishes to work in the field of brain imagery, which is not addressed through the coursework that she pursued.

Karen. While her desire to achieve her doctorate is purely for "reaching a lifetime goal," Karen has met many pitfalls along the way. She is the only pilgrim who has temporarily abandoned her path. A few major life events have interrupted her journey. The first was that of her marriage ending. The second was a difficult workplace environment. The third was changing jobs. The fourth was losing her house. Finally there was the need for a new relationship. All of these factors combined to cause her abandonment of her degree pursuit.

> I was married to someone who, the time I started my degree, didn't have anything but what he called a 'phd' (plain high school diploma). So he was less than understanding about the time commitment required for this level of education. I guess I would say that I handled the juggle by working myself to death. I am a very motivated person and once I set my mind on a goal, I don't let anything stop me from achieving it. I suppose this would explain why I am divorced, at a new job, and nearly completely burned out from my classes. Between politics, pleasing

four committee members, vying for classes, getting the appropriate approvals, and making sure not to step into any pitfalls along the way, I am truly surprised I have learned anything.

By throwing herself into her work, divorcing, and starting a new relationship; Karen has created more stress. She copes with this stress by adding more and more to her list of things to do and avoiding her pilgrimage. She has put her degree on hold for her emotional needs and has retreated into other pursuits. According to Erickson (1935) it relates back to previous stages that are unresolved. In addition, by adding other diversions to her life, Karen is avoiding the realization that her pilgrimage was not meeting her expectations.

<div align="center">Problem and Emotion-Focused Strategies</div>

There are also individuals who employ the use of both coping strategies. In general, given time to process, a pilgrim who used both would eventually employ Problem-Focused Coping strategies. The initial reaction may be that of emotion but after the reaction, the three steps of accessing, decision, and implementation of the solution occurs. In this study, only Arianna demonstrated this combined strategy.

Arianna. "I just thought it was some magical things and it was done." The time that went into the pilgrimage initially took Arianna by surprise. She was aware that school would be work but she was not aware of all that was involved. Her husband, who was not a pilgrim, would arrive home in the evening and watch television. Arianna would have to work in the computer room and not be able to join him. In the beginning, this cost her time and energy because she had to make sacrifices that were not easy to make. However, she decided that she could schedule time to be with him and time for herself.

> I have given up a lot of time, both personally and well mainly personally for
> myself and then with my family. I'm not home very often and that was a difficult
> thing for me. I felt like I missing out, felt like it was not fair.

She also had to adjust to her educational requirements. Writing was difficult and massive. It took her months to write her master's project and it was returned to her marked up. She had to make adjustments to her perceived failure and invest more time to succeed.

> I set down at the computer and I had no clue. There was no, I didn't know what to
> do. I didn't know how to structure it and it was horrible. I've had to pick up and
> be successful at things I didn't do well.

She learned to set boundaries on her time, her workload, and her efforts. Time management, social support, and healthy living were all tools that Arianna used to help succeed. While initial reactions were emotional, "not fair," she learned to cope using positive skills.

Conclusion

In terms of developmental needs, each of the pilgrims followed a pattern of growth throughout the process of entrance, engagement, and exit. Within each of these stages, there are specific areas of focus. The coping skills that were used to address these areas of focus relate to the successes of each pilgrim. It is my conclusion that of those pilgrims who participated in my study, the individuals who used Problem-Based Coping skills were successful and able to make the journey to the Ivory Tower without the stress and resulting distress that was found by those who used Emotion-focused coping only.

The individual who employed both method of coping needed extended time to complete her journey but she did succeed.

The ultimate goal of our pilgrims was to receive their doctorate. During this pursuit, this journey to the Ivory Tower, each pilgrim progressed through a three stage developmental process. In the beginning stage, that of entry, Stewart (1995), relates that there is a struggle to maintain motivation, meet academic demands, develop a clear sense of purpose, finding and maintaining a social support network, and working with issues of dependency and independence. It is in this stage that any earlier failures to resolve crisis return.

In the engagement stage, pilgrims encounter issues of self-preservation, achievement, complacency, and isolation. Through these issues they also develop coping skills that relate to health, happiness, and performing required tasks for school. Crotty (2003) notes that individuals under high amounts of stress, as in this stage, tend to be unproductive and complex tasks are difficult and generally avoided. In my study, the emotion-focused coping skill users were unproductive and did avoid working on their dissertation.

The exit stage brings what is described as a reorientation to reality. A student must reestablish interpersonal relationships and learn to relate to others outside their area of interest. The primary focus of this stage is the social support network. This is crucial to the success of a student during the transition from student to professional.

In this study, the preferred coping strategy was Problem-Based coping. As a collective the pilgrims who used this strategy succeeded in their endeavors. They exhibited skills that included social support, time management, ownership of learning,

and positive forms of stress management such as diet, exercise, and sleep. While each pilgrim confronted his or her own problems, all of them analyzed the problem, considered the options, and implemented a solution.

The Emotion-focused pilgrims did not implement a systematic approach to their journey. The journey happened to them and they had no control over it. Of the two pilgrims who employed Emotion-focused coping strategies only one succeeded in the journey to the Ivory Tower. The other has abandoned the journey. In general these pilgrims had a maladaptive or no social support network, time management was not employed, and health concerns such as sleep, diet, and exercise were ignored in order to maintain a sense of control on their present situation. In the arena of learning these pilgrims generally did not attempt to work with their peers and would take on more work academically in an attempt to succeed. These skills combined to create a haphazard approach to the Ivory Tower and do not consistently provide success for those who employ them.

In the case of Arianna, the only pilgrim who used both, there were emotional moments that were followed by analytical moments. She felt that this use of reacting and then assessing the situation contributed to her extra time in school. However, this allowed her to succeed in her journey and allowed her to pool her resources for that success. While she initially would react to her situation with disappointment and despair, given time she could analyze and respond to the situation. She found ways to cope with her issues of social support, time management, academic success, and stress management. She realized that her initial reactions were not as productive and so she modified them to suit her needs.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of graduate school is developing or calling upon positive coping skills. The pilgrims who used Problem-Based Coping skills addressed the areas in the developmental stages by approaching each issue with addressing the situation, assessing the situation, and implementing the best solution. These pilgrims used social support networks, time management, academic prowess, and positive forms of stress management to complete their journey. In assessing each area of stress, the students were able to find ways to meet the challenges before them. The journey to the Ivory Tower was the same road for all of the pilgrims, however, those who used Problem-Based Coping skills were able to complete their journey in less time, with more successes, and a healthier outlook that those who did not use that coping style.

