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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Matthew S. Vos entitled “Bridging Thought Communities: Implications of Membership in Degree-Completion Program Groups for the Self-Concepts of Adult Students.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Sociology.

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**BRIDGING THOUGHT COMMUNITIES:
IMPLICATIONS OF MEMBERSHIP IN DEGREE-COMPLETION
PROGRAM GROUPS FOR THE SELF-CONCEPTS OF ADULT STUDENTS**

**A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Matthew S. Vos
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Joan who willingly and cheerfully shared the entire process with me. Her love and support have been an ongoing source of encouragement, without which I would long ago have lost sight of my goals. Joan, I will now mow the lawn once in a while! I also dedicate this dissertation to two others who have profoundly impacted me over the course of my studies: Russell Heddendorf, my mentor and friend, who introduced me to sociology, taught me to pursue it as a calling and whose wisdom has greatly impacted my life, and John McMillian who gave me the confidence and vision to complete that which I had started.

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Abstract

This study assesses the impact that an alternative delivery model in higher education may have for adult undergraduates who return to college. In trying to adapt their institutions to the needs of adult students, and reduce barriers facing them, some colleges and universities have developed degree-completion programs. In addition to offering convenient class times, some programs utilize what is known as a “group” or “cohort” model that provides a context within which students can find support, and which allows them to retain important outside-the-classroom statuses and identities. The purpose of the study was to determine whether close identification with a group of relatively like others plays a role in elevating the self-concepts of adult students.

The research proposes that the group model utilized by some degree-completion programs may result in the creation of thought communities. The study explores whether this delivery model has the potential to transform cohorts of adult students into thought communities from which learning cultures may emerge. When groups become thought communities, learning environments can become places where students are less dependent on professors’ supervision, and are more empowered to recognize the depth of their own skill and experience, and the relevance of that experience to the ongoing task of learning.

Data for the study were obtained from nine program groups in the Covenant College Quest program. A pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design was used to assess the impact of several features of small group process and structure on the self-concepts of adult students. The pretest was administered when students first enrolled in the program,

and the posttest was given when they entered their second semester (approximately seven months later). Dependent variables were measured using the Tennessee Self-concept Scale (second version: TSCS:2). Data for independent variables were obtained using a questionnaire designed by the researcher. Complete pretest and posttest data were obtained from 109 Quest students ($n = 109$). Results from multiple regression analysis suggested statistically significant relationships between “influence of instructor” and an increase in student “total” self-concept scores, and between the “group supplying imagery for a possible self” and an increase in total self-concept scores. In addition, support was found for a positive relationship between a “student’s describing his/her group as cohesive” and an increase in “social” self-concept scores.

This study demonstrates that the program group does play a role in elevating the self-concepts of adult students in degree-completion programs. It suggests that the program group provides a “context of possibility” from which thought communities may develop. These thought communities may help bridge the gulf between the temporary world of higher education and the outside worlds which adult students inhabit. This research raises questions about universalistic approaches to higher education and suggests that if education is to be made meaningful for adult students, the institutions that deliver education must develop programs that account for the mental memberships their students hold in worlds outside the academy.

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Chapter One: Learning Environments for Adult Students

College and university demographics have shifted considerably over the last generation. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) documents that in 1999 39 percent of all postsecondary students were 25 years or older – up from 28% in 1970. Other recent estimates indicate as many as 47 percent of students enrolled in higher education are 25 years of age or older (Bash, 2003). Educational research proposes that adult students have unique needs which are often not met in classroom environments created for 18-22 year old students (e.g. Wlodkowski, 1985; Draves, 1997; O'Toole, 1974; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Tinto, 1987; Kerka, 1995). Researchers describe how many components of college life appropriate for post-adolescent students and fundamental to the traditional college environment (traditional authority structures, linkage with past educational experiences, traditional curriculum, etc.), function as impediments for adult students uncertain about how they will perform and whether college will help them reach their goals.

In trying to adapt their institutions to the needs of adult students, and reduce barriers facing them, some colleges and universities have developed degree-completion programs. Many of these programs offer convenient class times and major fields of study that appeal to the working adult. More importantly, some programs utilize what is known as a “group” or “cohort” model that provides a context within which students can find support, and which allows them to retain their important outside-the-classroom statuses and identities. Groups or cohorts are comprised of between 10 and 20 students who remain together for the duration of their course of study (typically until they graduate).

For some degree-completion programs, the group model is the centerpiece of an androgogic approach to teaching.

For adult students, the group or cohort provides a learning community that performs both academic and social functions. Traditional college and university programs also create learning communities for their (younger) students (i.e., in the dormitories), but tend to utilize a “total institution” approach. This approach is appropriate as the identities of younger students are frequently bound up in the college or university. Many of these students will look back on their college years as a defining right of passage – one that shaped their identities and provided major direction for their lives. Adult students root their important identities outside of the academy – in the worlds of work, home, and community. They attend college for different reasons than their younger counterparts, who typically place great importance on the social dimension of college and embrace the institutional reshaping of their lives. Learning communities may better serve adults when they are constructed in ways that support, recognize, and emphasize the important outside-the-classroom statuses and identities they bring to the classroom.

Because traditional college programs are frequently constructed with younger (18-22 year old) students in mind, adults sometimes feel marginalized as they move through classes trying to attain credentials needed to support their outside of college lives. Adult students may feel disconnected and unwelcome in traditional environments. Ultimately this may compromise their likelihood of success. When college threatens one’s core identities, and when institutional support systems are developed with 18-year-old students in mind, adult students may grow disillusioned and discouraged, and drop

out. Zerubavel's (1999) explication of thought communities provides a helpful framework for understanding this disconnect. He suggests that people hold mental memberships in delimited thought communities. For example, a group of accountants may comprise a thought community who together share a unique approach to understanding the world. Within their thought community they learn what is important or unimportant, how to focus their attention, and what modes of behavior are appropriate in a variety of situations. It is due to the influence of their respective thought communities that accountants and architects will view a piece of real estate through very different eyes. While accountants share many cognitive similarities with the rest of humanity, their thought community shapes the way they view the world and define the situations they encounter. Adults hold mental memberships in different thought communities than those familiar to 18-year-old students. When adult students enter institutions of higher learning designed for younger students, the experience is like entering a different world – a world that may require the suspension of important identities if they are to attain success.

This research proposes that the group model utilized by some degree-completion programs may result in the creation of thought communities. Thought communities may be regarded as groups of people in the same social environment who have learned to see the world through a common mental lens. Zerubavel (1999) writes about cognitive socialization. He observes that socialization is a process involving both how to “act,” and how to “think.” Colleges and universities can socialize students to behave in particular ways. However, the same attention may not be devoted to socializing their minds. When colleges and universities use universalistic “one size fits all” approaches to higher

education, they may neglect to consider that many adult students view the world through mental lenses grounded in social groups outside the college. Consequently, these institutions should work to create thought communities where adult students can retain their outside-the-classroom statuses and identities, and thus link education to life in meaningful ways. Thought communities are groups of adult students who share common ways of thinking rooted in their memberships in communities outside the college or university, and who react to the educational experience as a group in ways which promote relevant linkage between new learning and the “worlds” in which they base their primary identities. When groups become thought communities, learning environments can become places where students are less dependent on professors’ supervision, and are more empowered to recognize the depth of their own skill and experience, and the relevance of that experience to the ongoing task of learning. Transformation of a group or cohort into a thought community can be a liberating experience for adult students – one where their shared identities become meaningful and relevant to the educational process and to the worlds from which they come.

The study explores the impact that an alternative delivery model in higher education may have for adult undergraduates who return to college. This delivery model has the potential to transform cohorts of adult students into thought communities from which learning cultures may emerge. In particular, the study assesses the impact of degree-completion programs utilizing the group or cohort model on adult students. The purpose of the study is to determine whether close identification with a group of relatively like others plays a role in elevating the self-concepts of adult students. One

assumption made in the study is that a positive change in self-concept (along a variety of dimensions) is indicative of the transformation of the group into a thought community.

The study is framed in the larger context of trying to identify and understand the group processes that lead adult students to make their social identities salient over their individual identities. This salience may contribute to the adoption of a program-orientation (as opposed to an individual-orientation), which reflects behaviors more likely to lead to a satisfying, successful, and relevant educational experience. The broader sociological question explored here addresses how institutions of higher learning may assimilate an increasingly diverse student population without requiring them to abandon the important worlds from which they come.

This chapter introduces the concept of adult degree-completion programs and details ways in which colleges and universities make higher education more accessible to adult students. The study population consisted of adult students enrolled in “program groups” in Covenant College’s Quest program. The Quest program is an exemplar of degree-completion programs using the group model, and the way the program is structured is typical of many similar programs. Consequently, the majority of the examples offered in the study are derived from personal experience with Quest program groups. I begin by describing how features of the physical learning environment, the structure of the classes themselves, and the way programs are administrated are designed to meet the needs of adult students. This is followed by a discussion of ways in which placing students in program groups may address some of the unique identity needs that adult students bring into the college classroom.

Reducing Barriers for Adult Students: New Approaches to Classroom Learning

Searching college and university websites reveals a wide variety of approaches to adult education. One of these approaches is commonly called “degree completion.”

Although there is variety in how degree-completion programs are designed, a number of them advertise a group model (Covenant College Quest program), cohort model (George Fox University), cohort group (University of Sioux Falls; Olivet Nazarene University), or class group (National-Louis University) as central to the educational process. Many of these programs try to attract adult students by advertising programs that can be completed in 14-18 months while fulfilling other important responsibilities such as going to work and participating in family life. In addition, degree-completion programs typically draw attention to the centrality of a student’s life experience in creating a learning community of working adults (i.e., Bluffton College, Covenant College Quest program).

Promotional material advertising degree-completion programs generally tries to appeal to the sense an adult student might have that the traditional college or university learning environment might compromise other important parts of his or her life.

Degree-completion programs are designed to help adult students overcome barriers inherent in more traditional forms of higher education. Some of these barriers are rooted in negative past experiences with formal education. Draves (1997) advises reducing the number of associations with past schooling that adult students may have experienced. “The imprint of our schooling is still on all of us, and if those memories are not good, it is best not to revive them” (Draves, p. 10). Consequently, degree-completion programs frequently try to present themselves as viable alternatives. This means more

than developing novel pedagogical approaches; it also means transformation of the classroom and administrative environments.

Administrators of degree-completion programs place great importance on the educational environments into which they invite adult students. Kerka (1989; 1995) identifies three factors that affect adult students' persistence and participation in higher education: student characteristics; student circumstances; and the educational environment. She cautions that since the first two factors are often beyond the reach of college administrators and professors, educators must focus on the college environment. "Personal/job factors may seem to be beyond institutional control, whereas program satisfaction is something educators can improve" (Kerka, 1995, p. 3). Retention of adult students may hinge on whether the "total package" the college offers addresses their frequently complicated "network of needs," which must be met before they see finishing a degree as a viable option.

Class size, self-concept, and the remoooring of identities

It is not uncommon for adult degree-completion programs to advertise small class sizes. For example, on their world-wide-web pages, Wheeling Jesuit University in Wheeling West Virginia advertises a "12 to 1" student to faculty ratio; Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania advertises "14-16 students per group or cohort;" Malone College in Canton, Ohio proclaims "A class group of 16-20 students advances through the program together;" Calumet College of St. Joseph in Indiana writes, "Cluster groups of approximately 15 adult learners meet once a week for 4 hours. . ." and Northwestern College in Saint Paul, Minnesota simply promises "small class sizes." When students

register for these programs, they are assigned to particular groups with which they will spend the entire program. Classes with 12 to 18 students promote increased contact between students and professors, and minimize anxiety about speaking out in class or participating in classroom activities such as role-plays. Furthermore, small class size can lead to closer identification with a group, helping students make salient their social identities (identities vested in a group) over their personal identities. Identity salience is a concept reflecting the degree to which an individual emphasizes or prioritizes one of his or her identities over another – in this case, emphasizing social or “group” identity over personal or “individual” identity (Jackson & Smith, 1999). When adult students learn to see other group members as similar to them, they can forge new “education-oriented” identities based in the group.

Degree-completion programs work to create environments that help students put aside personal identities and their accompanying status issues, and develop intra-group solidarity. Identifying with a group can significantly impact a student’s self-concept (what a student thinks about him or herself). Wlodkowski (1985) discusses the relationship between self-concept and motivation to learn. Concluding that positive self-concept and high academic achievement are fundamentally interrelated, he maintains that well-designed learning environments can impact self-perceptions, even overcoming poor self-concepts.

No matter what a learner’s self-concept is, we have a chance within our special instructional or training session to positively affect that person’s self-estimation. Like an oasis in the desert, our particular learning environment can nourish and

replenish even a poor self-concept that has been weakened by other harsher and more barren learning situations. (Wlodkowski, 1985, p. 89)

Some adults doubt their ability to function in a formal academic setting (Wlodkowski, 1985). Social worlds they inhabit outside of the classroom may reinforce those doubts. Family members may question an adult's decision to return to college as classes take time away from the home. Small classes help the student, who is accustomed to living in worlds beyond the college's walls, "remoor" his or her "educational" identity to new social supports (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). This remooing process is simplified in a more limited social environment where students can get to know each other on a personal basis. For example, as student groups develop internal solidarity, they may function as support systems for their members, reinforcing new more positive academic self-concepts.

Placing students at the center: Physical environment, scheduling, and structure

The physical classroom environment utilized by many degree-completion programs is also constructed with the adult student in mind. In some programs (for example, Indiana Wesleyan University, Covenant College) students sit around tables rather than in desks, and the tables are arranged in a circular or "U" shaped pattern. This places students on the same physical level as their professors, further de-emphasizing status issues that may become salient. This sort of arrangement also encourages visual contact between students; all students are on the same level and there is no "sitting at the back."

Degree-completion programs generally schedule classes at convenient times for adults. Adult students usually work during the day; thus many classes are held during the evening or on weekends when students are able to attend. In the program explored in this study, classes are held on weeknights from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. or on Saturday mornings from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. Additionally, several weekday morning classes are scheduled (i.e., every Tuesday morning) to enable adults who work in the evenings to attend. Convenient scheduling helps adult students in two ways: First, it solves the structural problem of integrating work and school schedules; Second, it functions as a symbol for students that their program is intrinsically different from – and in their minds superior to – traditional programs.

Classes in degree-completion programs are frequently presented in modular form. Calumet College of St. Joseph, Malone College, Geneva College, Northwestern College, Nyack College, Friends University, Indiana Wesleyan University, Eastern University, and Wheeling Jesuit University all advertise variants of such a class format. These “modules” range from five to seven weeks in length, run consecutively rather than concurrently, and require active participation in the learning process. Where the traditional image of a college classroom places students in a “receiving” posture – the professor lecturing to the students – the androgogical “module” concept includes placing adult experiences at the center of learning.

Presenting course material in module form may produce learning environments less restrictive than those typically found in traditional college classrooms. For example, traditional classroom environments sometimes emphasize fairly scripted exchanges between professor and student (professor lecturing, student taking notes) – in part

because professors teaching post-adolescent students in traditional programs primarily interact in thought communities unavailable to their students. Courses presented in interactive module form may encourage a “productive informality.” In this less formal environment, students and professors may share worlds as they find common ground in their not-too-different “adult” thought communities. However, research suggests some adult students may not welcome such flexible, interactive environments. In a study exploring stress and anxiety in adult learners, Nicolson and Bess (1997) found that when the learning environment is qualitatively similar to a student’s work history, anxiety is reduced. This finding lends support to the proposition that adults learn best in environments that replicate the sort of experiences they have in their primary thought communities. Thus, we may find that students working in restrictive, regimented vocations may feel uncomfortable with less formal learning environments, while students accustomed to flexible work conditions may flourish in environments using the interactive module concept.

An interpersonal communication module I have taught provides an example of this flexible, interactive learning environment. In this module students are required to produce role-play scenarios based on communication problems they have experienced both in the workplace and in their personal lives. These role-plays are acted out by other students in the class, and followed up with general discussion identifying the principles of communication present in the incident and exploring what might have been done differently. In this way students may explore problems they encounter in their lives within an academic framework that acknowledges their important identities. Structuring classes in this way helps relate formal education to other important areas of life. O’Toole

explains: “. . . by segmenting life functions, we make the activities of education, work, and leisure less meaningful than if they ran as three strands throughout our lives” (O'Toole, 1974, p. 13).

Many degree-completion programs take seriously the proposition that education and life should be continuous. Ovando (1979) suggests “. . . [T]he primary function of education is the creation of responsible culture makers” (p. 153). Connecting students' academic lives with their occupational lives has the potential to result in critical thinking about what goes on in their workplaces. Students in degree-completion programs may become enthusiastic about “trying out” a new management idea at work and reporting the results in class. Experiences like this are meaningful for students; they increase their confidence and confirm that classroom learning is relevant to the worlds they inhabit. In traditional college classrooms, instructors engage the students in more limited ways by drawing on students' life experiences on campus, and when possible, future settings.

The adult learner comes to the classroom with a multitude of experiences from the worlds of work, home, and community. Many adult degree-completion programs claim to employ educational models that place those experiences at the heart of the learning process. Traditional college programs designed for younger students also draw on student experiences, but to a much lesser extent due to the much more limited life experience of their students. For example, having taught research methods classes in both adult degree-completion programs and traditional undergraduate programs, I find the content of research projects completed by adult students to be much richer than that of projects authored by their post-adolescent counterparts. This is primarily because of the breadth of work and life experience that the adult brings into the research process. I

find that adults can more easily identify concrete, “researchable” problems, in part because the worlds they have experienced extend far beyond the college campus. Younger students, on the other hand, have spent the majority of their lives in school situations; many have entered the work world only in very temporary ways. Bringing the life experience of adult students into the formal learning environment in a meaningful way contributes to a more meaningful experience which has relevance to the worlds they inhabit. Writing about adult students, Ovando stresses the importance of linking education with life experience:

Education suffers basically from the gap between its content and the living experiences of its pupils, between the systems of values that it preaches and the goals set up by society, between its ancient curriculum and the modernity of science. Link education to life, associate it with concrete goals, establish a close relationship between society and economy, invent or rediscover an education system that fits its surroundings – surely this is where the solution must be sought. (Faure, 1972 as cited in Ovando, 1979, p. 157)

Placing adult students at the center of the curriculum connects their student identities with their workplace identities. This diminishes status issues because students can introduce their workplace identities into the classroom. Work is seen as organically related to the learning process, not as something from a different world, connected in only abstract ways.

It is this wealth in your participants that makes teaching adults so exciting and rewarding. Drawing on your participants’ experiences can make the class an

exciting and new interaction every time you teach; to ignore the past is to miss out on something valuable and special. (Draves, 1997, p. 11)

The informal classroom environment: Developing intragroup solidarity

Some degree-completion programs try to encourage community in the informal classroom environment. Class mealtimes provide a good example. Because classes often fall during a mealtime (i.e., from 6-10 p.m.), students are encouraged to eat together. Students do this in various ways; some groups order food delivered to the classroom, some groups divide responsibilities for preparing food (i.e., a pot of chili, bread, salad) among group members, and some groups eat as individuals. This “supper time” may seem unrelated to the educational aspects of the program, but it may facilitate development of intra-group solidarity.

A program I am familiar with recently made a ruling that groups who chose not to eat dinner during class time could not end class early (i.e., getting out at 9:40 instead of 10). The reason for this is that groups who wanted to rush through their evening, tended to make “getting home” their goal for the night. Students who eat together, by contrast, get to know each other better, and group solidarity may become much stronger. Consequently there is not as great an emphasis on “getting out of here.”

Additionally, meals provide a time for professors to mingle with students on a less formal level. Professors sometimes “invite themselves to dinner” by joking that they assign grades based on the quality of the food they receive. This communicates interest in the students and solidifies the professor’s identity as a temporary member of the group. This informal interaction with professors may be especially important given the minimal

amount of social interaction adult students have with the other representatives of the college. Faculty members frequently provide the main point of contact between adult students and the institution (Hanniford & Sagaria, 1994).

An accessible administration

Adult students may be deterred from returning to college because they anticipate that institutional bureaucracy will demand more time and effort than they are prepared to give. Successful degree-completion programs have accessible administrative staffs. Adults prefer to spend their time in the classroom, not waiting in line to register (this is, of course, true for traditional students as well). To attract adult students, degree-completion programs often adopt a “sales” approach. Registering for classes, buying textbooks, checking on grades, making appeals, and the like are all available through easily accessible staff who do not work for the traditional college programs.

Colleges and universities that add “degree-completion” responsibilities to overworked traditional program staff overlook a critical barrier blocking adults who might otherwise return to college. To adequately serve adult students, colleges and universities should dedicate resources to meeting their needs. Somewhat like minority students, adult students may have a sense of marginality at institutions designed for younger students (Tinto, 1987). Consequently, adult students respond very positively to staff focused on and specialized in providing for their needs.

When administrations of degree-completion programs eliminate bureaucratic obstacles, provide easily accessed avenues for help, and a clear path toward graduation, adult students may find higher education more accessible. Schlossberg et al. (1989)

stress an integrated approach, suggesting that various administrative departments governing adult students be concentrated in an “entry education center.” Centralizing functions such as admissions, orientation, financial aid, and academic advising will reduce bureaucratic barriers for adult students.

Assigning Students to Program Groups: Identity Needs of Adult Learners

Navigating confusing and unfamiliar thought communities presents a fundamental problem for the adult returning to school. Status and identity issues, coupled with insecurity about one’s academic abilities may result in adult students dropping out of college. Norms from the worlds of work, home, and community, sometimes do not translate well into the classroom environment. Adult students may feel alone, adrift, and uncertain about their competency.

