

**Why a Select Group of Bahamian Female Adult Learners Return to the Classroom and
How their Return impacted their Personal and Professional Lives**

By

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Thesis

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Abstract

A review of the available literature indicates that adults are returning to the classroom at a phenomenal rate, with over 40 million in the United States alone. My personal experience in the Bahamas convinces me that even in developing countries, adults are indeed returning to the classroom, the majority being women. This study attempted to provide answers to the question: Why do some Bahamian women working outside the home, with families and other social responsibilities, return to the classroom? Following a recruitment process, three Bahamian women volunteered to tell of their decision to return to the classroom and how their personal and professional lives were affected as a result. Each of the women was interviewed for approximately 70 minutes, with the aid of eight semi-structured questions. The findings indicated that these Bahamian women were remarkably similar to women in industrialized countries like the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. They returned for economic and job-related reasons. The credentials had to constantly updated so that the women could remain employed and competitive in the work-place. The implications of the findings to education practices in the Bahamas are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Purpose and Importance of the Study

My interest in female adult learners stems from two sources. Firstly, I am an adult learner and I come into the classroom with mixed feelings and expectations. My experiences have, for the most part, been pleasant ones. However, there have been some disquieting times, many of which I attribute to the fact that I am an adult learner. Secondly, I am employed as the Provost of a college campus that caters to a significantly large population of older working women. While I do not intend to explore this topic to validate my own experiences as an adult learner, I hope that coming from a similar background as my participants I will be able to better serve the needs of my college clientele.

The purpose of this study is to explore why a select group of Bahamian female learners, age 25 years and older, return to the classroom, and how their return to the classroom impacts on their personal and professional lives. I am convinced that my participants might provide important information that will assist educators of female adult learners to make possible a more comfortable and meaningful experience in an adult learning environment. This is paramount in light of the influx of female adult learners into the classroom, especially during the last two decades and the apparent absence of such studies done in recent times. A brief review of the adult learner population growth will help to place the female adult learner population into perspective.

Over the past decades, the adult learner population has grown at a phenomenal rate. Wlodkowski (1993) stated that each year, approximately 40 million adult learners in the United States alone participate in formal educational activity. Jarvis (1983) while

not providing specific figures, does, maintain that there is a significantly large adult population in the United Kingdom. Bohlin and Milkeim (1994) also identified a continuous growing adult-learner population in Canada.

The Bahamas, like most developing Caribbean countries, shares a similarity with industrialized countries like the United States of America, Great Britain and Canada in that its adult population is returning to the classroom in greater numbers each year. In fact, Bahamians have borrowed the expression, "the paper chase" from a once popular American sitcom by the same name, to describe the parade of adults, particularly females, who for whatever reason, are returning to the traditional classroom.

The question though, is why are so many older Bahamians returning to the traditional classroom? A brief review of the education system in the Bahamas will provide a backdrop for the return of many adult learners, 25 years and older into the traditional classroom, and also provide some understanding of the educational system in the Bahamas.

Schools in the Bahamas, whether government operated or privately owned (generally church schools) practice a streaming system, which classify students as academically bright (top achievers) and non-academic (lower performers). Each group of students is allowed to pursue prescribed programs, the outcome being that the students in academic streams are likely to graduate having passed five or more subjects with "A" to "C" passing grades in the national external examination. These academic results allow graduating high school students to gain direct entry into colleges and universities locally and abroad. Many of these top achievers will qualify for private and government scholarships.

This does not mean that all top achievers enter colleges immediately after high school. Many young Bahamian men chose to work in the tourism industry, being lulled

into an apparent easy life and fast money. In fact, for many years many Bahamian men made successful careers in the hotel and tourism related fields. On-the-job training, hard work and dedication to the company were all that were needed for continued employment and job promotion.

Many young Bahamian women entered the bank establishments and other government, quasi-governments and private institutions. While attendance at college may have been an option, often due to financial constraints and early marriage many Bahamian women never exercised that option until much later. A college degree was not a requirement at the time of employment. Women were often employed because of the school attended, family background and academic achievement at the completion of high school.

The outcome for non-academic students is predictably low, with very few meeting the entry requirement for colleges locally and abroad. Though many of those low achievers would have been exposed to some technical and vocational programs for two years at high school, it is of insufficient content to allow them comfortable entry into the workplace. Many of them enter the two local technical and vocational colleges, Bahamas Hotel Training College and Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute. While many of these persons may later qualify for entry into college; many have not taken advantage of a college education.

Each year, the high schools, both government operated and private, continue to graduate approximately 4,000 students, ages 16 to 18 years old. While a small percentage, (15%) enter colleges and universities locally and abroad, by far the majority enters the workplace having only attained a basic high school diploma. A former president of the Chamber of Commerce, and chief executive officer of Burns House Limited observed that too many high school graduates were coming into the workplace

having no workable skills (Munroe, 1989). A former director of Statistics commented similarly, that high schools are sending out graduates who lacked basic competencies and salable skills (George, 1986). It is, therefore, not surprising to find that there is an unusually large number of adult learners returning to the traditional classroom for academic, technical and vocational training as indicated in the ensuing discussion.

The College of the Bahamas, the national tertiary level academic institution, has a student population of just over 3,700 and approximately one third of that population are adults over 25 years and older (College of the Bahamas Handbook, 1996). Other offshore colleges and universities such as St. Johns and St. Benedict, Nova Southern University, St. Louis University, and the University of Miami offer diploma programs, undergraduate and graduate degree programs locally (Bahamas Chamber of Commerce Directory, 1997).

Currently, there are about 37 Bahamian students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate degree programs at Acadia University and each year at the local College Fair held in Nassau and Freeport, Bahamas, more and more Bahamians are recruited for studies abroad. I have invigilated a number of external off-campus examinations of courses offered through the Continuing Education division of Acadia and other universities. This does not take into account the other top achievers graduating from government and private schools who are spread amongst other international colleges and universities in the Caribbean, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other universities in Canada. This certainly speaks to the notion that in developing countries such as the Bahamas, adults are returning to the traditional classroom just as much as adults from industrialized nations.

In addition to the College of the Bahamas, there are two technical and vocational colleges in the Bahamas; the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute and the

Bahamas Hotel Training College to which I alluded earlier in this chapter. Both of these colleges constantly seek to expand their facilities to accommodate the ever-growing student population, mostly mature adults. Cross (1981) anticipated this adult learner population, stating "the new social environment is spawning non-traditional learners studying part-time, who will greatly out-number the traditional student".

Why are all of these adults returning to the classroom? But more germane, why are female adult learners returning to the classroom to engage in such costly venture? What motivates these women to leave their jobs at the end of the day to sit in structured classrooms for three hours at a time while spouses and children wait at home or children are left with baby-sitters, relatives and/or friends? How do these female adult learners juggle work and family responsibilities, and social obligations? These are important questions to me as an educator and they are poignant reminders of a period in my life to which I now look back with mixed feelings.

My Experience: From Adult Learner to Researcher of Female Adult Learners

In September of 1979, I began my undergraduate studies with the University of the West Indies. For two academic years, I was a part-time student, a teacher at a Junior Secondary School (Middle School) from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., and a mother of four small children, and a spouse. I attended classes from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., at least three evenings each week. I thought it was the most remarkable misfortune for me that my husband transferred to another Family Island as a manager of a large hotel. I had to make the decision to accept the government scholarship and attend the university or pack my family and move with my husband to Grand Bahama Island. It was the worst of times. I had to leave my children at home with a housekeeper after school, often returning home late in the evenings, exhausted. Their homework was

partially completed or not done at all, and those after-school chats and fraternizing that were such an integral part of our routine were becoming few and far between.

During my final year, the Ministry of Education released me for full-time studies. However, full-time studies also carried with it all that "baggage" of parenthood, childcare, demands of the Parent-teacher Association, and the household responsibilities. Then there was the guilt of not being there for the family socially and sometimes, I felt, emotionally. The guilt feeling was made more poignant because my husband was not there to give our children that care that I was unable to provide to them. Full-time also meant a full course load and the completion of a required undergraduate thesis. As a female adult in the Bahamas, you are expected to negotiate all those needs of the family, the job, the society, and the learning institution or be "damned". The pressure to do well is strong.

I think about my reasons for returning to the classroom. I wanted to be academically and professionally qualified. Granted, I was a trained teacher with Associate degree status but there were covert pressures to do more. My former students were returning from full-time studies abroad with bachelor degrees; they spoke the language of persons who were informed of current trends in education, the latest journal issues, and recent developments in the field of education. There was a feeling of not being quite what a progressive educator ought to be, for my students, my employer or myself. In spite of my excellent teaching record, I was not promoted, nor was my salary commensurate with the hard work I felt I was doing in school and after. Subtle forces operated just as powerfully as though my employer had said "go back to school or else". What about the female adults who are stuck in low-paying jobs, or those who are desirous of a promotion? Are the same forces operating on them to return to the classroom or are they being told overtly to return to the classroom or else?

So, I have become passionate about the female adult learner. Yet, as I look back in retrospect, it was not always so. My personal experiences as an undergraduate student had significance only for my immediate family and me. So my interest in adult learners, especially the female adult learner must have spawned, and was obviously nurtured over the past six years so that it has become a virtual passion within the last two years. It was at the time when I gave serious consideration to engaging in further education as a full-time student, abroad. As reality began to dawn on me, I began to experience a range of feelings, mostly negative ones. I was actually afraid.

I became fearful of my own age and those physical and emotional contingencies which might negatively impact on my ability to perform in an unfamiliar student/professor environment. I saw fear manifested in my reluctance to engage in a basic computer course at my place of work. I kept making, what could seem quite plausible excuses; I had to attend meetings, important appointments, many which could be rearranged. Besides, my secretary would gladly have explained away my absence from the office. I registered at least two times and withdrew each time. My problem was that I was afraid that I would not do well in a class of young college students.

I soon found myself debating whether I could “pull off this fiasco” of completing an on-campus full-time study experience. Oh, I did not doubt my intelligence or my ability to debate or to think logically, but I questioned my ability to engage in the rigorous demands and dynamics consistent with graduate studies, particularly after a lengthy absence from academic pursuits. Contrary to the commonly held view, working in an academic environment does not of itself keep one academically active. In fact, I am convinced that my six years of administrative work has actually dulled my academic sense immensely.

But what did I have to lose by returning to the classroom? I am no longer beset by those responsibilities associated with raising a family. My four children are now successful adults; three of them have families of their own; the fourth child is engaging in undergraduate studies at Acadia University. My husband is now engaged in a family business and is very supportive of my efforts at self-improvement. I have a secure job with a salary that allows me to enjoy a comfortable life style. My employers are supportive, yet there are forces which operate just as subtly as when I did my undergraduate work. I must do well for the good of the family and friends on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the institution for which I work expects it of me.

I fall within that difficult age group which many psychologists and others regard as the age of stagnation. Compounding this notion, the daily manifestations of forgetfulness, physical slothfulness, and the general feeling of "not being quite with it" add to my feeling of fear. I sometimes wonder how much of my fear shows in a class of much younger students. And so I continue to question whether I could pull off this "fiasco" called "formal learning" at 51 years of age.

I think of my experiences and my ambitions and I am convinced that I am a progressive adult. My personal feeling of well being and self-directedness speaks to the notion of self-fulfillment. I think of the institution with which I am associated and I know that I need to complete the task that I voluntarily undertook; it is good for me and it is right for an administrator of an emergent four-year degree-granting institution. I would also like to exercise an option, which was closed in 1995 to non-graduate faculty when the college took on university status. These are high stakes for me, but I can live without them. What about the thousands of female adult learners, who are asked by their employers to go back to school after so many years or those females whose work climate, suggest a return to the classroom or else?

My own reflections, and introspection led me to contemplate the range of feelings, that is, the fears, anxieties, doubts, and frustration, which the hundreds of working women and mothers must have experienced. Each academic year they would sit in my office to be advised about courses for which they have no personal interest or those which will demand all the time and energy they could muster, after spending long days at their workplaces. Most of these adults are fully employed, have large families; many are single parent families, and have many other social responsibilities (Bahamas Chamber of Commerce Directory, 1997).

How do all of these forces impact on their willingness to return to the classroom especially after a lengthy absence from the classroom? As a female adult learner I had to come to grips with my feelings. There was the excitement of traveling abroad, interacting with new friends and getting away from the routine of the office. But there were also the many negative feelings that were related to my family, finances, and those persistent feelings of doubt that, perhaps this was not the right decision for me at this time.

As the Provost of a satellite campus, I felt compelled to take time to inquire into other women's lives. I was convinced that I needed to become more informed for the role that I have been playing in the lives of the women who sought my advice, my expertise. What better way to become equipped than by engaging in a study of female adult learners? I therefore made the decision to interview four female adults who engaged in formal learning at the college level, to listen to their stories. I needed to hear them express their own feelings. I hope that through the process of "coming to know" as far as it is possible through discourse, and through these female participants' reconstruction of their own adult experiences, I will be able to provide further enlightenment for others and myself (Van Mannen, 1990).

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Most of the literature reviewed in this chapter addressed the predominant American, Canadian and European cultural aspects of adult education, and does not reflect the Bahamian experience of which I am a part. It is also true that much of the literature does not speak specifically to female adult learners. However, it does help to establish the history and growth of adult education, while providing the reader a universal appeal.

To my knowledge there have been no studies done about adult education in the Bahamas. This being the first of it's kind will form an important part of future literature reviews. Interspersed throughout this chapter, as well as chapters four and five, references will be made to the Bahamian experience, through my own reflections, but especially through the sincere expressions of the participants.

As I surveyed the available literature, four main points stood out in my mind:

1. The huge influx of adult learners, age 25 and older, is making a significant impact in the traditional classroom.

2. Adult learners are returning to the classroom for many reasons. However, they are primarily motivated by professional and economic concerns.

3. Adult education has a long and colorful history. While there has been much progress made, there have been many political, social and economic barriers that impede that progress.

4. Female adult learners occupy a prominent place within the history of adult learners' history, yet they are continuously viewed as marginal in this 20th century.

Adult Learner Population Growth

Much of the literature about adult learners which I reviewed seemed to indicate that there are many contradictions and confusion regarding the nature of the adult learner, particularly as the term relates to the older persons who are returning to the classroom for extended formal education and training. The lack of a clear perception of the adult learner may be directly linked to the many misconceptions about adulthood and maturity and the perceived roles which have been assigned to mature adults by the society in which they live. These conflicting views appear to arise out of many schools of thought about the nature of adults and by extension, the nature of the adult learner.

Lenz (1980) addressed an attitude that was dominant in the late 1960s and early 70s, that adulthood is seen as a plateau, a time of life when growth has been completed, identity has been established and formal learning is put away with other "childish things" (p. 1). However, Lenz (1980) also showed that in spite of this conviction, there is still confusion about a clear demarcation between youth and adulthood; it is often elusive and sometimes non-existent.

Kidd (1981) showed that preoccupation with life's stages has a long history and might indirectly influence how societies have come to view the adult. Quoting from H. G. Wells', The Shape of Things to Come, Kidd stated:

The years from thirty to seventy were formally a sort of dump for the consequences of the first three decades; now they are the main part of life, the years of work, self-expression, and complete self-discovery, to which these earlier years are a bright, delightful prelude (p. 7).

Kidd (1981) contrasted Browning's delightful approach to age and maturity, "Grow old with me. The best is yet to come." With Shakespeare's rather pessimistic approach to life as expressed in his seven ages of man, "Last scene of all, that ends this

strange eventful history is, second childishness, and mere oblivion: sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything" (p. 53). However, the answer to the plaguing question, "what is an adult?" still remained elusive.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1973) described an adult as being, "fully developed and mature: grown up" (p. 17). Again, this definition falls short of describing important elements. For example, how do we define "developed" and "mature"?

Overstreet (1949) referred to the mature adult in this way:

A mature person is not one who has to come to a certain level of achievement and stopped there. He is rather a maturing person - one whose linkages with life are consistently becoming stronger and richer because his attitudes are such as to encourage their growth. A mature person, for example, is not one who knows a larger number of facts. He is one whose habits are such that he grows in knowledge and the wise use of it (p. 43).

While Overstreet's portrayal of the nature of the mature adult is descriptively rich and very philosophical, it does not provide the answer to the crucial question: What is an adult?

Lenz (1980) also pointed to the inconsistencies in attempts to define the adult. She referred to three political metaphors that might have direct bearing on the confusion in this regard. She identified: (a) "children, rebelling against the father, George III" as represented by the American Revolution, (b) the accepted notion that Great Britain is the "mother country", and (c) the "founding fathers" were drafting a Constitution that deprived ordinary citizens of political responsibilities. Since many persons who would be considered "chronological adults" were ordinary and property-less, the status, "adulthood" was restricted to a few. Ironically, in that society

one was an adult because one performed certain roles such as, citizen, spouse, parent, and soldier (Knowles, 1980).

Coleman (1994) alluded to the subtle attempt at separation of youths and adults that began as child labor laws became necessary, and as children no longer followed in the occupational paths of their parents. Schools then began to extend periods of preparation (for work) to as long as possible. Coleman observed, rather satirically, that "with every decade, the length of schooling increased until a thoughtful person would need to ask whether society could conceive of no better way for youths to come into adulthood" (p. 3).

Since the late 1970s, the chronological age, 25 years and older has been used to define the adult learner (Abeiter, 1978; Apps, 1981; Bureau of Census, 1980; The College of the Bahamas Handbook, 1996; Douvan, 1977; Gally & Hunter, 1978-79; Knowles, 1980, and Markus, 1976). The rationale for this arbitrary stance appears to be rooted in the logic that at 25 years of age, an individual would have completed secondary education, and would be in some form of employment for the last three or more years. In other words, the adult should have been engaged in at least some of those areas classified by society as "adult roles" (Knowles, 1980; Lenz, 1980).

Knowles (1980) explored the sociological and psychological premise of what it means to be an adult. He postulated that one is an adult to the extent that the individual is performing social roles typically assigned by the culture; spouse, worker, parent, responsible citizen and soldier. Knowles also maintained that the adult defines his/her own psychological self as an adult to the extent he/she perceives him/herself to be essentially responsible for his/her own life. Cognizant of all this, the research has used the designation, 25 years and older to refer to all mature adults, and in this case female adult learners.

A further reviewing of the literature showed that the designation of 25 years and older is perhaps not an arbitrary stance. Apps (1981) pointed to the demographic changes taking place in the United States. For example the median age of the US population in 1975 was 28.8 years. In 1980, it was slightly more than 30 years and by 1990, it was predicted to be nearly 33 years.

Like Lenz (1980) Apps directed attention to the decline in birth and death rates in recent years. He observed that in 1975, 93.9 million people were 24 years old and younger, but he predicted that this would drop to 90 million by 1990. He stated that those 25-64 years old in 1975 numbered 97 million with a predicted 124 million in this age group by 1990. It was from among this anticipated adult population that the adult learners were coming to form the more than 40 million adult learners in the United States (Apps, 1981; Wlodkowski, 1993).

In a report aired on CNN television station (August 18, 1997), Garsten, a financial analyst stated that three out of every 10 adults in America will return to the classroom for some formal learning experience. This comment is indicative not only of a significantly large adult population returning to the classroom, but also of the financial retail projection for September which included anticipated purchases of back-to-school material for traditional students as well as for adults returning to the classroom.

Great Britain also boasts of a significantly large adult learner population (Javis, 1983). In Canada, Bohlin and Milheim (1984) also identified a continuous growing adult learner population, while Selman and Dampier (1991) reflect on the positive influences which Great Britain and the United States have had on the history and phenomenal growth of adult education in Canada.

Apps (1981) vividly described the influx of adult learners into the classroom as a 20th century phenomenon; a return of millions of adult learners to the classroom who

will affect the total approach of educators to the non-traditional student, age 25 years and older. Speaking metaphorically, Apps (1981) stated:

The quiet revolution will be more subtle, and more complex. The quiet revolution will come about because older returning students will insist on change...Increasingly, they will question the quality of teaching, and the relationship of faculty to students. They will question the attitude that prevails on many campuses that faculty is superior and students are inferior, no matter what their age (p. 12).

Perhaps an investigation into the many changes that have taken place within the last decade will provide some insight into this phenomenal growth of the adult learner population into the traditional classroom.

Motivation to Return

The 20th century has witnessed a significant shift in traditional values and norms. What was previously taken for granted must now be revisited in the face of new realities. The Industrial Revolution introduced an era of academic and technological explosion. The scientific advances made during the last two decades ushered in a time when one could dream and achieve one's dreams through hard work, dedication and persistence, and virtually guaranteed long life and good health for a few (Solorzano, 1991). For many in industrialized and developing lands, the scientific advances made during the last two decades ushered in a time of sobering reality; escalating health care cost, high inflation, high divorce rate, and single parenting.

The phenomenal social and economic changes have resulted in millions of adults becoming under-employed as well as unemployed. Many persons began to take stock of their lives and come to terms with the changes to see how those changes were

impacting on their lives. Can one be assured of a job after long years of service to a company? A few years ago, this question would not be raised. If one was employed with a government agency, or a large corporation, job stability, insurance benefit for the family and retirement benefits were assured.

In the Bahamas, there is a saying, "if you have a government job, you OK". Today, however, job security is no longer a reality for the new generation of adult learners. Cross (1981) predicted that one's ability to hold a job or even obtain employment will depend to a great extent on one's involvement in some learning experiences within the last three years. While it may be argued that professional and academic upgrading does not guarantee one permanent employment, it certainly increases the odds. One is in a better position to sell oneself and to develop a salable portfolio of one's achievements and performance capability.

The tenuous climate of the job market has not gone unnoticed. Appreciating the need to be professionally equipped for job change one mature student states:

We are moving toward a new definition of a career as a consequence of positions occupied by a person during the course of his working and work-related life. This takes into account the fact that most people change occupations several times during their careers and that for many people, occupational mobility is horizontal rather than vertical (Lenz, 1980, p. 12).