Chapter 5
Conclusions

The coping mechanisms used by graduate students allow for a varied response to the stressors of graduate education. The success rate of 50 percent of all students who begin the process leads to the question of what allows for this success. The coping mechanisms used by these students were studied and analyzed for similarities and differences. In addition they were framed in the context of the developmental plane of the graduate student. It is within this context that the successful strategies can be used and benefit maximized for all who begin the graduate school journey.

Study Summary

While the journey to the Ivory Tower contains large investments of time, money, personal sacrifice and effort (Austin, 2002), these activities result in successful completion of the doctoral degree for 50 percent of the students (D'Andrea, 2002). Conversely, 50 percent of the students fail. Bray, Braxton, and Sullivan (1999) explain this anomaly of success and failure on stress and different styles of coping employed by the students. However, this is where the literature ended. There were several articles relating that stress was prevalent in graduate school, several articles on coping and coping mechanisms, but there were very few that related the successful skills of graduate students.

The purpose of this study, to explore the successful graduate student experience in terms of stressors and how students coped with them, was accomplished in four stages:

1. An examination of graduate student stress through the eyes and experience of successful students.

2. Analysis of the graduate student experience through the lens of coping and development of the graduate student (Bray, Braxton, & Sullivan, 1999, Stewart, 1995).

3. Reporting of other realities revealed.

4. Assessment of the usefulness of the coping lens for understanding the success of graduate students.

The data needs of the study necessitated the recruitment of both male and female doctoral students from various areas of Liberal Arts. Individual in person interviews were conducted to discover each individual's journey to the Ivory Tower. Using the methodology of Creswell (1998), the research was limited to doctoral students a single locale (the state of Oklahoma). This allowed the research to account for the extenuating factors of economic, social, and communal issues.

In the style of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the journey of each pilgrim to the Ivory Tower was presented and later analyzed for similarities and differences. By developing abstract, hypothetical theories the study offers the ability to transfer findings to other graduate student populations (Punch, 1998). Further trustworthiness of the study was assessed through the use of credibility, dependability, and conformability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Finally the lens of coping was used to assess each pilgrim's journey and find the methods they used to cope.

Findings

Although graduate student success is not as well studied as graduate student attrition, the tools for success were found. Problem-based coping skills allow for graduate student success. The doctoral students who employed problem-based coping skills completed their programs with greater ease, less stress, and more quickly than those who did not employ problem-based coping skills. The ability of these students to actively cope through the use of social support networks, time management, balance, and a positive belief that goals can be achieved were essential to their success. In fact, in this study, the doctoral students who employed problem-based coping skill completed school at an 80 percent success rate.

Conclusions

In the analysis of this study, the conclusions will be related back to the literature, information will be confirmed, and the new information added to the knowledge base detailed. Three sets of conclusions emerged from this study. The first of those was related to the methods of coping the successful doctoral students used. The second was the applicability of the selected research methods, instrumentation, and the flexibility they offered. The third was theories about the developmental stages that a graduate student travels through to reach their goal. All of these combined allowed me to reach a personal conclusion that perhaps my own journey would have been smoother and faster had I had these techniques and knowledge to support me on the way.

Coping

While all of this literature helps to define coping strategies, none of it is directed solely at doctoral seeking graduate students. The literature does not seek to define the

unique stressors that face these individuals and how the successful individuals cope with these stressors. In my study, this specific topic was explored and given my findings, I conclude that problem-solving coping skills are the best path to success among this group. Specifically, the ability to actively cope through the use of social support networks, time management, balance, and a positive belief that goals can be achieved. I believe that if these methods were exploited through a continuous approach to active coping throughout the graduate student curriculum that the success rate of these individuals would improve and the 50 percent success rate could be raised.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) described four elements of coping. The first element was that coping is an ongoing process of evaluation of the success of strategies used by the individual. The second is that strategies are learned as situations are encountered. The third is that coping requires constant effort. Lastly the effort is to manage stressors not to successfully master them. I found that the successful graduate students used these four elements. However, Lazarus and Folkman's research did not further define the additional depth needed to explain graduate student coping skills.

Applying this initial explanation of coping to the participants of this study, a broad, and thus non-specific, picture of coping can be applied. However, to bring together the specific experiences of the pilgrims in this study to the four elements of coping proves challenging. In my participants' journeys, the first element of an ongoing process of evaluation is apparently linked to the second element, that strategies are learned as situations are encountered. All of the participants learned strategies as events changed, both problem solving and emotion-focused coping skills. In addition, they would all fit the definition that coping requires constant effort. However, the last that it

was an effort to manage and not successfully master the stressors is debatable. This is where further definition is needed to refine the four elements. It came in later studies on student coping.

Folkman and Lazarus (19850 and Struthers, Perry, and Menec (2000) reported on student coping. This study was not directed at graduate students but towards the more populous undergraduate student body. They refined earlier work to include three coping elements. First the student would make a primary appraisal of the situation or realization of the threat. Next, the student would make a secondary appraisal of the situation or bringing to mind potential responses to the situation. Finally, the coping or execution of the coping response occurs.

While the definition of coping became narrower, it still did not adequately apply to the pilgrims of this study. The students did encounter and employ primary appraisal of the situation. The next logical step is to find a response to the situation. But to what extent and what kind of response would be employed by the students was not well defined. Finally the strategy is employed but the results are not included in the assessment. Nor is the adjustment of future behavior mentioned. This study allowed for that future assessment and adjustment to be explored. The participants in the study learned over time how to further refine their coping responses so that the best possible approach might be achieved.

The addition of research by Taylor (1998) and Jarry (2002) included problem solving strategies and emotion focused coping strategies. According to Taylor (1998), problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something to alleviate stressful circumstances, also known as an active approach. Jarray (2002) notes that the goal of

emotion-focused coping is to avoid the stressor, also known as a passive approach. Rick (1997) relates of the two approaches to coping, problem-solving coping strategies are healthier and lead to the characteristics of hardiness, optimism, psychological control, high self-esteem, conscientiousness, ego strength (dependability, trust, and lack of impulsiveness) and the tendency to be self confident and easy going.

The addition of problem solving coping strategy research allows me to further explain the successful coping skills used by the pilgrims of the study. It allows for categorization of the pilgrims into problem-solving coping individuals and emotion-focused coping individuals. Additionally the further definition allows for greater understanding of the journeys and further exploration into the necessary traits needed to succeed in the graduate school endeavor. This aspect of the literature allowed the pilgrims to be classified into the categories of problem solving, emotion-focused, and both coping skill sets. The findings that the problem-solving coping skill users were the most successful lends credence to the previous studies on the subject and adds to the premise that it will help graduate students to be successful.