Placing students in groups comprised of other relatively similar individuals helps minimize issues that prevent adult students from attaining their educational goals. Being part of a group helps them avoid unfavorable comparisons with 19-year-old students, and gives them a more relevant point of social comparison. Participation in a group helps adult students overcome this isolation by providing them with a community.

However, the mere placement of students into program groups provides no guarantee of a transformation into thought communities. Some groups may develop into dynamic communities of learning while others may support behaviors that may actually compromise students’ likelihood of success. The remaining sections of this chapter explain how program groups are constructed and discuss features of groups that may contribute to the development of a learning/thought community.

Registration: Learning to think as a group

When students entering degree completion programs utilizing the “group” or “cohort” model meet for registration, they find they have been assigned to a particular group. In the program explored in this study, all students who will comprise a group meet for the first time in the classroom where they will spend the remainder of the program. Registration in this program commences with student introductions led by a recruiter who brought the students into the program. These introductions are often punctuated by informal comments, made by the recruiter, drawing attention to the ways in which a particular student’s background may enrich the experience of the class. For example, if a nurse is registering, the recruiter (with whom all students are familiar) might proclaim that nurses frequently make important contributions to the “group and organizational management” module because they are “familiar with balancing the demands of hospital bureaucracy while trying to deliver quality care to patients.”

When there is great diversity among the occupations represented by students, the recruiter might explain that such diversity significantly enriches the classroom experience because students have unique perspectives on different issues. In short, the registration meeting provides a time when students are introduced to each other in ways that draw attention to the importance of their outside-the-classroom statuses and identities. Registration also involves clear explanations of program policy (students receive a calendar listing every class meeting for the entire 14-month program), but the primary goal at registration is to help the students begin thinking of themselves as a group. Thus, one purpose of registration, from the program administrator’s perspective, is to help students begin to develop ways of thinking that reflect and support program objectives.

At the group registration meeting, at least one professor is usually present. The professor talks to the students about how positive it is they have taken this step of enrolling in college. In this introduction to the program, professors typically tell students to think of themselves as a family. They are told that several of them will meet significant obstacles during the program (“adults have complex lives, and things will happen. . .”), and that the key to overcoming those obstacles is to “pull each other through.” The idea is that the group should determine to finish the program *as a group*. All of this is an attempt to foster development of a shared identity – having students see themselves as group members – not just individuals who succeed or fail entirely on their own merits and without social support.

Student leadership in the group

After students are in class for about four weeks, a professor leads the group through the process of selecting a peer leader. The individual elected (called a “student representative” in the Quest program) plays an important role may significantly shape group behavior in the program. Students who assume this responsibility are provided a modest stipend for their work. Their primary duty is to function as liaisons between administrative staff and the students in their group. The representative’s duties include relaying information between group members and administrative staff, locking the classroom after evening classes, collecting and returning student papers, and negotiating student grievances, among other things. While the title “student representative” does not convey a strong sense of authority, group members in the Quest program generally regard the position with some esteem.

The student representative may influence the quality of communication flowing between students, professors, and staff. The quality of this communication may significantly affect the quality of the group experience. When student representatives are sloppy, or fail to communicate critical pieces of information to their groups, group enthusiasm may drop, and members become discouraged. Conversely, when a student representative appears organized, prompt, consistent, and communicative, group solidarity is strengthened and the overall group experience may be enhanced.

It is difficult for some adult students to transition between familiar and unfamiliar thought communities as they move from the worlds of work, home and community to the world of higher education. Although some degree completion programs make considerable effort to develop learning environments consistent with thought communities familiar to students, there is no certainty that such learning environments will result. The student representative plays a pivotal role in the establishment of a new learning culture – a culture consistent with thought communities familiar to adult students and the development of new student-appropriate behaviors. Leadership by student representatives may help group members adopt positive views about the program. One way they do this is by taking the lead in helping encourage group members to make salient their group identities over their personal identities. Although student representatives may not always emerge as the “informal” leaders of their groups, they can influence groups to embrace program ends – ends reflecting positive educational outcomes – leading to a more positive experience for the students.

Formal to informal: Instrumental and social functions of program groups

As noted, prior to registration many programs assign students to groups. As the “assigned groups” progress through the curriculum, members get to know each other well and gradually transition into a type of reference group within which students learn appropriate patterns for in-school behavior. As students develop bonds at more relational levels, groups frequently assume a heightened importance for their members which transcends the group’s instrumental purposes.

Characterizing these groups is a challenging task. They are better defined functionally than substantively. Goffman (1961) helps me define what I call “program groups” with his distinction between “focused gatherings” or “encounters,” and what he refers to as “little groups.” Of the distinction he says, “. . . a crucial attribute of focused gatherings – the participants’ maintenance of continuous engrossment in the official focus of activity – is not a property of social groups in general, for most groups, unlike encounters, continue to exist apart from the occasions when members are physically together” (Goffman, p. 11). Furthermore, little groups possess several generalized properties including:

. . . regulation of entering and leaving; capacity for collective action; division of labor, including leadership roles; socialization function, whether primary or adult; a means of satisfying personal ends; and latent and manifest social function in the environing society. (Goffman, 1961, p. 9)

The important distinction between encounters and little groups is that encounters are contained in the “moment” or “occasion,” while little groups transcend the immediate

gathering. Traditional college classes seem better defined as focused gatherings, while degree-completion program groups seem consistent with Goffman's little groups. For example, traditional-aged college students are much more loosely affiliated with each other on a "college class" basis, and are often not even aware of the names of many other students in their classes. Degree-completion groups tend to develop the generalized properties for little groups outlined by Goffman. Furthermore, little groups perform an identity function for adult students, whereas traditional-aged college students often anchor their identities in a variety of extracurricular dimensions of the college. Goffman speaks of this identification with a social group, saying that individual members:

. . . perceive the organization as a distinct collective unit, a social entity, apart from the particular relationships the participants may have to one another; they perceive themselves as members who belong, identifying with the organization and receiving moral support from doing so; they sustain a sense of hostility to outgroups. (Goffman, 1961, p. 9)

This transition to functioning as informal or "little" groups is frequently noticeable to professors in degree-completion programs because students begin favorably comparing their group with other groups, for example, expressing the opinion that their group is more family-like than other groups. Groups members may gradually develop affection and, in a sense, care for each other. Their personal lives may begin to intertwine as well. Members sometimes express disappointment when they learn that because of logistical problems they will be seated alphabetically during graduation ceremonies, not by group. When one group member goes through a death in the family, or becomes ill, those events affect the group. For degree-completion students, their

experience within their program groups – positive or negative – may define their experience with the program as a whole.

Placing adult students in groups with relatively “like” others may help reduce the identity threat they might face in classrooms with younger students, and contribute to making learning more relevant to their outside-the-classroom lives. This study offers the proposition that close identification with a group helps make adult students’ “social” identities (as contrasted with their personal identities) more salient. When students attach greater importance to the social dimension of their identities, they may become more likely to embrace “program-ends,” which, in turn, may lead to more positive educational experiences and success in college. Groups begin as formal entities, playing largely instrumental roles, and gradually develop into informal groups. We can place them on a continuum from “minimalist social” (groups playing an instrumental role) to “minimalist instrumental” (groups playing a social role). The learning culture developed in the group can support primarily instrumental or primarily social ends. An extreme emphasis on either end of the continuum has potential negative implications for students’ academic goals.

Any particular group falls into a number of positions on this continuum at any given time as some members identify more strongly with groups outside the program (external identifiers) while others strongly identify with the program group (internal identifiers). The salience of these identities has implications for the degree of resistance students manifest toward adopting new, student appropriate behaviors which will help them succeed in their academic endeavors.

Program ends versus individual ends

Placing students in groups may help make classroom learning more adaptive to the adult student. Program groups function to bridge the divide between the two cultures that adult students simultaneously inhabit – the “outside” world and the college world. Frequently, adult students enter degree-completion programs with salient workplace identities. However, students may anchor their selves in their homes or communities rather than their workplaces; some adults desire a degree simply to fulfill a long-time goal, or to illustrate the importance of formal education for their children. Not all students are employed. Regardless of where students’ identities are based, the group they are assigned to has potential to provide a new “world of meaning” by which they develop patterns for behavior consistent with both their outside lives and their classroom identities.

What I call “program ends” refers to student outcomes reflective of what happens when program groups become thought communities. Administrators of degree-completion programs conceptualize their programs with certain educational outcomes in mind. These outcomes might include the timely graduation of adult students who have learned to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problems (i.e., George Fox University), have shown a commitment to lifelong learning, and who possess solid leadership skills which can be applied in the workplace. Program ends represent outcomes that benefit both the institution and the student – where the student completes a degree, and looks back on the experience as positive, meaningful, and relevant, and where the institution has developed a learning community that advances the institutional mission and serves both student and the larger community. Individual ends refer to

outcomes the student attempts to achieve outside of the context of a learning community. When students persist in leaving class early, fail to engage with subject material, and disengage themselves from the group, they are still seeking a degree (an individual end), but in ways less likely to lead to success. Students pursuing such ends sometimes graduate, but they do not help the institution fulfill its stated purpose, and they do not reflect the commitment to lifelong learning which can characterize students in groups which have become thought communities.

Congruity between program ends and individual ends is not always realized. Sometimes students use the program for individual ends, but their behavior runs contrary to program ends. For example, a student may want a degree (an individual end), but may try to put in minimal class time to attain it. Or, a student may desire a good grade (an individual end), but instead of performing at a high academic level may choose to use his or her skills in manipulating the administration to discredit a faculty member who assigned a lower than desired (but reasonable) grade. In both of these instances, individual ends may be met, but program ends remain unfulfilled.

On the other hand, program administrators may set policies that advance the financial ends of the program or college – such as hiring a minimal number of full-time faculty – but compromise individual ends of becoming more knowledgeable and effective in the work place. In this situation program ends take precedence over individual ends – the program is served (in the short-term), but the individual loses out.

A group culture

Groups develop a “group culture” which manifests itself in how students respond to the program as a whole. For example, professors in the Quest program will sometimes comment to administrators about the character of particular groups. Some groups are perceived as “a pleasure to work with,” “a group that goes the extra mile,” “a group that never complains.” Groups characterized in these ways gain reputations as enjoyable to teach because they support the professors’ efforts in the classroom and advance program ends.

Other groups develop reputations as “difficult to work with,” “nit-picking,” “looking for an easy way out of work,” “expecting much, giving little.” Word spreads about these groups, and professors sometimes express reluctance to teach them. Students in these groups subtly imply that they feel shortchanged – that the program is different than what they had been led to believe before enrolling. These groups approach learning with little joy or enthusiasm and the group culture that they produce has a self-fulfilling prophecy effect.

Enthusiasm for program ends or disdain for program ends can spread through a given group. This is most evident during group “exit interviews” held just prior to program completion. Groups tend to fall into two camps during these interviews – members of some groups exude positive sentiments and support for the program; other groups express widespread negativity. Only rarely will a group characterized by resistance to program ends contain members who express primarily positive sentiment

toward the program; likewise, groups supportive of program ends and appreciative of the program only rarely contain members who express primarily negative sentiment.

This study explores how particular features of program groups may influence groups toward becoming thought communities that emphasize program ends which serve both student and institution. Specifically, the study looks at the way different characteristics of program groups influence how students “define the situation.” Adult students re-enter the classroom with some degree of uncertainty, and must constantly interpret what school means for them and for the people they will become (Swann, Jr., 1987). Occasionally, for reasons related to illness or personal circumstance, a student will drop out of the program for a time and join a different group upon re-entering. When this occurs, students may retain the mindset developed with their original group, and they must re-orient themselves as they align with the tendencies or “ethos” of the new group.

College can be threatening for adults, generally defined as marginal to the institution. Program groups help minimize this marginality by bridging the social space between the thought communities familiar to adult students and the unfamiliar thought communities they enter when they return to college. This study seeks to identify features of program groups that contribute to increases in student self-concept, and ultimately to successful program completion. A broad goal of the study is to assess the efficacy of non-traditional educational delivery systems – in particular the group model – utilized in institutions of higher learning. The study provides greater linkage between frameworks in social psychology and problems confronting colleges and universities as they try to adapt their programs to meet the needs of increasing numbers of adult learners. In short, the study will provide insight into the nature of group processes that elevate student self-

concept, and ultimately transform loosely gathered program groups into thought communities.

Chapter Two: Adult Students in Context – The Program Group as a Symbolic Solution

That adult students are positioned between conflicting thought communities when they simultaneously stand in the world of work and the world of the college classroom is not an isolated problem. This problem is one exemplar of a class of problems becoming more prevalent in contemporary society. Profound technological changes have taken place in the social order increasing the number of social worlds we simultaneously inhabit. Social structures that have traditionally remained separate have collided in postmodernity. For example, electronic mail (e-mail) enables us to communicate with people from other countries as easily as we communicate with our neighbors. People increasingly prefer electronic forms of communication to face-to-face interactions. We may never meet our next-door-neighbor, but may communicate regularly with individuals living on other continents.

These changes in the social order require us to internalize normative standards from a myriad of incompatible social worlds. For example, some college professors report receiving papers from students which are written entirely in lower case. The norm for “chat room” behavior (typing quickly in lower case) is incompatible with the norm for formal academic standards. In an ever-expanding world rife with this sort of dissonance, how does one know how to behave? Should professors receiving such papers embrace these new norms, or enforce more familiar traditional standards? Colleges and universities continue to debate these matters.

In the college where I teach, we are constantly exhorted to “connect” with students. Connecting with students no longer means simply meeting them in the school

cafeteria; it means trying to emulate behaviors common to the worlds they inhabit. Thus, lecturing is “out” and more symbolic forms of teaching are “in” – especially forms that communicate content via popular media-driven images. However, even if professors embrace these new ways of thinking, students are still tested in conventional, “non-symbolic” ways. The “Graduate Record Exam” has no pictures or sound bytes!

Trying to reconcile the conflicting demands of these “worlds” produces tension and problems of meaning for which we must generate solutions. As I explain presently, these problems are structural in nature but the solution to them often comes in symbolic form. Of course, we have always had structural problems in the social order. The significance of these problems lies in their sheer magnitude. In contemporary society we can no longer deal with “problems of culture” in a broad sense, only with particular problems in particular subcultures. Tradition is evaporating and people in general find themselves living in multiple but incompatible worlds, unable to transition smoothly from one world to the next.

Thus, the problem explored is one of bridging the “outside school” worlds with the “inside school” worlds inhabited by adult students. Since the traditional ways “don’t work” for adult students, college administrators must carve out spaces where new thought communities can be developed. The challenge is to create social space so students can develop thought communities compatible with the worlds from which they come. Without this goal in mind, colleges will tend to process students through disconnected “credential factories.” Furthermore, finding solutions to these problems may lead to fruitful ideas for bridging other social worlds.

Postmodernity: Symbolic Solutions to Structural Problems

I observed that social structures traditionally separate from each other have collided in postmodernity. In the following paragraphs I briefly outline how the structural basis for problems faced by adult students is exacerbated in the shift from modernity to postmodernity, and explain how contemporary solutions to those problems are frequently symbolic. Immediately following that outline, I present my argument in greater detail.

The problems we see in the postmodern world are related to a breakdown in social structure. Robert K. Merton's (1996) conception of "sociological ambivalence" helps explain the strain people experience while trying to reconcile structurally opposed statuses and roles. Merton points out that the social world requires people to hold incompatible statuses and perform incompatible roles. People in such situations have difficulty performing their roles because those roles may include conflicting normative expectations.

Merton explains that this problem of ambivalence, of incompatible normative requirements existing in a status set or even within a single role, is not social psychological in nature. These problems are built into the social structure itself. Adult students' problems stem from incompatible normative requirements built into their status sets, not from psychological inadequacies. While sociological ambivalence has always been present in social life, it is much more acute in contemporary society.

Postmodernity multiplies problems of this sort by dramatically expanding the individual's status and role sets. People in general play a greater number of roles, and

those roles are often ambiguous and incompatible with each other. Kenneth Gergen (1991) develops this with the concept of “social saturation.” In the postmodern world, technological developments spawn the development of an enormous number of relationships. These relationships overlap, and norms from one relationship often do not translate over to other relationships. Consequently, we experience great breadth, but little depth, in our relationships.

Contemporary solutions to these structural problems frequently come in symbolic form. In the present study, the group model constitutes a symbolic solution to the problem of incompatible normative expectations faced by adult students. While administrators do make changes in how classes are structured, the group functions as a symbol that students “just like me” can finish a degree and can be something better than when they enrolled. The structural problem remains, but its impact is “softened” by these symbolic representations.

With this framework in mind, I turn to a more detailed explanation of my argument, offer contemporary examples of ambivalence in the postmodern world, and suggest a few ways that these problems are dealt with symbolically.

The saturated self: Overlapping social worlds

Gergen (1991) describes postmodernism as a condition of culture and explains that in the postmodern world “. . . an array of technological innovations has led to an enormous proliferation of relationships” (Gergen, p. 49). This “social saturation” results in the intersection of the individual with a myriad of social worlds. Inhabiting so many

worlds, each replete with an endless array of possibilities results in problems of meaning as we move between various worlds, many of which we find unfamiliar.

The technologies of social saturation expose us to an enormous range of persons, new forms of relationship, unique circumstances and opportunities, and special intensities of feeling. . . . When exposed to other persons, we change in two major ways. We increase our capacities for *knowing that* and *forknowing how* .

(Gergen, 1991, p. 69) [Italics in original]

Technological developments played a central role in this saturating of the self. Gergen (1991) divides the history of technological development into “low tech” and “high tech.” “Low tech” developments include the railroad, postal service, automobile, telephone, radio broadcasting, motion pictures, and printed books. These advances led to “high tech” developments which include air transportation, television, and electronic communication. All of these had a profound impact on social life – each expanded the scope of the social world for the individual.

Electronic mail, touched on earlier, provides a staggering example of the sheer scope of the social worlds available to anyone with a modem-equipped computer. Through e-mail the average person can share worlds with people from South Africa to people across the street. This social saturation has the potential to create problems of meaning unparalleled in human history. This shift in communication patterns results in new, very specialized norms. For example, many interpersonal communication textbooks now outline norms for “netiquette” (etiquette over the internet) (e.g. Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1999; Trenholm & Jensen, 2000; Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2001). These

technology based shifts in communication patterns lead to social problems because they challenge the individual's ability to assimilate accepted patterns of thinking and behavior into daily life. Norms are shattered, and social worlds become diverse and overlapping.

Ambiguity in social roles

In the modern age, social roles contained broadly understood meanings. For example, fifteen or twenty years ago the meaning of the role of "teacher" was shared and widely recognized. Most people in Western society agreed about what the role of teacher entailed. Television programs such as "Little House on the Prairie" provided us with ideal-type images of teachers with well-defined, easily recognized roles. Interaction between teachers and students was scripted and predictable. When students misbehaved and were sent home from school, their parents told them to go apologize to the teacher and submit to whatever punishment the teacher deemed necessary.

In contemporary postmodern society, the role of teacher is open to a host of different role definitions. In particular, the relationship between a teacher and a student is ambiguous. It is unclear what authority the teacher holds in relationship to the student. It is unclear what rights and responsibilities the student has. Parents hold teachers responsible for calling them when their child fails to turn in homework; these same students frequently drive better cars than their teachers do. Normative role responsibilities are increasingly unclear.

The structural position of teacher has also become much more fluid. We now have private school teachers, public school teachers, home school teachers (which can be parents or outside specialists), and even teachers who teach via the internet or on

videotape. The point is that the common, widely understood definition of the role of teacher has been diluted. While a core understanding remains, the cultural understanding of “teacher” has been fragmented and different subcultures internalize the meaning of the role differently.

The Structural Basis for Conflicting Thought Communities

The traditional college classroom (and the entire institution) is designed around thought communities familiar to the 18-22 year old student. Consequently, adults who return to college must straddle two cognitive communities – one prescribing behavior in the worlds of work, home, and community, the other governing behavior in the classroom. The discontinuity between these two “worlds” produces dissonance that leads to problems of self-concept and identity. The group model utilized by some degree-completion programs functions to make classroom learning more adaptive to the adult by bridging these two worlds.

I now turn to a more detailed discussion of some of the structural factors which contribute to this dissonance and discontinuity. I further explain Merton’s “Sociological Ambivalence,” showing how it helps explain the structural source of some of the strain experienced by adult students. Following several contemporary examples of sociological ambivalence, I argue that what Zerubavel (1999) calls “cognitive sociology,” provides a helpful framework for understanding situations where people must enter unfamiliar worlds, and I explicate his notion of “thought communities” which flows out of the cognitive sociology approach.

Sociological ambivalence

As I have explained, the cultural changes characterizing postmodernism resulted in social saturation and a proliferation of thought communities. These incompatible systems produce the kind of problems adult students face when they return to the classroom. Merton's development of sociological ambivalence provides a theoretical frame for understanding the structural dimensions of these problems.