The literature also suggested that there are other reasons for adult learners' return to the classroom, which are not directly related to organizational expectations. Apps (1981), in his research found that most adults want to have jobs and the economic security which they perceived would accompany those jobs. He noted that "Of the 40 million American adults returning to the classroom, 36 percent were in some kind of

'career transition'. Twenty-four million, or 60 percent of the 40 million, said they planned additional education as part of their career change" (Apps, 1981, p. 23).

Javis (1985) suggested that the basis for adult's decision to return to the classroom is fourfold. Quoting from an Open University report on continuing education, Javis showed that mature adults are returning to the classroom for economic and vocational reasons. Javis (1985) also stated that adults return for occupational re-organization, preparation for new responsibilities and opportunities in the jobs, and for training and retraining. Javis (1985) further stated that vocational studies were undertaken for the purpose of professional and vocational qualifications, updating courses to offset obsolescence in both knowledge and experience.

Javis' (1985) comments seem to be a reflection of the Bahamian experience. For many years it has been the custom for young Bahamians to graduate from high school and enter the job market. Perhaps some young persons are influenced by the apparent wealth of the many tourists who vacation in the Bahamas. But it is also a reality that many high school graduates held part-time jobs at least three years prior to graduating from high school. It is necessary for their economic survival. More often than not they live in a single parent family. These high school graduates have gone on to become middle managers in banks and in many large government and private corporations because they worked hard and gained seniority on the jobs.

Each year there is an influx of younger adults, with graduate degrees who expect to hold middle management jobs and are aspiring for top management positions in the same organizations. Would age and experience count in this era when youthfulness and certification is so highly valued?

Compounding the difficulty for the older woman, is the fact that she becomes a medical risk because the insurance companies are reluctant to initiate a new policy with

an older client without extensive medical examinations. And her previous insurance benefit would be discontinued at retirement. Worrel and Remer (1992) showed that the older woman is the most likely to be laid off and the job becoming redundant.

The Bahamian woman must also look to the time when years of service, not age, will determine her place on the job. For example, she graduates at 17 or 18 years old, and by the age of 47 she would have completed 30 years with the firm. Years of service dictate that she should be retired, but she is the sole wage earner of her children who have not even graduated from high school. She is only half way along the mortgage payment. What does she do? Her experience may be valuable in finding another job but at what salary? Without current professional upgrading and certification, her bargaining power is virtually non-existent.

As the Provost of a college campus, I have advised hundreds of mature adults who seek advice about employment and job certification. The Bahamas is not unique as a patriarchal society. Men, overwhelmingly, control the political and social power and wealth. Like many industrialized nations, Bahamian women earn approximately 60% of men's salaries even though Bahamian women are more likely to have returned to the classroom for formal education and professional training. A grim reality is that women in the Bahamas experience economic and social dissonance. Of the 67,420 recorded households, 65% are headed by single mothers (Bahamas Chamber of Commerce Directory, 1997, p. 22). This has serious social implications for a country with a population of just over 265,000 persons.

Additionally, the Bahamas continues to experience an escalating divorce rate with many unemployed female family heads wishing to establish small businesses of their own. This entrepreneurial interest is not surprising since tourism is the primary industry in the Bahamas that naturally affords numerous avenues for women to pursue

in establishing small businesses. However, to apply for a small government loan from the Central Bank, everyone must demonstrate some business acumen, by submitting a business proposal, which meets banking standards. But, good business sense is not automatic. Therefore adults must be taught the basic management and marketing skills in addition to general education courses (Javis, 1985).

A second important industry in the Bahamas is Banking and Finance. In fact in September 1996, there were 428 financial institutions licensed under the Banks and Trust Companies Regulation Act of the Bahamas, with 300 institutions actively dealing with the general public, some of them offering foreign exchange facilities (The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce Directory 1997, p. 75-76). These financial institutions employ many Bahamians at all levels, and for years have provided financial assistance to employees who want to return to the classroom. More recently, the local banks have extended a line of credit with computer companies so that all bank employees are able to purchase personal computers. The mandate appears to be that all employees must become computer literate or else! It is also becoming mandatory that employees complete specific banking diploma courses if they are to remain in the banking industry.

It is becoming more and more evident that the education received many years ago no longer applies to the working persons today. The rules are different. It is noteworthy that, in 1980, Lenz observed:

We cannot expect an education, concluded at 18 or 21 years to still be adequate at 50 years. This fact, coupled with the entrance of women into the work place in greater numbers, underscore the need for extensive retraining and conversion of facilities to make them adequate to the needs of adult learning (Lenz, 1980, p. 13).

Colorful History of Adult Learners

The history of adult learners is lengthy and colorful, and it appears to have experienced many growing pains. In 1930 the University of Wisconsin took the lead in reviving the extension division which was established originally in 1885. In spite of the obvious growth and interest of the adult learner population, however, the education of adults still remained rife with serious contradictions and constraints imposed by bureaucratic and campus policies and financial problems. Lenz (1980) described the profession of adult education as resembling, "Gulliver, straining unsuccessfully, at times importantly, to break free of its bounds." Three decades later, adult education continues to experience growing pains, its major problems being social acceptance and limited financial support. Commenting on the erosion of adult education support in Ontario, McEwin, Mombourquette, McBride, and Dickinson (1996) identified recent changes to Ontario's Education act which:

Enable school boards to segregate traditional school age and adult learners into regular day school and separate continuing education classes on the basis of age alone. Given the substantially lower per-pupil grant provided for continuing education students than for regular day program students, these changes potentially affect the quality of education adult learners can expect to receive (p. 103).

It is of interest that those adults most affected by adult education budget cuts and small grants are considered to be "minorities" (p. 101). Women are an important part of that majority by virtue of the fact that women make up the largest proportion of adult learners returning to the classroom on a part-time basis. They are mostly part-time students, employed and have family responsibilities (Markus, 1976). So, a question that is very germane to this research project is, what role do female adult

learners have in the history and growth in number of adult learners over the last three decades?

Female Adult Learners' Place in History

An examination of the history of adult education speaks positively to the notion that female adult learners have played a dominant role in the growth of adult education throughout its development (Lenz, 1980). Female adult learners continue to occupy a very prominent place within the adult learner history, yet it would appear that they are continually viewed by political and educational institutions as "marginal" to their male counterpart in adult education.

Commenting on the ambivalence with which females, as adult learners have been viewed, in the first half of the 20th century, Perun (1982) quotes Virginia Wolf:

The procession of the sons of educated men; there they go, our brothers who have been educated at public schools and universities, mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, ascending the pulpit, preaching, teaching, administering justice, practicing medicine, transacting business, making money. But now for the past twenty years or so, traipsing along at the tail end of the procession, we go ourselves (p. 3).

It would appear that, progressively, female adult learners continue to out-number male adult learners in colleges and universities all over the world (Apps, 1981; The Bureau of Census, 1980; Cross, 1981; Dagg & Thompson, 1988, and Perun, 1982).

The Bahamian society reflects a similar phenomenon. The statistics show that more than 78 percent of the student population at the College of the Bahamas is female and more than 90 percent of adults in continuing education classes are also women.

This female dominance is reflected in the work force, particularly in government and private corporations, however, the women are not at the 'top'.

Even in institutions like the Bahamas Hotel Training College and Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute, which were previously dominated by men, women are the dominant student population (The College of the Bahamas Handbook, 1996).

It is true that many female adult learners return to the classroom for leisure and social interaction (Lenz, 1980), however, for the majority of women it was absolutely essential for their professional and economic survival. Markus (1976) observed that difficult financial times are a major factor precipitating a return of women to the classroom. Employment is the second reason.

It would appear, however, that even when female adult learners complete college and university levels of education, at equivalent colleges to those attended by men, their employment chances and salaries are still inferior. One may ask the question, "to what extent were Virginia Wolf's words a self-fulfilling prophecy"? That females would still be "traipsing along at the tail end of the procession" of male adult learners after three decades of history, is difficult to comprehend.

It becomes very clear that women in the Bahamas share a similarity with women in industrialized lands like Canada and the United States. Pence's (1987) study (as cited in Stewin and McCann 1993) addressed the question from a feminist perspective. They posited that women are disadvantaged in the Canadian society. Women continuously receive less than men for doing the same job, and with the same qualification. Also, commenting on the lack of equity that exists between educated females and their male counterparts, Featherman (1980) stated "Women apparently must rely more heavily on formal credentials for access to jobs. It is probable that educational credentials retain

their importance across the working lives of women; men use credentials for initial entry and then experience becomes more prominent" (p. 710).

Perun (1982) explored the notion of "separation but equality" in education for mature adults. In the mid 1990s figures showed variability between men and women; women were in humanities and education while men were in science, politics, economics and professional training of various kinds. In 1970, women with Bachelor of Arts degrees were represented as follows: 99% Economics, 93% Nursing, Therapy and Dental hygiene, 92% Library Science, and 79% Social Work, Language and Literature. The separation becomes even more obvious as they are reflected in the following figures: 1% Chemical and Material Engineering, 3% Agriculture, 5% Science, 6% Law, and 7% Physics.

Perun (1982) concluded that while the historic gap between men and women attending college has steadily narrowed and in some instances, disappeared substantially, women continue to trail men in their choices of college courses and in their rate of full-time and part-time enrollment in 2 year and 4 year institutions. In the Bahamian context it is true that women have a great impact on the system, socially, economically, and educationally. This could not be otherwise, since 65% of Bahamian households are headed by women, and are also single parents.

Stewin and McCann (1993) observed that a similar situation exist in the Canadian context. They show that there are few aspects of the Canadian society that have not been affected by women's and, in particular, mothers' changing roles. "Indeed, many see the increase in the number of women in the labor force as the most significant social revolution in the post-world war II period" (p. 137).

Women in Canada working full-time earn about 60% of men's salaries. Education is often seen as "a women's field." School personnel and teachers are

women, but top positions in the education hierarchy, are overwhelmingly held by men. Apps (1981) stated that there are certain economic realities: women are paid 60% of men's salaries therefore women need to have better education.

Women and men seem not to work in the same jobs. Women work as secretaries, nurses, in particular segments of sales and service sectors, while the men are predominantly in managerial jobs, doctors, lawyers, electronics, some sector of manufacturing and sales. Women are still seen as primarily responsible for work in domestic settings. Gender is implicated in the organization of work in the Canadian society and it is implicated in how education is organized (Stewen & McCann, 1993).

The Victorian ideology of separate spheres for men and women continues to be evident today, not only in the lack of equity between men and women in their career choice, employment options and salary scales, but particularly in society's view of women's role. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) observed that an equal role for women in the organization of society has never been the norm. Women's role was viewed as "private and domestic". They postulated that two spheres govern the Canadian culture - private and public and which do not carry equal responsibility for the creative molding of the society. They pointed out that a two-tier system of responsibilities and salaries existed, higher for men, lower for women. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) indicate that this two-tier system operates across professional lines.

Solomon (1985) commented on the "female paradox" and the "double-edged ideal" of the educated female. Advanced education led many women to develop increasing independence of spirit and some financial independence for those who were not married. A perception of personal individualism emerged for them. Solomon (1985) stated:

Individualism in old and new forms pressed the educated women to be independent in seeking her own moral course. Independence was a double-edged ideal: while a young man was applauded, a young woman at best received an ambivalent approval from family and society in her struggle to strike out on her own (p. 30).

Fass' (1989) comment on "the female paradox" as it relates to the domestic roles that educated females must assume, is reminiscent of the Bahamian culture. Like the industrialized society, more Bahamian women are educated, but they are part of a society that ascribes female roles to the family. Educated women are therefore experiencing dissonance between their studies and work. Dagg and Thompson (1988) emphasized the social disparity that impacts the female adult learner's involvement in full-time, undergraduate studies. Women are more likely than men to have obligations such as children, domestic work, and work in the labor force while they are in attendance at University.

Lopez (1995) concluded that women face glass walls as well as glass ceilings. Often this is expressed in the male oriented curriculum that often denies the female experience. Commenting in a similar vein, Stewin and McCann (1993) stated:

We continue to design our curriculum as if women were some special small investigation group with strange and unusual ways of thinking; as if women are different from the norm rather than having a quite legitimate numerical claim to being the bench-mark for that norm (p. 295).

Why is knowledge about women's experiences and behavior still treated as peripheral after so long a history? Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that there are too few women in academia, especially at the top where decisions are made (Cass, Dawson, Temple, Willis, & Winkler 1983). Perun (1982) similarly showed that with a

lack of strong female role models and the absence of female academic mentoring systems at the top, the aspirations and opinions of women undergraduates will remain unnecessarily limited.

Funding for college and university education is perhaps the most devastating obstacle encountered by the female adult learner. It has been established that society assigns lower salaries, and greater parental responsibility to female adults as compared to male adults. Dagg and Thompson (1988) found that women had a harder time finding well-paid summer jobs, and an even harder time finding well-paid jobs once they graduate. Women suffered more from the burden of debts than their male counterpart. It was also found that women are less eligible for bursaries, fellowships, and scholarships than their male counterparts.

Dagg and Thompson also stated that Dalhousie University in Canada has 6,700 full-time students, with half being women. Less than 1% of the budget went toward continuing education in which there are 1,800 part-time students, two-thirds being women. They further stated that the director for the Center for Continuing Studies states that there is a resistance within the university community against women students; "Some will still say you shouldn't educate women because she'll only get pregnant or married" (Dagg & Thompson, 1988, p. 6).

Dagg and Thompson (1988) addressed the pervasive attitude that dominates colleges and universities which impact negatively on the comfort of the female learner saying:

What we have at present is a man-centered university, a breeding-ground, not of humanism, but the masculine privilege. As women have gradually and reluctantly been admitted into the mainstream of higher education, they have

been made participants in a system that prepares men to take up roles of power in a man-centered society (p. 1).

Commenting on the impact that this male-centered environment might have on women, Dudovitz (1984) stated that stress and anger are inevitable responses on the part of women entering the men's sanctuary of the university. Dudovitz postulated that stress will be aggravated by the female's failure to recognize that the university has been, "from its beginnings a patriarchal institution and is committed to remaining so" (p. 135).

How do female adult learners balance societal and organizational forces against their own needs for economic survival? Dagg and Thompson (1988) state that "women more than men, suffer from stress, especially in their first year. They worry about their academic performance, their interaction or lack of it, financial situation, about how their studies affect their spouses, partners or children" (p. 13). Studies have also shown that there are many legitimate concerns which impact on the female learners lives (Apps, 1981; Knowles, 1980; Perun, 1982 and Wlodkowski, 1993).

It is felt that adult learners have fears that may be rooted in the characteristic differences between the traditional learner and the adult learner. The young trustingly look to the teacher for direction and information. On the other hand, the female adult learner, until now, has "called the shots", made the rules for her family, chosen friends, and to a large extent, defined job position and level of personal comfort on the job (Knowles, 1980; Wlodkowski, 1993).

It is not by accident that learners come into the learning environment with feelings of inadequacy. Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs (1977) described a "dispositional barrier" where adult learners express fears of being too old to begin new learning activities, or that their poor academic background will not allow them to perform in a

formal learning situation. Many educators trained in Piaget's (1973) school of thought where intelligence is believed to develop only until late adolescence, have subtly and sometimes, directly encouraged negative feelings.

Though Piaget's (1973) theory has been modified to include adult stages of cognitive development, cultural stereotyping of adult learners' intelligence still persists. Lenz (1980) showed that, educators were not always subtle about the negative messages that they send out to adult learners. She stated that prior to the Second World War, the attitude of many educators to adult learners was one of tolerance and patronization. Adult learners were perceived mostly as underprivileged, with remedial needs, being taught to "catch up to the average".

There have obviously been many advances in the training of adult educators during the last two decades; however, there is still much that needs to be done in recognition of the unique characteristics and learning styles of adult learners. Adult learners are different from the traditional learners (Apps, 1981; Johnson, 1980; Kidd, 1981 and Knowles, 1983). Knox (1977) identified two types of intelligence at work, fluid intelligence of youth and crystallized intelligence of the adult. Knox stated:

During adulthood, as fluid intelligence decreases, and as crystallized intelligence increases, general learning ability remains relatively stable. But, the older person tends to increasingly compensate for the loss of fluid intelligence by greater reliance on crystallized intelligence; to substitute wisdom for brilliance (p. 42).

Apps (1981) concurred with Knox's (1977) findings about adult intelligence. He postulated that negative conclusions have been drawn from observations and comparisons of timed examination performances by adults and traditional learners. In timed exams Apps (1981) explained that the traditional learner is faster. He observed,

“young learners place a great deal of value on doing things quickly” (p. 40). Apps further showed that many formal educational establishments place considerable emphasis on speed of performance and recall of factual information, often resulting in a compromise of accuracy for speed. The returning adult student on the other hand, comes from a work setting, where speed over accuracy is often inappropriate. Therefore, adults want to take time on exams to make correct responses.

Educators therefore have a serious responsibility to accommodate the large adult learner population that will continue to flock to the traditional classroom. Perry (1994) recommended training for adult instructors in areas of curriculum design, questioning techniques, teaching, and training methods.

Smith (1982) addressed the diversity of adult learner population and recommended that institutes develop programs which are responsive to the individual background and needs of the growing college audience. Wlodkowski (1993) addressed the inter-relatedness of curriculum planners and adult instructors to successful outcome of adult learning experiences. He emphasized that attitudes are learned and changed through experience. Therefore, adult instructors should be open-minded and flexible in their approach to adult learning. Wlodkowski (1993) also postulated that positive results are linked to instruction and friendliness. He showed that when adults learn anything, under any circumstances, their emotions are involved.

The implication of all this speaks to a greater degree of accountability on the part of adult instructors and organizers of adult education. It will require retraining of adult faculty in specific skills and attitudes. Knowles (1980) insisted that the focus must be shifted from teaching to learning. He stressed that greater emphasis should be placed on what happens inside the learner rather than what a teacher does. Education must

be seen as a process of facilitating self-directed learning and redefinition of the role of the teacher as facilitator of and resource to self-directed learning.

Emphasizing that the adult is a different kind of learner than the traditional learner, and that instructors of adults must operate within the new understanding, Knowles (1980) stated that, "good educators don't just happen, they learn the necessary principles and skills to become good" (Knowles, 1980, p. 37). Finally, commenting on the changed roles of adult educators, Knowles (1980) stated:

These are entirely new roles, requiring entirely different skills, knowledge, attitudes and values from those of the traditional educators. The new mission is to develop a total environment conducive to human growth and self-actualization (p. 38).

Apps (1981) compared the return of adult learners to college and university campuses to the violent demonstrations that took place in the United States of America in the 1960s. He was drawing attention to the large number of adults who would return to the classroom. He referred to the millions of adults who have attended college for one year or more and then dropped out or who may have received a baccalaureate degree but find the need for additional education, and to adults who may never have attended college.

Just as the demonstrators of the 1960s agitated for political and social change and reform, so the huge influx of adult learners into the traditional classroom will call for political and educational reform by those who deliver services to the adult learner (Johnson, 1982; Knowles, 1980).

My review of the related literature indicated that adult learners are returning to the traditional classroom in greater numbers each year. However, one must surely question where female adult learners and their experiences fit into this evolving mosaic

of adult learners. Why are they returning? What sort of experiences and problems are they encountering as they return to the classroom? How do their relationships with their family change as a consequence of being in school? And what sorts of changing feelings do they have about themselves as a consequence of their on-going school experiences?

Perun (1982) pointed out that while there have been many studies that focused on female adult learners at the graduate level and in administration, very little attention was paid by researchers, educators or policy analysts to adult learners enrolled in post-secondary education and undergraduate studies. She concluded:

It is very clear that undergraduate education of women merits some long overdue attention in light of the increased propensity of women to obtain baccalaureate degrees and their increased presence on the college campus" (p. 5)..

As an educator with responsibility for adult learners, mostly women, I concur with Perun wholeheartedly. It is time that focus be directed to the ever-growing population of female adult learners who are entering our classrooms. It is with these thoughts uppermost in mind that this research project was conducted.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

My personal and professional experience led me to conclude that an appropriate research format for my topic should be qualitative. I was convinced that the qualitative format would fit my study because, by its very nature, the qualitative format seeks to make sense of personal stories (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I was keenly interested in the "women's intuitive way of knowing" (Van Manen, 1990). This would call for careful listening in an intuitive way so that I was hearing and making sense of my participants' stories. I believe that it was only by allowing them to tell me, the researcher, their feelings and their individual lived experiences that I could hope to represent them in a meaningful way in this text.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) emphasized this need for the researcher to take into account the individualized stories, stating that:

The people, who come to see us, bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. We have to remember that what we hear are their stories. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear are their story (p. 1).

Many designs, for example, ethnography, case study, educational criticism and others, fall under the umbrella of the qualitative research format. However, within the qualitative frame of inquiry, I believed the interview provided a best fit.

Denzin (1989) referred to that which attempts to make the world of 'lived experiences' accessible to the reader, and which focuses on those life experiences that radically alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves and their life

prospects. Van Manen (1990) further showed that these lived experiences must be reflected upon and recollected. He stated that a person cannot reflect on lived experiences while living through the experience.

Reflection on lived experiences is always reflective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through. As an adult learner and researcher, I am convinced that my participants have lived experiences which, over time, have been suppressed or forgotten. Perhaps their stories are just waiting to find expression. I was interested in their personal reconstruction of lived experiences, particularly as these stories relate to their classroom experiences.

Denzin (1989) stated that thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact, and surface appearance. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the web of social relationships that joins one person to the other. Geertz (1973) also addressed the need for thick description, stating "man [sic] is an essential animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). As the researcher, I hoped to discover the nature of my participants' experiences through the use of thick descriptions (Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I was keenly aware that time was of the essence and that if the wealth of knowledge is to be gained from the participants, a systematic approach to soliciting this knowledge must be in place. I decided to interview a small participant population. Patton (1990) stated that an abundance of in-depth information and increased understanding of the topic could be explored through interview of a small population.