If coping skills, especially problem-based coping skills are added to the graduate student developmental framework, a method for success can be found and implemented to help future students succeed. The pilgrims that used problem-based coping skills maintained social support networks, found a balance between academic and personal time, and were active participants in meeting their future goals.

Researcher as Instrument and Qualitative Methods

The shared experience that I as a doctoral seeking graduate student had with the pilgrims of this study allowed me to enter with credibility that other researchers would

not have had. Since I was experiencing the same stressors that they had or were confronting, I believe the individuals from my study shared information that they would not have shared with others who did not offer an empathic understanding of their journey. I was part of the group because I was also on the journey. I feel that this role allowed a unique opportunity to explore the realities of their situation and share in the experience of their emotion. It ultimately provided an insider look at the life of a doctoral candidate.

"Interview allows conveyance of a mental image of an event, the account related from the perspective of the person doing the depicting" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 173). Allowing each pilgrim to relate their story was a method that allowed individuals to be examined and studied for common experience. In addition, the commonalities and differences were studied and adaptations to both were analyzed. It also allowed for the most successful coping skills to be found. A questionnaire alone could not have provided this kind or amount of information. It would have been less personal; more biased through *a priori* bounding of possible responses, afforded only limited responses, and not be as credible of an addition to the literature. In addition, a personal commitment on the part of the researcher was shown and it allowed for active participation on the part of the researcher and the participant. Finally, since the pilgrims and I had a shared experience, the information that was supplied may not have been revealed to others that were not part of the group. Austin (2002) presents interviewing as a method that allows for individual experience to be introduced and explanations to be given to their experience. Without the explanation provided by interview, the only information that would be available would be a narrative of the information. Questions from the interview provided an opportunity to

review, analyze, and relate the individual journey. Ultimately, the interview allows for a personalization of an event.

Through personalization of events, participants become active members of the research. They are allowed to give voice to their experience and explanation to their choices. It is a way to not only review the past but also reflect on the changes that were made as a result of that experience. An individual can relate how they changed their future, indeed, how they adapted their coping repertoire for the next challenge. Nonis, Hudson, Logan, and Ford (1998) reinforce this through the statement that those who provide their experience will provide cues to successful coping strategies.

Finally, the method of interview was successful because of my empathy, situation (credibility), and approach. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss the use of credibility in the successful gain of knowledge from an interview. Since I brought the reality of being a graduate student, seeking her doctorate, experiencing stress, and researching ways to cope, I had a common experience with the participants. This allowed for validity in my research and allowed for them to respond on a level that could not be found with other researchers. In addition, I brought the use of humor into the interview and this allowed for a more personal approach to the topic.

<div align="center">Theory</div>

The pilgrims who succeeded in this study all found a balance of time for personal and academic work. The solutions that the students found were to implement a day of the week or a time period each day that they devoted to personal and family time. All pilgrims related that they were better able to cope after this. It brought a sense of relief

and allowed them to experience this time guilt free because they knew that they would be back to work after their time.

To understand successful coping mechanisms in graduate students, the developmental stages of Erickson (1953), the hypothesis of Baker and Siryk (1984), Crain (1998) and the developmental stages of Stewart (1995) combined allow for a better picture and explanation of the graduate student experience. Along with coping theory, these offer an all-inclusive picture of what allows graduate students to succeed. Ultimately it was found that these all needed to be utilized to provide a cohesive theory for the pilgrims of this study and to generalize for future pilgrims.

Erickson (1953) discusses eight developmental stages that an individual will pass through during their lifetime. While each stage has its strengths and particular characteristics, the common weakness is that of failure to resolve crises. If an individual fails to resolve, or cope, with a particular crisis when they encounter a similar situation in the future they will revisit this failure to resolve. It will be revisited until a solution, or coping mechanism, is found or they will fail and abandon that course of action.

So it was with the pilgrims of this study. When they encountered a situation they had to find a way to cope with it. If they did not cope, the same type of stressor returned. In the case of Karen, it caused her to abandon her pilgrimage to the Ivory Tower. For Stella, the thought of leaving Middle America and beginning anew elsewhere was a very real possibility. She managed to switch advisors and finish her program in Middle America but at the cost that her journey was not enjoyable and she has no desire to practice according to the designs of the program. If Karen and Stella had the coping

mechanisms to resolve their crisis there experience could have been like that of the other pilgrims.

Erickson allows for a history of development. Those who came after built upon his work. Crain (1998) refocused on the psychological aspects of failure to resolve crisis and included self-restraint in the stages. For Crain it was those who practiced self-restraint that could succeed. Indeed, the students who employed problem-based coping skills practiced a form of self-restraint and reflection. Baker and Siryk (1984) included in their research a conclusion that graduate students mirror incoming freshman in their motivations, dependence, and adjustment to college. This work was a beginning look at student development.

However, it was Stewart (1995) who discussed the three developmental stages of graduate students. The stages of entry, engagement, and exit allow for a framework of understanding the graduate student experience to be built. In the beginning stage of entry, a student experiences a reversion to dependence. The student is dependent on the department for financial support, research focus, and a social life. There is the position of being new and having to please the others in the department. In addition, there is a form of disillusionment that occurs. The pilgrims of this study related not knowing anyone in Middle America. They also stated that they felt less than human that they were not treated like undergraduates who had orientation and help whereas graduate students had nothing. One department had several activities available for students to attend but they were mandatory and numerous. In essence, there was no form of balance provided to orient students to their new roles and responsibilities. There were no mentors provided to explain this is what will happen during your journey to the Ivory Tower.

Engagement, a word that usually signifies a joyous commitment to life however, in the life a graduate student, according to Stewart (1995) it signifies a loss of identity. The pilgrims are now systematically cutting themselves off from life. They sever social relationships and focus on surviving graduate school. The feelings of guilt encroach on their psyche if they are not working all the time on research and school. This is a time where the decision to not be the best but just to survive occurs. This is also the time that students will leave. ABD is such an accomplishment by this point that students tend to take that and walk away. They wish to return to some semblance of a normal life.