Merton (1996) suggests that the sociological meaning of ambivalence is quite different from its use in psychology. Psychologists use the term in reference to the condition where an individual is pulled in psychologically opposed directions. Examples of this sort of ambivalence include “. . . love and hate for the same person, acceptance and rejection, affirmation and denial” (Merton, p. 123). Merton notes that psychologists are focused on how various “personality” types deal with the condition. He explains the sociological application of ambivalence:

In its most extended sense, sociological ambivalence refers to incompatible normative expectations of attitudes, beliefs, and behavior assigned to a status (i.e., a social position) or to a set of statuses in a society. *In its most restricted sense*, sociological ambivalence refers to incompatible normative expectations incorporated in a single role of a single social status. . . (Merton, 1996, p. 123)
[italics in original]

The concept of sociological ambivalence helps explain problems faced by adult students who return to college. These students must assimilate incompatible thought communities – those found in the work world and those found at school. This

discontinuity between social worlds produces dissonance and tension which may suppress learning. For example, many adult students have conceptions of authority structures rooted in the workplace. Entering the college classroom they may find a professor twenty years their junior. Should they refer to the professor as “doctor?” How do they take criticism about their writing from a young professor? Behaviors appropriate for one social world are asynchronous with behaviors appropriate for another.

It is not the personalities of adult students that result in problems of self-concept and identity; students do not suffer from some psychosis or personality disorder. Rather, students suffer these difficulties because of problems in the social structure. In his work on role-set theory, Merton (1996) explains that individuals possess multiple statuses, with multiple roles associated with each status. The effects of social saturation outlined by Gergen (1991) result in greatly extended status sets – we wear a lot more “hats.” Because people play so many roles, and occupy so many statuses, there is discontinuity in their lives. Appropriate behaviors for one situation are inappropriate in other situations.

Contemporary examples of ambivalence

Several contemporary examples illustrate the ambivalence that results from incompatible requirements in an individual’s status set. The first details how different institutions make incompatible claims on the individual. Consider the individual who aggressively sells products for a company during the week and attends church on the weekends. During the week it is normative to work in self-interest. If the salesperson were to work primarily in the interest of his or her buyers, he or she would soon be out of

work. When this same individual attends church on Sunday morning, he or she is instructed to work not in self-interest.

In the postmodern world these disparate requirements can be reconciled symbolically. In this example, “humor” functions as a symbolic solution to the structural problem. The dissonance plaguing the churchgoing salesperson in his or her daily work is often softened by jokes downplaying the seriousness of each of those worlds. And these worlds are very different; for example, even the vocabularies individuals use in church bear little resemblance to those used in the workplace. Comic strip artists like Scott Adams of “Dilbert” fame have made a good living depicting this dissonance.

Working teenagers provide another example of structurally opposed roles combined in a single status set. Carpet mills in Dalton, Georgia, the largest carpet-manufacturing base in the world, employ large numbers of teenage students in hourly-wage positions. Many of these teenagers attend high school during the day and work a carpet-tufting machine during the night shift. The role of “student” and the role of “worker” are structurally opposed to each other. Being a good student leaves little time to be a good worker; going to work five evenings a week puts significant strain on the role of student. In an effort to put greater emphasis on the student role, the city of Dalton passed an ordinance stipulating that students who dropped out of school would lose their jobs as well.

How do students deal with the conflicting requirements of these statuses? They buy cars. A new car – driven to school – functions as a symbol which bridges the gap between these structurally opposed roles. However, this is usually a short-term solution

to the problem. Students work to buy cars that they can drive to school, drop out of school because work demands result in their receiving low grades, lose their jobs because they drop out of school, and have to return the car because they can no longer afford it.

We see the same sort of dilemma faced by parents who hold full-time employment. In a way, fulfilling all of one's parental responsibilities means letting some things go in the workplace. Conversely, being an exemplary worker means sacrificing time with one's children. A symbolic solution to this problem might be for the parent-worker to purchase extravagant toys for the child. This would symbolically bridge the gap between the parent role and the worker role, making the two roles appear compatible. Thus, we live in a number of worlds which are structurally opposed to each other – when we cannot reconcile them we soften their dissonance by employing symbols which allow us to maintain a consistent identity as we move between them.

Mental memberships in thought communities

Eviatar Zerubavel (1999) suggests cognitive sociology holds an important key to understanding situations where people face incompatible norms.

. . . cognitive sociology reminds us that we think not only as individuals and as human beings, but also as social beings, products of particular social environments that affect as well as constrain the way we cognitively interact with the world. (Zerubavel, 1999, p. 6)

According to Zerubavel, the cognitive sciences tend toward either cognitive individualism or cognitive universalism. At present the cognitive sciences fall clearly on the side of universalism – “As evident from the general indifference to their research

subjects' biographical background, most cognitive scientists today assume a universal, human mind" (Zerubavel, 1999, p. 3). Zerubavel suggests a middle ground – part way between individualism and universalism. That middle ground, cognitive sociology, sees individuals as holding mental memberships in various thought communities. These thought communities shape the ways in which we “define the situation.” In them we learn what is important or unimportant, we learn how to focus our attention, and we learn appropriate ways of behaving.

The notion that individuals hold mental memberships in particular thought communities is particularly relevant to the present study. Adults generally hold mental memberships in the thought communities of the work world, and in the thought communities surrounding their home life (which includes organizations such as schools, churches, bowling leagues, and the like). These thought communities provide the means by which they learn appropriate behavior, and by which they define situations. In the world of work, for example, status is fairly prescribed – status generally is earned based on seniority, education, and position. Many adults who return to college to finish their bachelor's degrees have moved up the “status ladder” in the workplace.

When these same adults re-enter the classroom they may face instructors younger than they are, and classmates who make less money and hold lower status jobs than they do. In that classroom, their ascribed student identity defines them as low status individuals. In effect, normal status criteria are suppressed, and the accepted avenues by which adults define and navigate situations are strained.

Traditionally, colleges and university administrators have fallen into the trap of cognitive universalism. As it is not practical to design degree programs to fit the needs of individual learners, they design “one fits all” type programs. Doing so downplays the structural ambivalence Merton writes about and ignores the mental memberships in thought communities proposed by Zerubavel. When college and university administrators fail to consider the thought-community-based cognitions of their students, they overlook a significant source of strain detracting from their learning.

Symbolic Solutions to Structural Problems

Degree-completion programs are a response to shifting college demographics. In contemporary society more than fourteen million students in American higher education are 25 years or older (Flint, 2000). These programs attempt to provide solutions to the dissonance produced by the conflicting thought communities inhabited by adult college students. As we have seen, the solution includes redesigning the classroom, providing convenient class times, presenting material in interactive module form, and other things. Despite the importance of such modifications, the structural problem still remains because adult students cling to mental memberships in the primary social worlds they inhabit.

The group model provides a symbolic solution to the structural problems confronting adults who return to higher education. For adult students the group functions as a symbol that affirms their outside-the-classroom identities and statuses. As humor quells the dissonance present in the churchgoing salesperson, the group bridges the gulf between the student identity and the worker identity. The group stands for a future

possible self that is more knowledgeable, capable, and of course, upwardly mobile, than the person who did not return to college. When groups become thought communities where adults can retain their outside-the-classroom identities and statuses, learning can become meaningful and relevant to the worlds from which they came and to which they will return.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework I – Group Processes and Identity Salience

Study hypotheses fall under two main headings. Chapter three explores the linkage between program group processes and student identity needs. Literature leading to hypotheses is rooted in social identity theory, and focuses on how particular group attributes and behaviors (specifically formal leadership in the group) help individual members increase the salience of their social identities. This leads to positive increases in self-concept and helps facilitate the transformation from program groups to thought communities. In addition to the sociologically oriented social identity literature, chapter three also reviews literature from psychological traditions. For example, using Markus and Nurius' (1986) research on possible selves, I suggest that when program groups function as thought communities, they can help their members envision desirable future selves – an effect which has positive implications for their success in college. Chapter four explores the relationship between program group characteristics and student self-concept, drawing on literature from social psychology and organizational behavior that suggests that heterogeneous groups tend to elevate self-concept to a greater degree than homogeneous groups.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory emerged, in part, as a response to the individualistic and experimental hegemony in psychology characteristic of the 1950s and 1960s. The theory, rooted in the early work of European social psychologist Henri Tajfel (e.g. Tajfel, 1978; 1981), and more fully developed in collaboration with John Turner (e.g. Turner, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) in the mid 1970s, emerged as a compromise between the

individual-level explanations supported by cognitive psychologists and group-level explanations preferred by sociologists (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Operario & Fiske, 1999). Where the more psychologically oriented social cognition approach advocated tightly controlled experiments, explaining individual behavior with reference to intrapsychic processes, social identity theory adopted a more macro-oriented perspective, stressing fluidity among individuals and groups. In particular, Tajfel's work focused on the "individual" as group member, avoiding the psychological reductionism of social cognition approaches and the sociological emphasis on the group as the fundamental unit of analysis (Operario & Fiske).

According to social identity theory, individual behavior reflects the larger social unit in which the individual is embedded. Social identity theorists place great importance on the (socially derived) norms and values that strongly influence how individuals perceive reality (Operario & Fiske, 1999). Consequently, a person's identity emerges from the context of intergroup relations in which he or she exists (Deaux, 1993) and is established by an in-group identification as contrasted with relevant out-groups. Deaux illustrates this point, showing how Nazis are defined by their (out-group) contrast with Jews, or Blacks as contrasted with Whites. Abrams and Hogg (1990) summarize the social identity approach in this way:

To put this another way, social identity is self-conception as a group member.

Social identity theory assigns a central role to the process of categorization which partitions the world into comprehensible units. Categorization of stimuli involves the psychological accentuation of differences between categories and the

attenuation of differences between objects within categories. (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963 as cited in Abrams & Hogg, 1990, p. 2-3)

Social identity theory is organized around the notion of individual “self-concept” as a dependent variable; group cohesion/identification and measures of intergroup contrasts function as independent measures. While self-concept has been defined and utilized in a wide variety of ways, according to social identity theorists, “the self-concept derives meaning from the categorization of self and other within larger social units or groups, and social comparisons within and between groups motivate people’s attitudes, appraisals, and judgments” (Tajfel, 1969 as cited in Operario & Fiske, 1999, p. 41). This echoes Epstein’s (1973) definition which suggests that the “self-concept” is a “self-theory.”

It is a theory that the individual has unwittingly constructed about himself as an experiencing, functioning individual, and it is part of a broader theory which he holds with respect to his entire range of significant experience. (Epstein, 1973, p. 407)

Epstein expands his definition, saying that the fundamental purpose of the self-theory is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain over the course of a lifetime, as well as “. . . to facilitate the maintenance of self-esteem, and to organize the data of experience in a manner that can be coped with effectively” (1973, p. 407). Thus, the self-concept, rather than being a “thing,” is a theory the individual holds about him or herself, which helps with the process of making sense of the world and finding a place in it.

Social identity theorists understand the self-concept as a collection of self-images which range on a continuum from the “personal” to the “social.” When social identity is salient, individuals think of themselves using relevant social categories; when personal identity is salient, there is an awareness of characteristics which distinguish the individual from other individuals (Abrams, 1992). Thus, self-concept varies according to identity salience – whether social or personal.

Self-categorization Theory

A theoretical refinement of social identity theory, self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987) places somewhat greater emphasis on “the operation of the categorization process as the cognitive basis of group behaviour, and focuses more on intragroup processes than on macrosocial intergroup relations” (Hogg, 1992, p. 93). Thus, differences between self-categorization theory and social identity theory are a matter of emphasis rather than content.

Self-categorization theory conceptualizes social identity as “. . . cognitive groupings of oneself and some class of stimuli as the same (identical, similar, equivalent, interchangeable, and so on) in contrast to some other class of stimuli” (Turner, 1987, p. 45). Hogg and Turner (1987) explain that self-categorization theory better specifies the process by which the in-group identification, depicted by social identity theory, is internalized. According to self-categorization theory, individuals must cognitively organize and bring into some kind of perceptual order an enormous variety of stimuli. By placing stimuli (physical, social, and aspects of the self) into categories, the individual may render his or her experience of the world “subjectively meaningful” (Hogg, 1992).

“Categorization clarifies intergroup boundaries by producing stereotypical and normative perceptions and actions, and assigns people to the contextually relevant category” (Hogg, p. 93). In short, to form an understanding of who we are, we place ourselves into social categories, and internalize those group memberships along stereotypical dimensions defining those groups. “. . . categorization is a functional, adaptive process, designed to make sense of the world” (McGarty & Turner, 1992, p. 254).

Self-categorization theory hinges on the process by which an individual comes to prioritize the social dimension of his or her identity. Turner, Oakes, Haslam, and McGarty (1994) explain the importance of distinguishing between personal and social identity as two different levels of self-categorization. “Personal” identity refers to self-categories that define the individual by his or her differences from other in-group members, while “social” identity refers to the individual by his or her shared characteristics with members of particular social categories. Deaux (1993) cautions against compartmentalizing the two concepts, arguing that social and personal identity are “fundamentally interrelated,” – individuals package their identities within categories (social) important to them, and by the meanings (personal) they attach to those categories.

Depersonalization: Becoming a Group Member

The term “depersonalization” helps explain the cognitive shift that occurs as shared social identity becomes salient for an individual (Turner, 1987; Turner et al., 1994; Hogg, 1992; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Turner et al. explain that under particular circumstances individuals may gradually come to define themselves

less as individual persons, and more as interchangeable exemplars of some shared social category. Placing depersonalization in the context of group effects Turner (1987)

hypothesizes:

. . . the depersonalization of self-perception is the basic process underlying group phenomena (social stereotyping, group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism, co-operation and altruism, emotional contagion and empathy, collective action, shared norms and social influence processes, etc.). (Turner, 1987, p. 50)

The depersonalization hypothesis summarizes the theoretical argument underlying social identity and self-categorization theory.

Depersonalization, however, is not a loss of individual identity, nor a loss or submergence of the self in the group. . . . It is the change from the personal to the social level of identity, a change in the nature and content of the self-concept corresponding to the functioning of self-perception at a more inclusive level of abstraction. (Turner, 1987, p. 51)

In summary, social identity theory rests on three main ideas: 1) Individuals desire a positive self-concept; 2) One's self-concept comes from identification with a group; 3) People establish positive social identities by favorably comparing in-groups with out-groups. From self-categorization theory we may add the concept of depersonalization to this list as the process by which an individual makes the cognitive shift toward seeing him or herself within relevant social categories.

Recategorization: Appropriating New Norms

Social identity theory helps explain several effects that degree-completion program groups have on adult students. Specifically, social identity and self-categorization theory suggest a possible mechanism by which individuals appropriate new norms.

Individuals do not arrive at norms by themselves; norms always reflect some social consensus (Turner & Oakes, 1986). Adult students entering degree-completion programs often hold normative conceptions of professors and administrators that place them at cross-purposes with students. These norms may be based in prior negative academic experiences (i.e., see Draves, 1997). Because students in degree-completion programs have, for one reason or another, failed to complete a bachelor's degree, they may perceive professors and administrators as symbolic "gatekeepers" who have kept them from reaching a socially important goal.

When students re-enter the college classroom they must be resocialized to behaviors that support program ends. If they are not socialized to such behaviors – if they become resistant to or opposed to such norms – neither individual ends nor program ends are served. In other words, failure to adopt modes of behavior that support administrators' and professors' goals may compromise the adult student's likelihood of success.

Social identity theory explains this problem using in-group/out-group contrasts. Applying the theory to this problem, we might say that if the out-group (professors and administrators who have an interest in certain modes of student behavior) tries to enforce

or instill norms in students, they will likely meet resistance because students will emphasize inter-group differences. Adult students enter degree-completion programs with at least a latent conception of school authorities as the “out-group.” Students may see themselves as the in-group and professors/administrators as the out-group. The situation is similar to a parent trying to encourage positive normative behavior in a teenage child – if the child’s peer group is exerting the pressure to “try hugs, not drugs” (an anti-drug slogan from the 1980s) the child is more likely to internalize and comply because the norms become in-group norms and thus function to increase positive self-concept. According to social identity theory, pressure from a parent to comply with the very same behaviors might have an opposite effect because the tendency will be to accentuate intergroup differences (the parents constituting an out-group) along stereotypical dimensions (i.e., Turner & Oakes, 1986; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Ford & Tonander, 1998).

This tendency for groups to accentuate intergroup differences is problematic for adult students trying to obtain a degree. In the contrast between students and faculty/administration, students will likely emphasize individual-oriented behaviors (to embrace program-oriented behaviors is to align with the out-group). For example, Ford and Tonander (1998) and Tajfel (1981) suggest that stereotypes serve a self-esteem enhancement function which allows individuals to “feel good about themselves” in relation to stereotyped out-group members. “[In addition,] it is assumed that people wish to maintain a positive social identity and thus strive to differentiate the in-group favorably from relevant out-groups” (Ford & Tonander, p. 373).

Social identity theory suggests that the contrast between in-groups and relevant out-groups provides the mechanism by which in-groups maintain and increase their members' self-esteem. Consequently, we might expect the group of adult students discussed here to establish an out-group. The most accessible out-group includes the professors and administrators who control students' academic success or failure. As we have already seen, if out-group members try to socialize students to new "program-oriented" norms, that socialization will be resisted. Thus, the problem appears on two fronts. On the one hand, students are motivated to accentuate intergroup differences between their own groups and the professor/administrator groups. On the other hand, accentuating those differences means embracing individual-oriented behaviors (as opposed to program-oriented behaviors) that may compromise their likelihood of success.

"Recategorization," a theoretical alternative to the more conventional concept of "decategorization," suggests a possible solution to this problem facing adult students. Decategorization was developed by theorists focused on developing strategies for reducing intergroup conflict. Their aim was to explain the process by which the salience of intergroup boundaries is reduced (Dovidio, Validzic, & Gaertner, 1998). The dominant thinking, known as the "contact hypothesis," was that simple contact between groups is by itself not sufficient to reduce conflict between groups.

The contact hypothesis stipulates that to reduce intergroup bias, conditions such as "equal status," and "cooperative intergroup interactions," must exist. The concept of decategorization is simply a theoretical specification of the mechanisms underlying the contact hypothesis.

The concept of decategorization explains that contact between groups can help in-group members individuate members of the out-group by helping them gain more intimate insights about out-group members – revealing them as individuals, rather than stereotypical group members (Dovidio et al., 1998). As group members gain intimate knowledge of members of other groups, the categories defining each group become more permeable.

Recategorization provides an alternative way of understanding how intergroup biases are reduced. According to Oakes, Haslam, and Reynolds (1999), “People who are categorized and perceived as different in one context. . . . can be recategorized and perceived as similar in another context. . . . without any actual change in their own positions” (Oakes et al., p. 60). “Recategorization involves using an alternative, superordinate social category to think about both the in-group and the out-group” (Dovidio et al., 1998, p. 109). The basic idea underlying the concept is:

If members of different groups are induced to conceive of themselves more as a single, superordinate group rather than as two separate groups, attitudes toward former out-group members will become more positive through processes involving pro-in-group bias. . . . Categorization of a person as an in-group member rather than as an out-group member has been demonstrated to produce more positive evaluations. (Dovidio et al., 1998, p. 109)

As previously noted, one problem facing adult students derives from their tendency to cast professors and administrators as out-group members. Because the in-

group (students) has a tendency to resist norms perceived as emanating from the out-group (professors/administrators), their academic success may be compromised.

Recategorization provides a potential way around this problem. If the group provides the motivation to embrace and comply with program-oriented norms for behavior, there is a recategorization of in-group and out-group. When the group provides positive pressure to behave in ways consistent with the behaviors desired by professors and administrators, students are motivated to comply with program-oriented norms because this tends to increase their in-group standing and consequently their self-concept. Because in-group norms mirror the out-group norms, the out-group is recategorized as a subgroup of the in-group. Students recategorize professors as “one of us” – professors play a different role, but are “geared toward our success.” In effect, students, professors, and administrators become different groups existing under a single superordinate category – the category of “program participant.” Professors can facilitate this process by drawing attention away from themselves and onto an alternative out-group. For example, when I teach research to adult students I begin class saying something to the effect of:

I really love working on research with adult students because the topics they develop are so much more meaningful than those my 18-year-old students choose. 18-year-olds are fun to teach, but they really don't have the practical workplace experience that you folks have. I look at this class as something like a partnership. I will be sharing some research techniques and tools with you, and you will be sharing real workplace problems with me. Together we'll come up with something really good!

Then I go on to describe a few particularly insightful research projects completed by adult students. The result is that I am frequently recategorized as being “on their side.” This puts students at ease with me, and appears to lessen their fear of the research process.

When recategorizations such as the one just described occur, the out-group focus is diverted toward the contrast with traditional students. Evidence of this can be seen in comments adult students make about how they “work harder” and “have more experience” than traditional students. However, an out-group focus on the contrast between adult and traditional students is not as likely to compromise the success of adult students. When group members perceive program authorities as “co-program-members,” program ends intersect with individual ends and the likelihood of student success is increased.

The terms “recategorization” and “decategorization” echo the older terms of “resocialization” and “desocialization.” However, the older terms imply that a person must make adjustments to new situations in which the norms are fixed, while the newer terms suggest a more flexible image wherein the situation (not the person) is adapted for “one’s own purposes.” This hints at the earlier discussion of postmodernism and social saturation in the sense that their defining characteristics are a proliferation and confusion of norms, and a sense that individuals can mold situations into whatever forms they wish.