Through a series of open-ended questions, two interviews were conducted with each of three female participants to gain insight into their life experiences as female adult learners. They told their stories, haltingly at first, but eventually, they became very absorbed and effusive in recreating their experiences.

The literature review has undoubtedly provided much theoretical knowledge, which has immeasurably informed this study. However, in light of the very dated research material available, it was apparent that new investigation was necessary at this time.

Recruitment of Participants

While it is very clear what the basic characteristics of the participants would be, it was paramount that only the best informants be included in the sample. Morse (1991) clearly identified two necessary qualities of a good informant, stating that "as well as being someone who has undergone or is undergoing the experience, a good informant is one who is able to reflect and provide detailed information about the phenomenon" (Morse, 1991, p. 32). With this in mind therefore, I directed the college official with whom I would be working, to provide a list of students who had been involved in a program for at least one year or more. I was convinced that this time period was necessary for the informants to have gained a wide range of classroom experiences.

The female participants were selected according to their ability to add knowledge to the topic (Morse, 1991). Therefore, I proposed selection criteria which must be met by female participants:

1. She must be 25 years or older.
2. She could have a spouse/mate, but must have dependent children.
3. She must be actively engaged in full-time or part-time formal studies.
4. She must be employed outside the home on a full-time or part-time basis.

The participants were solicited and requested to volunteer. Morse (1991) states that a volunteer sample is one in which "the potential informants may not be known to the

researcher or to each other. The researcher must rely on the potential participants identifying themselves" (p. 131). The participants were recruited through a senior lecturer who was also a recent chairperson for the Business Division of the College of the Bahamas. As the former department chairperson, the lecturer would be familiar with either the participants themselves or know those lecturers who had this information.

Selection of Participants

Consistent with Morse's (1991) definition of appropriateness, I evaluated the participants according to the degree to which they fit the purpose of this study, and the extent to which the participants could contribute to the understanding of the research problem. Perhaps, a greater degree of appropriateness would have been achieved had the participants been selected from similar tertiary institutions in the Bahamas. As it was, the participants were all students of the College of the Bahamas and as such, their related experiences could not be represented in any comparative way.

I had no previous experience with the participants. And, as part-time students, they would not be expected to know me or details about my position as Provost at the Freeport campus. The Freeport campus is located on one of the family islands that make up the Bahamas, and is attended by Freeport students whose majors could be completed at that campus. The participants expressed some initial concerns about my knowledge of their student record. However, I was able to convince them that the college held student records in the strictest confidence.

As the researcher I was concerned that my position as an administrator of the college might seriously compromise the participants' trustworthiness. I was influenced by Morse (1991) who commented that "social desirability" occurs when, "research

subjects respond with what they believe is the preferred social response whether or not it is true" (p. 168). I am convinced, however, that the participants were honest in their standard expressions and their feelings. Many of the comments made were not complementary of the college. The participants revealed personal stories that they would ordinarily not relate. I was convinced by their candor and frankness of expression. I was further convinced, because the responses met the test proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) "Does the account 'ring true', make sense, seem convincing or plausible?" (p. 278).

My initial contact with the college regarding the research project was by telephone. I expressed the desire to meet with college personnel as soon as possible to provide additional background information on the project being undertaken and to provide a written summary of my thesis proposal to ensure the prospective participants were suitable. The summary included the purpose and rationale of the study, the nature and extent of participants' involvement in the study and a copy of the interview guide.

The college was on summer break so students could not be contacted directly by lecturers. A list of 62 business students was provided to me. The problem, however, was that without birth dates, there was no way of determining who met the age criterion for the research project. The Assistant Director of Student Affairs accessed the computer files and provided the names of female students 25 years and older. This added information eliminated the majority of persons on the list.

I initiated any further contact with the participants. I contacted each of the 16 possible participants by telephone, providing a brief summary of the research project and solicited their assistance. I also obtained permission to send letters to each student, outlining the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and the

selection criteria. A copy of the consent form was enclosed for signature as well as a stamped return envelope. The students were also reminded of their right to refuse to participate and to withdraw from the study at any time. Five students met the criteria, however, because of pre-arranged family vacation and pressing job responsibility the fifth student declined. The fourth participant declined after she missed her first two appointments. This was regrettable since she was the only single parent of the group and I felt that her participation would have added a different perspective to the study. It is noteworthy that the participants contacted me by phone first to confirm their willingness to participate in research project. Written responses followed.

Site Selection

In selecting my site, I was influenced by Lancy (1993) who stated "one chooses the site(s) that will yield the maximum information regarding the topic/issue being investigated" (p. 16). I selected my participants from among female Adult Learners who were currently attending the College of the Bahamas, and, who were engaged in studies at the Associate and the Bachelor degree level.

Over the years, a large proportion of adult learners have returned to engage in studies through the Business Division of the College of the Bahamas. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the fact that many employers are encouraging employees to return to the classroom to participate in formal learning. The Bahamas is also a banking center (tax-free); therefore there is a great need for trained personnel in specific areas of Banking and Finance, and Accounting - courses that are offered through the Business Division of the College of the Bahamas.

I did not elect to interview female participants at the Freeport campus of the College of the Bahamas, although it would have been eminently simpler. Glesne &

Peshkin (1992) suggested that the nature of the investigation may be compromised in the researcher's "backyard" or institution. As the Provost of the Freeport campus, and given the insularity of the island, it is reasonable that some level of compromise was inevitable. This became apparent after I administered the pilot test.

Interview Process

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, interviewing was selected exclusively above other data collection methods as it was felt that interviewing was more ideally suited to this study. My decision was informed by Gordon, (1987), Patton (1990) and Bogden and Biklen (1992). Gordon (1987) maintained that interviewing allows for an exploration of new avenues and clarification of ideas already expressed. Patton (1990) regarded the interview as an opportunity for the researcher "to enter the other person's perspective" (p. 278). Bogden and Biklen (1992) posited that the interview is ideally suited to gathering "descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how the subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p. 96).

I conducted two semi-structured interviews of approximately 70 minutes in length with each participant. The interview followed a prepared outline of topics to be explored during the interview (Appendix A). Although the same topics were explored with each participant, the wording and sequencing varied across interviews depending on the responses.

It was felt that an interview guide was a necessary tool in obtaining a balance between being flexible and consistent in the data collection. Morse (1991) states that "an important challenge in qualitative research interviewing is maintaining enough flexibility to elicit individual stories which are likely to vary a great deal, while gathering

information with enough consistency to allow for comparison between and among subjects” (p. 192).

The interview focused on six topic areas: (a) variables that influence the decision to return to the classroom; (b) personal feelings about being a mature female student; (c) classroom experiences; (d) classroom comfort; (e) spousal acceptance of return to the classroom; and (f) adjustment as parent and employee. Greater emphasis was placed on topics a, c and f since the emphasis of the study was on, why Female Adult Learners return to the classroom and why a select group of Bahamian Female Adult Learners return to the classroom and how their return impacted on their personal and professional lives.

My personal experience as a mature female student referred to in Chapter 1 and at present, my work experience with adult learners, coupled with a review of the literature, led me to develop my interview questions based on the following assumptions:

1. The female adult learners experience both positive and negative feelings as they returned to the classroom.
2. These feelings are not necessarily related to the level of academic and/or professional training in which the adult learners are involved.
3. Female adult learners are returning to the classroom because of overt or covert pressures at the workplace.
4. Many female adult learners are returning to the classroom for academic upgrading and/or professional training for job security, promotion, and/or salary increase.
5. The educational system is not providing the comfortable learning environment for female adults’ return to the classroom.

Pilot Study

A pilot interview was conducted prior to the interview process to determine effectiveness of the interview questions, format, and interviewer's style (Giesne & Peshkin, 1992). A pilot was done with a member of the Freeport campus office staff, who is also a student in the business program. Having completed the pilot, I was convinced that the respondent provided "socially desirable" responses (Morse, 1991, p. 168). However, I determined that my original questions formed a good guide for my interviews. I also gained a greater measure of confidence, and my role in the interview process then appeared less intimidating. The pilot interview was tape recorded, but it was inadvertently destroyed. Therefore, my research supervisor was not able to review and comment on the effectiveness or lack thereof, prior to the administration of the interviews. Time constraints did not allow for a second pilot study.

The interviews were conducted in a boardroom at The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce office, Nassau. This location was ideally suited for three of the participants. Participant I was interviewed during lunch breaks, as her place of work was a relatively short distance from the interview site. Participants II and III had to travel from work past The Chamber office. The fourth participant lived in the same general area as I did, and she worked at a bank that was located many miles from town. I arranged for her interviews to be conducted at my place of residence. She felt that her children would be a source of distraction if the interviews were conducted at her house.

Considerations

I undertook this study aware that my professional and personal experiences could pose some threat to the reliability and accuracy of the data collection and analysis. I worked with adult learners for the past six years; additionally, I am an adult learner,

so it is natural that I came into this research project with certain biases, opinions and questions. These are alluded to, earlier in my assumptions. Bogden and Biklen (1992) stated that the researcher is never altogether objective and neutral; that one can only limit bias; not eliminate it. Cognizant of this fact, I made every effort to limit possible bias through the use of tape-recorder. This is consistent with Morse (1991) who stated that "the tape-recorded interviews provide a complete, accurate transcript of subject responses, and thus increase data reliability by preventing selective filtering of data to investigator recall or summarization" (p. 217).

Data Analysis

I experienced some technical difficulties with the tape recordings therefore the transcriptions were done by me, not by professional stenographers as I intended. This was a tedious process, which took about four weeks to complete. I solicited the aid of a professional studio person who was able to delete a significant amount of background noises, which had not been apparent during the interview sessions. The transcriptions were saved on computer discs and hard copies were generated for each interview.

Each participant was allowed to review a copy of her interview. Interview copies were also presented to the thesis supervisor for examination. The participants provided feedback that the transcripts were accurate and complete. Morse (1991) described this practice as a process of confirming. It increases phenomenological validity of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The process of coding began. I read through the transcripts many times while reviewing the questions asked. The major codes were then created from the list of coding categories. The material was further broken down for analysis, thus creating sub-codes. Abbreviations were assigned to major codes and sub-codes, which most

closely matched each concept (Appendix B). Influenced by Miles and Huberman (1994), who advised that names should be assigned to a code that is closest to the concept it is describing (p. 58), I decided to develop a set of codes. I found that it was necessary to read each sentence of the transcript and assign each unit an appropriate code.

Guba (1978) and Patton (1990) outlined two rules for judging whether my coding met the test for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Patton (1990) particularly points out that "the first criterion concerns the extent to which the data belongs in a certain category hold together or dovetail in a meaningful way. The second concerns the extent to which difference among categories are bold and clear" (p. 403).

I reviewed my coding process in the light of these rules and found that my coding did not meet the criteria. I was further convinced after reviewing Guba's (1978) comments that "the existence of a large unassignable or overlapping data is good evidence of some basic fault in the coding system" (p. 53). After reviewing the facts, I was able to make adjustments in my coding.

I began searching the data for emerging themes. I searched each code for key words or phrases then I examined each list (participant's list) for the patterns and themes. Four themes emerged from the data and formed the basis of the next section, Chapter IV. Excerpts from the transcripts will be used to illustrate the evolution of themes.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction to Findings

The interview transcripts were analyzed, and four themes emerged. Three of the four themes were related to how a return to the classroom impacted upon the female adult learners' personal lives. The fourth theme was directly related to the impact their return to the classroom had on their professional lives.

The most dominant theme that developed was the importance of recognizing the female adult learner, not just as an older student, but as a multifaceted, self-directed adult. All three participants strongly expressed a desire for recognition as persons who returned to the classroom, having managed, quite successfully, their personal and professional lives.

A second theme that emerged was the need for recognition as qualified, competent personnel in the workplace. A third theme that emerged was the need for female adult learners to be accepted as viable members of educational institutions. The fourth theme that emerged was the need for sensitivity and respect, and support, especially by classroom instructors for female adult learners.

The four themes are presented and illustrated with verbatim passages from the interview transcripts of the participants, however, a description of each participant will precede the thematic presentation. I shall provide alphabetized fictitious names for my participants so as to facilitate ease of reading and yet maintain confidentiality.

Description of Participants

The following information was gleaned from Anna, Beth and Carla, from their interviews.

Anna

Anna has been a mature student at the College of the Bahamas since 1989. She is a part-time student, completing an Associate of Arts Degree in Banking and a Diploma in Banking (ABIB) simultaneously. She is employed full-time as a secretary to the Economic Adviser of a major bank, where she has worked for eight and a half years. Anna described her job responsibilities as "very challenging".

Anna has wide work experience, having worked as a sales person at a candy store, a photography store, a real estate company and a car dealership, prior to her current position with the bank. She is married (10 years), and is mother to a five-year old daughter who is in Kindergarten. Though Anna's returned to school could be attributed to her need for financial security and job promotion, she also felt that going back to school would provide a sense of personal enrichment and a sense of self-worth. This is evident in her expression that it "gives you a feeling- -a spirit of self-worth- -also broadens your horizon. It expands your network of meeting people". She states that "I wanted to improve my present standing- -just didn't want to say, well, I've worked at a particular job for a certain amount of years, with no academic qualification whatever, to fall back on".

Anna's husband is a policeman. He participated in some courses at the College of the Bahamas, but he does not appear to have completed a college degree. Anna explained that when she applied for entry into the college, she put in an application for her husband at the same time. Commenting on the irony of the situation, Anna stated: "the thing about it is that he got accepted and I didn't. He was a mature adult, over 25

years old and I wasn't an adult learner". Anna explained that because she was only 23 years old at the time and did not have the prerequisites to enter a degree program, she had to wait two years to qualify as a mature adult. She then had to upgrade through Continuing Education and Extension Services Division (CEES) to be eligible to begin a degree program.

Beth

Beth is 37 years old. She is a wife, and a mother of three children - a 13 year-old daughter, two sons, nine and five years old respectively. Her husband is a pilot with a national airline.

She is a mature student at the College of the Bahamas, pursuing an Associate of Arts Degree in Computer Data Processing. She started the program in 1992 and hoped to graduate December of 1997. She is a clerk at a government corporation where she has been employed on a full-time basis for the past 16 years. She worked as a sales clerk at a ladies clothing store before coming to her present place of employment.

Beth was given encouragement by a supervisor to return to school. She explained that she had a boss who always wanted you to, "go back to school, go back to school, go back to school". But, Beth also felt that getting a degree improved her chances of obtaining another job elsewhere, or getting a salary increase.

Beth stated that she always intended to further her education beyond high school but she chose to have a family instead. She also attended a prestigious private high school, but did not complete the academic requisites. Her ambivalence about pursuing advanced degrees is reflected in her expression, "I really wanted to go as far as a Master's, but I think I got a little bit discouraged doing the Associate [laughs]. I'm like, "don't want to go to the BA- -I'm not sure I want to take up the BA".

Carla

Carla is a 31-year old woman who has been married for 10 years and is the mother of three children - two girls and one boy whose ages range from seven years, to one year. Her husband did not attend the College of the Bahamas, but he attended a Technical and Vocational Institute and is a professional plumber.

She is employed at a large trust bank as a Trust Officer. She has been employed for nine years. Her other work experience includes, a filing clerk at a local bank, and a general clerk with B signature status at another offshore bank. She has been in attendance at the College of the Bahamas since 1983, has completed an Associate degree in Banking, and graduated in the summer 1997, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Banking and Finance.

Carla also attended an exclusive Anglican high school (private). Unlike the other participants in this study she completed the requisites for direct entry into the College of the Bahamas. She explained that her plans to attend a university abroad were frustrated at the last minute when her father decided not to finance her university education. However, she was determined and resumed her academic studies as a part-time student in 1983. Perhaps Carla's decision to enter college almost immediately, and to pursue her studies at the Bachelor's level stems from the fact that her father and mother were both educators.

Carla's return to the classroom in 1983 presented some unique challenges for her. She explained that her experiences as a traditional student were not essentially different from those experienced when she was a mature female adult learner. In fact, she related that although she was the same age as many of the full-time students, she was treated differently by these students. She compared her younger sister's experience as a full-time college student to her own stating that:

fortunately for her [sister], she went full-time. So full-time, I found, was different from part-time life, in that she [sister] would leave home- -OK, she'd catch the bus, but, because you're always there on campus, its easier, somehow, to catch a ride because your times are flexible.

Carla explained that the full-time students "hang out together. They would never accept you into group because they saw you as older, more matured. Even though you were the same age, they were like, you should know this because you are working". Her comments seemed to indicate that chronological age was not, necessarily the determining factor for how one was treated by younger students, but whether one was employed and attend college as a part-time student. As a student having experienced both worlds (tradition and non-traditional student) Carla was certainly able to make a fair assessment of her experiences as a mature female student.

The three participants appeared to share some similarities: they were married and had dependent children. Each of their husbands worked unusual shifts, Anna's as a policeman, Beth's as a pilot, and Carla's as a professional plumber. While none of the husbands appeared to have a university degree each of the husbands was involved to some degree with his wifes' education. However, each of the husbands worked unusual shifts, thus compounding the difficulties of these female students.

By all accounts the three participants appeared to enjoy a comfortable life-style. While Beth and Carla had some concerns about finances, it was Anna who expressed greatest concerns about the need to be independently able to support her child and herself, whether it was a result of job promotion, or salary increase. Her comments indicated that she anticipated a failure of her spouse to provide adequately in a financial way, for the family. Her concerns are reflected in the following:

It's very strenuous for one person with mortgages, etc. The men will take the money and give it to sweethearts and leave the children starving, you know...So this is why you find a lot of women are going back to the classroom. If she has to leave, or if he has to leave, she wouldn't be left homeless.

If was not the intention of the researcher to interview women from any particular segment of the Bahamian society. Each of the women in this study met the criteria set out by the researcher and responded voluntarily. It is possible that potential participants might have been misled by criterion two which stated that the participants could be married, but must have dependent children. However, the fourth volunteer was not married. It was most unfortunate that she could not continue with the research project.

Presentation of Themes

Theme 1: Recognition as Multi-fascited and Self-directed Adult.

An analysis of the transcripts revealed that these female adult learners wanted to be recognized as responsible adults who are not only students, but persons who operate at many levels, all of which impacted their personal and professional lives. For each of them, adjustments had to be made with family and work. One participant described it this way: "there was a need to juggle roles so as to maintain a sense of balance". Those roles that appeared to have the greatest impact were those directly related to being the primary child-care provider, family organizer/housekeeper, and wife. Anna, Beth and Carla also identified some of the conflicts that inevitably accrued because of their return to the classroom. Female conflicts also operated very powerfully on these female adult learners' lives.

Evidence in support of female roles and conflicts will be presented through the following passages taken from the interview transcripts. The excerpts will be presented in two categories: female adult roles, and female adult conflicts.

Female Adult Roles

This category will be presented in three sub-categories: primary child-care providers, family organizer/housekeeper, and wife. Through the presentations it will become apparent that Anna and Carla were affected to a greater degree by their diverse family responsibilities than was Beth.

Primary child-care providers

Anna was asked to comment on the adjustments that she had to make as a parent.

Oh! It's horrible. Going back to school, it's very strenuous. You have to get up in the morning at five- -get the baby dressed, drop her to school then you go to work. At 2:30, you have to pick her up from school, find a baby-sitter and then be to class for 4:00. You have 4-6; 6-8 classes, and some classes you have until 10:00. Then you go home and, if she hasn't eaten, you have to feed and bathe her, then put her to bed. My daughter had a habit that no matter what time I came home, she's up and I come, and we talk, and I check to see what she was doing, that she is well- -and then she goes to bed. That is an adjustment I had to make.

She commented further that she felt she was the one to bear the brunt of the financial responsibility as child-care provider.

I find in my situation, very often, if I ask my husband for money and he says he doesn't have it- -sometimes I have to shop for groceries, and sometimes I need

gas or I have to take her [daughter] to the doctor and he doesn't have it. And then, another thing, they have extra stuff that you don't know of and when you think they should have money, they don't have- -they say they don't.

Anna worried about the safety of her child and she went to great lengths to make sure that she was safe.

That's definitely a concern, that's why I try to leave her in places where I'm comfortable. OK, and, you know, with people who are very responsible. Not places where you wonder if she is in the street playing or she's dirty or she hasn't eaten or something like that. Sometimes, because you are going to school, you make a better salary, so you are able to "tip" the person that's keeping her, you know. That makes me feel more comfortable knowing that I don't just get any kind of service for her.

Beth expressed less concern about her role as primary child-care provider commenting, that her husband shared equally with the care of their three children.

And then, sometimes, if I can't make it, my husband- -he will go. So, yes, he's totally involved in lots of things, even the doctor. If they have to go to the doctor, he will take them.

As a consequence, she never worried about the safety of her children while she was at school.

No, I've never worried about my kids. They are always safe. I just don't sit worrying about what's happening. I try to get them involved in other stuff like gymnastics and football. They just want to go. Like today, they want to go on a picnic--as long as they can go on their picnic [laughs].

Beth was asked whether or not she will take them, and she replied that her husband was going to take them on the picnic.

Carla acknowledged the important role her husband played in the care of the children. However, it appeared that she remained the primary child-care provider throughout her classroom experience. She explained that as a parent she had to make many adjustments in order to attend classes.

OK, first of all as parent, I had to rearrange my whole schedule. I had, what I termed, two days in one day, three days, sorry. I had the workday, the school day, and then the parent day when I reached home, in a 24-hour day. As a parent what I found I had to do once I got home, as tired as I would be driving home, I would have to get there, and play "ring-play" with the girls. Because I had to sort of keep that dialogue between us, or they would be total strangers to me. I had to do it. No matter what time I got there. And that's when they would eat.

Carla stated that her children often intervened when they felt that she was neglecting them.

There were times when they would say to me, "mummy, time to go to bed." Yeah, they would actually come and say, "time to go to bed". Then you had some time when they would come and actually sit on the books you know, "time to go to bed. Close the book and put me to bed".