The students who made it to the exit stage, a time when sickness both real and psychosomatic occurs, truly have to call upon all of their coping skills to finish. They employ all that they have learned and have to revert from the dependence of the early stages to become self-sufficient. The student has to finish their dissertation, apply for jobs, reorient into a society that is not solely academic. Thoits (1991), Chen (1999) Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) all discuss the importance of social support during this time. Since previous relationships have to be reestablished, due to the isolationism of the engagement stage, it is important that these relationships support the work that is concluding. I think that the pilgrims who maintained strong social support systems throughout their journey tended to succeed at a higher rate and were almost all problem-based coping skill users.

<u>Recommendations for Practice, Research, and Theory</u>

The information this study provides allows for additions to research, theory, and practice within the graduate student curriculum and experience. The most important recommendation is for practice. Students need to be made aware and reminded often of

the challenges they will face and the resources they need to use to overcome these challenges.

The need to incorporate problem based coping skills into the graduate school curriculum is great. While an introductory course would be advisable, these skills must be reinforced throughout a student's coursework. There are ample opportunities in coursework where problem-based coping skills can be infused. Not only through discussion and reading but also other assignments that students are required to complete. It is recommended that further research be conducted on groups of students that begin a program that incorporates coping skills into the curriculum versus a program that does not; perhaps similar programs at different universities so a correlation may be found. This could add significantly to the research on graduate students and success rates.

More research could be implemented to include defining graduate student development and coping mechanisms that are appropriate to this development. Students could be followed from start to finish and the successful coping mechanisms found and applied for future students. A longitudinal study of groups of doctoral seeking graduate students in several fields at different universities would provide far-reaching conclusions for the population at large. Students who used problem-based coping skills could be studied to provide baselines for use of these skills in curriculum.

In addition, the three developmental stages proposed by Stewart could be expanded into sub-categories, combined with problem-based coping theories, and a better picture of graduate student development could be found. This could provide a better foundation for helping students to succeed at a higher rate in graduate school. It could also translate into other areas of education such as undergraduate work. The process of

setting and reaching goals could also be part of this study to see how it impacts student success.

The next recommendation is to use a repeated measures design semester by semester. This will determine exactly when students are most likely to terminate their program as well as the stressors specific to that point in time of their pilgrimage. This would then allow understanding of what was going wrong and help to determine the coping skills that would address the problem. More studies need to be performed over an entire cohort's journey to further refine this research. If a cohort's curriculum included problem-based coping skills, the results could be compared to a group that did not have problem-based coping skills in their curriculum. This would give better definition to the graduate student experience and provide further validation for the use of coping skills.

In combination a better-defined theory needs to be formulated to encompass both coping skills and development of a graduate student. These will increase the literature and thus the knowledge of those who will follow me in the journey to the Ivory Tower. This would provide a future group the knowledge of what is to come and how to cope, specifically with the developmental phases of the doctoral graduate student. For instance, the coping skills needed for entry may be more structural in nature, while those skills needed for engagement may be more interpersonal. Finally, the exit skills needed may focus on emotional support and a return to structure. All of these combined will help provide an overall approach to success for doctoral seeking graduate students.

<u>Commentary</u>

In the beginning of my journey to the Ivory Tower, I had no idea what it would entail. I did not know of the twists and turns that lay in the road ahead nor did I care. I

knew that above all else I wanted my doctorate. Initially this journey, which began at age 11, was one to prove that I was indeed intelligent. Later, it became a way to show others that not only would I survive but also I would prosper. Finally, it came to be for my own accomplishment, for my enjoyment, and my betterment. Ultimately, it is the culmination of an 18-year journey from grade six to the date of finishing this degree. It was an ever-changing experience that shaped who I am and what I am capable of accomplishing when I move to attain a goal.

I remember vividly the night that I decided to pursue this topic of what allows an individual to succeed. I not only decided on it for personal reasons but also because my peers and I had just had a conversation about what led us into our pursuit. It was the last class meeting of the last class I took for my degree requirements. In hindsight, perhaps I should have found a topic sooner. However, I think the topic chose me. I was at a crossroads in my journey; I was to the "now what" stage of life. Strangely, due to personal issues, I wanted to know what allowed me to endure and what allowed my peers to endure this process. What was their motivation, I wondered, what was my motivation, what allowed us to make it this far and how many of us will succeed?

I have learned that if I knew now what I should have known then, the process would have been smoother. I do not think that any part of the journey would ultimately have been any easier, but at least I would have known what was coming. Additionally, I could have used problem-based coping skills to ease that journey. I was by no stretch of the imagination a practitioner of problem-based coping. In fact, I was an emotion-focused individual. As a result, most of my early graduate school experience was painful. I was reactionary, took criticism personally, and hated school. Fortunately, due to previous

unresolved crisis, I entered counseling and through the cognitive approach, I learned

problem based coping skills. My writing improved, my self-doubt diminished, and my

ability to handle criticism increased.

For now the chief benefactor of my study is myself. It is my hope that my

suggestions can be incorporated into the classroom and the journey of those who follow

me on their journey to the Ivory Tower. I think that if problem- based coping and a

cognitive informed approach are incorporated in the classroom that students will succeed

at a higher rate in graduate school. To have knowledge of what is to come and how to

address it allows an individual to shape their future rather than be defined by the present.

I have used the knowledge gained from my research to make this final process of

writing easier. I enrolled in a pottery class with my husband so that we could have

personal time together. I budgeted time to write with this in mind. I found time to go out

and spend time with friends while being able to explain that I had work to do and could

not join them on a particular excursion. All of this took away the guilt that I had been

feeling, which ultimately caused a writing stoppage, when I wished to do something else

besides writing.

Someone said that the most difficult journey begins with the first step. That

person was right. What they failed to mention was that while the journey is finished by

the individual who took the first step, it is all those they meet on the way that ultimately

make it successful. I have found through my research, my personal experience, and that

of watching my students (who are beginning their journey) that I am shaped by my

experience not defined by them. When I began graduate school I felt like it was defined

for me and that I did not have the power to change it. When my advisor refused to define

deadlines for me or to hold my hand I learned it was going to be a journey of legend. Fortunately, everyone along the way answered my questions, sometimes with more questions and occasionally with an answer. Ultimately the rough parts of the journey were made passable by the encouragement of my friends, family, and peers. In addition, I discovered that the professors in the Ivory Tower remember parts of their journey and can empathize.