From Personal to Social Identity: Comparative and Normative Fit

For adult students to adopt program-oriented behaviors that help in the transition from groups to thought communities, their social identities must achieve salience over

their personal identities. The related concepts of relative accessibility and comparative and normative fit help predict when an individual will define him or herself by a personal or social identity (Turner et al., 1994). The theory explains variation between personal and social identity categories as a function of how ready an individual is to use a particular social category (how accessible is the category?), and whether there is adequate “fit” between perceptions about the category and how the category is represented (Oakes, 1987; Turner et al., 1994). As McGarty and Turner (1992) specify:

Information about an accessible classification which is congruent with the stimuli being categorized will, by definition, increase the fit between the stimuli and category specifications, resulting in a more salient categorization and hence more categorical perception. (McGarty & Turner, 1992, p. 255)

The concept of “relative accessibility” reflects an individual’s past experience, present expectations, and current needs (Turner et al., 1994). Is the individual prepared to use this social category? In the present study, the adult student might be prepared to identify with group members (the social category) because of their common experiences with higher education. In degree-completion programs, group identification is highly accessible to most adults unless there are significant status issues present (i.e., a high status student in a primarily low status group or vice-versa).

The concept of “fit” has two dimensions: comparative fit and normative fit. Comparative fit hinges on whether the intragroup differences are perceived as smaller (on average) than the intergroup differences. Normative fit is concerned with whether the

differences between “us and them” are consistent with our normative beliefs about the substantive meaning of the social category (Turner et al., 1994).

The social category of degree-completion group member is, as we have just seen, accessible for adult students. Comparative fit is present because traditional students are perceived as being substantively different from adult students (the differences between “us” are much smaller than the differences between “us and them”). Normative fit is present because the differences between traditional and adult students are consistent with adult student perceptions of the respective social categories. The “adult” norms include expectations that “adults act maturely;” the norms for traditional students include immature behaviors. In short, traditional students “fool around” and “party” in college; adult students are “motivated” and “goal oriented” in college. As noted, adult students frequently express the opinion they work harder than traditional students.

If groups enforce behavioral norms for members, this establishes normative fit between in-group (adult students) and out-group (traditional students) members. If the group exhibits primarily mature behavior (a group behavior), then group members who have salient social identities would subscribe to those norms for behavior and (consistent with social identity and self-categorization theories) would stereotype out-groups (i.e., traditional students) as immature. Ideally, the behavior of the adult students would tend toward a program orientation. This process would also reinforce the recategorization of professors and administrators as sub-groups of the in-group, but only if the administration demonstrates commitment to the degree-completion program and is not seen as primarily allied with the traditional program.

Possible Selves

This review has drawn primarily on literature from sociological traditions in social psychology. Here the focus shifts away from the “social identity” approach, and toward the more psychological “social cognition” approach. Specifically, I examine some of the cognitive dimensions of individual motivation and performance. I argue that a strong relationship exists between how an individual sees him or herself in the future and how that individual performs in the present. Thus, self-concept is based, in part, on “who” an individual feels he or she can become in the future. The group plays a central role in invoking images of success-oriented future selves or failure-oriented future selves. This may lead to an increase or decrease in student self-concept, and thus to behaviors which may help or hinder academic learning.

Conceived of by Markus and Nurius (1986), the concept of “possible selves” explores a dimension of self-knowledge not found in previous literature. Possible selves specify a type of self-knowledge focused on what individuals think about their potential and on how they view themselves in the future. “Possible selves are the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (Markus & Nurius, p. 954). Markus and Nurius see this line of inquiry as providing a link between cognition and motivation.

An individual’s repertoire of possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, and threats. Possible selves provide the specific self-relevant form, meaning, organization, and

direction to these dynamics. As such, they provide the essential link between the self-concept and motivation. (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954)

Possible selves have implications for the “now” self. Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that events in an individual’s life have power to invoke success-oriented or failure-oriented imagery. For example, if an individual fails to attain desired employment, that event could be a momentary disappointment, or it could have much more significant implications if it activates an “unsuccessful professional” possible self. In contrast, achieving some highly desired goal may activate success-oriented possible selves – also having implications far beyond the momentary achievement. “The meaning given to a particular self-relevant event depends on the context of possibility that surrounds it” (Markus & Nurius, p. 962). For adult students, the program group functions as a “context of possibility” through which their educational experiences will be interpreted. Groups that make failure-oriented self-imagery salient may contribute to a decrease in the self-confidence of individual students. Groups that make success-oriented self-imagery salient will likely produce the opposite effect.

Performance is dependent upon more than possessing task-relevant skills and abilities (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Without sufficient motivation to succeed, skills and abilities remain latent. How an individual thinks about his or her own abilities has particular significance for generating motivation.

Thus, performance is also influenced by one’s perceived competence, by positive expectancies, by perceived control, by one’s estimates of one’s own ego strength,

hardiness, optimism, efficacy, and self esteem, and by what is colloquially called will power. (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992, p. 96)

The concept of “possible selves” helps explain an important source of motivation for the individual. Possible selves are elements of the self-concept that represent what individuals might become in the future. Thus, as previously mentioned, they contain representations of what an individual is afraid of becoming as well as what he or she would like to become (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992). Ruvolo and Markus see these resulting from individual cognitions. When they tested hypotheses in a study exploring possible selves, only intrapsychic variables were manipulated – group influences were largely ignored. In short, Ruvolo and Markus explain possible selves as a product of intrapsychic cognition – relatively unrelated to the social environment. A familiar example of this approach is the success-oriented imagery that Olympic sprinters use to visualize success in a given race. In summary, the idea behind the “possible selves” concept is that visualizing success helps generate motivation necessary to achieve success.

Somewhat different from Ruvolo and Markus’ (1992) psychological development of possible selves, the concept can be extended to reflect group effects on the individual. The degree-completion program groups adult students hold membership in can influence whether an individual invokes self-images of success or self-images of failure. Success-oriented images help provide motivation for the adult student to excel in academics. This motivation is primarily a product of a change in focus.

Specifically, the underpinnings of a sense of efficacy, control, or competence are specific, self-relevant thoughts and feelings, particularly images and conceptions of the self in future desired states. (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992, p. 97)

The notion of possible selves hinges on the idea of a “working self-concept.” This “. . . is a biased sample from the universe of one’s self-representations, and only one of many possible versions of the self-concept” (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992, p. 98). The working self-concept helps regulate an individual’s performance. If an individual’s working self-concept contains positive possible selves, with few negative self-representations, performance may be enhanced.

This idea is compatible with one of the central ideas of social identity theory – Individuals are motivated to achieve positive self-concepts. However, where Ruvolo and Markus (1992) see this as “self-relevant imagery,” originating intrapsychically, I suggest that such imagery is strongly facilitated by group interactions. In other words, the group helps determine whether an individual invokes success-oriented future selves or not. Disputing the notion that an individual possesses “one true self,” Markus and Nurius (1986) hint at the importance of the social context saying, “Possible selves contribute to the fluidity or malleability of the self because they are differentially activated by the social situation and determine the nature of the working self-concept” (Markus & Nurius, p. 965).

Program groups which have become thought communities may help members envision success – because behavioral norms in such groups are geared toward the success of adult students (programs are constructed with the unique needs of adult

learners in mind). On the other hand, groups characterized by individual orientations may tend to subvert program expectations, and thus reinforce self-images of students succeeding or failing on their own (apart from the group). Because such students have (to this point) “not” achieved individual academic success, the tendency will be to envision negative or unsuccessful self-representations. In short, groups help individuals see “who they can become” and, like Markus and Nurius’ (1986) contention that possible selves function as a context for the now self, this imagery helps motivate them to adopt modes of behavior which lead to success or which lead to failure. The behavioral expectations inherent in either orientation (program or individual) are a product of group composition, personalities of individual students, and the quality of direction provided by members of the faculty and administration.

Those with a clear vision of themselves in a future state will have accessible more cues that are relevant to this future state, and this can facilitate the selective processing of information that is useful in attaining the desired state, and thereby enhance goal-related performance. (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992, p. 119)

The concept of possible selves resonates with at least two other ideas from social psychology – one from the psychological camp, the other from a more sociological orientation. Self-enhancement theory (Pittinsky, Shih, & Ambady, 1999) suggests that people are motivated to enhance their self-views. This theory appears in contrast with Swann’s self-verification theory (Swann, Jr., 1987; Swann, Jr., & Read, 1981) that suggests that individuals seek out information that confirms their self-concepts rather than seeking to enhance self-views.

In summary, small groups which have become thought communities can help individuals envision success. Social identity and self-categorization theories advance the idea that individuals promote self-esteem by identification with an in-group as contrasted with relevant out-groups. Consequently, if the in-group (student group) adopts a program orientation (reflective of a group which has become a thought community), encouraging students to behave in ways that promote program ends, part of that encouragement will include a positive vision of what the program can do for the students' future selves. Out-group identification (the contrast with traditional students and the adoption of an individual orientation) will invoke negative images for students. In short, generation of success-oriented imagery (emanating from the group) facilitates the development of more positive self-concepts, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of academic success in the program.

A related theory comes from a more sociological perspective. Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1993) is closely related to self-categorization theory. According to this view, social identifications help individuals satisfy two core human needs: the need to belong and the need to be unique (Operario & Fiske, 1999). Having a social identity satisfies both of these needs “. . . meanwhile contributing to the robust ingroup bias phenomena for which social identity research is famous” (Operario & Fiske, p. 43).

When groups help their members envision success-oriented possible selves, they are simultaneously helping the individual see an improved and successful “unique” self at the conclusion of the program (one does not stay in the program forever), and increasing

intra-group solidarity which satisfies the students' need to belong. When this happens, self-concept increases, and both students and the program benefit.

Hypotheses for "Group Processes and Identity Salience"

Based on the preceding arguments and literature review, the following hypotheses were tested. The first two hypotheses are rooted in social identity theory and propose that leadership in the group helps increase the salience of a student's social identity, thus contributing to the development of program groups into thought communities. Program oriented thought communities have positive implications for a student's self-concept and thus for a successful academic experience. The third hypothesis was developed from the literature on possible selves. Operational definitions for independent and dependent variables are provided in the methods chapter (Chapter 5).

1. A student's attributing gains in self-confidence to the influence of an instructor will be positively correlated with an increase in "academic/work self-concept" scores from test one to test two of the study (T1-T2).

2. A student's viewing his/her group's "student representative" as contributing to the smooth operation of the group, will be positively correlated with an increase in "identity" scores on the TSCS:2 from T1-T2.

3. A student's crediting his/her group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self, will be positively correlated with an increase in his/her "academic/work self-concept" scores from T1-T2.

Chapter Four: Theoretical Framework II – Group Characteristics and Self-concept

This chapter presents a summary of literature debating some of the factors contributing to cohesiveness in small groups. In the chapter I explore research on cohesiveness, gender diversity, and social compatibility within groups, and develop hypotheses that test the influence of these factors on student self-concept. I make the assumption that an increase in student self-concept (along “academic” and “identity” dimensions) reflects group processes that contribute to the formation of thought communities.

There is evidence that both interpersonal cohesiveness and task cohesiveness play a role in group performance and in the elevation of member self-esteem. Some researchers find that interpersonal cohesiveness, though pleasurable for members, actually detracts from a group reaching its goals (Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988; Mullen & Copper, 1994). These studies suggest that task cohesiveness is more valuable for members and may help keep a group focused on its goals. Other researchers (Stokes, 1983; Roark & Sharah, 1989) place greater emphasis on the interpersonal processes that contribute to group cohesiveness. Despite differing emphases, a variety of research supports that both interpersonal cohesiveness and task cohesiveness help elevate group performance and member self-esteem.

Some research indicates that gender heterogeneity contributes to task cohesiveness and is positively related to group performance (i.e., Van Hiel & Shittekatte, 1998; Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Carli, 1989). Consistent with prevailing gender stereotypes and gender-based norms for behavior, males often adopt a task-interaction

style while women tend to perform better at tasks requiring cooperation and finesse (Van Hiel & Schittekatte, 1998). Consequently, gender diversity may produce greater innovation and increased efficiency within groups (Carli, 1989). In degree-completion programs gender heterogeneity may help focus group members on the goals of the program and produce a positive increase in student self-concept. Mixed-sex groups may relate in ways that contribute to the transformation of program groups into thought communities.

The final portion of this chapter explores the relationship between social compatibility and the self-concepts of adult students. I argue that students are most likely to experience an increase in self-concept when they see themselves as similar to other group members. Conversely, students may experience status threat when they interact with group members they perceive as significantly superior or inferior to themselves. We tend to look to similar others as models of success; we ask whether others who are succeeding are “like us?” (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). Thus, groups containing socially comparable members are more likely to produce the kind of bonds that foster the development of thought communities.

In summary, this chapter reviews literature dealing with the dialectical relationship between group cohesion, performance, and member self-esteem. In exploring these relationships I examine how gender heterogeneity and social compatibility influence group outcomes and member self-concept. These arguments contribute to understanding the larger issue regarding how program groups or cohorts can develop into thought communities that promote the sort of learning culture that helps adult students reach their educational goals.

Effects of Group Cohesion

A variety of studies find group cohesiveness positively correlated with group performance (Stokes, 1983; Wheelless, Wheelless, & Dickson-Markman, 1982; Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988). In addition, cohesiveness appears related to an increase in self-esteem and a decrease in group member anxiety (Roark & Sharah, 1989; Stokes, 1983). However, while there is consistent support for these relationships, group productivity (defined by organizational goals) and group cohesiveness, are not always related in a simple straightforward way.

In a study examining the effects of cohesiveness on performance, Zaccaro and Lowe (1988) found that while “task” cohesiveness may help a group in attaining its goals, “interpersonal” cohesiveness may detract from a group reaching its goals.

For example, interpersonal cohesiveness represents the degree to which positive interpersonal relationships exist among members of the group. Task-based cohesiveness results when group membership provides for the personal attainment of important goals, or when there is a “shared commitment to the task of the group.” (Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988, p. 548)

Consistent with these findings, Stokes (1983) identifies three characteristics which may contribute to group cohesiveness. These include the attraction that group members have for each other, the extent that the group has instrumental value for members (meets members’ needs and is helpful to them), and the performance of “risky” behaviors by group members (i.e., intimate self-disclosure, etc.), which, in turn, leads to greater cohesion. Stokes speculates, “. . . certain aspects of cohesion are more important

for certain types of groups” (Stokes, p. 170). Some of this depends upon the norms which are salient for a particular group. For example, if a group supports explicit norms of interpersonal openness, and rewards risky behavior reflecting those norms, those behaviors may contribute more to group cohesion than the instrumental value that the group holds for members.

In a study exploring the effect of cohesiveness on therapy groups, Roark and Sharah (1989) found a significant correlation between empathy, self-disclosure, and trust. Their discussion suggests a dialectical relationship between levels of cohesion in groups and levels of empathy, acceptance, self-disclosure, and trust – each depends on the other. When group cohesion is “up,” so are empathy, acceptance, self-disclosure, and trust. When those factors rise, so does group cohesion.

Mullen and Copper (1994) found that cohesiveness does have an effect on performance, but smooth coordination (interpersonal attraction, group pride) is not the key to this effect. Rather, they found that positive increases in performance were due primarily to “commitment to task.” They quote Forsythe who says “. . . cohesive groups are often more enjoyable, but they aren’t always more productive” (Forsythe, 1990 as cited in Mullen & Copper, p. 211). To summarize:

. . . the studies integrated here suggest that what distinguishes the groups that perform well is not that their members interact with smooth coordination, like one another, or are proud of their group but that they are committed to successful task performance and regulate their behavior toward that end. (Mullen & Copper, 1994, p. 225)

I expect that group cohesion will be positively correlated with an increase in the academic component of a student's self-concept. This increase in self-concept may be indicative of the transition from program groups to thought communities.

Heterogeneity in Sex Composition

Heterogeneity in the sex composition of groups can function to reinforce or promote program-oriented (as opposed to individual-oriented) norms. This argument relates back to prevailing gender stereotypes. A number of studies document differences in how males tend to behave contrasted with how females tend to behave in a variety of settings. However, despite prevailing stereotypes, research suggests that members of either sex may modify their behavior in mixed sex groups in ways that produce more optimal group functioning.

What stereotypical behaviors characterize male and female behavior in groups? The most basic finding is that men tend to be "task" oriented while women tend to engage in greater amounts of positive social behavior. Wood and Karten (1986) explain that perceived differences in behavior are a function of group members' beliefs that the sexes differ in competence; that sex functions as a status cue. The widespread belief that men are more equipped to "get things done" (task oriented), has a self-fulfilling prophecy effect resulting in their taking charge of the task dimensions of group behavior. Thus, the reason that men often assume high status roles in groups derives from beliefs that the sexes differ in competence.

Behavioral confirmation of gender differences might function in a group setting according to the following chain of events: group members form expectancies

about sex differences in competence based on their general experiences with men and women, interact with each other in a way that is consistent with the belief that men are more competent than women, and consequently male and female group members behave in a manner which confirms the original expectations. (Wood & Karten, 1986, p. 346)

Other research supports Wood and Karten's (1986) "behavioral expectancy" hypothesis. In a meta-analysis exploring gender and the effectiveness of leaders, Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) found that neither sex was more effective in leadership roles, rather, effective leadership tended to depend on the stereotypical dimensions of the task at hand. In other words, some leadership situations tend to favor women, and other situations favor men. They found that women were perceived as more effective in leadership roles requiring cooperation and interpersonal skills (qualities stereotypically associated with women). Men, on the other hand, were more effective in roles requiring "task ability" – which Eagly et al. define as the ability to direct and control people. Although their findings support the notion that women perform better at certain tasks (i.e., those requiring interpersonal skills), they conclude that this difference is not due to any real difference in competence, but is due to the way the leadership role is defined – whether in masculine or feminine terms.

According to some research, group heterogeneity by sex composition can help overcome the sort of stereotypical behaviors we have just discussed. One researcher found that gender does have an effect on group interaction. In groups, women stereotypically show more agreement while men show more disagreement and higher levels of "task" behavior (Carli, 1989). One possible explanation for this is that men

generally enjoy higher status in society. Thus, competing for status is acceptable, even expected, for men, but is viewed as unacceptable for women.

In the present study I argue that degree-completion groups tend to encourage behavior directed toward primarily program ends or primarily individual ends. Program ends are functional for both the individual and the college or university, while individual ends tend to detract from both individual and organizational success. Because a small group in a degree-completion program must deal with widely varying situations, groups must engage in both task-oriented behaviors and process-oriented (social) behaviors. An overemphasis on either of those may result in a less than optimal (or even dysfunctional) group. In short, groups must function to get things done, but they must also be able to establish and maintain a social space where different people feel enabled to succeed – a social function (i.e., see discussion on possible selves in the previous chapter).

Carli's (1989) study on gender differences in interaction style and influence provides some insights into ways in which group structure may have some effect on the adoption of program-oriented norms for behavior. Carli observes that men disagree more in same sex groups, and that all-male groups tend to engage in much higher levels of competitive behavior. While men in same sex groups will tend to disagree with each other, women in same sex groups will tend to agree. These stereotypical tendencies can have both positive and negative implications for groups in adult degree-completion programs. A tendency toward agreement is helpful for encouraging smooth, social interaction, but may be detrimental with respect to reaching certain group goals (tasks). Likewise, competitiveness and disagreement may play a role in generating higher quality

solutions to certain types of problems, but may lead to group fragmentation and polarization.

Gender heterogeneity may reduce the amount of gender-based stereotypical behavior in a group. When groups are homogeneous with respect to sex composition, gender norms are relatively clear. Women generally know how to act around other women; men generally know how to act around other men. In mixed-sex groups, each sex may be somewhat confused about what norms are appropriate and may modify their behavior accordingly (Carli, 1989). When individuals begin interacting in groups, they are likely to model the behaviors of other group members. According to Carli, “This would result in an exaggeration of gender differences in same-sex groups and a reduction of these differences in mixed-sex groups” (Carli, p. 566). In short, gender differences are more pronounced in same-sex groups than in mixed-sex groups.

Thus, a mixed-sex group may result in a wider range of behaviors than often characterizes same-sex groups. In a sense, being with people of the opposite sex tends to encourage individuals to manifest a wider range of behaviors in the group. According to Carli (1989), “. . . both men and women show a variety of less sex-stereotyped behaviors when interacting with those of the opposite gender” (Carli, p. 573). Having mixed-sex groups may produce a change in both sexes because of the uncertainty of norms. Because such a variety of behaviors are required to sustain a program-orientation in a degree-completion program, a mixed-sex group may encourage an appropriate balance of task-oriented and social-oriented behaviors.

Closely related to Carli's (1989) finding that mixed-sex groups reduced the amount of gender-based stereotypical behavior in a group, Van Hiel and Schittekatte (1998) explored patterns of "information sharing" in groups. They observed that men are generally viewed as engaging in more "task" activity, while women are generally seen as engaging in greater amounts of positive social activity. Furthermore, they found that heterogeneous groups tended to manifest more "masculine" task-oriented behaviors while homogeneous groups tended to emphasize stereotypically feminine norms such as "relational qualities." When they looked at a variety of groups under different conditions (i.e., intragroup condition, intergroup condition) they found that significantly more information was sampled and shared in heterogeneous groups.

Van Hiel and Schittekatte (1998) link the increased amount of information sampling in heterogeneous groups and the suboptimal sampling of information in homogeneous groups to the gender-based stereotypical tendencies of males and females. "These effects can be attributed to the different interaction styles associated with the membership of the male or female gender groups as frequently shown in the relevant literature. . ." (Van Hiel & Schittekatte, p. 2063). The implications for the present study are that all-female groups may tend to emphasize sociability – which detracts from the dissemination of information and thus inhibits group members from making progress with the group tasks. On the other hand, all-male groups may manifest a task-orientation and competitiveness, which generates solutions to problems, but which may detract from group cohesion.

In short, heterogeneous groups are more likely to be characterized by a task-orientation (Van Hiel & Schittekatte, 1998).