Carla described how her weekends were organized so that some quality time was spent with her children. On Saturdays she took the children to McDonalds or the other fast food centers while on Sundays, she saw that they attended church. She was emphatic when expressing her concern for her children's safety.

I could remember, Sam had a flu, and I could remember thinking, "I wonder if she got her medicine". Sometimes, during the break, I'll go to the phone, "Bill [husband], do you know whether Kate [helper] gave Delia her medicine? Are

you sure she did this? Now, when you bathe her, don't do this, don't wet her hair" or something to that effect. That was there, threat, that was ever present. There was no which way of getting around it.

Carla stated that communication with her children was a major concern. She was determined that it had to take priority over the classroom work, even when her spouse felt that perhaps she was being unreasonable.

I feel as though I had an obligation to my kids and I was going to do it, whatever it took. I wanted to be involved in their lives. I would be in the bathroom and they are all in there, you know. That time you need to take a bath and relax yourself, that don't work, you know. This is the time they have to discuss how their day went and I accommodated it. I could remember a time when Bill said to me, "Carla, how could you come home and listen? What are they talking? They can't understand you. And you are asking them what they did today". I said to him, "they may not be able to talk back to me in words, but at least we have a dialogue going here".

Family organizer/housekeeper

Anna admitted that she had to assume the role of primary family organizer and housekeeper.

I have to be all things everyone. It's tedious. But I think once you put a percentage rate to all of this, you determine what is most important; first, second and, third, and the rest. School should not come before the marriage or the children. You should be able to balance all these aspects of your life.

Beth contrasted her role as family organizer/housekeeper with that of the traditional, full-time student.

When I look at it, I have kids, I have a job, I have a husband. I have to work harder just studying, studying, whereas, they don't have anything to do. They sit under the tree and talk. But me, I have to go home and cook and take care of the kids and find time to study. You have to get up and cook early in the morning so that when you get home in the evening, there'll be something to eat.

Beth had more flexibility than Anna and Carla. However, she commented on one particular function that she felt obliged to attend.

I had to leave class early because they were having an Easter parade and he said his mummy had to be there and she had to bring a camera. So, I had to leave that class early, because he's like, "but everybody's mom is going to be there and I want my mom too. You have to bring your camera". It really mattered, I had to be there. It wasn't like he was going to do much in the play, but he wanted me to be there.

Carla explained how she "got around" her meal preparation for the family.

Well, you work around that. What you do--in the morning, you cook your rice, season your meat, you ask your husband to stick it in the baker or whatever, when he got home. Short of not getting up on time, you had to have everything in place such that--well, my husband, he'd help out with the cooking, and he sort of was able to just function in the kitchen. Other than that, it was "Carla, when you're coming home, stop by and pick up something to eat". And so you bought something to eat. And so you brought some take-out home. And that's how we got around that issue. Many times I would get up in the mornings when they [kids] were younger, take out some mashed potatoes and corn and I

would arrange...you know. The meat would be seasoned in the fridge and I would arrange it so that he [my husband] knew "OK, this is what to fix".

Carla also felt obligated to assume the role as family manager and housekeeper.

She alluded to a view that is commonly held by men in the Bahamian society.

My husband thinks that it is my job to cook and so it's my responsibility to have it done, right, cleaning of the home- -to make sure the house was clean. I had to say, "well, I'm not able to do this, this one body can't take it". So its either me stepping over the dirt as I see it or it means getting somebody in here, sacrificing that money to get somebody in here to assist with the keeping of the home [pause]. Definitely, it's still viewed as that.

She also commented that there were subtle social forces that often dictated the role of women in the society.

And people, when they hear you go back to school, you have three kids, they're like "who does keep the home? Who does keep your children?" Its almost like its my obligation...and my sole obligation, and forgetting I have a husband.

"Well, what do you mean? You just left your children with your husband?"

Anna explained that she wanted to be involved in the social life of her child. She served on school boards so as to be abreast of what was happening at her daughter's school. Carla, on the other hand, had to take vacation days to be able to attend school functions.

I had to take vacation days. I took vacation. It got to the point where I would take half-day vacation because I had to be there. I felt as though I had to make up that time when I could. Mind you, I did not attend all of them, but I attended the ones where I knew she [daughter] was participating or something. I try to make a point...field trips. If I knew about them in advance I was able to

get the time off. Whether it was half day, I took the time off. That's the only way I could get around it. It had to be where I took time off, and it had to be vacation.

Student as wife

All three participants agreed that being a mature female student invariably put stress on the family, and especially on their marital relationships.

Anna's comments, for example conveyed the feeling that her role as student and wife was one of self-sacrifice:

As a wife, you have to listen to your husband. You'd had to- -even if you're tired and you really don't feel like doing certain things [pause]- -you have to- -you know- -you have to fake and pretend that all is well. And [pause] and, many times the family is having a get-together and you really don't have the time to go out. You very rarely have time for yourself, very rarely. And so normally, I get pushed in the background.

She further highlighted the difficulties associated with being a wife and student.

There are so many things you have to do as a working adult. There are so many areas. You have to try to keep the balance, you know. And if its too much, if I'm involved in too many things, I slow up. That is when I find there are problems with my marriage. Because, I think, in going to school, and meeting new people, my husband- -I don't know- -I don't know if its jealousy or what. I don't know, but he feels as though...well, you're involved in many things. I often feel it's a level of jealousy. If I wasn't in school a lot of persons I would not have known.

Anna expressed frustration about the overlapping of the female adult learner's roles.

You are having problems on the job and sometimes you have a challenge and you have to distinguish between your job, the home and school. You can't take the problem of the job home and the same thing, you can't take your problems of home to the job and the same for school, you have so many areas in which to function; you have to pay your bills, you keep the family together.

Beth commented on how going back to the classroom impacted her role as wife. Well, everything was fine with going back, at first, and then my getting up and studying and homework. And he was like "when you are going to come to bed? or, "why you have to get up so early and study, and you have to read your book?" It's like he can't understand. Why can't he understand that I have an exam tomorrow? And I'm going to pass this exam? And, then he's like, "when books ain't in the bed, then the children in the bed". You know- -and I'm like [frustrated laugh] "Oh gee, here we go again!"

Carla explained that although her spouse was very supportive of her decision to pursue the Bachelor of Art degree, she experienced some uneasy moments. Going to school placed demands on herself, her kids and her marriage.

I think, me too, underestimated the demand on me, on my kids, on my marriage. Then there were times when, 4 o'clock, you're still studying and he is there, he's done get up, checked the house, sleep, get up again, you sitting up (laughs) you know. And sometimes at that point, you [laughs] just close your book, you know, to save peace and you go to bed. It's like that balance. And I think I sacrificed more time with him than I did with the kids. It was very difficult for him, and I, like I said, he underestimated it.

When asked about the times she had to pay attention to her husband, Anna laughed good-naturedly.

Well, we sort of slipped that in. But, he worked shifts. That's why I said we worked around the cooking side of it. But, he would work shifts sometimes. Sometimes when he got home, I would be up but he would be too tired to even talk. So it was like you caught up on your conversations and you passed along. And that's how I got around that. I don't know, I [long pause] I came though it I said "you mean, we're still married?"

Anna, Beth and Carla showed that in spite of the difficulties associated with assuming the primary responsibility for the family, the home and meeting their spousal obligations, they were able to be successful female students. As a female adult learner in the 1980s I could identify with the difficulty of juggling of roles so as to maintain a balance in one's life. It calls for creativity in planning, self-sacrifice and the ability to determine what is important. Anna described this process as "prioritizing". All three participants did just that.

Now as a full-time graduate student, I am able to understand the severe imitations placed on the working female mother and wife who must face the pressure to perform well on the job, in the home, and in the classroom. It is understandable that Anna, Beth and Carla would experience a range of conflicts.

Female Adult Conflicts

All three participants experienced a range of conflicts that they perceived as directly related to their status as female adult learners; the most notable were conflicts with classroom instructors. They also identified conflicts with employers/supervisors. Though operating less significantly, traditional students were cause for concern for these female adult learners.

Conflict with classroom instructors

Anna, Beth and Carla revealed that their conflicts with instructors were related to what they perceived as the instructors' insensitivity to them as female adult students.

Anna described an experience she had with a classroom instructor that angered her.

The lecturer just needs to know the person. You just can't talk to an adult like you talk to a 16 year-old. You know- -you say, "oh, get from me", or something like that. You just can't deal with that- -this scene.

I asked her what she felt should be done about the problem and she responded: It needs to be looked at. And the lecturers who are teaching the course for the older people need to be looked at because you have some students not wanting to finish their degree, after they have gotten to a certain point, because they have to deal with a certain lecturer. They prefer not to finish the degree, and that shouldn't be. And then you have some lecturers, if there is a personality conflict, you will never pass that class. So there is certainly a problem. So when you're talking about going to school because you want to go to school, - you don't want to go to school to have to come up with personality conflicts with a lecturer. And you've worked hard in class, and at the end of the day, you still get a "D" or "C". This shouldn't be.

She felt strongly that the lecturer's attitude contributed to the problem.

It is a - -it is a problem. Some of the lecturers, they've been teaching for years and its hard to- -I mean, you're just a student. They look at you as just a student not realizing that you contribute- -you pay their salary, you know. You work to pay their salary. But they look at you as though, "OK, I have something..." Some even go to that extent and say, "I have something that you

want”, meaning the degree, and so, because they’d gone through it with their lecturer, they feel that you should go through it as well, OK. And some things you should not have to go through, as an adult learner. Some remarks you should not really have to deal with, you know, because you’re in college.

Anna had a suggestion about how the matter might be resolved.

Some lecturers, they definitely need to be pulled in. They need to be pulled in because where they got away with it so long. Well, it has to be [pause] they have to realize that that student is there, not because they have nothing else to do, OK. We are there for a reason. Sometimes your job- -some jobs, they force you to go back to school if you want a promotion. And so, to go to school with stress, and come to class and have a lecturer talk down to you, and, you’re already an adult. Basically you know what you want out of life- -I don’t know, it has to be- -.

Beth experienced conflicts when lecturers gave inconsistent directions and recommendations.

It’s confusing sometimes when one lecturer tells you “you can do it”. And then on the other hand, some lecturers telling you “you’re not getting A’s, you’re not getting B’s or- -and you’re not passing the course so you need to drop”, you know, they tell you that. Whereas, it should be, “well Mrs. D, you need to study this, study this and study this in order to achieve”. But, I have a lecturer who said, “You need to drop”. He should, perhaps say, “Maybe you are not used to my methods yet and maybe you are not used to it. And I want you to try and study every night or try and read every night” you know.

She explained what she perceived was at the root of the problem.

They don't get into your personal life or, "Mrs. D, why you failing?" No! Another thing, they don't consider, you being a full-time mom, full-time job.

Anna, Beth and Carla indicated that conflicts arose because instructors' had certain expectation for female adult students. Lecturers didn't know what it was like to be a wife, mother, student and employee, that they expected you to come to class as well as make a certain grade because you were an adult.

Beth commented on the conflict that accrued when instructors were not as flexible as they might be with respect to office hours.

Sometimes, their office hours just don't correspond with your time, especially the part-time person who is working. Sometime, you take lunch time, and the boss gives you a certain time, you have to get back. When they set their hours 10-12 [noon], or one lecturer had 5 o'clock or between five and six. So, if you go home, and class starts at six, and you knock off at 5:30, you could never get to his office hour.

She further felt that confronting lecturers often only served to exacerbate conflicts between student and lecturer.

Well, no [uncertain]. Well, I find [long pause] with the lecturers when you confront them, that is used against you. I find that, most people who confront them they always keep that in. And with COB being small, you end up with the same lecturer again [laughs]. You end up with that same person and that person will use it, you know. You have to work extra hard in that course in order to pass it.

Carla observed that conflict with the instructor was often due to the instructor's unrealistic expectation.

Another class tomorrow, which means I'm looking at another 4 o'clock night. The night before, you know, you got to bed 4 o'clock, and so, sometimes it's not your best. And that's why I say "certain lecturers say ain't no way you're supposed to hand this kind of work in". And, you know, yes it wasn't my best because, maybe if I was given a longer time period, time frame with which to get it done, then maybe I would have given you a better paper. So that's what I mean when I say you don't want students to breeze through, but appreciate and understand what we're going through. You go to a lecturer or you call a lecturer and say "You know, I realize I have this assignment but you know, my baby was sick so I really didn't get it done". And they'd say, "well, that's your problem". Just like that, "that's your problem, you work it out".

Female student conflict with employer/supervisor

It would appear that student/employer conflicts arose most often with Carla. She held a high profile position in her place of employment. However, all three participants expressed some concerns about the impact that going back to school had on their professional lives.

Anna related how she experienced conflicts with her employer when she needed time off to write examinations. She explained:

Sometimes your employer will not let you off for a class the next day even though you have an examination. You have some work, and if the work needs to be out that day, you can't tell your employer, "I have to go to school". And you go to class and you tell your teacher you couldn't get off, some of the teachers will look at you and tell you, "tough luck".

Carla commented that her employer encouraged her to go to school but was reluctant to release her to do so. She stated:

The job encourages you, and they will quickly- -they will encourage you and tell you "go for it", but they will quickly tell you when conflicts arise between going to class and your job, they will quickly tell you, "Your job comes first. You made the choice. Either you go to class or stay here and work like we require you to do". Um, so, they tell you, "you go to school for you", you know. It's so amazing how quickly the statement "in order for you to be promoted you need to do this", and the minute there is a conflict between school and your job, you really getting your BA for you. "Now this is what we require, we need you to be here now", and so, hey!

She highlighted what she felt was the dilemma of the female adult student.

You go to school on your own time, damned if you do, damned if you don't. That's just the tricks of the trade. You know, and I've had it happen to me. When I approach, "what do you think about this program COB is doing?" "Oh, yeah, go for it, go for it. I think it's good, yes it's better, oh yeah, we welcome the opportunity where staff take the initiative to do the training". And I can remember at COB, when they started the BA. Degree program, they used to arrange day classes. And the first time I approached the supervisor about having the...I didn't ask for extra time, I asked to move my lunch hour to 4 o'clock and get off at 5 o'clock. So it meant switching my lunch so that I could get to class at 4 o'clock, on time. "No, no, it can't be done, it can't be done. You know we require- -what if you're not here and a question arises?" And then, I was told outright "Basically, you are doing the program to benefit Carla, not to better the work here, its to better Carla". I'm at the bank, not to better the bank! I was like, "Wait a minute, this is these same persons who told me

that in order for you to be promoted, you have to do this? Now I'm doing it, they are telling me, 'oh, that's not for us, that's what you wanted'."

Carla expressed her personal feelings that both the bank and her self benefited as a result of her return to school.

I believe both benefit in that, I think I go out there and I try to educate myself.

I think I can make better decisions. I think it brings on a certain level of maturity, and so both benefit- -maybe even more so the company more than me individually, because they are employing me to use what I have learnt, use my experience, use my work, whatever, to better the company- -to make more money. I think both- -I mean I will benefit when I am able to put on my resumé that I have achieved this, but, I think until then, I'm benefiting the company that I work for. So I don't accept that argument that you're doing it only to better yourself.

She reflected on the conflicts that arose over the use of work time to attend school.

So, it was definitely a timing problem, always, always. I have memos that I canceled, and I sometimes had to go back to work and explain, and they would say "in order for you to take class today, you definitely have to give us the time back. You have to account for your time!" And, so I had to fill in a time sheet to show my supervisor "look, I stayed here this lunch time and four hours after work just to account for the extra time I had to take". So work was always--the conflict was always there. There were times when you had meetings after work or functions are planned after work. And when you say to your supervisor or your boss, "that's a Wednesday, I have class", they may not come out and say it to you but subconsciously, in the back of your minds, its there "oh, she doesn't

come to this particular meeting because she has class". So the thought is always there.

Conflict with traditional students

Anna and Carla said that they experienced conflicts with the traditional students (17-24 years old). However, Beth did not have those concerns. She enjoyed a pleasant interaction with them, even "piggy-backing" off them at times. Anna and Carla voiced strong feelings about being placed in the same class with younger students.

Anna felt that there was sufficient difference between mature female students and the traditional students to merit concern.

Well, there is a difference, particularly in the classroom. As a female student, I don't want to sound biased, but I don't particularly like being in the classroom with a lot of the other 16 to 24 year old traditional students. Even at college, you have 18 to 24 year old and the level of maturity of - some of the students, anyhow, you have- -they're talking all of the time or giggling. So, as a mature adult, I don't have much tolerance. I feel like I've made a sacrifice to come to class. I have a family and a job that I can be to. I don't have time to sit and wait and listen to the complaining all the time, or the little bickering.

She felt the adults should be separated from the traditional students because adults had certain peculiarities which were not incidental to the traditional student. For example, she stated that:

...the mature adults have been out of school for a very long time and the younger ones are fresh out of school, you find they have a lot of time to study, whereas, with the mature adult, they would have to work regular hours. You have to deal with your family, you have to deal with your own personal life, and

you have to deal with school. So, I think the mature adults should be much more together than with the younger ones in their class.

Carla explained how the traditional students' presence impacted upon her comfort level in the class.

The older students, because it is more of a disruption- -because, you look at the "teeny-boopers" and say, "OK, they're just not as matured as yet" or "that's expected of a teeny-booper". But I think its more disruptive to the student who is more focused and who is there to get as much as she can out of the class.

Carla also commented on the traditional students' apparent lack of interest in class and the disruptions that some traditional students cause as a result of their lack of interest.

There are time when you could be sitting in the class and they are goofing off and you will here them actually saying "well, I'm only here because my mother sent me here, or my father sent me here". Am, you know, disrupting the class sometimes. At least I found, in the majority of cases the disrupters were always the full-time, younger students. I think I always had a- -because of my background, and I knew how I got there. I was always focused and determined not to let anything stray away from me getting the most out of it. And so, many times, I blocked them out. And once you blocked them out, you didn't laugh at a joke or find the behavior funny, you were labeled as "stuck up" or "boring" and things like that because you did not goof off. You didn't laugh at what was supposed to have been jokes, when I saw them as disruptions. So the maturity level was definite--there was a difference, maturity-wise.

She pointed out that many of the traditional students were not as focuses as the mature female adult learners were.

But, the thing is, they are really not serious. I found some of them not serious at all. Some of the things I saw them do, it was ridiculous. It was ridiculous from my point of view. You had persons...I actually watched some students, first, before class somebody handing them their homework. And its like, "You didn't do your homework? You have the time to have done your homework. You don't have a family, you don't have a husband; you're just a full-time student. You know, what else is there for you to do besides do your assignments". And I say, "When you really look at those types of things, you really get annoyed and angry when you know you took the effort, you took the time". You go to the library and they are just copying. And it really bothers you because you know you sat up until 2-3 o'clock. All through my school, I called them "teeny-boopers", just waltzing in and having somebody doing their assignments and its handed to the teacher and its back out there!

Beth observed that there was an apparent lack of concern, and purpose of some younger students.

Some really know what they are there for and just want to get out. I think some are just playing around because they are there because of their parents. I met a guy. He said, "I don't want to be here. I told my mother, I spent X amount of years in high school. I don't want to go to college. She wants me to go to college". And he refuses to go to class...

Unlike Anna and Carla, Beth was very comfortable with the traditional student.

OK, I like it. I like to be in the class with young people. I don't like being in the class with people only my age. They help me, they have been studying all day. They spend all day looking--they can help me when I really only have the time

to do and assignment whereas they can say, "No, you don't do it that way, you do it this way". In this area, they help me. I enjoy the classroom.

Summary of Theme 1: Recognition as Multi-fascited and self directed.

The three women certainly highlighted the difficulties associated with being a female adult returning to the classroom. As an adult learner, I identified with the dilemma of the female upon whose shoulder rests the responsibility of raising the family, doing the house chores or paying a house keeper and a babysitter to have it done.

Beth appeared to have less concern generally than Anna and Carla, but even she could not escape the pressure of being a wife, a student and an employed person. The pressure to give up was obviously great. But as Anna stated, if one is able to place a "percentage" on things, then one is able to succeed as mother, wife family organizer, employee, and successful student.

The participants were emphatic about the need, on the part of spouses/mates, employers, and especially educators to view female adults from a different perspective. These adults are not coming to the classroom to search for an identity, they bring this to the classroom. They are professional people, seeking professional expertise in the banking arena. Female adult learners sought the help of educational professionals who can teach them those skills and knowledge needed for certification, in the shortest time possible. But they wanted to maintain their dignity while doing so.

Theme 2: Recognition as Qualified Competent Personnel in the Workplace

A second major finding of this study was the need for female adult learners to be recognition as qualified competence personnel in the workplace. This need become

apparent as the participants discussed their decision to return to the classroom, and their personal feelings about the stereo-typical attitude directed towards females in the Bahamas. Germane to the theme is the need to understand why female adult learners return to the classroom. This will be discuss in four segments: job choice/job change, salary increase/promotion, job security/job competitiveness, and fear of being the sole financial provider.

Decision to Return to the Classroom

Anna , Beth and Carla's decision to return to the classroom will be discussed in three segments: job choice and job change, salary increase and promotion, and job security and competitiveness. Though these are strong motivating factors for returning, they do not in anyway demean or detract from these womb's professionalism on their jobs and their sense of self-worth. Rather, it is because of their own recognition of their need to do something more to enhance their professionalism that they wish to be recognized as qualified and competent in the workplace.

Job Choice/job change

Anna explained that her decision to return to the classroom revolved around her professional life. She was convinced that certification would make new employment possible.

If I wanted to leave for another job, one of the first questions an employer is going to ask is "what are your qualification?" And I wanted to improve my qualification level. Well, it helps you a great deal in terms of - to create a good impression on the interview. The way you present yourself, in a good manner- - but with the qualification, it makes it easier, you know, it not only tells the

employer that, yes, you are capable enough to perform that job, but you are also qualified for that job.