I do not know what the future holds for me. I do know that if at all possible, I will be there to help other students with their journey. Hopefully, I will offer sage advice, skills to help them cope with the ever-changing terrain, and in the end learn as much from them as I learned about myself during the journey. This is not an experience that I would trade for anything, nor is it an experience I wish to repeat. If I had to begin again I would approach things from a problem-based coping methodology. The journey would be smoother and more enjoyable. Perhaps as time passes I will reflect on my journey with humor, for the present I am glad to be finished.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

1.   Why did you decide to pursue a doctoral degree? How did the reality meet or not

meet your expectations?

2.   How did you handle the transition to graduate school?

a.   What was easy or difficult about it?

b.   What made it easier?

c.   Think back to how you felt when you sat in your first class. How did you feel?

Anxious, excited, overwhelmed?

3.   How did you handle managing a career, personal life, and school?

4.   What helped get you through?

a.   Were support systems important?

5.   How did you handle the coursework?

a.   Reading, assignments, library work, team work?

6.   Any general advice you have for making it work?

7.   What do you know now that you wish someone would have told you when you

first started?

APPENDIX B

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 10/20/2004

Date: Tuesday, October 21, 2003

IRB Application No ED0431

Proposal Title: Stress in Graduate Students: How It is Perceived and What Changes Can Be Made

Principal
Investigator(s):

Jennifer R Smith
2311 W. 44th St.
Tulsa, OK 74107

Adrienne Hyle
106 Willard Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact me in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, colson@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW

 This device right here, and the plans are to transcribe this and give you a copy of it, of the transcription and I'll e-mail it to you. At that time you can look over it and say no that's not what I meant or let me add this to it. I've thought about it since then and any changes you need. So I'm going to read this to you, ah, not that you can't read okay.

I understand.

I (your name)   hereby authorize or direct Jennifer R. Smith to interview me in conjunction with the research on successful graduate student coping mechanisms. This research is being conducted through Oklahoma State University. The principle investigators are Jennifer R. Smith, a doctoral student, and Adrian E. Hyle, a professor in the School of Educational Studies in the College of Education. The purpose of the study is to explore coping mechanisms used to aid successful degree completion of doctoral students; so basically what you use to cope with your stress. Interviews are the data collection method of choice. Each participant will be interviewed and voice recorded during in-depth and   follow-up interviews if we need them. Interviews will consist of a minimum of one 45 minute session, that's a ballpark. Your participation in the study will be limited to a period of no more than six months from the date of your interview.   Interviews will be of open ended questions that begin with why you decide to pursue the doctoral degree. The interview will continue to inquire about your experience in school and any mechanisms used to cope with various stressors during that time. Information obtained from the interviews will be kept in a locked safe at the residence of Jennifer R. Smith. My advisor, Dr. Adrian E. Hyle, will keep drafts of the thesis in a locked file cabinet. Files will be stored separately from any identifiers. Files will be destroyed upon the completion of the project. Any computer information will be stored with password protection and will be deleted upon completion of the project. No risks to participants are anticipated. This research provides insight into the coping mechanisms used by successful doctoral student graduates.

Additionally, the study provides the necessary skills that future students may employ to be successful in their chosen field. The information in this study will be valuable to research practice and theory. The possibilities for the study include raising the awareness of the stress in graduate students and coping mechanisms that can be used to overcome the stressors.

So, if you have any questions, this is Dr. Hile's address and phone number. Then I have my address and then my phone number is on the other page. You can call me at any time. Always leave a message because I'm usually in class from 8:30 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon. Once in awhile I get lucky. Then this is the IRB Executive Secretary if you have any questions regarding this or this study you are welcome to call her. So then I have, I understand participation is voluntary and I will not be penalized if I chose to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and end my participation in this project at anytime without penalty. I have fully read and

understand the consent form and I sign it freely and voluntarily, a copy has been given to me.

I'm going to sign this one and give to you so that you have it and you can keep it.

Do we need to sign both of them.

Yes, we do cause I need to have one on record on the off chance that I'm audited, which I seriously doubt I will be but

Cover all the bases.

Yes.

It is 7:45 p.m. no 6:45, the clock's off, I'm sorry.

Is it the tenth.

Yes mam.

So this is yours and that's yours and I'm going to sign this. And then you can keep that and hold onto it and if at the end you want a copy of the results, I will be happy to email them to you.

Okay, so now I'm going to ask you some questions. I'm also going to put some comic strips in front of you. Okay?

Okay.

Just be fore warned. Uh, you're going to be my guinea pig. I haven't narrowed all of these down yet. But, what I'm going to do is at the end I'm going to ask you to look through these and pick out three that relate to your experience in Clinical Psychology . So, I'm going to set these aside and we can do that in a minute. So.

Why did you decide to pursue a doctoral degree?

I'm sure I had great reasons at the beginning. I think that I knew I wanted to go on. I got my bachelors in a different area. I got my bachelors in special education and I knew I wanted to go on in the field of psychology and just researching it, it looked like the PhD provided more flexibility with jobs and just kind of the directions you could go when you got out compared to maybe another bachelors or masters degree.

So, PhD offered more flexibility. And why did you move from Special Ed, if I can ask.

Oh, yah of course, feel free to ask anything. Ah, well, I really enjoyed special education, but my interest through my training really started focusing more and more on the field of

psychology. I started out specializing in mental retardation. Once I finished that I moved on to SED and emotionally disturbed and a lot of the classes were really psychology classes and I realized, hey, this is what I really want to do.

I'd always intended on going on to graduate school even if I was going to be in education. I think I just got a little more focused at the end.

That's kind of the way it goes.

Yah

How did the reality meet or not meet your expectations when you started your doctoral degree?

Well, I think, honestly, my first semester didn't meet my expectations all that well. I had a few courses that were much easier than my undergrad classes, but it didn't continue throughout my training. But my first semester I was a little disappointed thinking was this really what graduate school was all about. Pretty quickly that changed and it picked up. I think looking back it seems like things were pretty consistent with what I expected. If you had asked me at different times I wouldn't have said that probably.

Well, knowledge is foresight. How did you handle your transition from an undergrad to a graduate school student?

Well, one thing that was a little different probably about my training is that I took some time in between my undergrad and my graduate training to uh, technically I guess I was still taking bachelor's level classes at another university in psychology though. So I worked for a year in a psychology lab working with other graduate students and so that transition was pretty easy. I think, honestly when I got to graduate school didn't seem to be a whole lot more demanding at first like I said. And so I think the transition wasn't as difficult as I had expected. I'd been pretty focused as an undergrad so that didn't change that much. I'd never had a crazy social life or anything like that that I had to give up.

Not many of us do. Uh, so it was pretty easy then?

Initially, it was.

Initially it was easy. When did it begin to be challenging?