More generally, task-oriented groups have specific goals relating to performance and productivity levels. . . . In groups in which sociability has become the defining norm, there will be a positive correlation between social identification and sociability and a negative correlation between social identification and group performance, at least when increased sociability impedes high performance levels. (Hogg, 1992 as cited in Van Hiel & Schittekatte, 1998, p. 2062-2063)

In conclusion, a variety of research supports the idea that heterogeneous groups produce interaction effects between males and females, which result in a task-orientation but within a context encouraging group cohesion and smooth social coordination. Heterogeneity decreases stereotypical behavior, and, relevant to the present study, appears to encourage conditions leading to the adoption of program-oriented norms for behavior. Consequently, if a program-orientation is argued to produce patterns of behavior consistent with individual student success, then heterogeneity (which encourages the adoption of such an orientation) should have positive implications for student self-concept.

Social Compatibility and Self-concept

Social identity theory rests on the idea that individuals are motivated to achieve positive self-concept. They do this through group affiliation. However, what happens when group affiliation may have negative implications for self-concept? According to Kalkhoff and Barnum (2000), members of low-status groups are motivated to do one of

two things in an effort to increase self-concept – either leave the group, or achieve a positive re-evaluation of the group. Thus, the “status” composition of the group has implications for self-concept. If individual students perceive significant status differences between themselves and their groups, self-concept will decrease and learning will be diminished (if the student remains in the group at all). A significant dimension of group membership is “are these people like me?”

Social structures can be thought of as being either permeable or nonpermeable. If the system in which the individual holds membership is permeable (it is a system he or she can move out of), the individual in the low-status group will simply leave and attempt to move to a higher status group. If the structure is nonpermeable, the primary option available to the individual is to try and induce some kind of change in the group. Kalkhoff and Barnum (2000) suggest several ways this might be achieved. If the structure is “secure” and stable making it difficult for individuals to conceive of viable alternatives to the group, the individual will develop creative ways of changing the group. This may include either changing comparison groups (comparing with a different out-group along some dimension favoring the in-group), or simply changing the dimension for comparison with existing comparison groups. “If the structure has insecure status, group members are able to envision alternatives to the existing order and are likely to engage in social competition (e.g., by attempting to change the social structure)” (Kalkhoff & Barnum, p. 98).

These strategies illustrate some of the implications that degree-completion programs may have for students at either end of the status spectrum. Consider the individual who holds membership in a high-status group at his or her workplace. For that

individual, joining a degree-completion program will reflect on self-evaluations of where he or she fits on the status ladder. Joining a small group where you perceive other group members as approximating your own status may function to increase self-concept. The reasoning may be “Here are people just like me doing something that is difficult and worthwhile.” Consequently, furthering one’s education is seen as self-enhancing – a challenge that is not for the faint of heart.

On the other hand, imagine the same high-status individual. If he or she joins a degree-completion program and perceives other members in his or her group as mostly lower-status individuals, self-concept will decrease as the individual perceives his or her own status as tenuous (“If I’m such a high-status individual, why am I in a class of ‘losers?’”).

The same dilemma might confront the low-status individual who enters a degree-completion program. If a person who considers him or herself of relatively low ability and/or status, perceives other members of the group as primarily high-status/ability individuals, then self-concept will decrease due to the perception of imminent failure (“What am I doing here with all of these brainy people?”). If the low-status individual perceives others in the group as having comparable status, self-concept will increase because of the perception that “People just like me are in this program, therefore I can do it too!”

Thus, how an individual views his or her status relative to others in the group has implications for the sort of strategies that are adopted to achieve comparative fit. Relating this to the study at hand, we might say that individuals who perceive the group

as significantly different from themselves in status characteristics will resist identification with the group, adopting an individual (as opposed to a program) orientation. This assumes that the system is non-permeable (the individual has no other viable choices – he or she must obtain a degree). In my experience with a degree-completion program, very wealthy individuals who enter the program for intrinsic reasons frequently drop out because for them the system is permeable – when status is threatened they simply leave.

The social compatibility argument contains a gender dimension as well. Gender, while a nominal characteristic, is associated with differential rewards in society, and is thus construed as a status characteristic (Webster, Jr. & Hysom, 1998). If, for example, a male enters an all-female group, status dissonance may lead the individual to change groups or drop out altogether. The converse is true for female students.

In an article titled “A socially contextualized model of African American identity: Possible selves and school persistence,” Oyserman, Gant, and Ager (1995) conclude that social context and a young person’s sex appear to influence his or her beliefs about what is possible in the future. Although the article deals primarily with race and sex, those attributes function as status characteristics. The following will help the reader see the parallel with adult students in degree-completion programs:

. . . African American males, while still in middle school, scan the social environment for information about the self in a manner that protects them from negative feedback about what is possible for the self. Only when their attention is drawn to similarities between the self and others who are failing, or differences between the self and others who are succeeding, does the individual sense a

restriction of possibility. Conversely, same-grade-level African American females may scan the social environment quite differently. Already more aware of the potential for restricted opportunity, girls may be scanning their social environment and asking themselves “Am I similar to others I know who are doing well?” and “Am I different from others I know who are failing?” Lack of certainty may result in a further decrease in one’s own sense of one’s possibilities of succeeding in school. (Oyserman et al., 1995, p. 1226)

The implication is that we tend to turn to more similar others as models of success. If other students in an adult class are perceived as significantly different, or socially incompatible, then the student will distance him or herself from the group (possibly dropping out) and self-concept will decrease. This idea is compatible with Swann’s finding that people gravitate toward social relationships in which they are likely to receive information about themselves which is consistent with what they already believe (Swann, Jr., 1987; McNulty & Swann, Jr., 1994; Swann, Jr., & Read, 1981; Riley & Burke, 1995). The thinking behind this self-verification theory is that people resist self-discrepant feedback about themselves. Swann goes so far as to say that individuals will enlist the help of others to help them in their attempts at self-verification. The point is that we do not like to be in environments that challenge our self-conceptions – regardless of whether those self-conceptions are positive or negative. If groups are to become thought communities, group members must perceive other group members as similar to them in status and other salient social categories.

Hypotheses for “Group Characteristics and Self-concept”

Based on the preceding arguments and literature, the following hypotheses were tested. As with the hypotheses in the previous chapter, operational definitions for independent and dependent variables are provided in the “Methods” chapter (chapter 5).

1. A student’s describing his/her group as cohesive, will be positively correlated with an increase in “academic/work self-concept” scores from T1-T2.
2. Program group members perceiving each other as socially compatible, will be positively correlated with an increase in individual student “academic/work self-concept” scores from T1-T2.
3. Groups heterogeneous in sex composition will be positively correlated with an increase in student “identity” scores from T1-T2.

Chapter Five: Methods

The methods chapter of this study is organized in the following way: First, I provide a brief review of study objectives, specifying the linkage between the theoretical perspective governing the study and study hypotheses. Next, I explain the design of the study and detail the methods used to carry it out, including selection of the study participants, a description of the research tools, a chronology of procedures, and an explanation of the statistical tests used in data analysis. A discussion of study limitations can be found in the results chapter (chapter 6).

Review of Study Objectives

This research deals with a problem rooted in the structurally opposed thought communities faced by adult students who simultaneously inhabit the “world” of work and the “world” of school. This particular problem is an exemplar of a class of problems created by an increasingly saturated social world. In the contemporary world, people face increasingly diverse and expanded status sets. Because these worlds may have very different behavioral expectations, adult students sometimes have difficulty behaving in ways appropriate to their student identities, and which lead to success in the classroom. Merton explains this tension with the concept of “sociological ambivalence.” I suggest that in contemporary society, these structural problems, wherein individuals live simultaneously in multiple “social worlds” characterized by conflicting thought communities, are often mediated (or at least their impact softened) with symbolic solutions (in this case the student group is a symbolic solution to incompatible normative requirements).

The adult college student who returns to the classroom after an extended absence faces problems of the sort just reviewed. For such a student, the thought communities of school are incompatible with the thought communities of the work world. Placing adult students in program groups may help to carve out a “social space” where they can develop positive affect toward program goals – a “program orientation.” Program groups, as opposed to loosely structured cohorts, may help students develop a type of academic culture appropriate to their student identities, while maintaining a sense of who they are in the “outside” world. Membership in program groups helps adult students retain their outside-of-the-classroom statuses, without compromising their roles as students.

This research is rooted in social identity theory, which concerns itself with the individual as “group member.” Social identity theorists define one’s self-concept as the categorization of self and others in larger social units or groups. In other words, people see themselves as group members and portions of their self-concepts are negotiated via intergroup comparisons. Individuals desire a positive self-concept, portions of one’s self-concept comes from identification with a group, and people establish positive social identities by favorably comparing in-groups with out-groups.

The first set of hypotheses deals with “student identity and the program group.” These hypotheses hinge on the idea that individual self-concept is negotiated in response to the type of behaviors in which groups engage. When groups actively encourage positive affect among their members, and when groups act in such a way as to allow their members to envision success-oriented “possible selves,” then student self-concept will increase.

The second set of study hypotheses proposes that group composition is related to changes in student self-concept. The argument I make is that heterogeneous groups are more likely than homogeneous groups to foster climates that manifest positive affect and have members who embrace program ends. This study is limited to an examination of gender heterogeneity in group composition. The study also examines whether self-concept is positively correlated with group members' perceptions of social compatibility with other group members.

Research Design

This project utilizes a non-experimental design. Study data were obtained from “naturally occurring” groups. The researcher had no influence over the size and composition of these program groups. Covenant College recruits and initiates Quest program groups based on target start dates and locations rather than size or composition. The study focuses on 9 consecutive program groups. Instruments deriving individual-level data were administered to students at two different times during the study. The researcher administered the TSCS:2 during the first 8 weeks after groups registered for the program, and a second time after groups entered their second semester (approximately 7 months later). At the time of this second test, students completed a questionnaire designed by the researcher (described presently under “independent variables”).

Participants

The data analyzed in this study come from adult students in Covenant College's “Quest” program. Covenant College is a small, private liberal arts college located in

North Georgia. While the college is physically located in Georgia, the Quest program, started in 1984, is operated out of offices located in downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee. In addition to the Chattanooga location, Quest holds classes in Cleveland, Tennessee, and in Ft. Oglethorpe, Dalton, Rome, and Canton, Georgia. The college initiates approximately 13 new Quest degree-completion groups per calendar year. While students fall anywhere between the ages of 25 and 60, the majority of students are between 25 and 49 years of age, and the mean age of students is 38, according to program administrators. To enter the Quest program a student must have five years of work experience (a relatively flexible requirement), at least two years (sixty semester hours) of college credit, and be at least 25 years of age. This study obtained data from Quest groups started in January, March, May, and October of 2002 – nine groups. Groups generally range in size from as few as 12 students (occasionally fewer) to as many as 20 students and contain both male and female students.

Quest students who completed both pretest and posttest portions of the study were between 24 (an exception to their minimum 25 years of age rule) and 52 years of age. The mean age for participants was 35.25, and the median age was 34. The composition of the sample groups was 87% Caucasian, and 13% “other” students. An administrator from the Quest program informed me that this racial composition was typical of the program as a whole. The same administrator informed me that most Quest students are considered middle class and live within 30 miles of their class site.

Quest is a fourteen-month program designed to help eligible working adults finish their bachelor’s degrees in organizational management without having to terminate their employment to do so. Each program group must hold class for four hours per week. The

program administration decides on variety of group meeting times (evenings, Saturday mornings, Tuesday mornings, etc.) to accommodate a variety of student work schedules. Once a student is assigned to a group, he or she remains with that group for the entire program (i.e., students may not rotate between groups as they please). The Quest program has a rolling admissions policy, so groups are formed approximately every other month.

Measures

Dependent variables

Dependent variables were measured using a well-known scale produced by Western Psychological Services in California. This instrument, the “Tennessee Self-Concept Scale” (second version: TSCS:2) is a re-standardized version of the original test, first published in 1965. The TSCS:2 is designed to provide a multidimensional description of self-concept. The chief argument for using the TSCS:2 over other available self-concept measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is that this newer version of the test includes an Academic/Work Self-Concept scale. This scale measures how an individual feels about him or herself in work and school settings. Such a measure is particularly well suited to a study examining the effects of non-traditional college groups on the self-concepts of adult students.

The TSCS: 2 consists of 82 statements to which subjects are instructed to respond by choosing one of five response categories including: 1 = Always False; 2 = Mostly False; 3 = Partly False and Partly True; 4 = Mostly True; 5 = Always True. The test takes from ten to twenty minutes to complete.

The test generates two summary scores. The “total self-concept” (TOT) score provides a measure of an individual’s overall self-concept and self-esteem. The manual for the test states: “Individuals with high TOT scores tend to define themselves as generally competent and to like themselves. They feel that they are people of value and worth; they have self-confidence and they act accordingly” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 21). The other summary score, the “conflict” score “. . . compares the extent to which an individual differentiates his or her self-concept by assertion through agreement with positive items, focusing on ‘who I am,’ or by negation through disagreement with negative items, focusing on ‘who I am not’” (p. 22).

This instrument yields six self-concept scales including physical self-concept, moral self-concept, personal self-concept, family self-concept, social self-concept, and, important for this study, academic/work self-concept. “People with high ACA [academic work self-concept] scores feel confident and competent in learning and work situations. They are comfortable when approaching new tasks. They are not unduly disturbed by the early failures that usually accompany new learning or creative activity, and they tend to seek out mentors, relevant information, and opportunities to practice new skill” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 24). This measure is particularly relevant to this research as the focus is on how people feel about themselves in an academic setting and students are in a program focused on organizational management that may directly relate to their ongoing work.

In addition to the two summary scores and the six self-concept scales, the TSCS:2 produces three supplementary scores including: Identity (IDN), Satisfaction (SAT), and Behavior (BHV). These scores identify, respectively, “who I am,” “how satisfied I am

with myself,” and “how I behave.” Raw scores for each of the scales included in the TSCS:2 are converted to T-scores. After scoring tests, Western Psychological Services provides an interpretive report indicating where an individual’s scores fall with reference to test norms. Scores range from ≤ 30 T: Very Low; 31-40T: Low; 41-59T: Average; 60-69T: High; and ≥ 70 T: Very High.

Measures of three key dependent variables are derived from the TSCS:2. The first, Social Self-Concept, consists of twelve items. These items fall under three frames of reference: Identity (3 items), Satisfaction (4 items), and Behavior (5 items). Questions range from “I am a friendly person” (Identity) to “I am as sociable as I want to be” (Satisfaction), to “I do not feel at ease with other people” (Behavior). The TSCS:2 manual states: “The Social (SOC) Self-Concept score is intended to measure how the client perceives himself or herself in relation to peers, apart from family members and intimate friends” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 110). It measures how adequate an individual feels in social interaction with others. The Social Self-Concept is appropriate for this study of degree-completion groups in that it measures the amount of satisfaction an individual derives from his or her “non-family” social relations.

The second dependent variable derived from the TSCS:2, Academic/Work Self-Concept (ACA) consists of 12 items. Representative items include statements such as: “Math is hard for me,” “It is easy for me to learn new things,” “I do as well as I want to at almost any job,” and “It’s easy for me to understand what I read.” The ACA measure is the TSCS:2 measure most strongly related to actual academic performance. It provides a measure of how people see themselves and how they believe others see them in both work and school situations. High ACA scores indicate feelings of competence and

confidence in new school and work situations and resilience against initial discouragement in those settings. Low ACA scores are linked with performance difficulties in school and work settings. These difficulties may reflect actual ability levels, or may be based in unrealistic self-expectations for performance.

The remaining dependent variable, “Identity” (IDN), is calculated by combining scores from the Physical, Moral, Personal, Family, and Social Self-Concept scales. The majority of items included in calculating the Identity Supplementary measure ask the subject to respond to an “I am. . .” statement. Typical statements include, “I am an attractive person,” “I am an honest person,” “I am a cheerful person,” “I am a member of a happy family,” and “I am a friendly person.” In this study, the identity score is the most important of these supplementary measures. A low IDN score indicates an actively negative self-view.

Fitts and Warren (1996) report (based on their own analyses) two types of reliability estimates for the TSCS:2 – internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Internal consistency estimates, calculated using Cronbach’s alpha, range from .73 to .95 with a median estimate of .80. The highest estimate, .95, derives from the Total Self-Concept score (TOT). The other three internal consistency measures for scales used in this study are as follows: “Social Self-Concept” .84, “Academic/Work Self-Concept” .85, and “Identity” .87.

Test-retest reliability was measured with a 1-2 week interval between test and retest. The test manual reports that the estimated test-retest reliabilities are well within acceptable psychometric limits. “The estimated test-retest reliabilities range from .47 for

the Inconsistent Responding score to .82 for the Total Self-Concept score on the Adult Form (median .76)” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 60). The reported reliabilities for the remaining scales utilized in this study are: “Social Self-Concept” .70, “Academic/Work Self-Concept” .76, and “Identity” .69.

TSCS:2 test results are reported in T-score units. The test manual reports standard error of measurement (SEM) estimates which “. . . estimate the range within which a person’s true score falls on a given scale, within a certain likelihood, given his or her actual obtained score” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 61). According to the manual, a 68% likelihood exists that an individual’s “true” score falls within +/- 1 SEM of his or her actual obtained score. Standard error of measurement estimates for the TSCS:2 range from 4.2 to 7.2 for the adult version of the test.

Evidence exists for the validity of the TSCS:2 both as a general measure of self-concept, and with respect to the scales which tap a variety of dimensions of self-concept. Much of the data attesting to the validity of the measures is based on analysis of the original TSCS items. A variety of published studies attest to the validity of the instrument for populations similar to that used in this study. For example, Hazelworth and Wilson (1990) used the TSCS to measure the effects of an outdoor adventure camp experience on self-concept; “the scale’s well-established reliability and validity were the deciding factors in selection” (Hazelworth & Wilson, p. 34). Their study population consisted of teenagers participating in structured 2-week activity sessions in an adventure camp.

Ware and Barr (1977) used the TSCS in a study exploring the effect that the amount of structure furnished by a group leader had on subjects' self-concepts. They reported that subjects who stayed with a structured group tended to exhibit more openness and a higher total self-concept “. . . since the experiences encouraged self-disclosure and reinforced individuals' positive characteristics” (Ware & Barr, p. 98). As the present study explores both group leadership and relative degrees of group structure, these findings bolster support for the TSCS:2 as a valid measure.

In another study, Wilcox and Mitchell (1977) used the TSCS to explore the effects of group interaction on the self-concepts of group members. Their primary interest concerned the effects that a group's acceptance or rejection of a group member would have on that individual's self-esteem. They found that self-esteem decreased among individuals who experienced rejection by their groups, but was maintained by subjects whose groups accepted them. Likewise, Griffin and Pennscott (1991) used the TSCS to test the effects of group cohesiveness on the self-concept of students enrolled in a master's level group procedures class. Similar to the population tested in this study, the students tested by Griffin and Pennscott met for class one evening a week. In another study involving students in a university setting, Stanton (1980) tested the extent to which participation in a self-enhancement group contributed to an increase in student self-concept scores on the TSCS.

These and other studies attest to the validity of the TSCS (and by association the TSCS:2) as an appropriate measure of self-concept in studies involving groups, and more specifically, groups of college students. Furthermore, the endurance of the test, and its

widespread popularity lend support to its credibility as a valid measure of self-concept for the present study.

Independent variables

Six independent variables were operationalized in this study. Three tap student identity and the program group, and three produce measures of group cohesion and composition. One of these measures is a modification of a published scale, while the remaining variables are measured using indicators designed by the researcher.

“Attributing gains in self-confidence to the influence of an instructor” is operationalized using the following two indicators: a) Thinking about a Quest instructor who helped you gain confidence in your academic abilities, about how much of an increase in confidence do you think that instructor’s influence resulted in? 1) No instructor contributed to an increase in my confidence; 2) Very little increase; 3) Some increase; 4) A fair amount of increase; 5) A great deal of increase.

The second indicator for this variable is basically the inverse of the first indicator. b) Thinking about a Quest instructor who detracted from your confidence in your academic abilities, about how much of a negative impact on your academic self-confidence do you think that instructor’s influence resulted in? 1) No instructor had a negative impact on my self-confidence; 2) Very little negative impact; 3) Some negative impact; 4) A fair amount of negative impact; 5) A great deal of negative impact. After inspection of the data derived from these indicators they were combined into an index with a minimum score of 2 and a maximum score of 10. The second (negatively worded) indicator was reverse scored.

“View of student representative’s contribution to the smooth operation of the group” is operationalized with the following: “To what extent does your student representative help your group operate more smoothly?” 1) Doesn’t help at all; 2) Helps very little; 3) Helps some; 4) Helps a fair amount; 5) Helps a great deal. The student representative was instructed to refrain from answering this question.

A second indicator tapping the “student representative” measure asks for a response to the following statement: “In general, the student representative for my group is very thorough in performing his or her duties.” 1) Strongly disagree; 2) Disagree; 3) Neither agree nor disagree; 4) Agree; 5) Strongly agree. These two indicators were combined into an index with a minimum score of 2 and a maximum score of 10.