She was also convinced that going back to school would improve her chances for job promotion.

Well, the job that I presently hold does not require an Associate degree. If I wanted to apply for another position or have the option of a promotion, the fact that I am pursuing my Associate degree, and the ABIB, the fact that I'm doing that, then my employer would be able to say that this employee is working well. You come to work on time, you're there, you don't call in sick so often and all that. Because I'm improving my educational level, that will better my chances of getting a promotion.

Anna was convinced that a degree would allow her to get another job, with equivalent or higher pay, and this was important to her.

If I were to apply at another institution, the salary is also factored in. Well, the bank, if I were to leave the position I have now, because I have an Associate degree, even though, even though I have not finished it, but if I were to go someplace else, obviously, I would not start at the same place. I'd be making a better salary. I'd be more inclined to hold a higher position.

She commented that job experience was not sufficient to guarantee one's job in today's world. She needed additional credentials if she hoped to improve the odds.

Even though I may be a little more experienced than a young person just out of school - well, experience is OK. But also, sometimes these very young persons are interviewed and given the position if it's available. So you can't think that, "I've been in this job or I've been in another job". You know, technology is improving all the time, so you have to go to school and become familiar with

various improvements in technology - other options - you know, that may be available to you. So you'll have the experience and the qualification - your options are definitely better.

Beth was asked what precipitated her return to the classroom.

Well [pause] when I looked around and everyone was asking for a degree, and I really don't plan to stay to the insurance company all my life. I would like, really, move on. I'm not doing it for the insurance company. Even after we have completed our degree, we don't get anything. They tell us it's to make us more marketable. I went back because I'd really like to move on to something different. I would really like to work for myself one day.

She expressed doubts about being able to obtain another job without a degree.

But I think my degree, I think it will help. Most people who get a job, they get it on their mother's or their father's merit. I want it on what I have- -you know [pause] and, I feel in the area of, the computer area, I think with my degree, I stand a better chance than without.

Carla expressed the opinion that there was definitely a correlation between job choice and certification.

A lot of Bahamians are finding that they have the age but they do not have the papers and they are finding that themselves out of a job and can't get back in because they don't have the papers or the backing. They were like "oh, experience is going to take me far". People, now, they have so many other choices out there, they're not going to limit themselves to just experience. So, it is there by implication. In years gone by, when I entered the work force, it was to move ahead. But that, that is slowly diminishing more or less, if you want to maintain your job now.

Salary-increase, and job promotion.

Anna, Beth and Carla stated that salary increase and job promotion were powerful incentives for them to return to the classroom.

Anna stated that the ABiB, a bankers certificate, will make salary increase and job promotion possible:

You could complete Part 1 in a year, and you can get a certificate which can on your file, and also you can get a promotion or salary increase as you go along. And, also that proves to be more beneficial rather than waiting for an Associate degree. Well, one of the reasons is the salary. You know, you're working on a job, you- -each year you would get a salary or even perhaps you work hard and get a promotion.

She was convinced that going back to school increased her chances of moving into another area of banking.

I would like to go into the technical part of banking. At the Central Bank, we have--there are various departments that you can go, such as Accounts; Bank supervision; Research; Statistics; granting bank licenses, and all that. Those are the areas that I wouldn't mind going into, even Accounts. I wouldn't mind Accounts. I don't want to stay in the secretarial area, simply because persons look at secretaries as just somebody that can type something for them or proof read something or copy, make copies. That's not a person who is being used to their full potential.

Anna was convinced that going back to school would make all this possible.

Yes, it will qualify me because somehow, when you enter certain establishments, you know, certain establishments, they know you can do a good job. I guess they are afraid to give you the challenges because, or put you in the position,

and, you know, they may even offer remarks or say that you are not qualified for the post. And so, you show that you can do the work and on top of that, you are qualifying yourself to make sure they won't basically have another excuse [long pause]. Anna contemplated other possibilities that were a reality in the job market. It's rough! And then at the end of the day, you're working towards a degree and you mightn't even get a promotion, or an increment, or an increase...to find out that you don't get it. Some excuse comes up. But sometimes, you have gone through all that turmoil, so the only thing you can do to boost yourself up again, you say, "OK, its self-gratification". You did it to improve yourself'. In case there is an opening for a position, at least you have qualified yourself. And, so you just wait.

Beth explained that mature women like herself were returning to the classroom because they were not getting the promotions. They hoped that becoming certified would allow them to earn more money.

Well, yeah [laughs], I mean everybody want more money. Especially with three children and a 13 year old daughter [laughs]. Yes! We have women with Master degrees but they have not been promoted. That, on the other hand, has caused many females to want to make more [money]. Yes, I think so. I think its about making more money. I find that some jobs require your academic record. You need to have an Associate degree or a degree. The Associate is the minimum requirement; some require that.

Carla Linked her return to the classroom to financial security for herself and the future of her children.

I got that out of the way because I didn't want my kids to have to go through what I had to go through to further my education. So I wanted to give them a

solid background, you know a solid foundation. So that when they get out of even high school, at least they could go further, you see? And then, also in trying to get them further, I have to qualify myself on the job--go a little further. Because, in order for me to put myself in a position to send them off to school, whether it be COB, or another institution, it requires funds. And I always said I don't want them to work and go to school, not if I could help it. Um, it may come in the future where I am not fully able to, but at least I want to give them that head-start. That's no picnic, working and going to school.

She stated that job promotion was directly linked to return to the classroom.

They will tell you, "Carla, in order for you to become a Senior Client Accountant, you must have an Associate degree". So, yes, you had to go after the Associate degree. So, now, you the Associate degree, you are being told "You want more challenge, and in order for you to become a Trust officer, you need to qualify yourself". And I'm finding more and more these days that employers are putting more emphasis on specialization. For instance, in our field, it's the ACIB. Right now, it's the ACIB.

Job security and competitiveness.

Of the three participants interviewed, only Carla spoke at length about job security and competitiveness.

It wasn't just that Carla did well in high school and she is expected to go off.

Yes, that was a part of it. But, I wanted to have an Associate degree, I wanted to have a BA degree; I wanted to have a job, right? And, in order for me to have that, I had to go back to school. It was just no getting around it.

Carla explained that concern for job security featured very highly in her decision to return to the classroom.

OK. My job would have played an important part because, in banking, it's very competitive. As you find, day in and day out, that society is changing. People are now going back to school. The young persons, they are coming back from school with their masters. So, sometimes it is competitive! Experience only takes you so far and you will learn that very quickly. And do, if you don't have the necessary papers to go with it, you can excel and go so far, and at some point, that experience will catch up with you. And it would sort of balance out with the paper. Somehow, experience is not. Once ago, people would say, "Oh, she had 25 years of experience so we will go with her". But I think what is happening now, "OK, we have to pay her a certain amount of salary for years of experience. We can hire this little younger person coming in with maybe a Bachelor or something and we can pay them a cheaper salary, and we can train them". That's where I think experience balances out and puts you on the same level. I am finding more and more, from the employer's point of view, they are all cost conscious, so they will all, sad to say, make those decisions to go with more junior persons, train them and pay them less. And it becomes a business decision.

Carla commented further on the need to constantly upgrade so as to remain competitive in the job arena.

It's competitive. You have to stay abreast, and when you look at it, it's expected because you have about 5,000. I don't know how many students coming out of high school annually, about 5,000, and they are coming out, coming back, looking for jobs.

So it becomes, at some point, and if you put yourself in the place of the employer, it becomes a business decision, whereas loyalty and experience really

does not carry much weight as it did in the past. It boils down to what is best for the company in that experience plays a big role...You take your pick, which level you want to start at. So, by implication, you have to keep yourself more competitive just as to maintain your job.

She stated emphatically that "jobs for life" even in Government sectors were gone.

I don't think that's any longer a case. I find a lot of people work for government. Just the other day, Government itself - I think, with the teachers, OK, you have a teacher's degree and different salary levels, OK, that itself tells you off the top that government is into qualifications. So don't fool yourself into thinking that, "I can go to my MP [Member of Parliament] and get a job and just sit there for ever and ever". I think those days are gone. I think, right now- -people used to say, "government jobs are until death do us part". But now Government came to the realization that in order to absorb the 5,000 students coming out to school very year, you need to have a filtering system. It's opened people's eyes so that they are realizing that in order for me to stay in here a little longer, I have to go back to school so that I'm not put in that position where once I've put in 30 years, I will be asked to leave. And I'm not prepared for work anywhere else. So I think Government is getting like the private sector. It's competitive!

Fear of being sole financial provider

Anna was concerned about becoming the sole financial provider hence the need to return to the classroom. Carla also implied that her decision to return to the classroom was influenced by her consideration for her children's financial future. However, Beth appeared not to have concerns in this regard.

Anna's unsolicited comments clearly revealed her fears of being the sole financial provider.

And that's what I'd want a salary to get. So you go to school, you know, so that even if that, you know, you hope- -but I'd like to be able to take care of her [daughter] on my own. I don't have to be running to him [spouse] every minute. I'd be able- -I know what my bills are, I know what I have to pay. You put your money in the home if you have a house, and if anything is needed in the house, well I don't have to be nagging for it. If something is needed I go out and buy it.

Anna commented further that many mature females are returning to the classroom for similar reasons.

So this is why you find a lot of women are going back to the classroom. If she has to leave or if he has to leave, she wouldn't be left homeless. So, you know, I think even though society feels certain roles are men's, things are changing. Some men are irresponsible and your children shouldn't have to starve or go without necessities. So I think you should be able to provide for yourself and your child. The men, they are not going to do it. They are not going back to school.

Anna's final comment leads directly into the second segment of this discussion, social perception of male/female roles.

Social Perception of Male/Female Roles

Each participant was asked to comment on their feelings about the socially perceived roles of males and females in the Bahamas, and about how this perception impacted the female adult learners' personal and professional lives. This section will be

presented as social biases expresses through employment and salary, and promotion and college attendance.

Employment and salary

Anna commented on the biases that she felt had implication for Bahamian female adults.

I guess from history women have always been in the house, taking care of the domestic matters and rearing the children, you know, but I think its time for a change. It should be changed in that, you know, the women are working the same hours as the men, 9 to 5. Even if we apply for a particular job, the starting salary is- -for women, its different, same hours. They expect the same thing out of her. They act as though she is not supposed to be there, you know. The man would be favored in terms of obtaining certain jobs or certain position.

Carla was asked about the ration of males and females in her workplace. She stated emphatically that:

It's the same thing. I can say, well at the first bank the ratio was 50 to 40, maybe 45 to 35 in favor of females. Then I went to the second bank where we had two males to seven females. And it got to the point that there were six females to one male. Where I am now, there are, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11 females. Yes, 11 to 2.

Like Anna, she also commented on the disparity in pay and qualification that exist between Bahamian males and females at her present place of work. However, there appeared to be a balancing in the level of education.

I think there is equality in the level of education with what we now have. Before, we did not have that. At the other two places, we found that the females were going back to school and trying to get ahead on their education. And I think at the time I was at those other two institutions, that was the period where you would definitely- -as a female, you were somewhat discriminated against in that you were doing the same job as a male but the salary was really lower. And so, in order to try and counteract that, somewhat, I think a lot of us went out there to try to get the education to prove that I have an Associate, we are both doing the same job. Why is he being paid much higher than I am? I think the disparity between men and women- -I think that's somewhat gone because- -and I think it's because women took the challenge.

Promotion and college attendance

All three women agreed that more men were promoted to responsible positions but that fewer men were attending colleges locally. They suggested that men with less qualifications were being hired and promoted over the women who were more qualified.

Anna observed that women were not considered as favorably for promotions as the men were.

I find that women have to work very hard to hold a position. You have to prove that you can do it, whereas, I believe back then the, and I say back then, the women, even though the men were in the forefront, the women were the ones pushing them, you see? Even though we didn't have a voice, we were still doing the work.

Beth also observed that there was a disparity in the employment practices at her place of work, usually in favor of men.

I think even where I am now, we have one- -we have one female at the top, and she is our Legal Officer. All the rest are male. And not that they are more qualified or that they can do the job better, but because they are male. I find that now they are saying, "We have females with the same qualification", and they are thinking about employees and we may have 150 men...the women are in the majority. At the top, at the top, our director is a man, our deputy director is a man and the financial comptroller is a male. The only female at the top is a legal officer. We have women with master degrees but they have not been promoted.

Anna noted that Bahamian men often displayed negative attitudes even toward college attendance.

The men, they are not doing it; they're not going back to school. In my class, we have more women in the class than men. The men want to sit on the blocks or hang out with the boys while the women are in the classroom. And still at the end of the day when it comes to the job for the women, it's still not fair. Even in the salary, it's unfair to pay a man a higher salary than a women, if she is qualified and doing a good job, just because he is a man, you know, and they will give him a position over her because he is a man.

Beth commented similarly on the attitude of Bahamian men towards college attendance.

Well, at the College of the Bahamas, I can only talk about College of the Bahamas. There are more females than males. It's like - you're like four males to 32 females. So the guys...I had a lecturer, he was like, "Now guys, you'll have to get A's, you have to get A's". He was pulling for the guys. He said, "What's happen to the guys in the Bahamas?" And he was always trying to push them.

Beth further noted that even when men began college there was a high dropout rate. Her comments were personal because her husband started to attend college but later dropped out.

I find that male students always drop out. I had the same lecturer he [husband] had, doing the same course and I just looked at her and said she will not discourage me. He looked at her and said, "No way". I find that most men, they just don't have that go ahead to say, "I'm going to do it. I'm not going to let anybody discourage me". And I find it even in the younger men. If you even look around College of the Bahamas, they are not going to put up with it. They are not going to put up with what I am going to put up with.

She commented on society's view of male and female roles.

I don't know. I think- -this is what I believe. I think, I really believe that women have been put down so long and they have been told that "You could only be a housewife and you only could take care of the kids, and you'll stay pregnant all these years". I think, we, as women have to sit and say, "We can be anything". And, I think, with males, they reach a point where they say, "this is what I want to be and this is it. I don't want to go any further and it doesn't matter", you know. He's like "I already have my profession".

She also observed that the men at her place of employment were not going back to school either.

I don't think, I can't tell you about a male that's going back to school. But the females are. I don't know what--everyone that I have known...They have dropped out, especially those over 30. Now, I think we have one male, he is young, he is about 22, but the older men they are not going back to school.

Carla also felt that a relatively small number of Bahamian males were attending the college. She stated that she did not know why the ration of females in attendance was so much higher than the males.

Very few males! I'd say almost, almost 80 to 2, but its almost like 3/4 of the class is definitely females. Even at the BA level. And, I looking back at the College of the Bahamas this year, it was predominantly females. Now what was interesting is that the technology division, which was previously a male dominated field, was predominantly female. There was a female who got top honors in that division.

Summary of Theme 2: Recognition as Qualified Competent Personnel in the Workplace

Reflecting on the comments of Anna, Beth and Carla, it becomes very evident that they wanted to be regarded as qualified, competent personnel in the workplace. Each of the participants attended the same college. However, they each spoke of matters that addressed one of the major issues: why some Bahamian women returned to the classroom. It became very clear that these women were seeking credentials for job security, job promotion and higher salary.

Anna, Beth and Carla were seeking validation for their contribution in a Bahamian society that appears to value men's services above those of women. They pointed to a social system in which patriarchy is very strongly entrenched. In spite of the fact that more women are returning to the classroom and are becoming more certified than their male counterpart they are still assigned the lesser rank in the workplace.

All three women expressed great concern that in schools and on the job the women outnumber the men, yet women were still treated as "marginal". They, rather

than their spouses were assigned domestic roles at home even though they worked as many hours in the workplace as men. They received less money and fewer promotions in spite of the fact that they were more qualified. Carla suggested that at the higher level the rules appear to be changing in favor of women. At her present workplace there appears to be equity in education and salary for men and women.

Perhaps Carla's comments are indicative of the changes that are beginning to take place in the Bahamian economy. Tourism, the major industry has seen a gradual decline in the last five years. Bahamian men enjoyed a comfortable living as a result of the tourist trade. Since Banking is the second industry, perhaps more men are pursuing credentials abroad so as to enter the professional ranks.

Because women are assigned the domestic roles, it also appears that men are free to engage in studies abroad whereas women remained at home to pursue an education at the local colleges and universities. This may account for the noticeable absence of males in the local college campus. However, the women in this study felt that not enough was being done to recognize the female adult's accomplishments on the jobs, in the classroom and in the Bahamian society.

Theme 3: Program Relevance and Choices

This theme is by no means of lesser importance than the previous themes discussed. In fact, the participants' comments indicated the pertinence of this theme to their personal and professional comfort. The theme will be presented in three segments: relevance, choices and exemption, and course and examination scheduling.

Relevance

Each of the women entered the programs of their choice, either, Banking and Finance or Computer Data Processing. However, what Anna and Beth found problematic was the obvious lack of relevance of courses being offered to them.

Anna was concerned with relevance as it related to her employment needs.

Well, it's recognized in the banking arena. Also you get a certificate at the end of each part; part I, part II, part III. It's like Insurance, it's geared for the Insurance arena, and the ABIB is for bankers only.

Asked whether the extra courses at the college met the bank's standard of relevance, Anna agreed that it not only met bank standards but also her personal sense of relevance.

Yes, and the various courses that I've done at the college, it even allowed me to understand the arena that I work in better. Because it's banking, and I've done courses in International Banking, Money and Capital Market. So, those courses allow me to understand what's going on all around me. If I would just concentrate on typing a document, I would not even understand the contents of the document. But, because I've seen it before, in the classroom, I could now apply it to the real world.

However, Anna had concerns about courses that she considered irrelevant.

Well, you have courses like Chemistry, biology, Agriculture, courses and stuff and all of that. But I do not need Biology to count figures, to approve a bank license or something like that, you know. I came out of high school in '83, right? So, I've done without Biology or Chemistry. So for those courses, you can factor in or give credit exemptions for years of experience because some of those

courses, you know, you hate to say, they are irrelevant. You can get by without them and still at the end of the day, you can hold top positions in society.

Asked about the difficulty level of the courses, she conceded that some courses were difficult.

Some of the courses are difficult courses, you know. It's really difficult. It's tedious.

Like Anna, Beth also determined relevance of courses as they related to her employment. However, she also determined relevance as it related to her personal life. She stated:

Algebra- -I don't really want to do this. Why do I have to do Algebra? I didn't need it on the job. There is no way I'm going to use it other than probably help my kids. That's about the only thing with it. But the problem is that you have to do it. Now, Oral Communication, Public speaking, I really enjoyed that course. I just wish they had brought that into the workplace a long time ago, but it was a course I did, I did in the summer. You know, the average Bahamian, we don't cross our T's and D's, like that. I really learned something.

She also saw relevance in a course like Business Math. She could apply it to her work. But she was not inclined to complete College Math (Math 140).

Well, OK, I did one math before, which was Math 132, Business Math, I think, and that was good. I enjoyed that because I can use it again. Now Math 140, which I started in the summer and I dropped, I was like, "Why do I have to know why X is Y?" It is just, I don't know, maybe its because I've been out of school for such a long time and its kind of difficult.

Asked to comment on the difficulty level of the courses, Beth confessed that she did experience some difficulty with college work.

It was a little bit hard. College of the Bahamas was tough. I think it was tough. I feel that the courses are really tough, College of the Bahamas is, this is how I feel, like I have earned a BA. Degree, already. I find it very difficult, especially in another area, the Accounting area. I have to do Accounts 112 over in September and the workload is just so much for you to retain. At first it was kind of hard. Because when a lecturer like, 'you have to read four chapters by tomorrow, and I'm like "you got to be crazy".

Course choices and exemption

Anna, Beth and Carla were concerned that their programs were designed primarily for younger students. They felt that the organizers of the programs did not allow for flexibility so that the adult learner could pursue other areas of interests.

Anna observed that in specific instances the course outline was not designed with the mature student in mind.

You have that same course outline. Some of the courses we fail we don't know why we fail them over and repeatedly. And still, in order to graduate, you still have to take that same course. You have a choice of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, or to me that's not much of a choice because I would rather do biology as opposed to chemistry or one of those. But, I would say experience should be factored in. I suppose it's hard to please everybody. let's say in my Banking course, for example, there is no computer. In order for me to do computing, I would have to...They tell you it has to be a 200 level course, OK, but I feel even Spanish, a foreign language course- -I would like to do Spanish, but again, that's not one of the courses that I can choose from. So I think if I, if you are allowed more flexibility in the electives, that would be more beneficial.

She commented about the need to factor in the mature students' work experience:

You have adults that have been working 30-something years, and they are returning to the classroom; they have start over just as an 18-year-old just coming fresh out of high school and I think that should be considered. The fact that they have acquired all that knowledge, and that's first-hand knowledge, and that's on the job training. I think it should be factored in. You're talking real life experience, not television or storybook or movie, anything like that, but hands-on experience. If the adults were to get the credit exemption for some of the courses, that in itself would say a lot for the adult.

Beth wanted to have more latitude in selecting her courses.

I think more business related courses, more management, more Marketing a little bit of Marketing with maybe Management. We'll I've done one Management course as an elective. It was interesting.

She felt that the advisor could play a role maker in assisting students to make sensible choices but that they were not.

Let's say when advisement, lecturers should- -need to really sit down and try to see what the person really likes and what they are really looking for in the courses that they are doing.

Carla also expressed her concern about the limited course selection available to female part-time students.

Being part-time, you are very limited with the classes or selection you can get in, given the time, um, so I can remember those nights [laughs] clearly, um, and I always promise that I will never go through that again!

She also felt strongly that mature students should receive exemption for work experience.

I think first of all, when you are looking at the degree program for workers [part-time] I feel some of the courses we should be exempted from because of our work experience. Oh, I agree with some of the English. I don't agree with the math. Some of the courses, I think, because we are working we should be exempted from and because of our age.