The second year. Uh, in our program, the second year is usually challenging, more challenging for most people. The first year there, uh again in psychology there, they're solely introducing us to working with clients. Picking up the course load and in the second year we were also required to teach a couple of sections of Introduction to Psychology and we're also expected to be actively working on our research. So time commitment quadrupled from year one to year two. Uh, you know basically everybody gets about four or five hours of sleep every night; we have no social life, whatsoever.

You feel lucky if you get to watch an hour of television program or that kind of thing. So that year stress really picked up, uh and it was definitely a contrast to the first year.

You mentioned social life a couple of times, so I'm going to run with it. On your social life what was the hardest, in terms of that, what was the largest sacrifice or the largest stressor?

I think during that first year I think was great, I had a great social life. Second year it just wanted to be with friends and family. I also started dating the person who is now my husband during that second year. Really having people I wanted to spend time with. Um, I'm really close with my parents and grandparents and usually, you know, spend time with them. Either not having the time to do that or when I was spending time with them feeling like I should be at home studying. So just either not being able to see them or not being able to enjoy the time I did have because I felt like I had all these other pressures.

Okay, I'm a slow writer.

No.

What, uh what made, I'm kind of working with a transition also with the first second year. What made it easier during that time? Was there anything that?

Yah, I think that what really stands out was just the support of my fellow classmates. I became very close with a handful of my classmates and I think, you know, we're all kind of going through the same thing and I can't image going through that without their support. Uh, I made some really close friends I'll probably have them the rest of my life because we were able to be there for each other during that period of time.

Now, do you guys move in a cohort together or?

Kind of. More so at the beginning, uh, everybody takes a different amount of time to finish up, and so by the end you are with people, ah kind of a different group of people usually. But there were some established groups when we started. Eight people.

Okay, about eight people. Think back to how you felt when you set in your first class. How did you feel?

I was excited.

First class excited. With that excitement, uh, what was your first class? Your first one, do you remember?

I think the very first class I went to was Social Psychology.

Okay.

Yah.

So within this Social Psych class what was your load?

That's not the best example probably cause it wasn't that heavy.

Okay.

This was the first semester where things were a little bit easier, but it was actually less than a lot of my undergrad classes. We, uh, it was a lot of independent reading and discussion. We actually didn't have any exams; we had one paper and a few projects that we had to work on during the year.

Okay. Within that first year, this intrigues me, you said that you felt it was easier than what you had done in an undergrad. Uh, what things were done to make that easier, do you think?

Well, honestly, I think. We had a professor that was going through a lot of personal issues, that we had for both semesters. And I think that the reason that the class was easier was not because it was setup to be easier but because he wasn't putting in the same kind of effort. So we would spend a week talking about something that you learn in third grade. So I think that it was a lot to do with things outside of the departments control in a lot of ways that aren't typical for that program. Does that make sense?

Yes, it does. So, outside influence occurred. Now, how do you handle, okay we're going to go to the second year now. How did you handle a career, a personal life and school?

That second year probably not very well. I put school before everything pretty much. The program demands that you spend a lot of time but I think that the majority of my time was spent fulfilling those requirements. I think after second year I realized I needed to have more balance and so I really started actually working on that after my second year probably. And I think, honestly, one of the ways that that happened was by not doing everything in school necessarily I could do. So not taking on additional responsibilities at the level that I probably did before. Ah, not wanting to be a super star just wanting to be, you know, a OK students who has a life outside of that.

Want OK student, all right. Um, so towards the end of your second year you realized, ok the candle is burning a little thin,

Right.

And I need to find balance.

Un huh

So that was a conscience decision on your part.

Un huh, oh yah.

OK so how did you enact this?

Well, I had a very supportive advisor and so I was able to talk to her about that and say I can't continue to not see my boyfriend, my fiancé, at that point. I need to spend time with my family, you know, I just how comfortable are you with me not taking on a whole lot. Not trying to publish all these journal articles. Cutting back the extra things that I had added to my plate. And she was very supportive and I think maybe other people don't necessarily have that support and I think that would have been difficult without. So, I think that was really the first step, just talking to her and saying I'm going to make some changes are you okay with that?
Ok, that's good. That's always nice. So, I'm assuming you're at your dissertation?

Un huh

Ok, so from day one when you started till now, what has helped you get through?

The dissertation process?

Yah.

Well, our programs uh, it's a combination masters and dissertation so, I had to get passed the masters first. The dissertation project hasn't been as difficult I think just because I have seen how masters thesis work and that sort of thing. I think just the light at the end of the tunnel has really helped me keep going. For this semester, we're expecting our child at the end of the semester, so I have been very motivated to get as much done before that time so I don't have to spend as much time next semester after he's born finishing that up. So, those kinds of motives have been very helpful also.

Ok, I'm going to put baby due.

Well, I also think that I knew a little bit more about what my interest were by the time I got to my dissertation so I was able to pick a topic that I was really very interested in and I think ties into my future career goals and uh so I just enjoy the projects and it helps me be motivated too.

Ok, so interest in what your doing. Who in this process help you get through?

Uh, there are lots of people I'd have to say my husband would be one of the first. Honestly, he has been amazing supportive. He kind of served as my cheerleader and my editor and everything else. Uh, then my family, just my extended family too. But my advisor has been very supportive. And uh still-fellow graduate students are still very supportive. They're willing to read over things and we can run ideas off each other so I feel like there is really good support network set up just with school.

Ok, so good social support network. And that kind of answered my next question, were support network systems important?

Definitely.

So, how did you handle all the course work?

I've enjoyed my course work and that means maybe I'm a nerd. The course work hasn't been the most difficult part, I don't think, uh. I feel like I have had some really good classes, energetic professors that just let us throw around our ideas and get a lot out of the classes. Not that they've been easy , I mean I spend all that time readying and learning and things like that but the course work hasn't necessarily been over whelming. It's been enjoyable.

Within that, cause I know your in psych, clinical psych right?

Right.

I'm assuming casework has come into play?

Oh yah.

Is that where the difficultly….

For me research was pretty difficult but yah-seeing clients has often been a huge challenge. I think that's probably why course work doesn't seem to be as stressful because the other aspect of the program has been more stressful, probably.

Yah, Now how did you make, and you don't have to answer this one, but how did you make the transition from textbook to client work? How did that affect you?