“Crediting the group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self” is operationalized with three indicators which were combined into an index. The rationale for these indicators is that supplying success-oriented imagery contains three dimensions: future-oriented imagery, positive affect toward the group, and presence of a supportive context. The first indicator asks subjects to respond to the statement, “I feel that my group pushes me to succeed.” Response categories include: 1) Strongly disagree; 2) Disagree; 3) Neither agree nor disagree; 4) Agree; 5) Strongly agree. The second indicator inquires into the level of affect students experience in reference to their group. Subjects are requested to respond to the following statement: “In general, I feel close to my group.” Response categories include: 1) Strongly disagree; 2) Disagree; 3) Neither agree nor disagree; 4) Agree; 5) Strongly agree. The third indicator explains “Most groups have members who experience personal difficulties during the program” and then asks subjects to respond to the following statement: “My group is likely to provide

support to a group member experiencing personal difficulties?” 1) Strongly disagree; 2) Disagree; 3) Neither agree nor disagree; 4) Agree; 5) Strongly agree. The index constructed from these three indicators has a minimum score of 3 and a maximum score of 15.

“Student perception of group cohesiveness” is operationalized with an adaptation of Seashore’s Group Cohesiveness Index. The index provides a measure of group cohesiveness, defined as attraction to the group or resistance to leaving (Miller, 1991, p. 375). The index was designed with the work group in mind; thus, changes to it include changing the wording of “work group” to “group,” and omitting the item “Don’t work with any one group of people.” Furthermore, the response category, “Not ascertained,” was omitted. The index contains five questions to which subjects indicate their response choice on an ordinal scale. The questions are as follows: 1. “Do you feel that you are really a part of your [work] group?” Ordinal response categories include: Really a part of my group; Included in most ways; Included in some ways, but not in others; Don’t feel I really belong. 2. “If you had the chance to be in a different group, and moving to that new group would not have any negative implications for you, how would you feel about moving?” Ordinal response categories include: Would want very much to move; Would rather move than stay where I am; Would make no difference to me; Would rather stay where I am than move; Would want very much to stay where I am.

The next three items on Seashore’s Group Cohesiveness Index fall under the general question, “How does your group compare with other groups at Quest on each of the following points?” The way people get along together? The way people stick

together? The way people help one another in the group? Response categories for these items include: Better than most; About the same as most; Not as good as most.

Concerning reliability, Miller (1991) reports that in its original form Seashore's Group Cohesiveness Index yielded intercorrelations ranging from .15 to .70 among mean scale values for test groups on scales making up the cohesiveness index. For validity, Miller reports that variance among groups on this scale was significant beyond the .001 level. With the modifications to this index described above, this reliability and validity data may not apply. However, use of the index in its modified form is justified on the basis that it has strong face validity and taps a number of dimensions of cohesiveness that are expected to exist in degree-completion program groups. This index has a minimum score of 5 and a maximum score of 18. Across all groups, this measure produced scores ranging from a low of 9 to a high of 18. Although the data generated using this index skewed high (mean:15.87; SD: 2.16), there was sufficient variation in the data to warrant its use in the study. In addition to inspecting the range of scores across the sample, mean contrasts between groups were calculated and boxplots examined to determine the suitability of this measure.

"Heterogeneous sex composition" is calculated as "percent female" and then converted to an ordinal measure. A "balanced" heterogeneous group is one which falls into the third ordinal category for this indicator (41%-60% female). Ordinal categories for this variable include: 1) 0%-20% female; 2) 21%-40% female; 3) 41%-60% female; 4) 61%-80% female; 5) 81%-100% female. Sex composition was somewhat difficult to calculate given that group sex composition tends to shift due to student attrition from the group, absence during the class period when the test was given, and that some students

will “sit out” one five-week class for personal reasons. Quest maintains a roster for each group which contains the name of each student who joined a particular group. Furthermore, when students drop out of the program or change to a different group (allowed only in extreme situations), a permanent notation is made on the roster. Given that the researcher was given access to these rosters, the following two rules were developed to consistently calculate the sex composition of a group. First, if a student was present for at least three out of the four modules in first semester (and had attended the Applied Decision Making module), he or she was included in the “percent female” calculation. Second, if a student did not continue with the Quest program beyond the first semester, then he or she was excluded from the calculation. On the spreadsheet used in data analysis, sex composition group-level data were entered both as an ordinal category, and as a “female” proportion of the group. (The results chapter shows that this measure did not yield statistically significant results. In hindsight this measure was not particularly well-suited for a study involving only nine groups.)

“Program group members’ perceptions of social compatibility” is operationalized with the following three indicators: a) “The people in my Quest group are the sort of people I’d feel comfortable socializing with outside the classroom.” Response categories for this indicator include: 1) Strongly disagree; 2) Disagree; 3) Neither agree nor disagree; 4) Agree; 5) Strongly agree. b) “How would you compare your general level of intelligence with that of others in your group?” Response categories for this indicator include: 1) Much lower; 2) A little bit lower; 3) About the same; 4) A little bit higher; 5) Much higher. The rationale for including “perceived intelligence” as an indicator of social compatibility derives from Oyserman et al.’s (1995) argument that social context

influences a person's beliefs about what is possible in the future. The idea is that we tend to ask ourselves whether we are similar to others who are doing well – or who are doing poorly. In an academic setting, one's perceived intelligence, relative to others, constitutes a significant factor by which social compatibility is assessed. c) "How do you think your household's annual income compares with the household income of your classmates?" Response categories include: 1) Much lower; 2) A little bit lower; 3) About the same; 4) Much higher; 5) A great deal higher.

The first indicator for this variable (which deals with affect toward the program group) was treated as a single indicator. The remaining two indicators (which both deal with perceived similarity) were combined into an index but scored differently than the other indexes described earlier in this section. Both indicators use 5-point ordinal response categories. These categories were scored -2, -1, 0, +1, +2 respectively. Negative scores were converted to absolute values. Thus, a score of zero indicates perceived similarity with other students, and non-zero scores indicate perceived differences. This index has a maximum score of four, and a minimum score of zero.

Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the director of the Quest program who also agreed to provide funding for all testing materials, and to furnish paper and photocopying materials needed to complete the study. In addition, approval was obtained from the University of Tennessee for use of human subjects (See Appendix A). Students were asked if they would participate in a study, the goal of which was to better adapt the program to the needs of adult learners. All students were advised that

participation in the study was voluntary. During class-time an informed consent form outlining any benefits and potential risks (which were minimal) was read out loud to potential study participants. Those who signed the informed consent form were included in the study; those choosing not to participate were given the option of a 20-minute break while participants completed the pretest. The researcher had taught two of the Quest groups involved in the study. In order to minimize experimenter effects, the researcher had other instructors proctor both pretests and posttests for these groups, and the researcher was not in the classroom during testing. No students declined to participate in the study. Additional information about study participants and group attrition during testing is included in the results chapter.

Quest modules begin approximately every five weeks. Test One was administered during the first or second “module” (the first ten weeks of the program). The rationale for administering the test at this time is that students have a sense of being in the program, but they have not yet had time for significant group effects to occur. Thus, this test takes a baseline measurement of student self-concept.

Test Two was administered sometime after groups entered their second semester – at least seven months after they began the program. When students began the second semester they had made a commitment (financial and otherwise) to the program. By second semester they have a good sense of being a group member, and there has been adequate time since the first test for group effects to make an impact on student self-concept. The researcher-designed questionnaire was administered at the same time as Test Two.

Completed TSCS:2 test forms were scored by Western Psychological Services via a pre-paid mail-in service. TSCS:2 data, as well as the data generated by the researcher-designed questionnaire, were entered into an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) spreadsheet and hypotheses were tested using appropriate statistical procedures described in the next section.

Data Analysis

When collection of all data from nine groups was complete, and measures had been scored, data were entered into an SPSS spreadsheet, and multiple regression (N=102) was performed to determine the best predictors of academic/work self-concept change scores. Zero-order correlations were obtained, and study hypotheses tested against the results. Secondly, separate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to determine whether significant differences exist between groups (N=9) for dependent variables. Simple ANOVA is an appropriate test for this study provided Likert-type ordinal variables are treated as latent continuous variables. Thus, the study analyzes data across all Quest groups included in the study (N=102) as well as explores differences between groups (N=9).

Chapter Six: Results

This chapter is organized into four main sections. First, it provides a brief description of the study sample. Second, it presents the results of empirical testing of the major research questions and hypotheses developed in chapters four and five. Third, it offers additional analyses suggested by examination of study data, but not specifically proposed in earlier chapters. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major findings.

Description of Study Sample

The study sample consisted of nine “Quest” groups ranging in size from as few as 6 to as many as 18 adult students. There were 66 females (61%) and 43 males (39%) who completed both pretest and posttest phases of the study. Of the nine groups included in the study, 140 students completed the pretest. 112 students who provided pretest data completed the posttest. One student was found to have completed two posttests (due to her taking the test with a group to which she did not belong), and two students completed the posttest incorrectly, in ways that rendered their data unusable. These three cases were omitted from the data set. Complete pretest and posttest data were obtained from 109 Quest students ($N = 109$); 77.8% of the students who took the pretest completed the posttest (an attrition of 32 students from the original sample). The seven student representatives who completed the pretest and posttest were excluded from the data set due to missing values on the “effect of student representative” measure. Thus data from 102 students ($N = 102$) were used in the analysis. The reasons for student withdrawal from the study varied – some students changed groups or withdrew from the program for

a time, some were absent during the posttest period, and some may have opted simply not to participate. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the sample by Quest group number.

Research Questions

Chapter three explored group processes and identity salience, and proposed testing hypotheses concerning the relationship between changes in dependent variables “academic self-concept” and “identity,” and a number of group processes such as the interaction of instructors with the group, and the group supplying a student with success-oriented imagery. Chapter four dealt with the impact of group characteristics on student self-concept, hypothesizing relationships between gender heterogeneity in groups and perceptions of group cohesion on changes in self-concept. The data are presented as follows: First, the results of two analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests are presented and their significance briefly discussed. Next the results of multiple regression analysis are displayed, and statistically significant predictors of changes in student self-concept are identified. Finally, zero-order correlations are produced and study hypotheses tested against their results.

Identity and academic/work self-concept: Differences between Quest groups

One of the goals of this study was to determine whether a variety of features of group structure and group experience are significantly related to changes in student self-concept among adult students enrolled in degree-completion programs. Two primary dependent variables were operationalized in this study. The first, identity, provides a measure of how an individual identifies him or herself. The TSCS:2 manual cautions that

Table 1. Sample Breakdown by Number of Students per Group

Statistics		
GROUP	Frequency	Percent
Valid 171	9	8.8
172	11	10.8
173	9	8.8
174	9	8.8
175	12	11.8
176	5	4.9
178	13	12.7
179	16	15.7
186	18	17.6
Total	102	100.0

(N=102)

the identity measure is sensitive to situational factors. Very high scores may indicate an inflexibility of self-concept, low scores may indicate a generally negative self-view.

The second, academic/work self-concept, provides “. . . a measure of how people perceive themselves in school and work settings, and of how they believe they are seen by others in those settings. It is the most strongly related of all the TSCS:2 scores to actual academic performance” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 24). Analysis of variance was performed to determine whether significant differences existed between groups from test one to test two. If differences were found to exist, groups could be further examined to determine whether independent variables were significantly related to those differences.

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for identity and academic/work self-concept change scores by group. The mean differences for the

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Changes in Identity Scores and Academic/Work Scores by Quest Group

Dependent Variable	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Identity Change Score	171	9	3.33	6.442
	172	11	-.18	9.988
	173	9	.00	4.359
	174	9	1.89	6.254
	175	12	3.75	4.789
	176	5	6.40	8.204
	178	13	2.31	4.973
	179	16	.69	5.351
	186	18	1.00	6.408
	Total	102	1.77	6.309
Academic/Work Change Score	171	9	2.44	8.819
	172	11	1.91	5.449
	173	9	-1.11	2.472
	174	9	.33	5.701
	175	12	1.83	5.271
	176	5	6.60	2.966
	178	13	1.92	4.329
	179	16	2.13	3.739
	186	18	-.39	5.215
	Total	102	1.40	5.220

identity change scores are small, ranging from the greatest change of 6.40 to the smallest change of $-.18$ for a grand mean change of 1.77 across groups ($N = 102$, $SD = 6.3$).

The mean differences for the academic/work change scores are also small, ranging from the greatest change of 6.60 to the smallest change of -1.11 for a grand mean change of 1.40 across groups ($N = 102$, $SD = 5.2$).

The ANOVA summary tables for these data (Table 3) indicate there were no statistically significant differences between groups for either identity or academic/work dependent variables: Identity change scores, $F(8, 93) = .869$, $p = .545$; Academic/work change scores, $F(8, 93) = 1.352$, $p = .228$.

The results of the ANOVA testing suggest that test groups were not different enough to warrant further investigation into factors influencing the dependent variables considered. This does not suggest that significant change did not occur in student self-concept, merely that change did not occur at significantly different rates between Quest groups.

Predictors of change in student self-concept

As previously stated, there were two primary dependent measures operationalized in this study: identity and academic/work self-concept. Five independent variables were regressed against each of these dependent measures to identify significant predictors of change in student self-concept scores from test one to test two of the study.

Change score means for “identity,” “academic/work” self-concept and five independent variables are presented in table 4, and a correlation matrix for those variables is presented in table 5. Immediately following, table 6 displays the results of the multiple

Table 3. Analysis of Variance Summary Table of Changes in Identity Scores and Academic/Work Self-concept by Quest Group

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
IDENTITY	Between Groups	279.632	8	34.954	.869	.545
	Within Groups	3740.182	93	40.217		
	Total	4019.814	101			
ACADWORK	Between Groups	286.682	8	35.835	1.352	.228
	Within Groups	2465.838	93	26.514		
	Total	2752.520	101			

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Identity, Academic/Work Self-concept, and Independent Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
IDENTITY	102	1.77	6.309
ACADWORK	102	1.40	5.220
INSTRUCT	102	7.54	1.333
STUREP	102	7.82	2.122
SUCCESS	102	12.26	2.299
COHESION	102	15.78	2.174
SIMILAR	102	1.07	1.017
Valid N (listwise)	102		

Table 5. Correlation Matrix for Identity, Academic/Work Self-concept, and Independent Variables

		IDENTITY	ACAD WORK	INSTR UCT	STUREP	SUCCESS	COHESION	SIMILAR
IDENTITY	Pearson Correlation	1	.442 **	.188 *	-.030	.150	.207 *	-.013
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.000	.029	.381	.067	.019	.448
ACADWORK	Pearson Correlation	.442 **	1	.136	-.062	.120	.127	-.026
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.	.086	.267	.115	.101	.399
INSTRUCT	Pearson Correlation	.188 *	.136	1	.195 *	.186 *	.194 *	-.210 *
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.029	.086	.	.025	.031	.025	.017
STUREP	Pearson Correlation	-.030	-.062	.195 *	1	.373 **	.127	-.114
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.381	.267	.025	.	.000	.102	.128
SUCCESS	Pearson Correlation	.150	.120	.186 *	.373 **	1	.511 **	-.152
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.067	.115	.031	.000	.	.000	.064
COHESION	Pearson Correlation	.207 *	.127	.194 *	.127	.511 **	1	-.078
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.019	.101	.025	.102	.000	.	.217
SIMILAR	Pearson Correlation	-.013	-.026	-.210 *	-.114	-.152	-.078	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.448	.399	.017	.128	.064	.217	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

a. Listwise N=102

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analysis of Independent Variables on Identity Change Scores

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-11.645	5.700		-2.043	.044
	INSTRUCT	.816	.489	.172	1.668	.099
	STUREP	-.334	.319	-.112	-1.048	.297
	SUCCESS	.252	.337	.092	.746	.457
	COHESION	.416	.335	.143	1.242	.217
	SIMILAR	.221	.626	.036	.352	.725

Note: $R^2 = .079$, $F(5, 96) = 1.64$, $p = .157$

a. Dependent Variable: IDENTITY

regression analysis (MRA) for the dependent variable “identity,” and table 7 presents the MRA for the dependent variable “academic/work self-concept.”

In examining the relationship between the independent variables and identity, table 5 reveals a statistically significant positive correlation between identity and influence of instructor ($r = .188$, $p = .029$). Thus, as influence of instructor scores increase, identity scores are more likely to change in a positive direction. However, this relationship is relatively small. The matrix also reveals a statistically significant relationship between identity and perception of group cohesiveness ($r = .207$, $p = .019$).

Table 7. Multiple Regression Analysis of Independent Variables on Academic/Work Self-concept Change Scores

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-5.418	4.794		-1.130	.261
	INSTRUCT	.517	.411	.132	1.257	.212
	STUREP	-.341	.268	-.139	-1.272	.206
	SUCCESS	.267	.284	.118	.943	.348
	COHESION	.143	.282	.060	.510	.611
	SIMILAR	4.503E-02	.527	.009	.085	.932

Note. $R^2 = .048$, $F(5, 96) = .971$, $p = .440$

a. Dependent Variable: ACADWORK

Table 6 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis. Although influence of instructor was significantly correlated with identity change scores, the regression equation reveals that none of the independent variables examined were significant predictors of a change in identity scores from test one to test two. Less than 8% of the variation in identity scores can be explained by the five independent variables included in the equation: $R^2 = .079$, $F(5, 96) = 1.64$, $p = .157$.

The correlation matrix in table 5 reveals no significant relationships between academic/work self-concept and the independent variables. Similarly, MRA results displayed in table 7 show none of the variables entered into the model to be statistically significant predictors of change in academic/work self-concept scores from test one to test two of the study. Less than 5% of the variation in identity scores can be explained by the five independent variables included in the equation: $R^2 = .048$, $F(5, 96) = .971$, $p = .440$.

Hypothesis Testing

Two groups of hypotheses were tested in order to determine whether relationships existed between the independent and dependent variables identified in the methods chapter (chapter 5). The first group of hypotheses falls under the theoretical framework: “Group Processes and Identity Salience” (specified at the end of chapter 3). Three hypotheses were developed from this framework. Two propose that group leadership, operationalized as the “influence of a professor” and “view of the student representative’s contribution to the smooth operation of the group,” helps increase the salience of a student’s social (as contrasted with “personal”) identity, and aids in the development of a

program-orientation. The third hypothesis is rooted in the literature on “possible selves,” and suggests that a group supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self has positive implications for a student’s self-concept. The second theoretical framework, “Group Characteristics and Self-Concept,” culminates in three hypotheses of a more structural nature than those outlined in the “Group Processes” framework. Three hypotheses were developed from this framework. Two of these utilize individual level-data, testing the relationship between group cohesion and student self-concept, and social compatibility and student self-concept. The remaining hypothesis utilizes group-level data, and tests the relationship between the sex composition of groups and changes in group “identity” scores.

Hypotheses for group processes and identity/self-concept

1. It was hypothesized that a student’s attributing gains in self-confidence to the influence of an instructor (INSTRUCT) would be positively correlated with an increase in “academic/work” self-concept scores from test one to test two.

Correlations displayed in table 5 show that while there is a slight positive relationship between the variables, changes in academic/work self-concept scores are not significantly related to the influence of an instructor: $r = .136$, $p = .086$. The hypothesis is not supported.

2. It was hypothesized that a student’s viewing his/her group’s student representative as contributing to the smooth operation of the group would be positively correlated with an increase in “identity” scores from test one to test two.

While table 5 reveals a very weak negative relationship between “view of student representative’s contribution” (STUREP) and identity change scores, it is very small, and not statistically significant: $r = -.030$, $p = .381$. The hypothesis is not supported.

3. It was hypothesized that a student’s crediting his/her group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self (SUCCESS), would be positively correlated with an increase in his/her academic/work self-concept scores from test one to test two.

Table 5 shows that there is a very slight positive relationship between these variables. However, the relationship is not statistically significant: $r = .120$, $p = .115$. The hypothesis is not supported.

Hypotheses for group characteristics and self-concept

1. It was hypothesized that a student’s describing his/her group as cohesive would be positively correlated with an increase in academic/work self-concept scores from test one to test two.

Table 5 shows a small positive relationship between these two variables: $r = .127$, $p = .101$. The relationship is not statistically significant and the hypothesis is not supported.

2. It was hypothesized that group members perceiving themselves as socially compatible (SIMILAR) would be positively correlated with an increase in student academic/work self-concept scores from test one to test two.

The correlation matrix in table 5 reveals a very small negative relationship between these variables: $r = -.026$, $p = .399$. However, the relationship is not statistically significant and the hypothesis is not supported.

3. It was hypothesized that groups heterogeneous in sex composition would be positively correlated with an increase in individual student identity scores from test one to test two.

Different from the other hypotheses tested in this study, this hypothesis utilizes group-level data for both its independent and dependent variables. Table 8 shows the correlation between the group mean change in identity scores and the “female proportion” of the group. The value of r measuring the relation between mean identity change by group and the female proportion of the group is 0.447, suggesting a positive relationship. However, the associated p-value is 0.114 and thus we cannot conclude that the true population correlation is different from zero. The hypothesis is not supported.

Table 8. Correlation of Group Mean Identity Change with Group Proportion Female

		IDChange	Prop Female
IDChange	Pearson Correlation	1	.447
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.114
	N	9	9
Prop Female	Pearson Correlation	.447	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.114	.
	N	9	9

Other Findings

A goal of this study was to identify significant relationships between a variety of facets of group structure and experience, and a change in self-concept. The study examined two dependent variables in hypothesis testing: “identity,” and “academic/work self-concept.” The choice of these measures as the primary dependent variables was due to the sensitivity of the “identity” measure to situational factors, and to the face-validity of the “academic/work” self-concept measure (given that the test was administered to students in an academic setting). Concerning “identity,” the test manual reports, “When both the identity and total scores are low, it indicates a self-view that is particularly vulnerable to situational factors and to the reactions and opinions of others” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 25). However, the TSCS:2 generates data for a number of other dependent measures (more fully outlined in chapter 5). Additional analyses were performed using two of these alternate measures: “total self-concept” and “social self-concept.” As explained in the methods chapter, the “total self-concept” score provides a measure of an individual’s overall self-concept and self-esteem. The TSCS:2 manual states: “Individuals with high TOT scores tend to define themselves as generally competent and to like themselves. They feel that they are people of value and worth; they have self-confidence and they act accordingly” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 21). In addition, “The Social Self-Concept score is intended to measure how the client perceives himself or herself in relation to peers, apart from family members and intimate friends” (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 110). It measures how adequate an individual feels in social interaction with others. The Social Self-Concept is appropriate for this study of degree-completion groups in that it measures the amount of satisfaction an individual derives

from his or her “non-family” social relations. Low scores are correlated with social awkwardness and high scores with friendliness and extroversion.