Course and examination scheduling

The participants' concern for course and examination scheduling appeared to arise when it impacted negatively on their work time. For example, Beth did not appear to be as concerned about scheduling since her employment allowed for day release courses. However, this was not the case for Anna and Carla.

Anna expressed her concerns this way:

You have 4-6, 6-8 classes, and some classes you have until 10 o'clock. Then you go home and if she [daughter] hasn't eaten, you have to feed her and bathe her, then off to bed.

She commented further on the need for flexibility in course scheduling.

Another thing is the weekend classes. Now that is very convenient for an adult learner. You know you have class Friday evenings, all day Saturday. You are going to have more time to spend home and you will be more comfortable in the classroom setting. You don't want extra special but you want to know that, well, hey because I'm making a sacrifice. You don't have to be there, you need to be there to better yourself, but you can take that money and buy an outfit for yourself or something for your kids.

She also had a problem with regards to the scheduling of advisement times for female adult workers.

You had to be advised and they don't want to accommodate the working student. You come during your time off and they say "Oh, the advisement time is over, you have to come back tomorrow". I just can't leave my job. I think times should be set to assist working students. So I had to come back the next day. Things like that shouldn't be. If they are going to cater to adults, and a large volume of them- -the adults are coming back to school.

Asked to comment about how serious a problem this is for the adult learner, she stated:

You will find the adults are willing to go elsewhere and pay a higher fee where they can get the service. And so, the college may soon only have students coming out of high school. They [female adults] will find some place else where they can be comfortable. Because presently, the bank, at least the bank where I am at, the bank pays for a Bachelor degree, OK, but because of my experience, when I'm finished, I'm inclined to check- -to look at one of the other institutions where I can be comfortable.

Carla's concerns about scheduling were directly related to work and family.

It's just that when you say to your supervisor, in the middle of a meeting, like this afternoon, "look, I got to go to class", that's not an excuse. It's difficult to get out there for 4 o'clock because of the time constraint. Then they started arranging the classes around 12-1 o'clock or 9 o'clock in the morning, and we were like, "that's not going to work because we have to catch different markets, Hong Kong, London, Switzerland...".

She suggested planners for adult education could become more sensitive to the needs of female adult learners when setting class hours. She also commented that problems arose for working adults because of rigid examination schedules. For example, in order for her to take her final, she had to take a vacation for half-day.

Summary of Theme 3: Program Relevance and Course Exemptions

The women felt that they had legitimate concerns; their loves were impacted upon unfavorably. While they were free to choose their degree program, they felt they had no say in the selection of courses that they were forced to complete. As mature adults they found themselves being forced to do courses that were not relevant to their personal or professional needs. There were courses such as Spanish or computer that they would like to complete, and that they felt would benefit them more in the workplace. It was not a question of whether or not they could complete the assigned courses, rather they wanted more latitude in selecting elective courses, courses from which they could benefit after the degree programs were completed.

The participants also questioned the scheduling of courses, and examinations. They questioned the logic of scheduling times that were not conducive to the working female adult. Anna felt the weekend classes might ease some of the pressure that many women were feeling because they had to leave their families alone for long periods during week-days. The women felt given the large numbers of adult students, they could be accommodated better. Otherwise, many adults might consider alternative institutions where they can be comfortable.

These were experienced working women who had accumulated more than 30 years of work experience. Anna described the work experience as real life experience. She felt mature female adults could best use their time doing things that were relevant and they should be credited for their work experience. Each of the participants agreed that some consideration should be given to the wealth of experience and knowledge gained in their collective years in the workplace and that they should be exempted for their for life experiences.

Theme 4: The Need for Sensitivity and Respect, and Support for Female Adult Learners

The fourth theme which emerged through an analysis of the interview transcripts, was that female adult learners needed to be shown sensitivity and respect, and support. This theme will be presented in three segments, female adult fears, sensitivity and respect, and female adult support systems.

An analysis showed that each participant returned to the classroom with some fears, and that these fears often continued throughout their formal learning experiences. These fears will be presented as fear of being made to feel stupid, fear of age-related rejection and isolation, and fear of examinations/evaluation. I felt it was important to present adult fears as a preface to other three segments of this theme, as they help to amplify the need for sensitivity and respect, and support for the female adult learner.

Female Adults' Fears

Each of the three participants experienced a measure of fear at being called or being made to feel stupid, upon returning to the classroom. However, when asked directly if they felt stupid, Anna's and Beth's comments reflected some ambivalence. Beth was more direct in her response.

Fear of feeling stupid

Anna did not have the unpleasant experience of being made to feel stupid.

However, she recalled that other mature female learners were made to feel that way.

I've never felt out of place before. If there was an arena I wasn't sure of, I just didn't say anything. In terms of, let's say, Biology, I'll stick with Biology; some of the areas of the body [laughs]. Some of the parts you don't know about.

You sit back and let the other students ask or even answer the questions.

But, if there are some areas you are not sure of, as an adult learner, we tend not to say anything on the matter, because you would come out looking stupid. Ask or even answer the questions. But, if there are some areas you are no sure of, as an adult learner, we tend to say anything on the matter, because you would come out looking stupid.

While the younger students did not offend her personally, Anna admitted that it happened to other adult learners who asked questions.

I find that it hasn't happened to me, but I saw where an adult, she just kept asking the same questions or she kept asking questions and it would become annoying. And you'll watch the younger persons, kind of look at one another and smile or something like that. So, they come out looking a little stupid, but you still have to ask.

She felt that the instructors sometimes contributed in some way to older females feeling stupid.

Some lecturers tend to make older persons feel out of place, in that they'll ask something and they are like "well you don't know that?" It's like something you should have known. Um, then they will say, "Not you! That shouldn't be coming from you". It makes you feel as though its something I should not have asked. And, also because you don't want to look stupid, or for the lecturers to talk down to you, you tend not to ask questions. You'll find the adult learners some of them don't say anything in class.

Beth was also ambivalent in her response when asked about feeling stupid.

There is a lady who kept asking questions and you hear some young students in the back "She can't understand hey? You keep explaining the same thing over and over".

Beth also revealed that she was reluctant to let the younger students know of her seniority, at her place of employment for fear of their ridicule.

You're not there to say, "I don't have my qualifications. I'm just pursuing my Associate degree". I think a lot of adults probably even don't want them [younger students] to realize that "hey, I'm just doing my Associate degree with the 16 year old". Chances are the 16 year-old will come out with better grades than you, and you really don't want to put too much emphasis on the fact that you are an executive and you're getting something like 60-something and the young person is getting 95.

Carla recounted an experience where a lecturer made her to feel stupid in class.

I said, "But you didn't grade me". So he said, "What do you mean, I didn't grade you?" I said, "No, you did not because you only signed" [laughs]. I can't repeat the words he said when I gave him the papers. He asked me to bring the papers. I gave him the papers and he looked at it..."What do you mean? That's a duck's egg, that's a duck's egg" [laughs]. And I could remember feeling so stupid, a zero, a zero. I could remember that English 119, and after that, I was really down.

She commented further:

You already feel stupid walking into class, everybody looking at you as if to say, "well, you're already a vice president, you're already a manager, why you in here? Why come back to school?" They don't understand.

Fear of age, rejection and isolation

Beth enjoyed a pleasant association with younger people in the classroom.

OK, I like it. I like to being the class with young people. I don't like being in the class with people only my age.

Carla on the other hand, related experience of other mature adults with whom she spoke.

I know, well, talking to some of them, they'll say, "man, I'm too old for this", or they tend to take a "back seat" because they don't want to draw attention to a 40-year old with a 16-year old in class. SO they tended to take a little more quiet, less dominant role.

She described her personal feelings of rejection/isolation in a class of younger students.

Walking into class if you're 30 and you were walking into a class of average 21-year-olds, I think that that in itself is intimidating. I think, to pull the best out of a student, or to allow the best to come out, I think they should be allowed to feel a part of the class and not isolated. Because, yes they might know the textbook side of it but they have the general knowledge side of it and I think they should be allowed to contribute in that manner. I feel that it's up to the working person to contribute. It's not only for self-esteem, but like I said, just being in here is intimidating enough.

Carla stated that there is a sense of isolation in a class of younger students.

First of all, the full-time students hang out together. They would never accept you into their group because they saw you as older, mature. They were like "You should know this because you are working". This was the perception. So there was always like, those subtle differences between the two. They would always look--they treated you different. You really were treated different.

She explained how she was affected by this treatment.

I felt, to be honest with you, I just blocked some of it out. And, think I really focused in on school and I was there to learn. I was there to get through it. I was too tired to deal with anything else.

Fear of written examinations

Anna and Carla were very concerned about written examinations. They were uncomfortable writing them because they feared failure. Carla never mentions examination. I thought that this was unique in that Anna and Beth were studying at the associate degree level whereas Carla was completing her second degree. Their comments reflect their concerns about examinations.

Anna was asked about her preference for written exams or term papers. She stated:

Some persons cannot take the stress of the finals. And you'd find they'd do better on a term paper than the final. So it'll be unfair, or unfair to that person to say "well you failed that course", meaning that you know nothing about the subject. That might not be. Also, on the finals, that day, you may be having a very bad day. I had an experience like that. I- it was a very bad day for me. I knew I failed the finals and of course, I failed the course. Whereas, if I had a term paper, I would have had time to do that paper, even if I know that tonight I'm going to do the paper. But, if I'm not feeling well, I will do it tomorrow night, cause I still have time. But with the finals, the final is tonight, 7 o'clock, and I'm not there, I fail.

She explained how she personally felt about final exams, especially the weighing system:

The only problem with final exams is they weigh so heavily in terms of the grade. You will have a final weighing 50% or 65%, whereas you may have worked hard in this class, get good grades in the class, but if you fail your finals, you fail the course. But courses weigh heavily and they demand passing, that is

the only way you can pass the course. A term paper for an adult learner would be pretty much OK. It should be OK.

Anna further explained that for most mature adults there were definite advantages to writing a term paper over final exams.

It allows you to do research, if you're doing research on a particular topic, compile your information, get it typed, you present it. It's more like an essay. You tend to get more marks for an essay than on a true or false, multiple choice or direct answer. You get points for the presentation, points for, relevance, information, graphs- -you get various points. With a term paper it's highly unlikely you will fail a term paper.

She conceded that the term paper could be time-consuming for mature working female adults.

Beth felt that she performed better on projects, and that exams were "nerve-wrecking" for her.

I enjoy projects! You can work on them, you can take your time, you can achieve, but with exams [pause], exam really, is a nerve wrecker for me [laughs]. Um, exam is something this lecturer is setting for you and if you don't pass it, you know, you feel- -I mean I feel bad when I don't pass my exams. But it hurts me when I have been studying and studying and studying, and then something totally different comes on the exam. To me, that's very nerve wrecking. I like projects.

Sensitivity and Respect

Sensitivity and respect were important issues for the participants in the study. For them, the classroom instructor perceived as the primary person responsible for their

classroom comfort and well-being. Sensitivity and respect were expressed by the instructors' attitude to the students' presence in the classroom; their recognition of the fact that the adults brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom and their use of it, or consideration for the adult students' physical comfort.

Instructor's attitude

All three participants had concerns about instructor's attitude to mature students. In most instances they felt that instructors' attitude was undesirable. However, there were times when instructors were helpful.

Anna was asked whether she felt instructors made classroom experience pleasant, for older people. She commented that they were not.

Not, really. I feel- -not really. Some of the lecturers would assign you homework or even projects. What have you- -and they don't care that, it appears that they don't care whether you have- -you might have a very strenuous job, right, you might be coming to school, you might be paying for your own education. They don't care that you might have all those other stuff going on. You must have their work done within that- -find time. You have to make a certain percentage rank of that class. But I think they need to cater more to adults.

She commented on the negative attitude of some lecturers toward mature students.

Some of the lecturers feel "OK I had to do it when I went off to college". But a lot of us don't have the opportunity of going off. And when you go off, you have the time to go to the library to study. You can budget your time, but at home, you can't tell your boss that you have a term paper to do last week, and so you can't come to work.

Anna was asked to comment as to whether or not she was treated differently by male and female lecturers.

Yes, there is difference. Some of the males tend, some of them tend to be more understanding in terms of the adult learner coming to the classroom. But some of the female faculty, the like, they don't care, you know. You have to come to class during advisement time, You're not there that time "tough luck for you". Some of the lecturers tell you they don't discuss anything outside the class, you can't call them- -some of them don't have an office hour. You find the females are more difficult to deal with--they are less understanding.

Anna was asked if, as a female mature student, she wanted special attention.

Well, not really. You don't want special attention; you want respect, right, as an adult learner. Because, some of the younger children, they may be giggling and laughing, but if you notice, most of the adults, they don't carry on, you know, running on in this corner, talking and, you know, some you might have a little problem with. But most of the adults, they come in and they sit and they are willing to listen and learn, whatever. We may not grasp it as quickly as a 16-18 year old and so some patience could be given to that person. You have some lecturers who come to class and they tell you, "I do not give notes, I do not repeat myself...". You ask them questions and they really don't want to answer your questions. So it's like, "well, what's the point?" I don't think it special attention we need. We just need to be, you know, recognized as adult learners and perhaps, in some cases, a little patience. You may have to explain something twice.

Anna felt lecturers' attitude was important to the success of female adult learners and that it should be a matter of concern of the institution.

Another area that needs to be looked at is the attitude of the lecturers toward adult students. You know they act as though they are doing you a favor. I think they need to be dealt with. It is true that you are providing an education, and, yes it might be the cheapest on the island, but you don't want people to come because the college is the cheapest. You want to know that you are paying for a service and you should get what you pay for.

Beth commented about her personal experiences with instructors. She explained that some did not reflect concern for the mature female adult learner.

But it's like they have an attitude. "I have my degree, you have to get yours and I'm going to put you through the ropes. You know, you are not going to get yours easy. I didn't get mine easy...".

She was asked about her feelings on whether or not lecturers encourage adult learners.

No! They tell you "Drop" [with disgust]. I think the lecturer needs to look at her students, look at them, you know, everyone is not the same. And some students may be quick, they don't even need to come to class and they get an "A", and you can be there...Some people come to class everyday and still get an "F". Sometimes students just need encouragement.

She also commented on the positive effect lecturer sensitivity had had on her as a mature student:

But, the other lecturer, she was fabulous. If I did not understand, she would explain it. You could go to her at any time, and even if you got a bad grade, she was that type of lecturer who would say, "You could do better, you read this, you could do better". The other lecturer was like, "Girl, you need to go back and repeat 119". That was discouraging.

She felt that she received comparable treatment by male and female lecturers.

About the same! I had bad experiences with male and female and I had bad experiences with females. They are about the same. I had one female lecturer she was good; she was a female lecturer. She was good. Am, she was the type who, when you said, "I have a problem last night, I didn't have time to study". She'd say, "OK, we do the test tomorrow".

She did comment on the lack of respect shown to mature students by one lecturer.

She is just too hard. Sure she is just a little hard. You have an 8 o'clock, she locked the door. And sometimes, you're really late. Someone like me, I have kids then she got upset with you, then she'd say, "You'll think I'm God." I got a little discouraged with that. I come here to do a college course. You come off your job. It's tough, home, and tough coming to a lecturer with an attitude.

Carla commented on the negative impact that can accrue when a lecturer is insensitive.

I don't know but I mean others...I think everybody was intimidated by him, and somewhat just wrote him off as though he was just a crazy person. But I took issue with him. I can remember that night very clear. I would always remember him. I spoke with another lecturer and they said this is the way students are weeded out. If you're determined, you stay, if not, you'd die by the wayside.

Commenting further about lecturer insensitivity, Carla stated:

Lecturers treat you the same way as if you were a "teeny-booper" that kind of thing. Definitely that was the case with the incident with Dr. K. You know I felt as though, as an adult, there's a way to talk to an adult. I wasn't acting as a child, you know.

Recognition of learners' knowledge and experience

All the participants agreed that instructors seldom recognized their knowledge and experience. Carla explained that those instructors who came out of the business community were more prone to do so.

Anna was asked to comment about whether or not her knowledge and experience could be useful in the classroom.

Yes! Because, when you talk or speak, you're talking about something that actually happens on the job. The students that are not actually working, you have to teach them the way for the job market. But I'm already in that setting so I could tell you what's required. They telling that way, you're learning it that way, but on the job, there are many other ways you have to learn. But the person who is not working could come to me, ask me, "well, how do you do this on your job?" and I can tell you.

Beth explained how her area of expertise could be useful in the classroom.

I think it would help if it was related to the courses, say if you are doing Personnel Management, I think it would help that lecturer to know what is happening in your area, you know, "what do you do in personnel department?" It's good exposure even for the personnel students to know. Often times, we see even when a person comes for an interview, not even dressed properly. They may come to us not knowing anything, they don't know whom to ask for or what this job, they don't anything. So I feel as if sometimes a lecturer, if they let the students who are there explain to them what is going on, what they are looking for, you know, that would help a lot.

Carla was asked whether she felt the instructors made use of the mature students' knowledge and experience in the classroom.

There are some lecturers who are like that. We are all territorial but they didn't really focus on the wealth of experience in the classroom or the wealth that others could have brought just through participation. And so unfortunately, I say, it just was not focused upon. It may have been isolation of class and book, you know, "I'm the lecturer, this is how it is done, this is what the book says and that's the way it is".

She explained further.

Working students brought a lot of experience to the classroom, and, I know, speaking of some of the full-time students, they found these classes more interesting in that they got a better appreciation as to what happens in the work place, vs. what you read in the textbooks. So, they got some knowledge and an inside look at what was really happening in the workplace.

Carla recounted experiences where knowledge and experience were used in the classroom.

I think I can say in the BA Degree program. Because, well our major was Banking and Finance, and one of the requirements was they wanted persons in the field, part-time persons. Banking students or non-working students, so I could see many times they wanted to hear more, "and how do you say you'll do this again?" And "what does this mean? Tell me about your work. What is trust? I never heard that word before. What is trustee?" And, I think, the terminology that we used on the job, they got familiar with. You know there is always this thing where a textbook could only tell you so much. But until you get on the job. And so, they get that type of first-hand information, and we "piggy-back" off them. You learn, "oh, you don't do that! You don't go there, you go to this department". They [full-time students] know the ins and outs of

COB, so they were able to help us maneuver, I called it. When it came to common sense, they had it down "pat". They'd say, "No, you don't do it this way, this is how you do it. You go to this person or you go to that person", and so we "piggy-back" off each other. There were persons- -were able to get a job. We needed the position filled and they got their feet in the door.

Carla also commented on the role the lecturer can play in utilizing mature students' knowledge and experience, particularly when the lecturer is knowledgeable about the work-place.

Sometimes the lecturer- -now she came from the business field, and so, many times when she had a senior vice president or whatever she will say,, "You're senior vice president, tell how this done". So she pulled that out of you. But some lecturers they, and I think its because she had that working experience and she was one the lecturers who, when you sat in a class, "where do you work?" And when she came to a topic, if it had to do with time deposits, "what's your rate again, and how do you go about setting up?" you know. "You are at FINCO, tell us how you do it". She pulled it out of the students. There were some lecturers- -to them it wasn't as important. They came, they lectured and they left.

Classroom physical comfort

Anna and Beth spoke about classroom comfort. Beth expressed her feelings about her physical comfort in the classroom.

Well at the college, one of the areas in the classroom. When you go to class, the classrooms are dirty. The floors are not swept, some are just not opened, you know. Some of the fans are hanging from ceilings. You go to the bathrooms and very rarely there is tissue in them. Sometimes the bathrooms

are not cleaned . The dogs are coming on the campus making a mess and people are walking all over the campus. The other day, we were having exams and there was a choir just above the rooms where we were writing the exam. You could not concentrate because of the sounds in the building. It's just too distracting, especially for older, more mature adult learners.

She commented further on her tolerance level at the end of the day when she has to attend class.

But some of the classes are too large, I had a class of 70 students and the desks are too small and jammed up. There could be some pads in these chairs, and the air condition, and comfortable chairs, you have access to all of this at work, then you come to a hot classroom. It's very uncomfortable. Then you come to class at 6 o'clock and you are already drained, some lecturers put you to sleep. They literally read a text or they just talk stuff. It's very boring when you have a class that's jammed up and dirty.

Beth complained about the chairs. She felt that the chairs with side arms were most uncomfortable for older people. She humorously described her difficulty as a pregnant student trying to sit in the classroom. She said that she often got stuck in the arm tablet chairs. Though Anna was the only participant to speak at length about classroom comfort, it was nonetheless seen as an important concern.

Mature Students Support Systems

The three participants identified various support systems that were crucial to their survival and success. These support systems will be presented in four segments, family as emotional support, family as physical support, employer support, and peer support.

Family as emotional support

Family as emotional support will focus primarily on spousal support and other immediate family (parents and siblings) support.

Anna recalled how her husband reacted to her decision to return to the classroom. She described his reaction as "acceptable". Her level of hesitancy suggested that he simply acquiesced because it was socially desirable and financially beneficial for the family. However, she did receive some emotional support from her husband. She stated:

Well, his reaction wasn't [pause] it was acceptable, in that, when I decided to go to college. When I was finally got in, we had to coordinate our time. He would go to class Mondays and Wednesdays, and I would go Tuesdays and Thursdays. We already had a daughter by now. He was understanding when I went back to the classroom, and then I think he understood too, that he was not only helping himself but even if he wasn't going by my going to class, it also improved the level of finances and any promotion.

Beth commented that she received mixed messages from her husband after she returned to school.

Well, everything was fine with going back to school, at first. And then, my getting up and studying and homework. And he was like, "When you going to get to bed? Why you have to get up so early to study? And you have to read your books...". To me, it was difficult. Its like he can't understand. "Why can't he understand that I have an exam tomorrow, and I'm going to pass this exam?" And then, he's like, "when books are not in the bed, then the children in the bed", you know. And I'm like [frustrated laugh] "Oh, gee, here we go again!" I

would say, "You need to go to college", you know. He needs to just go. But, being make, I know he is just going to drop out.