It felt insane at first. They actually throw us into that pretty quickly and it depends on who your clinical supervisor is when you enter the program. But, I was expected to pick up a client within my first month in the program. So I feel like it was it was overwhelming definitely overwhelming. They provide a whole lot of supervision in our program so we didn't, we weren't just turned loose on the general population or anything like that. They would audiotape and videotape our sessions and we would set down and go over step by step. But it was definitely difficult and uh, it was hard not to take a lot of that home at first. And kind of dwell on what you are hearing during the day. I think that definitely contributes at least for me to a lot of the stress I felt early on.

That second year when I was so stress out, I started volunteering at the Center of Child Abuse and Neglect, which may not have been the best decision when I think back. It was a wonderful place to work but just being expose to a lot of things that were kind of hard to deal with from a already stressed out position.

So, yah, I can well imagine. My father was a social worker, so.

He got a lot of all that too.

That's right. Um, when you were doing your course work or your project assignments, um, what, was there an aspect of team work that went into some of these projects? And how did that work out for your?

Yah, there definitely were times when we were suppose to work together. I haven't always been a fan of group projects, but I think that the ones that I've had in graduate school I think actually been pretty successful and we were able to work together. Everybody had their part and uh helped support each other through that. So for the most part I think it worked out pretty good.

Within the team? Were there any times that it was very stressful?

The only times that I can think of was when somebody wasn't doing their part. And so you got stuck covering or something like that but that was very rare. Yah, I can't really think of any other difficulties.

That's a good thing. Alright, if you were an advisor, and I was an advisee coming to you to find out about this program, and you recently graduated, you know, do you have any advice for me as how to handle this process? What would you tell somebody starting for the first time that you would have loved to hear?

All right. Well I'm sure that this would differ from person to person but I think personally if someone would have told me to that that the actual being a graduate student didn't have to consume my life. If I could have learned that more quickly instead of waiting a couple of years, to really figure out how I needed to set my priorities, I think that my life would have been a lot easier for those first couple of years. So, more emphasis on balance and uh being able to maintain your own mental health during that period of time would have been helpful.

More balance, more stability, perhaps.

Yah

Okay? Now when they were doing this, did they have you attend counseling as part of your practicum at all?
No. They don't do that.

Would that have been helpful? I'm not in a department like that, I mean.

Yah, some departments do across the country. I think different models that they're based on. I don't think that would have been encouraged in my program. And probably would

have been kind of difficult just because you start to know the larger psychological community. And I think that, I think that one thing that might have been more helpful maybe a more organize way to talk about having problems. Because just being almost done with my program and some of the younger graduate students ask some of the questions you're asking, "How did you get through this?" And a lot of people talk about the fact they don't feel they can go to other people and say I'm stressed out or I'm having problems and so maybe more of an acknowledgement that everybody's going to be stressed and it's okay if you are. It doesn't mean that you're weird or that your weak or anything like that could be helpful to people. It would have been helpful to me too.

So, maybe need a more open environment to talk?

Uh huh

Less judgmental?

Yah, I think that, I don't think that the professors or the other students would see themselves as judgmental but I think that somehow there's this environment that you just put on a smile, you do your work and go home. You don't say, "This is really hard." You know. So yah, just have a more open environment where you feel comfortable talking about being stressed out one day would probably be helpful to a lot of people. Cause I think just in this, and again this is just my experience with the people that have come to talk to me about it, they don't, they didn't realize that other people also are stressed. They think they are the only person. They think that everybody else is just fine and somehow they're weird and not able to handle this stress.

Ok, other students don't realize that others have some problems.

Uh huh

Um, along that line, if there had been available a monthly group of grad students, is that something that you would have been willing to attend?

Probably so, yah, I would have checked it out at least. I would assume so.

Ok, I'm going to put roundtable discussion

Un huh

Might be helpful. Ok. All right, here's your shot to throw anything at me. Is there any additional information that I should know about your graduate school experiences?

Um, well this is maybe important, just that I've taken longer to finish than other people.

How long do you think?

Well, we have an internship that without counting that cause everybody has to do that, I've taken five and a half years. Some people finish up in four years. So I think that's probably important to know because its taken me longer but a, I think I'm, I know that personally I'm happier than I would have been if I would have just tried to hammer my way through in four years. I would have had to keep up the same routine that I had in my second year to get done in four years. So I feel happy about the decision. But it is a different path than some people take.

Now, well, on this five and a half years, cause I'm looking at time to degree completion also, cause there's got to be a connection there,

Right

Ah, and I'm right there with you. Did you go part time? Did you go full time?

Well, yes.

Was it kind of, was it ever a half and half sort of?

Well, we have a set plan, a set amount of hours each semester and our program doesn't allow any flexibility with that. So I've actually taken a lot of classes that I wouldn't had to have taken. I have had times where I don't do as much clinical work just to finish up, like to finish up my thesis I took some time off from my clinical practice. So splitting that up, so not having to do everything full force I guess. So in a way it would be like kind of dividing that up.

So it's a divide to balance?

Yah. Uh, and it also has to do with just personal decisions we decided to have a baby now instead of later and that was going to require that I stick around a little bit longer. With my internship it would have been impossible to do that.

Personal choice. Uh, since you are pregnant, I'm going to ask this question.

Oh yah,

Ah, what has been the most challenging thing of being pregnant and working on your dissertation?

For a while, I think, earlier I was talking about the fact that it's helped me like knowing the baby's coming has helped me try to get a lot of things done. But, there are also times when it's hard for me to get really into school cause I just don't stop thinking about becoming a mother, you know, and actually when's he going to get here? Sometimes I find myself not concentrating as much and thinking I can't just sit around thinking about the baby all the time. So that's probably been the most, it's been motivating but it's also been distracting at times.

So occasional distraction. Ok, where are we at, we're doing well. Let me think. It's a slow process at this point. Uh, when, your going to graduate I'm assuming or you're going to defend pretty quickly, right?

My dissertation?

Yah.

I should defend sometime this spring.

Ok, uh, once that's done what are your leftover requirements?

Well, we all have to do a twelve-month internship before we actually are done. So, everyone's done with the program at that point. But it requires us moving away somewhere. Um, I'm in the process of applying right now so, we applied to programs from coast to coast from you know Oregon up to Boston you know and uh so I have to go on interviews in January. And it's a match system where they rank everybody they interview and you rank everybody you interview with. One day in February you get an email saying your moving to Chicago. So I have to move next summer at some point and it's a clinical position so it's just seeing clients at what ever site you're at for twelve months. So there won't be anymore course work and my dissertation will be done it's just making sure you don't do anything screwy clinically for a year before they say you can have your degree basically.