Predictors of change in total self-concept

Multiple regression analysis revealed several statistically significant relationships between “total” self-concept and the five independent variables utilized in previous analyses. Table 9 presents descriptive statistics for the five dependent variables and two independent variables (“total” self-concept and “social” self-concept), and table 10 presents the correlation matrix for these variables. Table 10 shows statistically significant correlations between total self-concept change scores and influence of instructor, $r = .206$, $p = .019$, success-oriented imagery, $r = .206$, $p = .019$, and perception of group cohesion, $r = .171$, $p = .043$. The MRA displayed in table 11 shows that influence of instructor, effect of student representative, and success-oriented imagery are significant predictors of a change in total self-concept.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Total Self-concept, Social Self-concept, and Independent Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TOTAL	102	1.93	6.129
SOCIAL	102	1.47	6.773
INSTRUCT	102	7.54	1.333
STUREP	102	7.82	2.122
SUCCESS	102	12.26	2.299
COHESION	102	15.78	2.174
SIMILAR	102	1.07	1.017
Valid N (listwise)	102		

Table 10. Correlation Matrix for Total Self-concept, Social Self-concept, and Independent Variables

		TOTAL	SOCIAL	INSTRUCT	STUREP	SUCCESS	COHESION	SIMILAR
TOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.768**	.206*	-.092	.206*	.171*	.015
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.000	.019	.178	.019	.043	.440
SOCIAL	Pearson Correlation	.768**	1	.299**	-.004	.315**	.277**	-.105
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	.	.001	.482	.001	.002	.146
INSTRUCT	Pearson Correlation	.206*	.299**	1	.195*	.186*	.194*	-.210*
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.019	.001	.	.025	.031	.025	.017
STUREP	Pearson Correlation	-.092	-.004	.195*	1	.373**	.127	-.114
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.178	.482	.025	.	.000	.102	.128
SUCCESS	Pearson Correlation	.206*	.315**	.186*	.373**	1	.511**	-.152
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.019	.001	.031	.000	.	.000	.064
COHESION	Pearson Correlation	.171*	.277**	.194*	.127	.511**	1	-.078
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.043	.002	.025	.102	.000	.	.217
SIMILAR	Pearson Correlation	.015	-.105	-.210*	-.114	-.152	-.078	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.440	.146	.017	.128	.064	.217	.

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

a. Listwise N=102

Table 11. Multiple Regresson Analysis of Independent Variables on Total Self-concept Change Scores

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-10.593	5.409		-1.959	.053
	INSTRUCT	.974	.464	.212	2.100	.038
	STUREP	-.633	.302	-.219	-2.094	.039
	SUCCESS	.634	.320	.238	1.982	.050
	COHESION	.119	.318	.042	.375	.709
	SIMILAR	.446	.594	.074	.751	.455

Note. $R^2 = .121$, $F(5, 96) = 2.646$, $p = .028$

a. Dependent Variable: TOTAL

Given the independent variables included in the model, influence of instructor plays the most major role in predicting a change in total self-concept scores: $Beta = .212$, $t(102) = 2.100$, $p = .038$. Effect of student representative is a significant predictor, but not to the same extent, and the relationship is negative: $Beta = -.219$, $t(102) = -2.094$, $p = .039$. Success-oriented imagery is also a significant predictor: $Beta = .238$, $t(102) = 1.982$, $p = .05$. Overall, the MRA suggests that just over 12% of the variation in total self-concept change scores can be explained by reference to the five independent variables.

The negative relationship between effect of student representative and change in total self-concept was not expected. Inspection of raw data revealed that scores for the “effect of student representative” index (possible scores between 2 and 10) were inordinately low for group 178 (Mean = 5.23, SD = 2.89). This may have biased the results of the regression analysis. When group 178 “effect of student representative” scores were dropped from the analysis the relationship was not statistically significant.

Two of the hypotheses concerning group processes and identity salience are supported when “total” self-concept is substituted for academic/work self-concept.

1. A student’s attributing gains in self-confidence to the influence of an instructor will be positively correlated with an increase in total self-concept scores from test one to test two of the study. Table 10 reveals a statistically significant relationship between total self-concept and influence of instructor: $r = .206$, $p = .019$. The revised hypothesis is supported.

2. A student's crediting his/her group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self, would be positively correlated with an increase in his/her total self-concept scores from test one to test two. Table 10 reveals a significant relationship between total self-concept and success-oriented imagery: $r = .206$, $p = .019$. The revised hypothesis is supported.

Predictors of change in social self-concept

The research also revealed statistically significant relationships using "social self-concept" as a dependent variable. The correlation matrix in table 10 shows significant correlations between social self-concept change scores and three of the independent variables: influence of instructor, $r = .299$, $p = .001$, success-oriented imagery, $r = .315$, $p = .001$, and group cohesion, $r = .277$, $p = .002$. The MRA displayed in table 12 shows that both influence of instructor and success-oriented imagery are both significant predictors of a change in social self-concept. Given the independent variables included in the model, influence of instructor plays the most significant role in predicting a change in social self-concept scores: $\text{Beta} = .256$, $t(102) = 2.653$, $p = .009$.

Success-oriented imagery is also a significant predictor, and only slightly less so than influence of instructor: $\text{Beta} = .273$, $t(102) = 2.380$, $p = .019$. The model suggests that 19.5% of the variation in social self-concept scores can be explained by reference to the five independent variables.

Table 12. Multiple Regresson Analysis of Independent Variables on Social Self-concept Change Scores

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-19.075	5.718		-3.336	.001
	INSTRUCT	1.301	.490	.256	2.653	.009
	STUREP	-.550	.320	-.172	-1.722	.088
	SUCCESS	.805	.338	.273	2.380	.019
	COHESION	.337	.336	.108	1.004	.318
	SIMILAR	-.141	.628	-.021	-.224	.823

Note. $R^2 = .195$, $F(5, 96) = 4.665$, $p = .001$

a. Dependent Variable: SOCIAL

One of the hypotheses concerning group characteristics and self-concept is supported when “social” self-concept is substituted for academic/work self-concept.

1. A student’s describing his/her group as cohesive will be positively correlated with an increase in social self-concept scores from test one to test two of the study. Table 10 shows a statistically significant relationship between social self-concept and group cohesion: $r = .277$, $p = .002$. The revised hypothesis is supported.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reported the pretest/posttest results of testing on 9 Quest groups ranging in size from 6 members to 18 members. While complete data were obtained for 109 Quest students ($N = 109$), 7 student representatives were excluded from the analysis ($N = 102$) due to missing values on the “effect of student representative” measure. The analysis focused on change scores for two dependent variables: identity and academic/work self-concept. ANOVA testing revealed no significant differences

between groups on change scores for either of these dependent measures. Both identity and academic/work self-concept change scores were regressed against 5 independent variables in an effort to identify significant predictors of changes in dependent variables. The multiple regression analyses revealed no statistically significant predictors of change in the two dependent variables examined. The only statistically significant correlation obtained was between identity change scores and influence of instructor. However, influence of instructor was not a significant predictor of a change in identity. Consequently, none of the six hypotheses tested were supported by the data.

Following hypothesis testing, additional analyses were performed using alternative dependent variables. Total self-concept and social self-concept were substituted for identity and academic/work self-concept. Multiple regression analysis identified statistically significant correlations between dependent and independent variables as well as a number of significant predictors of change in both total and social self-concept variables. Finally, three hypotheses were supported when reformulated by substituting either total self-concept or social self-concept as the dependent variable. These analyses suggest that although the original hypotheses were not supported, statistically significant relationships do exist between a number of features of Quest groups and TSCS:2 measures of self-concept. These findings point toward a less compartmentalized view of the self-concept and suggest that greater attention be paid to the holistic changes in self-concept that involvement with degree-completion program groups tend to encourage in the lives of adult students. These and other findings will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

The research addresses the question of whether, for higher education to meet the needs of adult learners, colleges and universities should develop programs that recognize that adult students' identities are based in "thought communities" located in "worlds" outside the academy. This research on the impact of one type of adult education program is important for a number of reasons. College and university demographics have shifted dramatically in recent years. While in past years it was comparatively rare for adult students (older than 25) to pursue undergraduate degrees at colleges and universities, the contemporary college and university student body is significantly more heterogeneous in composition. Using data from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Education Statistics (nces.ed.gov) indicates that in 1999-2000 there were roughly as many "highly" nontraditional students as traditional students in the undergraduate population. Furthermore, the proportion of older students (those 25 and older) on college and university campuses has risen from 28 percent in 1970 to 39 percent in 1999.

While adult students now represent a significant proportion of the college and university student population, many colleges and universities have not adapted their programs to meet the needs of adult learners. As college and university administrators face increasingly tight budgets, the adult student population represents a reservoir of potential students. While the recent attention turned on adult students represents a positive development, administrators may expect these students to function in traditional environments designed for the post adolescent, 18-22 year old student. In response to complaints and adult student attrition, some colleges and universities have developed degree-completion programs. These programs represent an attempt to adapt delivery of

advanced education to the needs of the adult learner, rather than to require the adult learner to adapt to traditional institutional arrangements. A majority of the literature dealing with adult students focuses on addressing their manifest needs – scheduling classes after work hours, developing partnerships between their workplaces and the colleges they attend, and holding satellite classes right in their communities. There is limited research that specifically focuses on the identity issues of the adult student.

This research is a step toward better understanding the impact of degree-completion programs on adult students in light of several important theoretical frameworks developed by social psychologists. Many adult students experience the college or university environment as discontinuous with the other important “worlds” they inhabit. The application of social psychological insights on identity, self-concept, and group cohesion to the experiences of adult college students may ultimately help administrators who develop programs for adults to better bridge the gulf between the thought communities those students inhabit inside and outside of the classroom, and sociologists to understand change in adult life.

A goal of the study was to use ideas generated by social psychologists to better understand some of the problems faced by adult students who return to the college or university classroom after an extended absence. When college administrators develop programs for adults they may overlook identity issues at the core of the adult student’s experience, focusing instead on issues primarily related to increasing revenues for the larger institution. Several social psychological frameworks reviewed in this study suggest ways of retooling the classroom in ways that connect academic learning with life

experience. This research is important because it proposes new ways of understanding the complex relationships between student identity and student learning.

Colleges and universities must pay greater attention to the diversity of the learner population they serve. While there has been intense focus on multiculturalism and racial diversity, age biases continue to permeate college and university classrooms, negatively affecting the academic experience for many non-traditional aged students. As adult students find their way to the college classroom in unprecedented numbers, colleges and universities must build bridges to them – bridges that make academic learning relevant to the outside world, and bridges which help make the outside world relevant to the university. Ultimately, these bridges may improve the academic experiences of traditional age students as well.

Overview of Significant Findings

Although there were no statistically significant findings for any of the six original hypotheses tested, the research did produce other important findings. As shown in chapter six, when alternate variables from the TSCS:2 were substituted for the academic/work self-concept and identity change scores, three of the study hypotheses were supported – two from the “group processes and identity salience” framework, and one from the “group characteristics and self-concept” framework.

Total self-concept and influence of instructor

In the “group processes” framework, there was a statistically significant relationship between a student’s attributing gains in self-confidence to the influence of an instructor and an increase in his or her “total” self-concept scores as measured by the

TSCS:2. This finding is consistent with the “recategorization” framework presented in chapter three. One of the problems facing adult students comes from the potential conflict between professors and students due, in large part, to their structurally opposed positions. Students tend to cast professors as “out-group” members – they have the power to keep them from attaining desired goals, and, for adult students, they are forceful reminders of the status differences between people with educational credentials and those without. Oakes, Haslam, and Reynolds (1999), along with Dovidio et al. (1998) explain the concept of recategorization as a way of understanding how intergroup biases can be reduced. When professors interact with students in ways which lead them to recategorize them (professors) as in-group members (for example, by encouraging an out-group focus on traditional-age students), they help increase the salience of students’ social identities, enabling them to assume program-orientations and the related norms for behavior.

Thus, by substituting “total” self-concept for “academic/work” self-concept, the study finds support for a relationship between positive affect toward an instructor and an increase in a student’s total self-concept scores from test one to test two of the study. Recategorization theory, with roots in social identity theory, provides a plausible explanation for this relationship.

Total self-concept and the group supplying imagery for a possible self

The data also modestly supported the hypothesis concerning the relationship between “a student’s crediting his/her group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self” and changes in student self-concept when the “total” self-concept change score was substituted for the academic/work self-concept change score given in the

original hypothesis. This finding is consistent with literature on “possible selves” which suggests that significant events in an individual’s life have power to invoke success-oriented or failure-oriented images of future states (Markus & Nurius, 1986). More specifically, Markus and Nurius (1986) suggest that the meaning assigned to a particular event depends on “. . . the context of possibility that surrounds it” (Markus & Nurius, p. 962). Adult students enter programs unsure of themselves, perceiving that they have, at least at present, not yet realized a long-term goal they see as important. If an adult student is unable to complete a bachelor’s degree through a degree-completion program, there are few other avenues to him or her. Not completing a degree program designed without the obstacles of traditional programs would likely have negative consequences for his or her future self-concept. Thus, adult students make themselves vulnerable when they enter degree-completion programs. Swann, Jr.’s (1987) ideas on self-verification suggest that when a person enters a new and unfamiliar situation he/she asks what this new experience will mean for him/her, and for the person he or she is becoming. The group in which the adult student is navigating this last stage of formal education has potential to confirm a student’s apprehensions about his/her ability or to provide an affirming context that supports a vision of a successful, desirable future self. When a relevant group supplies success-oriented imagery for a possible self the student’s self-concept could be expected to change.

Social self-concept and group cohesion

From the second theoretical framework that dealt with the relationship between group characteristics and student self-concept, one hypothesis was supported when “social” self-concept was substituted for “academic/work” self-concept, the original

dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant relationship between a student's describing his/her group as cohesive and an increase in a student's social self-concept scores from test one to test two of the study. Research documents the multidimensional character of group cohesion (i.e., Wheelless et al., 1982; Stokes, 1983; Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988; Roark & Sharah, 1989; Mullen & Copper, 1994). Group cohesion appears to have two primary dimensions – task cohesiveness and interpersonal cohesiveness. Emphasis on one or the other dimension has implications for the character of the group, and determines, in large part, the norms developed within the group. Groups characterized by high levels of interpersonal cohesion may actually support norms which detract from the group staying “on task” (Zaccaro & Lowe). Mullen and Copper found cohesiveness positively related to performance, but caution that simple attraction to the in-group is not the key to this effect. Rather, positive increases in performance were primarily due to commitment to the task the group was engaged in accomplishing. Thus, for Quest groups to manifest “program orientations,” both dimensions of group cohesion – interpersonal and task-related cohesion – are probably important. An overemphasis on one or the other may detract from the overall effectiveness of the group.

While it was expected that perceptions of group cohesion would be related to increases in academic/work self-concept scores, results produced by substituting social self-concept change scores for academic/work change scores indicate a stronger relationship between perceptions of cohesiveness and a positive change in interpersonal competence.

The Program Group and Total Self-concept

When the original dependent variables were substituted with the more global “total” self-concept, several of the hypotheses were supported. The research revealed a positive relationship between the influence of an instructor and an increase in a student’s “total” self-concept, and between a student’s crediting his/her group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self and an increase in total self-concept. This supports the interpretation that the group does not activate isolated components of the self-concept, but has a more holistic effect on a student’s self-concept. The group combined with the prospect of finishing a degree may have a self-confirming aspect to it.

The test manual for the TSCS:2 helps support the idea that the more holistic “total” self-concept measure is a more appropriate dependent variable for this study. Fitts and Warren (1996) explain that the “total” self-concept is the single most important score derived from the TSCS:2. They write:

Individuals with high TOT scores. . . . tend to define themselves as generally competent and to like themselves. They feel that they are people of value and worth; they have self-confidence and they act accordingly. Such individuals can present a clear, well-articulated view of themselves. . . (Fitts & Warren, 1996, p. 21)

A bachelor’s degree functions as an important status cue in society. Adults working in professional occupations, who for various reasons have yet to attain a bachelor’s degree, often experience their lack of credentials as symbols of inadequacy – they have not finished something many 21-year-olds have attained. In the workplace, and in other

social arenas where people are primarily defined by their occupation or by personal attainment, the lack of a bachelor's degree may negatively impact an adult's self-concept. The problem is not that the professional adult lacking a degree actually perceives in him or herself a lack of ability; rather, the absence of a degree is incorporated into the self-concept as an inability to exercise control over the circumstances of one's life. Some students cite their own irresponsibility during their late teenage years as the reason they did not finish a degree; others cite family responsibilities that took priority over formal education in early adulthood. Whatever the reason, adult students frequently experience the lack of a bachelor's degree as a missing piece in the puzzle of their lives.

People who enter degree-completion programs may do so with the belief that they are basically competent people denied a variety of opportunities because they "never got that piece of paper." The concept of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ruvolo & Markus, 1992) helps explain why the "instructor" and "success-oriented imagery" variables were significantly correlated with total self-concept change scores. Both perceptions of the instructor, and success-oriented imagery are integral in the evolution of a student's working self-concept. Ruvolo and Markus explain that the working self-concept helps regulate an individual's performance, and they maintain that if an individual's working self-concept contains primarily positive possible selves, and few negative self-representations, performance may be enhanced. While they explained this process using intrapsychic examples such as Olympic athletes envisioning success at the finish line, the concept can be developed in a more sociological direction when such success-oriented imagery is seen as facilitated by group interactions. Markus and Nurius remark on the importance of the social context saying, "Possible selves contribute to the

fluidity or malleability of the self because they are differentially activated by the social situation and determine the nature of the working self-concept”(p. 965). Instructors and group members are the primary contributors to the context of possibility within which the adult students’ in-school working self-concept is shaped and modified.

Many adult students who enroll in degree-completion programs give the impression that placing the puzzle piece of a completed degree into their lives will cement their family life, work life, and status in their communities. In other words, an adult student does not primarily experience something like the Quest program simply as new skill attainment – in the “now I’m good at math” sense – rather, the perceived competency they gain by enrolling in and completing such a program is in the overall or “total” sense. Consequently, when students experience increases in self-concept as a result of involvement in a degree-completion program, their experience is one of new status in the sense that their educational credentials have finally “caught up” with what they knew to be true of themselves all along. Their working self-concepts, though subject to many different forces, have new resilience once they have completed their degrees. The group, and the instructor play key roles in this transformation, as they help the adult student envision a future possible self.

Discussion of Variables not Yielding Statistically Significant Results

Other hypothesized relationships were not statistically significant, even when “total” and “social” self-concept change scores were substituted for the original dependent variables. In particular, the variables “view of student representative’s contribution to the smooth operation of the group,” “program group members’

perceptions of social compatibility,” and “heterogeneous sex composition” were not statistically significant predictors of change in any of the dependent variables examined in the study.

Effect of student representative

A possible explanation for why the “student representative” variable did not yield statistically significant results is that leadership in the program group is primarily a function of the influence of the instructor and of the effectiveness of program administration. Even when the student representative does make positive contributions to the smooth coordination of the group, those contributions may be overshadowed by the positive or negative influence of the instructor. Thus, an effective student representative may be an important component of a positive group experience, but not in such a way that variance in the quality of the representative’s performance is significantly related to positive increases in student self-concept.

Perceptions of social compatibility with program group members

The variable “program members’ perceptions of social compatibility” was operationalized using an index (see chapter five for a more detailed description of the variable). The first indicator included in the index inquired about how students would compare their own intelligence with their classmates. The second indicator asked the student to compare his/her own household income and that of others in the program group. Construction of this variable drew on Kalkhoff and Barnum’s (2000) argument that the status composition of a group has implications for self-concept. Kalkhoff and Barnum suggest that group members who perceive the group to have negative

consequences for who they are tend to do one of two things: leave or try to change the group structure. This variable was also constructed with the central ideas of self-verification theory in mind (Swann, Jr., 1987; McNulty & Swann, Jr., 1994; Swann, Jr., & Read, 1981; Riley & Burke, 1995) which suggests that people resist self-discrepant feedback about themselves, and are motivated to remove themselves from, or alter, environments which challenge their self-concepts. Self-verification theory implies that we tend to turn to more similar others as models of success. The theory hinges on the idea that we do not like to be in environments that challenge our self-conceptions.

Self-enhancement theory, which provides a theoretical alternative to self-verification theory, may provide a better explanation for the character of relationships in the program group. The index used in this study centered on whether students perceived others in the group as generally similar or generally different from them (the individual). Self-enhancement theory suggests that individuals scan their environments for stimuli that will accentuate the positive components of their self-concept and minimize those things that have potential to reflect negatively on their sense of self. Thus, we tend to desire interaction with others who serve as models of who we wish to become, rather than as reminders of who we are in the present. Consequently, increases in self-concept may be more strongly related to whether students perceive other group members as able to make positive contributions to “who I am becoming.” Whether adult students in degree-completion programs experience increases in self-concept as a product of interaction with others perceived as similar, or with others perceived as different (in an enhancing way), may depend on whether students use the group for primarily social or primarily instrumental purposes.