She explained that her spouse did not have an appreciation for what she was doing therefore he was not as encouraging as he might otherwise be.

I wanted to see what it's like to go into the classroom and how it is to be sitting up late in the night. One day I came home, he's like, "honey, you look tired", and I'm like, "Oh, Lord, I can't take this any more". This him [sic]. "be like me". he said, "Be like me, see how it feels to be free again". He said, "Um, its freedom, I don't have to pick up no books, I don't have to sit at no computer".

Carla traced her experiences with spousal support even before her marriage, describing the positive effect it had on her as a female adult learner, particularly after the tragic loss of her mother to cancer. Recalling her sadness at her first graduation, she explained that her mother had died, and her father was absent from the ceremony.

I could remember looking around. My father did not come to the graduation, only my friend, my boyfriend at the time, and I could remember crying because the one face you knew would be sitting out there... That was difficult. And I could remember my friend, always trying to- -he bought me this gift because, I think he knew what I was going through. And, so he tried as much as he could, that night, to pep me up, or cheer me up.

Carla stated vehemently that spousal support along with her determination helped her to succeed in her studies.

If you speak to husband today, he'll tell you he doesn't know a time when I wasn't going to school and studying, which is true. We met when I was at COB, but I have to be honest, if it wasn't for him, I couldn't complete the program the

program. He picked up the slack when I sort of wasn't there he had to pick up the slack, definitely.

She described her spouse's reaction to her decision to continue her studies at the Bachelor degree level.

But when it came to the BA. I said, "well, its time for the BA. It's finally here. I'm finally accepted. How do you feel?" And he was like, "Ah well". At this point, we had a baby, she was one, and at this point, I don't think he realized the effect of it. Having a one-year-old, because I was always there. She, he said, "Go for it". He thought it was that easy. Now there were times when I felt I wasn't giving my 50% given my situation. That's why I said I was happy to have a husband who was putting his 50-70% when I was doing the 30-40%. Other than that it's impossible, it's impossible!

Family as physical support

As with emotional support, family physical support focused primarily on spousal support and other immediate family support.

Anna's husband was supportive at first. He cared for their daughter though he worked at various shifts. However, this support appeared to have waned as Anna's studies continued. There is the subtle suggestion that the care of the daughter later became Anna's responsibility.

But, luckily, on the nights when my husband was off, he would go home, see that she is bathe and so, and so forth.

Beth acknowledged that her husband took the children on family outings, even the family picnics. She confirmed that her husband has attended those Parent Teachers' Association meetings that she could not attend.

And, then sometimes if can't make it, my husband, he will go. So, yes, he is totally involved in lots of things, even the doctor. If they have to go to the doctor, he will take them.

She also commented on the role of her immediate family in providing physical support.

She stated that she was happy to have a mother who was alive and five sisters.

I would pick them [kids] up from school, then drop them off by my mummy until I finish class at 8 o'clock, and they'll be there.

Employer support

All three participants acknowledged the important role their jobs played in providing financial support; this, in spite of the fact that they experienced some job related conflicts.

Anna expressed her gratitude that the bank was providing financial assistance for her schooling. This was on the condition that she maintained a satisfactory grade point average.

Well, the bank officers, the bank pays for various courses, particularly the ABIB and the Associate of Arts degree at the college. And by enrolling, they would pay, and then if you fail the course or you get a "D", you would pay the bank back. But that in itself, is an incentive for persons who want to improve themselves. The bank is willing to pay, you just need to enroll and do the classes. So they are really paving the way, particularly since I'm married and funds are limited. So, to take extra funds and put it into education, it really, really would have been a burden, but of course the bank pays. Well you just have to concentrate on going to school, getting a good grade and doing well.

Beth stated that it was very important for her to receive physical and financial support from her place of employment. Earlier in the interview she stated that her

husband offered to provide financial support for her college tuition and any additional costs, provided she attended a local college. She mentioned that she would like to have studied abroad but that her husband was opposed to the idea.

She described the assistance she received:

Well, employer made it easier because they gave us six hours. We could take two days, so that was a little bit easier. They assist you know, I told you we were given six hours per week to, go to school and if you pass the test with a "C" or above, they gave you 50 percent back. But you pay first. Once you pass, and they look at your grades, and everything, then they give you 50 percent back. They also assist, they have given scholarships to go abroad.

Carla also commented that her place of employment provided financial assistance, without which, she would have been unable to complete her studies.

When I got to the bank, they implemented this program whereby if you were a student, and you passed your course with a "C" and above, you were refunded tuition. I passed all my courses so technically I got even a scholarship, because I had to pass all my next semester. So, it worked out. And I must say, "Thank God for that". He must have been orchestrating it up there, because, otherwise, I would not have been able to go to college, maybe and continue semester after because of funds.

Peer support

Carla commented on the positive effect peer support had on her as an adult student. Not only does she allude to the help she received from a girlfriend but vividly described assistance which she received from a team-mate when she felt that the only way out was to drop the course.

I could remember one time, during that last year where I had a term paper to do, and one night I reached to class and I was suppose to start a research. I don't know how the person found out, but the person I was paired with found out that my mother sick, and apparently they must have done the research, knowing I probably didn't get to it. I said to him, when I looked at him, "I didn't get to do my part. I don't know. I have to talk to Ms. G. I don't think I'm going to be able to finish this semester". "You know, I don't think I'm going to be able to finish this semester". So he [peer] said, "You know Carla, we all have our time. Hang right in there. Don't drop, because you don't know when this course is going to come again. It's going to prolong your graduation". I said to him, "I don't want you to feel as though I'm 'piggy-backing' on you, not doing my share". So he said, "Carla, believe you me, I want to carry you for a little while, that's because, today for me, tomorrow for you".

Summary of Theme 4: The Need for Sensitivity and Respect, and Support for Female Adult Learners

Anna, Beth and Carla experienced those fears that are associated with being older women in a new environment with younger students. They identified the concern of the older student who wants to perform as well as the younger student but who did not want to do so at the expense of their family, careers and their dignity. They felt that as older professionals, they brought a wealth of knowledge and experience into the classroom. They stated that theirs was the kind of knowledge that is not taught in the textbook. They wanted to be respected for what they were as professional women, not by test scores.

All three women felt they benefited from the return to the classroom not only because they would achieve a diploma or a certificate. Ultimately, this is why they came. However, they appreciated that while economic concerns, the work climate, and job security dictated that they engage in the intellectual exchange there were personal benefits too. Anna, for example mentioned the new friendships which developed and the sense of accomplishment, thus enhancing her feeling of self-worth and well-being.

Beth enjoyed the intellectual stimulation and the interaction with lecturers and young students. She also appreciated certain courses of study which served to enrich her life and hopefully that of her children. Carla needed to do her degree for work, for herself and for her children. She felt that her course of study would serve as a pacesetter for her children. She said that she hoped that they will understand that wearing graduation garb means hard work and dedication. Each of the women in the study felt that hard work and dedication won out against all odds.

It was also apparent to me that physical and emotional support was important to the women's well-being. Anna and Beth appreciated the support of their spouses. When support was given they expressed appreciation. Beth also enjoyed the extra assistance of her mother and five sibling sisters. Carla depended on the generous physical and emotional support of her spouse.

Earlier in the interview Carla mentioned that at her first graduation she looked out into the audience for that "one face" that of her mother's. But her mother had died before her graduation. Her boyfriend (now her husband) provided that emotional support. This was, for me, the most poignant of just how important emotional support might be to the female adult learner. However, her account of the student who helped her through a difficult time when she seriously considered dropping out for the first

time, was very moving. It summed up the total experience of the need for physical and emotional support.

Conclusion

A review of the themes makes it very clear that the three women came to the classroom having defined who they were. Each entered the classroom as mother, wife, household and family manager, full-time employee and with many other social responsibilities so as to become successful students.

The women were single-minded and self-directed. They came to the classroom for job certification and other related reasons; they wanted to be recognized as professionals. They needed to be respected for their age, work experiences, and the fact that they had the courage and the will to do what needed to be done.

They were aware that the social more assigned privileges to men while undermining their role of women. Therefore, the women in this study wanted validation for their as mothers, wives, family organizers, students and employees. They acknowledged that they experienced various fears that are associated with being an adult learner but sought success through hard work.

They also wanted the respect of instructors, the traditional students, employers, and their family, particularly their spouses. A serious reminder is detected in Beth's comments about her husband. She became frustrated when he could not understand that she had to study for an exam so as to pass it. They wanted physical and emotional support.

They wanted to have a part in the selection of their courses, scheduling of classes, and in their examination format. This would not only make for relevance in their lives but would also make it easier for them to accommodate family and work.

They wanted instructors to see their roles as having equal weight, family, work and school. Anna sums it up best. She explained that as female adult students, they did not want 'special attention' they wanted to benefit from their learning experience while keeping their dignity intact.

Further discussions, conclusions and recommendations will be presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Discussions and Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of the study was to explore why a select group of female adult learners, age 25 years and older, return to the classroom and how their return to the classroom impacts on their personal and professional lives. The findings are discussed in this chapter and conclusions are drawn based on my personal insights and the related literature. Suggested areas of additional studies are also presented in this chapter.

Two semi-structured interviews of approximately 70 minutes in length were conducted with three participants. These interviews followed a prepared outline of topics to be explored in the interviews (Appendix A). The interviews were tape-recorded, and hard copies were made of the interviews. Major codes were created and the material was further broken down into sub-codes.

A close examination of the data revealed the following themes:

1. The importance of recognizing the female adult learner not just as a student but as a multifaceted, self-directed adult.
2. The need for female adult learners to be recognized as qualified, competent personnel in the workplace.
3. The need for learning institutions to consider relevance of college courses, and provide reasonable alternatives/choices for female adult learners.
4. The need for sensitivity and respect, and support to be shown to female adult learners.

Discussion of Themes

Theme 1: Female Adult Learners Multi-faceted and Self-directed.

This was an important area and the participants had very strong feelings in this regard. The transcripts revealed that, consistent with Knowles (1980), Anna, Beth and Carla entered the learning institution, having defined themselves both psychologically and socially. They had clearly defined their roles as mature adults, and had learned to manage them very successfully as mature students. This will become evident throughout the discussion about female adult roles.

Female Adult Roles

These women were primary child-care givers, family organizers and housekeepers, and wives and were fully employed professional women.

Anna and Carla took the role of primary child-care giver very seriously. Beth did not appear to negate her role as mother but her circumstances were such that she did not have the same concerns as Anna and Carla. Anna and Carla acted out the role of primary child-care providers, though their spouses supported them in some measure in caring for the children. It became evident from their expressions that they saw themselves as ultimately responsible for the well-being of their children.

Beth took some responsibility for her children. However, her situation appeared to be such that other family members were present to assist a great deal more than was the case with Anna and Carla. She had a supportive husband but she also stated that she was glad that her mother was still alive. While she does not state categorically that her five sisters assisted her, in the Bahamas the extended family is still very much

involved in family affairs. The fact that Beth mentioned her five sisters would suggest that they provided physical support for her.

Beth was involved in the child-care process to some extent. However, it appears that her husband shared equally in caring for the children, even taking them on picnics and to doctors' appointments. She had the added advantage of attending more day release classes.

Anna made no mention of other family member so it may be concluded that she either did not have close family or that she was estranged from them. So she relied very heavily on baby-sitters. She was grateful that going to school had already allowed her to earn sufficient money to be able to afford proper care.

Carla saw herself in the role of primary child-care provider even though she admitted that she could not have done without her spouse's help. It would appear that her mother, with whom she shared a close relationship, died before her marriage and the subsequent birth of her children. She does not mention that her father was involved in her children's lives. As the primary child-care giver, communication was a major concern for her. She maintained that keeping the lines of communication open allowed her children to know her, though she was away from them often.

Anna, Beth and Carla also assumed the role of family organizer and home-maker. This dual role of family organizer and housekeeper does not appear to be by choice as much as it was a necessity. What I found interesting was that the husbands were basically supportive of their wives, but they had certain expectations of them. Beth's husband could not cook but he learned to cook during her second year at the college. Carla's husband appeared to be the most liberal in supporting his wife, yet he expected her to cook or buy food at fast-food places. She said he thought that it

was her job to cook. She also pointed out that her husband would not eat the food prepared by the hired help.

This is a reflection of the aspects of the Bahamian culture that assigned to women the domestic work. And it is also reminiscent of some aspects of American and Canadian cultures that assigned the care of family responsibilities to the female (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Dagg & Thompson, 1988, and Solomon, 1985).

Apps (1981) identified returning female adults as first and foremost, business people, home makers, parents of children, community leaders, volunteers, professional persons and a host of other roles that are part of their lives. This was certainly the case for my participants. As a consequence they experienced many conflicts. Apps (1981) explained that these roles did not go away, that it is among these concerns that place must be found for classroom learning. This would call for what Anna referred to as "putting a percentage on each role".

All three of the participants found it difficult to balance school, work and child-care with being a wife. Anna said she had to try and strike a balance. She said that meant listening and performing her "wifely" obligation whether she felt like or not. Beth's husband complained about the constant presence of books and the children in their bed. So she had to balance her roles so as to keep her relationship with her husband and children in proper perspective.

Carla's husband would have preferred to support her for the rest of her life. She mentioned that during her studies, she neglected her husband to the point that she marveled that at the end of her studies, she was still married. It appears that there was more dialogue between Carla and her husband throughout her studies than was the case with the other couples. She remarked that if you asked her husband, he would tell you that he doesn't know a time when she was not in school.

Carla's husband appeared to be more tolerant of her efforts to succeed. She completed the Bachelor degree program and had just begun a second banker's program. This certainly speaks well for her determination and self-direction. However, it also shows what is possible when female adults are given emotional support.

So, it is evident that these women put their marriage and family at risk when they returned to the classroom. Returning to school also meant sacrificing any personal pleasures, family celebrations, even giving up family vacations. They took an additional workload. Carla spoke of staying up until 4 o'clock in the mornings to complete assignments for tomorrow's class. The question about, why women were prepared to make such sacrifices takes on greater significance.

Female Adult Conflicts

Apps (1981), Johnson (1982), and Knowles (1980) spoke of the personality profile of the female adult learner and how this might affect her position as a student. These writers suggested that mature adult conflicts are very natural and are an integral part of the psychological and social make-up of the adult learner. I was naturally curious to see whether or not this would play out in the participants.

Carla observed that the instructor saw the classroom as his/her territory therefore conflicts arose because the female adult student came into the classroom with mature expectations. Knowles (1980) alluded to this fact when he said that often when mature students met classroom instructor, there was conflict crisis. Johnson (1982) insisted that female learners are not simply large children learners, that they are independent and self-directed.

All of the participants expressed the need to be treated like adults and not like children. Carla specifically addressed this issue. She felt that a particular instructor

treated her like a child when she was not acting like one. She suggested that instructors should be able to differentiate between childish behavior and that of an adult.

The participants felt very strongly that their return to the classroom was purposeful and immediate, unlike the traditional students who were not affected by time constraints (Apps 1981). All three participants felt that because classroom instructors were not always appreciative of the essential differences between the traditional learner and the female adult learner, conflicts often ensued.

As I reflected on the women in this study, their sheer determination to succeed as students was to be admired. I thought of many of the men at the Freeport College campus who have been irregular at classes, sometimes dropping out for semesters at a time. Usually after a year's absence, they would make written requests to continue their studies. The reasons could range from office overload to sheer exhaustion. But vary rarely do Bahamian men assume responsibility for household chores or care for the children. Usually their wives or girlfriends are attending classes, working full-time and going home to the family after a long tiring day.

The participants' comments were consistent with much of the literature. For example, Anna and Carla particularly expressed great concern about the impact that their returning to the classroom had on their professional and family life. Dagg and Thompson (1988) found that women, more than men suffered from stress that was directly related to how their studies affected their spouse and children. The findings also concurred with Apps (1981) who found that, women more than men were likely to have family obligations while attending school.

Theme 2: Recognition as Qualified, Competent Personnel in the Workplace

The pertinent questions addressed under this theme was why female adults returned to the classroom after many years' absence, and under less than ideal circumstances.

Why Return to the Classroom

The transcripts revealed that the women in this study returned to the classroom for four basic reasons. The participants pointed out that while certification was not a requirement for their present jobs, that over time, things had changed. Certification was now essential for job change and job choice, salary increase and promotion, and job security and competitiveness.

Each of the participants felt that they needed additional certification if they were to consider looking for another job. They felt strongly that their chances and choices were enhanced if they were certified. Anna was careful to point out that while her boss would provide an attractive reference, that an employer would also want to see her certificates. Otherwise, her chances for a new job, with equivalent pay, was almost impossible.

Beth agreed that she would stand a better chance of finding employment elsewhere once she had completed her degree in computer science. She stated that her employers did not promote persons with a degree but that they would advise you to become certified so as to have "salable skills".

Anna and Carla were concerned for the financial security of their children. Carla observed that employers were being economical and that it was considered to be good business when they (employers) favored a young employee with credentials over the mature employee who lacked certification. Being certified meant being employed and

perhaps well paid, or else being stuck in the same dead-end job with little prospects of promotion and salary increase. The other grim reality is unemployment.

All three of the participants stated that salary increase and job promotion were powerful incentives for them to return to the classroom. Anna cited the ABIB bankers' diploma, which is highly recognized in the banking community. She explained that bank employees are granted a pay raise after each segment of the diploma course is completed. Carla also explained that she was constantly told that if she wanted a promotion, she had to go back to school to upgrade.

The participants were concerned that they were not able to combine experience and certification so as to be able to compete with younger college graduates. Johnson (1982) stated that adult learners are in fact a "veritable store house" of codified experiences, ready to learn if the experiences are related to societal needs and are oriented toward immediate problem solving.

They felt that because their economic financial survival depended on keeping jobs that pay good salaries, they needed to return to the classroom. They were emphatic that females were the ones returning to the classroom and not the men. As the majority of the student population, they deserved to be respected in classrooms.

The women in this study were concerned that they become certified so as to enjoy a measure of job security and to remain competitive in the workplace. Anna spoke of the need to stay abreast of new technological advances being made. She also observed that younger women were graduating from high schools and they would be competing for the jobs. She emphasized that experience would only take one so far.

Carla echoed Anna's sentiments. She was also convinced that times were changing. She alluded to the changes taking place in government corporations. She explained that because so many thousands of high school graduates were looking for

jobs, that the government was obligated to find employment for them. She asserted that when employers hired younger, more certified persons and terminated the services of older, experienced women, it made good business sense. The overwhelming message appeared to be, "become certified or be terminated!"

Anna had great concerns regarding being the sole financial provider for her family. She focused on the prevalent attitude of many Bahamian male family heads toward the family. The men were not taking responsibility for their family. Often a shortage of money was due in part to the men giving it to their sweethearts. She felt that as a mother, it was her obligation to be able to take care of her family financially in the event that there was a break-up of the family. She wanted to be able to adequately care for her daughter and herself without depending on her husband. She referred to "other stuff" that men usually had to take care of. Often there was insufficient money for basics like groceries and medical care.

The literature also supported the findings that women are discriminated against and that this has always been an economic reality (Dagg and Thompson, 1988, Stewen and McCann, 1992). All three participants expressed similar feelings. In fact, Anna and Carla expressed outrage at the disparity and inequity of this economic reality, stating that in the Bahamas, women with equal or superior qualifications are still under-paid and are being ignored for promotions in the workplace. The participants thought that a sad reality is that women must continue to upgrade and be better than those who would represent a threat to their place in the workplace.

Theme 3: Program Relevance and Choices

This was an important area for all participants in this study. While recognizing their need to return to the classroom, they wanted to be consulted about the courses

and the scheduling of courses and examinations. They wanted courses that not only benefited them professionally but personally. If courses did not aid them to do their jobs or was not useful to them in practical ways, then the courses were not seen as relevant. Perry (1994) made some pertinent remarks in this regard.

Perry (1994) stressed that, curriculum should be structured for discovery learning, learning experience and learning motivation. So the concerns of the participants were well founded; they were concerned that the courses were those specifically designed for the traditional learner, not for returning adult students. At the Bachelor level it appeared that the programs were specifically designed for working adults. However, Carla's concern was that the instructors, for the most part, were too removed from the adult working environment.

Interestingly, Apps (1981) observed that the returning adult students would force change in the teaching methods and attitudes of educational institutions. Knowles (1990) also commented on the changes that will take place in learning institutions if they are to accommodate working adults. He stated that older, returning students would not accept many present day policies about how registration takes place, when courses are offered and the times that libraries are opened. That appears to be now!

Anna's comments certainly have application for change. She stated that mature students would search out whatever institutions are able to implement those policies that aid female adult learners' comfort, especially as it relates to scheduling of class times and exemptions for work experience and knowledge. She placed the responsibility for change on the institutions. The institutions must change or face the possibility of losing their female adult learner clientele.

Smith (1994) argued that institutions should develop programs that are responsive to the individual background and motivation. Beth expressed similar

sentiments. She felt that a degree program for part-time workers should be designed in concert with the students. She felt that more institutions should become familiar with the work environments and use that knowledge to effect positive changes for female adult learners.

The three participants were concerned that they were forced to register for courses which were neither relevant to their work nor their lives. They felt very strongly that they should receive exemptions for their work experience and accumulated knowledge. They agreed that they needed credentials from educational institutions, but they had valuable information gained through long years of work that even the younger students needed to get into the workplace (Javis, 1985; Venn, 1964).

The findings supported Johnson's (1982) claim that adult learners accumulated a wealth of experience over their working lives. Johnson referred to this accumulated knowledge as codified knowledge and experiences. Anna shared the same conviction. She stated that mature female adults brought 30 years of life experience to the classroom. She further stated that theirs was not a storybook or television drama, rather real life experiences.