Now what is the move, what kind of stress level is that?

Well, I think it will be stressful just because that I've grown up here and never moved away from here. But, it's not going to be so bad because my husband's actually going to be a stay at home dad that year so I feel like uh we pretty much have it planned out and feel like we have some control over our lives. It's not going to be any different than if we had stayed here really. It's kind of exciting too. My husband is also from here and we're excited about moving somewhere interesting. They're all interesting places. Either big cities or pretty countryside. So we've kind of seen it as a year long adventure, a good excuse to move away, but we're going to come back after that.

That's always fun. We enjoyed it when we moved, so. Um, so you planned ahead to cover some of the stressful issues. Uh, if you had to pick one thing from the entire experience from the very first class you walked into to defending your dissertation, which I know your going to do in the spring, but you can anticipate, what is the most stressful thing that ever happened?

And this is specific to school, something very stressful?

It could be anything within the whole process. It could be your personal, it could be family, it could be social.

115

Uh huh,

It's hard to narrow down.

Yah, there are things that pop into mind but, uh, the most stressful. Well it's not a certain day or anything but I think that my master's thesis has been the most stressful.

Okay.

I didn't have a strong research background coming in and I really feel like I stumbled around quite a bit before I was on the right track. So, trying to figure out what research was all about and how I'm suppose to put a proposal together all of that. That was probably the most stressful part of graduate school.

What do you think could have been done to help circumvent that? On the part of the system?

Well, I think that, I think that right now my program has it set up to have that be a learning experience. But again, my advisor was very helpful in helping me when I came to her saying, "What am I going to do?" But maybe a little more clearer direction or instruction about how this happens and kind of what we talked about before just the general stress issues   so, even a more   process to help students through it could have been helpful. And some people come into it with more research and didn't struggle as much and so that could have provided some help if we would have sought it out probably.

Ok and then with that working on your thesis how did you ultimately handle that? You worked with your advisor, your advisor was supportive. Can you think of anything else that had a good, how did you cope with it, that's were I'm going for.

Well, I don't think I always coped with it all that well. I think there were times when I would become just so frustrated I would put it aside and not want to look at it for a month. But I think at some point I just realized that you know I have to get it done and uh I have to finish this step before I can move onto the next step. Just buckling down and making myself do it I think in a lot of ways. And I think that that transition between second and third year I started uh kind of enjoying my life more than I had. It was helpful too because I felt I had more control over the situation, it wasn't something I was being forced to do by other people so just kind of taking responsibility for myself and not working for somebody else but just working to meet my own goals and that sort of thing.

Ok, what I going to do now, is I'm going to give you a series of comic strips

Ok

And to your best ability

Uh uh

I would like you to try and pick three.

Okay.

Now the three that I want you to pick, I'm not telling you which ones. The three stages I want you to think about are: entry, the middle of your experience, and then the end of your experience.

Okay, so pick one that's for each of those periods.

Yes, personifies you and then we'll get into why as soon as you've done that.

Ok and I think like this one and this separate one?

Yah, I ran all the papers and

This is funny. What's this, ivory tower?

That's a website.

It is?

Yep

(She's looking at comic strips)

Okay, I've picked three.

Okay. It's difficult, I know.

It is difficult. It was hard to find one that fit really good for the beginning but I went ahead and picked this one right here.

Ok.

Uh, and I think I did have some of those thoughts at sometimes just kind of like, uh you know, what like some of the courses, not even just courses, but feeling like okay now I'm here and I have to show them that they made the right decision letting me in, you know, work hard, those kind of things. So, that reminded me a little bit of the first year.

And that one is actually; uh they have a name for it, uh commonalities. So really that was just trying to fit in and hoping nobody notice.

And a lot of us talked about that. A lot of people in that group that I came in with, you know, even though we didn't necessarily feel completely challenged and we wanted to show them that we're bright and they made the right decision and all those kind of silly things so that

Ok, now for your second choice, for your middle.

I think this one definitely fit very well. Trying to work out all of that.

So we hit that finding life, and school, and work and making them jive.

Right.

Ok, and then your exit?

I'll take this one right here. I like the way she looks at the end, like ah. You feel like, you know, it's light at the end of the tunnel and just getting some, some positive feed back that kind of helps you get going and feel better about the whole process.

Ok, thank you very much.

Is that it?

That's it.

Oh, that was great.

Do you have any questions? Or anything you want me to answer?

No. I would be interested in hearing about your findings and seeing how that works out when you're done.

Ok, I'm going to write a note on the authorization form that I will e-mail the results to you.

Ok. That's great.

Um, I do not anticipate having a full-fledged dissertation until around March. But I will definitely send you transcript of our conversation so you can look through and say, oh you misunderstood or hey, this is great.

Right.

Or I want to put this in there too.

Ok.

Ok, if at anytime you ever want to meet with me to clarify or do anything like that don't hesitate to call. Okay?

Okay. Thank you very much.

Thank you, very much.

VITA

Jennifer Renee' Smith

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Thesis: GRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS: COPING MECHANISMS AND THE
JOURNEY TO THE IVORY TOWER

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1991-1995	University of Oklahoma	Norman, OK

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Lead Math Instructor-College Readiness Center
Mentor all math and Algebra instructors in the CRC.

Develop syllabus, curriculum, and mentor instructors in use of
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Resource team lead for developmental education, learning styles

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Assessment Committee member and team mediator for meeting accreditation.

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Latin- Beginning Latin to Elementary Students.

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Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: GRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS: COPING MECHANISMS AND
THE JOURNEY TO THE IVORY TOWER

Pages in study: 119

Candidate for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Higher Education Administration

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of the study is to explore the successful
graduate student experience focusing specifically on stress, its influences, sources,
the various ways students cope and expected outcomes. Additionally, assessment
was done to determine the usefulness of the coping lens for understanding the
success of graduate students. Participants, selected because of their status as
doctoral seeking graduate students, were interviewed in a semi-structured, open
ended interviews. Then the data was analyzed and compared for similarities and
scanned for differences.

Findings and Conclusions: The findings that the problem-solving coping skill users were
the most successful lends credence to the previous studies on the subject and adds to the
premise that it will help graduate students to be successful. If coping skills, especially
problem-based coping skills are added to the graduate student developmental framework,
a method for success can be found and implemented to help future students succeed. The
doctoral students that used problem-based coping skills maintained social support
networks, found a balance between academic and personal time, and were active
participants in meeting their future goals.

Advisor Approval _____
Adrienne Hyle