Heterogeneity in sex composition of the program group

The variable “heterogeneous sex composition,” was operationalized as “percent female.” As this was group-level data, the fact that the study contained only 9 groups (N=9) may have some bearing on the findings.

Groups that are heterogeneous in sex composition are reported to be more likely to be characterized by a task-orientation (i.e., Wood et al., 1985; Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988; Carli, 1989; Van Hiel & Schittekatte, 1998). It was argued that groups heterogeneous in sex composition may be more likely to encourage conditions leading to the adoption of program-oriented norms for behavior. The lack of statistically significant changes in “identity” scores from test one to test two, and “group proportion female,” should be taken as tentative given the very small sample size.

Implications for Social Psychological Theory

The findings suggest new ways of understanding the theoretical frameworks on which they rest. In general, the study did not find support for Swann, Jr.’s (1987) self-verification theory of identity negotiation. Swann, Jr. suggested that when individuals find themselves in new and unfamiliar environments, they are motivated to seek out information about themselves that is reflective of what they already believe to be true. No statistically significant relationships were found between “program group members perceiving each other as socially compatible” and any of the dependent variables tested in this study. It may be that self-verification theory helps explain the experiences of adult students who view the program group as primarily related to meeting their interpersonal or social needs. On the other hand, self-enhancement theory may provide a better

paradigm for explaining changes in self-concept when students see involvement with the program group in primarily instrumental terms. The present study suggests that the appropriateness of one theory over the other may vary with the identity needs of the individual, and the primary reason he/she continues involvement with the group. In the program group this may not be straightforward – one or the other – but a combination of the two with each aspect (instrumental or interpersonal) having varying degrees of saliency for the student. Furthermore, the extent to which one dimension achieves salience over another may vary during the course of a student's involvement with the group.

The “possible selves” framework developed by Markus and Nurius (1986) and Ruvolo and Markus (1992) represents a more psychological than sociological explanation for the success-oriented imagery by which performance is enhanced. The reader will recall that possible selves are a dimension of self-knowledge that is focused on what individuals think about their present potential, and how they view themselves in the future. “Possible selves are the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (Markus & Nurius, p. 954). Markus and Nurius explain possible selves using intrapsychic examples. They write of individuals possessing a “repertoire” of possible selves, and they offer examples illustrating the internal processes by which individuals engage in the sort of self-talk which leads to enhanced performance (i.e., an Olympic sprinter envisioning success at the finish line). This research extends their ideas in a more sociological direction. Markus and Nurius (1986) acknowledge that individuals assign meaning to self-relevant events based on the “context of possibility” surrounding

the event. While their research explains intrapsychic processes as subtly influenced by the context surrounding them, the research presented in this study suggests that the social environment may play a much more active role.

This study supports the idea that for the adult student, the program group provides an important “context of possibility,” with a statistically significant relationship between “a student’s crediting his/her group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self” and changes in “total” self-concept. Adult college students are frequently thrust into traditional learning environments that pose significant threats to their identities. The present research suggests that modifying the social context – providing a “context of possibility” more suited to the distinctive needs of adult students – may hold the key to unlocking potential that frequently remains unrealized in the traditional classroom. In other words, when the program group becomes a thought community, it helps supply the sort of self-relevant imagery necessary for academic success in an institution otherwise constructed around the thought communities of younger students.

This dissertation contributes to social psychological theory by extending Zerubavel’s (1999) conceptualization of thought communities. Zerubavel presents a static view of thought communities. He accepts their reality as given, and focuses primarily on how recognition of their existence, and understanding that different thought communities emphasize different cognitive norms (i.e., different approaches to “optical socialization”) can help us see that many of the problems we face are matters of social convention. “The difference between our various ‘outlooks’ on the world, therefore, is very often a difference between different yet equally valid cognitive alternatives” (Zerubavel, p. 31). Zerubavel pays little attention to how thought communities are

formed, and his writing does not suggest ways of creating them. This research proposes that thought communities can be created. It details how certain group processes and structural features of small groups may contribute to transforming groups from loosely structured cohorts into thought communities. In addition, this study introduces the idea that when program groups become thought communities they can function as symbolic bridges between adult students' in-school identities and their other important identities based in worlds outside of the college or university.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The chief limitation in this study is its quasi-experimental design. The problem is that no control group reasonably comparable to the experimental group exists. The study focuses on adult students in “program groups” in degree-completion programs. Adult students enrolled in “traditional” college programs would not constitute an acceptable control group, as they would not be enrolled in “programs,” but rather would simply be students in individual classes. An important factor defining the degree-completion program is the structure of the program – not just the fact that students are placed in groups. Thus, while it might be possible to locate adult students attending traditional college programs who have characteristics comparable to students attending the Quest program, the fact that they are simply taking courses, and not involved with a highly structured program leading to a degree, would severely limit the comparisons that could be made. Other researchers have encountered this problem as well. In a study using the TSCS to explore the effects of an outdoor adventure camp on self-concept, Hazelworth and Wilson (1990) initially attempted and then abandoned using a class of ninth-grade public school students as a comparison group for students participating in an adventure

camp. Kaplan (1974) discusses some of the difficulties inherent in establishing control groups for study populations of this type.

Recommendations for future research

This research explored features of group processes and group structure in degree-completion program groups in the Quest program of Covenant College. Little research addresses the social psychological dimensions of adult students who return to college. This study should be followed by other studies which are wider in scope, and which examine other dimensions of problems associated with bridging thought communities. I make the following recommendations:

1. Research should be conducted on a wider sample of degree-completion programs in a variety of different colleges and universities. The majority of schools with degree-completion programs noted in this study were affiliated with religious institutions. Colleges with no religious affiliations should be included in future studies.
2. Future research should investigate whether programs housed on college campuses have different effects on students than programs housed in off-campus or satellite locations.
3. Greater attention should be focused on the role that the administration plays in the success of degree-completion programs. Some schools administrate their degree-completion programs using staff dedicated to that purpose, while others administrate their programs using staff that primarily work with traditional programs.
4. A chief limitation of this study was its quasi-experimental design due to the lack of a suitable control group. Future studies could draw comparisons between adult

students in degree-completion programs and adult students enrolling in increasingly popular “on-line” degree programs. The lack of face-to-face interaction with peers, in on-line programs, would provide a good contrast with the effects that involvement with other students in the program group has on the adult student. On-line programs tend to be more tailored to the needs of adult students than are traditional programs, but they largely ignore the identity issues explored in the present study.

5. Future research should more thoroughly explore the concept of “status” as it applies to the experiences of adult students in degree-completion programs. Both quantitative and qualitative methodology could be employed in studying this dimension of group experience. For example, in an essay for the Quest program one student wrote,

In my experience of these different types of classroom settings, I have found that I prefer my present situation. I much prefer the “sitting around the table” approach. It reminds me that we are all equal and have about the same status in life. It is easier for me to comprehend what I am learning instead of constantly being reminded of my status at [another school]. . . . College life is very much status oriented in my opinion. You’re either part of the “in” crowd, or you’re banned eternally from it. Needless to say, I was the outsider. But not with Quest. Here, I’m an equal.

This quotation demonstrates the high level of importance some students attach to status. As adults, they do not wish to go through college fighting for status, nor do they wish to simply assume a low status role in the classroom. Future research could more fully

investigate the interaction between students, professors, and administrators on the matter of student status.

6. This study reviewed literature dealing with group cohesion (Wheless et al., 1982; Stokes, 1983; Roark & Sharah, 1989; Mullen & Copper, 1994) that addressed the multidimensional character of group cohesion (i.e., small groups perform both social and task functions). However, researchers drew different conclusions with respect to whether group commitment to the task or norms of interpersonal openness were greater contributors to group cohesion. Future research could explore the relationship between levels of group disclosure and commitment to instrumental ends. In addition, research could investigate whether adult students place greater importance on task cohesiveness or interpersonal cohesiveness in the group.

Bridging Thought Communities

This study demonstrates that the program group does play a role in elevating the self-concepts of adult students in degree-completion programs. I noted earlier O'Toole's (1974) contention that "... by segmenting life functions, we make the activities of education, work, and leisure less meaningful than if they ran as three strands throughout our lives" (O'Toole, p. 13). Colleges and universities, with their bureaucratic structures and large overhead costs, have been slow to integrate such ideas into the classroom. For the most part, the college classroom is designed with the ideal-type, 18-year-old student in mind. For such students the college or university functions as a "total institution" within which all of the activities of life are carried out, and within which a significant degree of resocialization takes place. Students who fall outside institutional norms –

perhaps by attending college at different points in their life cycles – are increasingly welcome, but must adapt themselves to the norms of the institution. Some colleges have begun to more systematically recognize in their programming that adult students are different from their post-adolescent counterparts. The degree-completion program, frequently characterized by less bureaucracy, and integration of the adult student into the program group, constitutes an attempt to reach out to adult learners in ways more relevant and meaningful to who they are outside the college classroom. In other words, the degree-completion program represents an effort by colleges and universities to weave together the threads of work, education and leisure in such a way that adult students experience coherence between these too-often discontinuous dimensions of their lives.

Early portions of the study raised the issue of ambivalence and social saturation in the postmodern era. Merton's concept of sociological ambivalence helps us understand situations where people face incompatible normative requirements in a single status set. This concept helps explain some of the problems adult students face when they must assimilate incompatible norms such as the conflict between status norms they experience as they move between the workplace and the classroom. This discontinuity between the "worlds" they inhabit may suppress learning and contribute to the overall experience that college is largely irrelevant to the lives they lead outside the classroom. I introduced Zerubavel's (1999) cognitive sociology as a conceptual framework for understanding what adult students experience when they return to the college classroom. Zerubavel explains that we hold mental memberships in limited thought communities. Cognitive universalism constitutes a paradigm upon which the traditional system of higher

education is founded. People are the same, and with few exceptions, education is delivered in a “one size fits all” format.

This research raises questions about such universalistic approaches to education. Adult students enter (or reenter) the arena of formal education at different points in their life cycles than do traditional students. Consequently, if education is to be made meaningful for them, if the strands of their lives described by O’Toole (1974) are to remain intertwined, the institutions that deliver education must develop programs for adults which account for the people they are in the present and the people they are becoming. When adult students elect to enter degree-completion programs they do so in order to change something about themselves. However, the type of resocialization they desire is of a very different type than that desired by the post-adolescent student. Adult students do not attend college to be socialized to the norms of the work world. Most of them already understand those norms. Thus, to be effective in transforming the lives of adult students, colleges and universities must work to bridge the distance between the thought communities adult students inhabit in the worlds of work, home, and community, and the temporary world of higher education. Ignoring the mental memberships held by adults outside the classroom contributes to the disillusionment adult students voice that higher education is only about “getting that piece of paper” – an endeavor that has little to do with “real life.”

Perhaps the most important insight coming from this study derives from the possible selves framework. The research supported the existence of positive relationships between a “student’s crediting his/her group with supplying success-oriented imagery for a possible self” and an increase in his/her total self-concept. Additionally, the research

supported relationships between the influence of an instructor and increases in total self-concept, and between perceptions of group cohesion and social self-concept. Markus and Nurius (1986) affirm the importance of the social in providing a “context of possibility” within which individuals assign meaning to events (what will this mean for me?) and which contribute to the self-relevant imagery by which they construct possible selves. The idea of a context of possibility provides a common thread tying together these three important findings. The influence of an instructor, the sense of interpersonal cohesion in the group, and the group-based generation of success-oriented imagery, all contribute to a context of possibility – a thought community – that bridges the gulf between the temporary world of higher education and the outside worlds which adult students inhabit. In the words of Schlossberg et al. (1989),

As educators, we must take a fresh look at the adult years. When we move away from the assumption that certain events are inevitable and right at certain ages, we can move toward helping students, and ourselves, explore new options at every age. (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 94)

Degree-completion programs represent a positive change in the way institutions of higher learning approach the education of adult students. This study demonstrates how important insights from social psychology can help educators better understand some of the cognitive dimensions of adult students, as they work to provide new and meaningful contexts of possibility which will challenge and inspire adult students with the courage to return to college.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Approval to Do Research Letter



Institutional Review Board
Office of Research
404 Andy Holt Tower
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-0140
865-974-3466
Fax: 865-974-2805

02/11/03

IRB#: 6349 B

TITLE: Bridging Thought Communities: Implications of Membership in Degree-Completion Program Groups for the Self-Concepts of Adult Students

Vos, Matthew Steven
Sociology
72 Crest Dr.
Rock Spring, GA 30739

Kurth, Dr. Suzanne
Sociology
901 McClung Tower
Campus

Your project listed above was reviewed. It qualified for expedited review and has been approved.

This approval is for a period ending one year from the date of this letter. Please make timely submission of renewal or prompt notification of project termination (see item #3 below).

Responsibilities of the investigator during the conduct of this project include the following:

1. To obtain prior approval from the Committee before instituting any changes in the project.
2. To retain signed consent forms from subjects for at least three years following completion of the project.
3. To submit a Form D to report changes in the project or to report termination at 12-month or less intervals.

The Committee wishes you every success in your research endeavor. This office will send you a renewal notice (Form R) on the anniversary of your approval date.

Sincerely,


Brenda Lawson
Compliances

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Bridging Thought Communities: Implications of Membership in Degree-Completion Program Groups for the Self-Concepts of Adult Students

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine the effects that being part of a Quest program group has on the self-concepts of students in adult degree-completion programs. The study is based on the idea that when adults return to college they face norms which often conflict with the norms they observe in the worlds of work, home, and community. This conflict has implications for their self-concepts and has potential to undermine their success in college. For example, adult students may have difficulty with the traditional authority structures found in many colleges – it may feel awkward to a student to study under a professor who is 20 years younger than he or she is. Placing adult students in groups is an attempt to take pressure off of individual students, creating a new “social space” where they can retain their adult statuses and some of the norms from the “worlds” with which they are more familiar.

In the Quest program, some groups really seem to fall into line with the sort of behaviors and habits that contribute to success in college. Other groups tend to engage in the sort of behaviors that appear to work against students’ success in college. The study is an attempt to determine whether a relationship exists between particular kinds of groups (i.e. groups with a very narrow range of student occupations represented vs. groups that represent a wide range of student occupations) and certain behavioral tendencies of groups (i.e. whether group members appear supportive of each other or not) and the self-concepts of students. In other words, what kind of Quest groups help students feel good about themselves and their abilities, and what kind of Quest groups seem to have the opposite effect? By gaining some insight into how Quest groups affect the students in them, we hope to be able to put together the kind of Quest groups which really help students learn and feel good about being in the program.

Information

If you choose to participate in the study, the following procedures will be utilized:

1. Early on in the program (module 1 or module 2), and during class time you will take a short multiple choice test designed to test how you feel about yourself in a variety of situations. The test is called the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale, version 2. It is easy to do and takes between 10 and 20 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential, and will not contain information about you on them which could be identified by anyone other than the researcher (Matthew Vos).
2. When you are in the second semester of the program, the test will be administered to you a second time. This is so that we can tell whether being in a Quest group has had a positive or negative impact on your experience in Quest. At the time of this second test, you will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire asking how you feel about your

group and whether you think your group helps you be successful in the Quest program. We estimate that this part of the study will take you about 25 minutes or less to complete. This too will take place during your regular class time and will not require any “outside-the-classroom” effort on your part. For both phases of the study (the test during module 1 and the test early in second semester) we estimate that your total time commitment will be less than one hour.

3. The study will include approximately eight different Quest groups. Thus, if students agree to participate, we will have between 75 and 100 students who participate.

RISKS

The only risks foreseen in this study that might affect you, are that you would feel awkward in class if you choose not to participate in the study. To that end, be assured that no person connected with Quest or this research will look down on students who choose not to participate, nor treat them differently in any other way. Additionally, because you may feel uncomfortable in front of other students if you choose “not” to participate, the test and an alternate assignment asking about your plans after graduation, will be distributed to you in a manilla envelope so that no one will know whether you are doing the test or the alternate assignment.

ACCESS TO COUNSELING

While the tests you take should not do you any harm, there may be situations where answering questions about your self-concept may bring up issues that you would like to explore with a counselor. Covenant College has a health services department, called the Priesthill Center, which employs qualified counselors that you may visit free of any charge. If at any time during the study (or while you are a Quest student) you would like to receive counseling, please feel free to contact Barb Michal, Health Services Director, at the Priesthill Center at Covenant College. Her direct line phone number is: 423-419-1275. In addition, you may call the researcher, Matthew Vos, at 706-419-1419.

BENEFITS

This study may have very little tangible benefits to you personally. The main benefit from this study is that the knowledge gained through the research will help make the Quest program (and other similar programs) more accessible and beneficial for the adult students who participate in them. We recognize that many college settings tend to treat adult students like they treat 18-22 year old students. However, adults bring a lot of life and work experience to the classroom – they often have a more mature perspective. Treating them like post-adolescent students may minimize the value of the education they receive. Consequently, we hope to learn more about how being part of a Quest group either helps or hinders your ability to learn and enjoy learning as you complete your college degrees. Ultimately, the research may be used to help us construct Quest groups in ways that are found to be most helpful to adult students.

*(your initials indicating you have received and read both sides of this page)*_____

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. The researcher will keep the data until the study is complete. As soon as the study is complete, the researcher will personally destroy all data. After all informed consent forms have been obtained, the researcher will personally drive them to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where they will be stored in an office in the Sociology department for a minimum of three years.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Matthew Vos, at Covenant College, 14049 Scenic Highway, Lookout Mountain, Georgia, 30750, and (direct line) 706-419-1419, [e-mail]vos@covenant.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Research Compliance Services section of the Office of Research at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

By **APPROVED**
Brenda Lawton
Date 2-11-03

APPENDIX C: Study Questionnaire and Alternate Assignment

Adult Learners and the Quest Experience: A Survey

The following questions are designed to help us understand some of the ways that your Quest group and the Quest instructors either help or hinder the learning process for you. For each of the following questions, please circle the response that best reflects your views.

Q1. Thinking about a particular Quest instructor who helped you gain confidence in your academic abilities, about how much of an increase in confidence do you think that instructor's influence resulted in? (Circle only one)

1. No instructor contributed to an increase in my confidence
2. Very little increase
3. Some increase
4. A fair amount of increase
5. A great deal of increase

Q2. Thinking about one particular Quest instructor who detracted from your confidence in your academic abilities, about how much of a negative impact on your academic self-confidence do you think that instructor's influence resulted in?

1. No instructor had a negative impact on my self-confidence
2. Very little negative impact
3. Some negative impact
4. A fair amount of negative impact
5. A great deal of negative impact

Q3. To what extent does your student representative help your group operate more smoothly? (If you are the student representative please check this box and skip to question #5)

1. Doesn't help at all
2. Helps very little
3. Helps some
4. Helps a fair amount
5. Helps a great deal

I am the student representative

☐

Q4. In general, the student representative for my group is very thorough in performing his or her duties.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Q5. I feel that my group pushes me to succeed.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Q6. In general I feel close to my group.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Q7. My group is likely to provide support to a group member experiencing personal difficulties.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Q8. Do you feel that you are really a part of your Quest group?

1. Really a part of my group
2. Included in most ways
3. Included in some ways, but not in others
4. Don't feel I really belong

Q9. If you had the chance to be in a different group, and moving to that new group would not have any negative implications for you, how would you feel about moving?

1. Would want very much to move
2. Would rather move than stay where I am
3. Would make no difference to me
4. Would rather stay where I am than move
5. Would want very much to stay where I am

Q10. How does your group compare with other groups at Quest on each of the following points? *(Circle only one number for each question)*

	Better than most	About the same as most	Not as good as most
a) The way people get along together?	1	2	3
b) The way people stick together?	1	2	3
c) The way people help one another in the group?	1	2	3

Q11. The people in my Quest group are the sort of people I'd feel comfortable socializing with outside the classroom.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

Q12. How would you compare your general level of intelligence with that of others in your group?

1. Much lower
2. A little bit lower
3. About the same
4. A little bit higher
5. Much higher

Q13. How do you think your household's annual income compares with the household income of your classmates?

1. Much lower
2. A little bit lower
3. About the same
4. A little bit higher
5. Much higher

Alternate Assignment

This assignment is optional. Students who do not wish to participate in the study may complete the following questions during the testing period.

1. How would you evaluate your experience in the Quest program thus far?
2. As you look ahead, what part of Quest causes you the most anxiety?
3. What suggestions do you have regarding Quest that would make the program even better for you?
4. Do you find that what you learn in Quest is applicable to your work?

Vita

Matthew Steven Vos was born September 30, 1968 in Ft. Meade, Maryland. After graduating from Durham Christian High School in 1986, he attended Covenant College located in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and in 1990 graduated from that institution with a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in music. He earned a Master of Education in Administration and Supervision from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in 1996. Later that same year he was accepted into the sociology program at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and in 2003 graduated with a Ph.D. in Sociology with specialties in sociology of religion and social psychology.

Vos began an appointment as Assistant Professor of Sociology at Covenant College in August 2000. He maintains scholarly interests in social psychology, social theory, and the sociology of education. His professional memberships include the Southern Sociological Society, and the Association of Christians Teaching Sociology (ACTS). Vos currently holds the position of secretary in ACTS.

Other work experience includes working for an adult degree-completion program from 1993-2000. Vos has written curriculum and taught research methods for the Quest program of Covenant College. He is married, and in October, 2003 adopted a daughter from Bulgaria.