Carla suggested that while books have much more to offer, that the mature female adult's knowledge of the work environment was often more practical. She related that a number of younger students asked questions about their jobs, and that because the adults were able to provide practical knowledge, some of these young students were hired. Beth felt that female adult learners also benefited from the younger students. The expression, "piggyback" occurs often, indicating the reciprocity of female adult learners and the traditional student.

The participants were concerned that they were not able to combine experience and certification so as to be able to complete their courses in the shortest time possible.

Johnson (1982) stated that adult learners are, in fact, veritable storehouses of codified experiences, ready to learn if the experiences are related to societal needs and are oriented toward immediate problem solving. There is the reminder that time is crucial to the adult learners. They are geared towards immediacy. Beth stated that instructors should help a student to get from A to Z in as short a time as possible.

The three participants experienced difficulty with course and examination scheduling, as they often created problems on the job. They observed that courses and examinations for mature adults were scheduled to accommodate non-working students. The participants also stated that it appeared the college operated on one fixed timetable that did not take the working adult into account. This created problems for the mature adult whose employers often needed their services at those times.

Examination schedule for part-time students was crucial since failure to attend a final examination resulted in the failure of a semester of work in a particular course. This was of serious concern to the participants, whose only interest was to complete their program in the shortest time possible. It was also problematic because the official transcripts were submitted to employers either for reimbursement of school fees or future payment of fees.

Theme 4: Sensitivity and Respect, and Support for Female Adult Learners

The participants each experienced some form of fear. Fear was age-related; fear of being made to feel stupid, and fear of examinations. All three participants related how fear of being too old in a class of much younger students was intimidating. Carp, Peterson and Reolf (1974) put forth the theory that mature adults entered the classroom with pre-convinced fears. They identified the "dispositional barrier" which is a fear of being too old, and of poor academic background to be a success as an adult student.

It was interesting that Anna and Carla who were younger than Beth experienced greater age-related fear in the classroom. Beth, on the other hand, liked being in a class of younger people. I think about the three persons interviewed and Beth was not only youthful in appearance but generated an exuberance which was almost child-like. Her ready laugh as was indicated in her responses complimented a youthful personality. In fact during her interview, she stated that the younger students often commented that she (Beth) thought she was young like themselves. I was also surprised by her youthful candor and lightheartedness. Anna and Carla displayed a more restrained, severe personality.

None of the participants felt that they were too old to engage in college courses, although Anna and Beth expressed some concerns about adjusting to college course-work difficulty. Again, one must consider whether this fear was in any way the result of a lengthy absence from the classroom, since Carla did not have the same concerns. However, each of the participants did experience some degree of fear at being in class with much younger students.

The older students were afraid to ask questions, so they depended upon the younger students to do so, even admitting that the traditional students explained some points better than some instructors did. They admitted that they hesitated to ask questions in class because they did not want to be regarded as stupid by the younger students. Carla said she often felt left out. She stated that the traditional students stayed together and that they effectively shut the older, working students out of their group. However, isolation was not a major concern for the participants.

One of the major concerns for Anna and Beth was fear of final examinations. Beth described final examinations as "nerve wrecking". Anna was concerned about the weighting that was placed on final examinations. She contended that after a student

had spent a semester in a classroom, doing excellent work, that the student's success ought not to be judged by a timed written examination. She felt that failing an exam indicated that the student knew nothing about the course. She reasoned that a student might study for an exam, yet fail it because one never knew what an instructor might put on the exam paper. She and Beth suggested that take-home examinations, projects and term papers were performed by most adult learners.

Sensitivity and Respect for Female Adult Learners

Sensitivity and respect appears to be of concern to all of the participants. They saw the classroom instructor as that primary person responsible for physical and emotional comfort of the student. They related that more times than not, instructors were insensitive to the needs of the female adult learner. Instructors' attitudes did not often reflect an appreciation of the multiplicity of roles these mature students had. Even when it was expected that the female instructors would be more understanding Anna stated that they were not. Beth experienced pleasant and unpleasant reactions from both male and female instructors.

The participants express the desire to complete their college programs in the shortest time possible, in the most comfortable environment. However, they felt that instructor's petty feelings and poor classroom comfort impeded their progress immensely. Often they failed courses without knowing why, and repeated a semester, often returning to the same instructor. It is understandable why adult students would find this problematic, since they want to complete college programs in as short a time frame as possible (Johnson, 1982).

Anna and Beth were unhappy about the lack of physical comfort they experienced on the college campus. They commented about small, uncomfortable

chairs, overcrowded rooms and locked classrooms. These were sources of annoyance to them, especially after coming from very comfortable office environments at the end of a long day. This is reminiscent of the classroom situation in the late 1960s. Howe, (1976) described the poor furnishings and overcrowded rooms at that time. He explained that adults were dropping out of classes because of the deplorable conditions in the classrooms. Anna suggested that many female adults today, might be inclined to go to other institutions which might offer greater physical comfort.

The participants focused upon the need for sensitivity and respect. They were concerned about the lack of empathy on the part of classroom instructors towards female adult learners. They were concerned that instructors were not recognizing their age, work experience and their many roles in society. They suggested that, perhaps instructors were too far removed from the real life of the working student. Carla showed how familiarity with the work environment could be an asset in making female adult learners more comfortable.

All three participants indicated that support systems were very important to their well-being. These support systems were identified as spousal and close family support, employer support and peer support. Each of these support systems operated on the basis of need for each of the women. Anna, Beth and Carla acknowledged their need for support from instructors, spouse and other family members. Carla benefited immensely from peer support. She stated that peer support contributed immensely to her timely graduation from the college.

From the three participants' accounts, it is obvious that spouses could be more involved in the care of children and the general housework assignments while their wives or mates attended classes. Carla's reflections indicated that she had to do the

housework or be prepared to pay an outside help. There was no suggestion that her husband paid for the help. Housekeeping was the exclusive domain of females.

Related Findings and Comparisons

The three participants met the criteria for my study, yet their experiences were different in respect to some female adult roles. For example, Beth's experience was very different from Anna and Carla's experience. I wanted to understand what contributed to this obvious difference. An examination of the facts showed that Beth, not the other two participants, was released for day courses. Additionally, she had older children, a teenage daughter and younger sibling sisters. Anna and Carla attended classes at nights, worked for private firms, had very young children, and no other family members, other than their spouses who both worked unusual shifts.

It was interesting to see that the findings in this study compared to other findings. Pence's (1987) study for example, revealed that social morals in Canada and the United States are not so different from those in the Bahamas as regards the female roles. Women in the Bahamas experienced very similar social stereotyping (Dagg & Thompson, 1988).

Another interesting finding was that, Anna and Carla are both employed by private corporations; so I naturally concluded that this might be the case in private institutions. However, Beth also expressed the same concerns though she has worked for 16 years at a large government corporation. As a government employee she would be considered a senior person. Her concern surely speaks to the changed attitudes which are now affecting long time employees even at the government institutions. It was generally assumed that this problem existed for persons working in private firms, only.

Another assumption was the negative feelings about returning to school were not necessarily related to the level of training in which one was involved. Kidd (1973) also supported this assumption. However, the interviews did not support my assumption or Kidd's finding. Anna and Beth were enrolled in an Associate degree program while Carla had just completed her second degree and was pursuing a higher diploma course.

Carla had no problems with course content or workload. Neither did she have problems with course work difficulties. She seemed more inclined to ignore, block out those things that were regarded by the others as problematic. She expressed no fear of examinations or workload that was within reason.

This study had done much to redefine the role of many female adults. It has offered new insights about some of the difficulties that these female adult learners had to overcome in their personal struggle to become more certified and to remain competitive in a male dominated society. Their plight to keep their families together at any cost is made more poignant as Anna's words echo "...and at the end of the day, you might not get the promotion. But you wait".

Limitations of the Study

There are many limitations to this study:

1. Much of the literature available to me was dated, and was very limited in scope and discussion of the female adult learner. Also, much of the literature was largely slanted towards the growth and development of the adult learner population, with female adult learners being relegated to a marginal position.

2. The pilot study was incomplete, therefore it had very limited influence on the main study.

3. The findings of this study will add to the growing literature on female adult learners, but the findings will not be immediately generalizable.

4. The participants were able to review the original transcripts but because of geographical constraints, they were not able to approve the final editing. However, I have tried at all times to maintain the integrity of the text.

5. A major limitation to this study is that it has been completed under severe time constraints and under the most unfavorable circumstances. I live in the Bahamas and the thesis supervisor and committee members live in Nova Scotia. E-mail service was not available to me during the course of this research exercise.

6. A Canadian researcher might find the Bahamian vernacular rather difficult reading. However, where possible, I have tried to edit some portions of the interviews without changing the meaning of the participants' stories.

Conclusions

The findings have serious implications for educators of adult learners and for planners of adult education in the Bahamas. Apps (1981) predicted that increasingly, adults would question the quality of teaching. They would question the attitude that prevails on many campuses that faculty are superior and students are inferior, no matter what their age. Apps (1981) also predicted that students would force change in teaching methods and attitudes of instructors.

All of this reinforces the complexity of the female adult learner. It also highlights the need for educators to begin to take female adult learners more seriously. Lenz (1981) predicted that educational institutions will have to begin to provide extra services, including a limited course load with more electives, flexible schedules, liberal provisions for credit transfers, allow credit for life experiences, provide neighborhood

classes and child-care facilities. Interestingly, when Carla was asked what she would like the institution to do for female adult learners, she jokingly responded that they should allow the children of female parents to come to school.

The literature review indicated that the large influx of adult learners, age 25 years and older, are making a significant difference on college campuses; that adult learners will become the dominant student population in the classroom. However, my findings did not support this view. Anna and Carla attended night classes, and they gave no indication that older students were in the majority. In fact, they complained that the class instructor taught for the traditional student and that the younger students intimidated them. Further studies might reveal otherwise. However, it was clear that those adults returning to the classroom were females.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The findings in this study are not generalizable. However, the findings provided important insights with regard to policy and practice.

Recommendation for policy

1. Further studies should be undertaken about female adult learners.
2. Specialized training must be made available for faculty of female adult learners.
3. Orientation specific to the needs of female adult learners must become a main feature of the registration process. Since older people may not know what questions to ask, perhaps trained personnel should anticipate adult inquiries and provide a medium for dialogue.
4. Adult learning centers should be made more attractive (more like the mainstream university campus).

5. Adult programs should be advertised like those of the traditional student. College and university handbooks, brochures and magazines too often feature young professors with youthful, traditional students. What of the successful female adult learners?

6. Financial aid, scholarships, and bursaries should be made available to part-time female adult learners, especially those whose employers may not be inclined to provide financial assistance. There needs to be alternate choices for women in the event she does want her employer involved in her academic life.

7. Some provision for on-campus child-care at reasonable cost to working mothers must be given.

Recommendation for practice

1. Programs must be structured to reflect the needs of female adult learners, their work experience and interest. Also alternative methods of evaluation could be considered.

2. Adult learners are time conscious, they appear to want to complete programs in a short a time as possible. Exemptions for work experience and accumulated knowledge in specific subject areas will reduce the time spent in the classroom.

3. Carla stated that returning to the classroom is good for the employer and the employee. Caffarella (1994) stated that this is indeed so. Therefore Caffarella suggested that the businesses should be involved in program development, orientation process, and the evaluation process of their employees.

4. Schedule courses, examinations, advisement and office hours to accommodate working female adult learners.

5. Physical and emotional comfort appear to be very important to the female adult learner. Find ways to increase student comfort.

6. Peer tutoring, library assistance and computer lab by older persons who are conscious of adult learners' fear of technology should become standard practice in college and universities.

7. Institutions of learning must find a way to involve private and public corporations in providing financial assistance to facilitate these practices and policies for female adult learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

The three women in this study were from similar backgrounds, they each attended private schools, were employed and in good standing with their place of employment. They each received financial support from their employers, were married to fully employed spouses who gave emotional and physical support.

All three of the women attended the same tertiary institution. Perhaps, a study could be done about women of different backgrounds; for example single mothers, responsible for their own education, or women who attended government operated high schools (public schools in the Bahamas), prior to attending the college, or women who attended other colleges of equivalent status. A determination could be made to see if the findings would be different.

The following recommendations are included for consideration:

1. A follow-up study to include women of different socio-economic backgrounds.
2. A follow-up study to include women from different educational institutions of equivalent status, to determine if the findings would be different.
3. A follow-up study of four male adult learners of the same socio-economic background to determine how the findings will compare with their female counterparts.

4. A follow-up study to determine why so few Bahamian male adults return to the classroom, and why there is such a high drop-out rate amongst the adult male students.

5. An in-depth study of each of the four themes should add much to the existing body of knowledge.

This study provided much in the way of first-hand knowledge about female adult learners in the Bahamas. Further studies will continue to be added to the existing literature.

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Appendix A

The Questions which will be used to guide the interview are as follows:

- (1) Demographic information: age, current living status, employment status, dependents, student(s) status.
- (2) Tell me about your decision to return to the classroom (school).
- (3) How do you feel about being a mature female student?
- (4) What are your feelings about your classroom experiences?
- (5) Tell me what things you would like to see more of in a classroom for female adult learners.
- (6) What was your spouse/mate's reactions when you decided to return to the classroom?
- (7) Tell me about those adjustments you had to make, both as a parent of dependent children and as an employee, so as to become a successful adult learner.

Appendix B

Themes and Sub-themes

Theme 1: Recognition as Multi-fascited and Self-directed

Female Adult Roles

Primary child-care provider

Family organizer/housekeeper

Student as wife

Female Conflicts

Conflicts with classroom instructors

Conflicts with traditional students

Theme 2: Recognition as Professional Competent Personnel in the Workplace

Decision to Return to the Classroom

Job choice/job change

Salary increase/job promotion

Job security/job competitiveness

Fear of being the sole financial provider

Social Perception of Male/Female Roles

Employment, salary and promotion

College attendance and drop-out rate

Theme 3: Program Relevance and Choices

Relevance of Program choices

Course Choice and Exemptions

Course and Examination Scheduling

Theme 4: The Need for Sensitivity and Respect, and Support for Female Adult Learners

Female Adult Fears

Fear of feeling stupid

Fear of age, rejection and isolation

Fear of written examination

Sensitivity and Respect

Instructors' attitude

Recognition of knowledge and experience

Classroom physical comfort

Mature Student's Support Systems

Family as emotional support

Family as physical support

Employer support

Peer support

Appendix C
Participants Consent Form

I have read the letter which explains the research study being conducted by Sylvia E. Darling, a Master of Education student at Acadia University. I understand that participation is voluntary, that information will be strictly confidential, and that participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have questions or concerns regarding your study or the rights of the participants, please call Dr. M. Brown at the School of Education at 902-585-1489 or the researcher Sylvia Daring at 242-323-8550/2.

242-352-9761

Fax: 242-326-7834

Participant's name: _____

Participant's mailing address: _____

Participant's telephone: _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D

20 June 1997

Miss Karen Lockhart,
Chairperson, Business Division
The College of the Bahamas
P. O. Box N-4912
Nassau, NP Bahamas

Dear Miss Lockhart,

I am a graduate at Acadia University working on my Master of Education thesis.

The purpose of this project is to help educators to have a better understanding of why a select group of mature female adults, age 25 years and older, return to the classroom and how their return to the classroom impacts their personal and professional lives.

The available literature suggests that millions of mature female adults are returning to the classroom each year for varied reasons. As an adult learner and an educator, I am interested in the stories of other female adult learners. I believe that through a series of interview questions, additional knowledge and understanding about this phenomenon may be gained.

As Chairperson for the Business Division of the College of the Bahamas, I am sure you are aware that the majority of our mature students are enrolled in programs in the Business Division, both at the Associate and bachelor's degree level. In your capacity as chairperson, you can assist me in identifying female adult learners who are

engaged in programs of professional and academic upgrading in your division. All information which you can provide will be treated with the greatest confidence.

The following is a selection criteria for your consideration:

1. Participants must be 25 years or older;
2. Participants could have spouse/mate, but must have dependent children;
3. Participants must be employed outside the home on a part-time or full-time basis.

I will make all further contacts with the participants by letter and telephone communication to solicit their voluntary participation in this worthwhile project.

I will be returning to the Bahamas July 1, 1997, at which time I shall be happy to answer any inquiries which you may have.

Thank You.

Sincerely,

Sylvia E. Darling

Master of Education Student

Appendix E
Letter to Student

I am a graduate student at Acadia University working on my Master of Education thesis.

The purpose of this project is to help others to better understand the reasons why mature female adults return to the classroom and how your return to the classroom impacts your personal and professional lives.

The available literature shows that you are among millions of mature females returning to the classroom for whatever reason. As an adult learner, I also contribute to that adult learner population.

These are changing times and I believe that, like the traditional learners (age 16-24), mature female adults like yourselves are being impacted by the changes. As an educator, I am interested in knowing your personal feelings about why you returned and how returning has affected you personally and professionally.

I believe that the best way for educators to fully understand about female adult learners' reasons for returning to the classroom and other related feelings is to get that information directly from you - your point of view.

As an adult learner, I appreciate your concern for privacy, anonymity and honesty in the proceedings. I would ask you to participate in private interview sessions with me during the month of July and August. The information given to me will be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality. I will be the only person privy to all the information about you.

In writing up the results of your story, your real name(s) will not be revealed. The audio-tape recordings made of each interview session will be heard only by myself

and a professional stenographer who is sworn to a secrecy code. All recordings will be erased at the end of the study. The results of the study will be submitted to Acadia University as my Master of Education thesis.

I believe that this is a very important study that will add to our knowledge and understanding about female adult learners. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be contributing necessary knowledge and understanding to recommend improvements in policy and practice in the field of adult education.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the attached consent form and return it by mail to me at The College of the Bahamas. P. O. Box N-4912, Nassau NP, Bahamas.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Sylvia E. Darling

Master of Education student

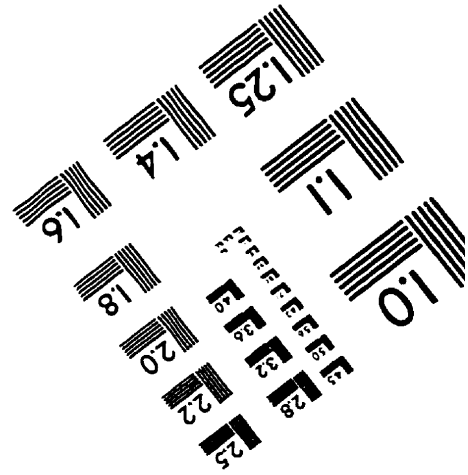
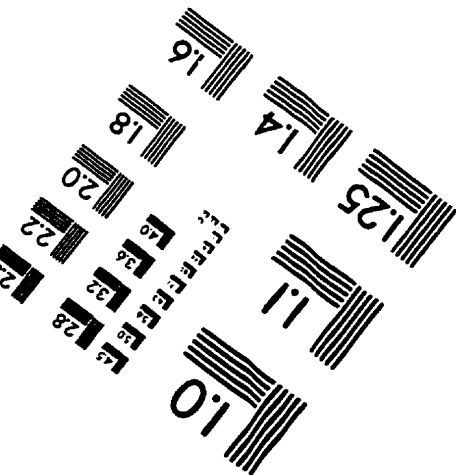
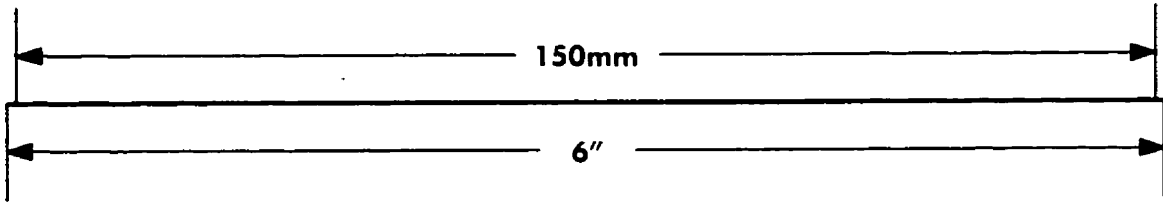
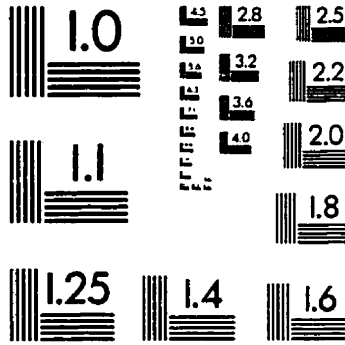
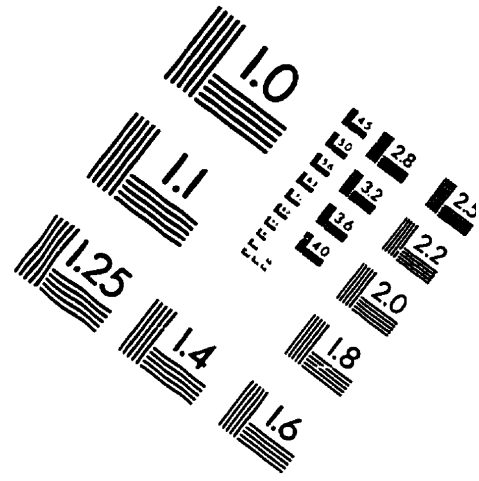
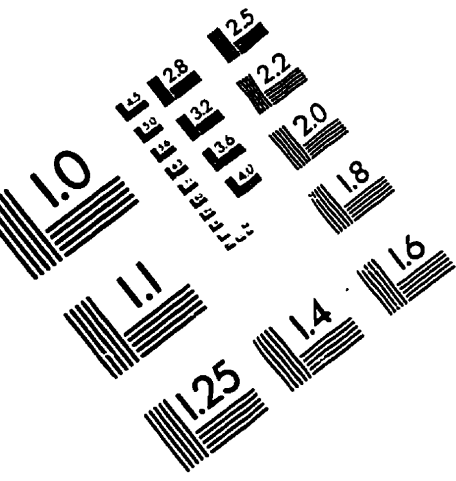
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Wolfville, NS

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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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