



SCHOOL of
GRADUATE STUDIES
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

East Tennessee State University
**Digital Commons @ East
Tennessee State University**

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

12-2007

Life and Debt for ETSU Graduate Students.

Laura Nelson
East Tennessee State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.etsu.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Nelson, Laura, "Life and Debt for ETSU Graduate Students." (2007). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 2140.
<http://dc.etsu.edu/etd/2140>

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact dcadmin@etsu.edu.

Life and Debt for ETSU Graduate Students

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Sociology
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master's of Arts in General Sociology

by

Laura S. Nelson

December 2007

Dr. Martha Copp, Chair

Dr. Scott Beck

Dr. Leslie McCallister

Keywords: Adulthood, Debt, Graduate School, Graduate Students

ABSTRACT

Life and Debt for ETSU Graduate Students

by

Laura S. Nelson

Through in-depth interviews with 21 participants, this thesis investigates how graduate students at East Tennessee State University feel about their finances. Although all adults, by necessity, have everyday money concerns, this study explores the unique experiences that post-baccalaureate students have with debt, how they talk about it, and what meanings they attach to student loans in their daily lives. This study is novel in that little research to date has examined how graduate students' perceptions of adulthood are connected to their financial situations and their stage in life. For example, saving money is important to this population mainly because it signifies the achievement of adulthood. Debt, on the other hand, signifies dependence and questionable adult status. Although graduate students' future incomes will vary, they share similar strategies for managing the stigma of debt.

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. METHODOLOGY	12
3. FINDINGS	18
Why People Attend Graduate School	18
Graduate School as a Life Transition.....	20
Dependent Adults.....	21
Interrupted Adults	23
Saving Money as an Adult Virtue.....	25
Avoiding Talk About Money.....	27
Debt.....	30
Do Financial Pressures Affect the Ability to be a “Good” Student?	34
Role Conflict for Mothers.....	36
Emotions and Money	47
Conclusion	38
REFERENCES	40
APPENDIX	43
Table 1: Parental Education and Income	43
Table 2: Participant Financial Support	44
VITA.....	45

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, a college education has been regarded as an essential element in starting a successful career. Having a bachelor's degree or graduate degree may be beneficial in the long run because it has been found that higher degrees are positively correlated to higher average incomes (Day and Newburger 2002). While an undergraduate degree is still helpful for obtaining employment, starting salaries for recent college graduates have not kept pace with inflation. Average earnings for women and men with undergraduate degrees may not provide much financial security, particularly for women, whose average earnings are significantly less than men's (College Board 2005). Consequently, recent years have seen an increase in the value of a master's degree for job applicants. Because middle class children can no longer assume that they will be better off socially or financially than their parents (Spilerman 2000), these children may turn to graduate school as a way to become upwardly mobile. With enrollment in master's programs significantly increasing and more people than ever earning master's degrees (Fairfield 2007), the experiences of students in graduate school are a vital, though relatively overlooked, topic for research.

At the same time that college education is viewed as almost obligatory for securing employment, the cost of tuition at public, four-year undergraduate colleges and universities is growing at an unprecedented rate (College Board 2007). The average yearly cost of undergraduate tuition at a public university is now \$6,185 (College Board 2007). While that cost increase is featured in the media, far less attention has been paid to the comparable increase in graduate tuition at those same institutions. Graduate students may be more strongly affected by

tuition increases than undergraduate students because graduate tuition is higher at most institutions and less government funding is available, which could translate into more loan debt.

Cost of education is an issue that has plagued students for decades; increased tuition rates are related to increased student loan debt (Williams 2006). If education is indeed the key to a financially successful future, then the cost of education is a worthwhile investment. In some cases, a graduate degree directly relates to a pay increase, making it a good financial investment; in other cases, a graduate degree does not enable financial gain and therefore a student risks undergoing financial debt or loss. When a person attends graduate school and takes out loans without expecting a pay increase, they forego financial security. Beyond the financial insecurity of taking out loans, graduate school may also be costly because graduate students typically take time off from work to study. The costs of graduate school thus compete with other ways that people get ahead, such as saving, earning, buying a house, or otherwise investing their money. Establishing and then maintaining financial security is associated with a successful transition to adulthood (especially for middle class people), the higher cost of graduate school may delay or undermine graduate students' perceptions of themselves as adult members of society.

For these reasons, graduate students may experience life differently than traditional undergraduate students or other categories of people who are not in school. This study aims to delve into the ins and outs of what these financial changes and pressures mean for graduate students. This thesis explores whether, and how, increased school spending impacts students' personal lives and families--the social and emotional repercussions of debt. This study will also examine how graduate students balance life duties with graduate school work. Additionally, it analyzes the issues that emerge for how graduate students see themselves in terms of what it

means to be an adult in our society. Before I explain the methodological approach used in this study, I will turn to the existing relevant literature.

Graduate students are by nature a diverse group of people. Some may be younger, enrolling immediately after completing an undergraduate degree, while others return to school after a hiatus and some life or work experience. In addition to varying life histories, graduate students vary by age, race, and social class background and are by no means a homogeneous group. Surprisingly few studies focus on graduate students compared to the large number of studies focusing on undergraduate students and college life. A population largely ignored, graduate students offer a window into how higher education is used to maintain one's social class standing or achieve upward mobility. Graduate school programs, more so than undergraduate degree programs, hold out the promise of securing professional work. Consequently, graduate students can offer many insights into the desire to replicate social class or improve, by "moving up" (Mullen, Goyette, and Soares 2003).

Predictors of enrollment in graduate school include students' social class origin (Crane 1969) and parental education (Mullen et al. 2003). People whose parents achieved higher education are more likely to attend graduate school, and people who performed well in their undergraduate work are more likely to further their education (Mullen et al. 2003). Parental income may influence what field people choose as well as the institution they wish to attend (Hansen 1997). Mullen et al. (2003) also found that the type of school attended was correlated with educational pursuits. Those students whose parents were highly educated were expected to attend reputable schools, such as research universities or private liberal arts colleges. Their findings indicate that social class of students is both reinforced and advanced through education. Not only are these findings reproduced in the United States, but they can be found in studies

worldwide and show that parental income and social class are positively correlated with graduate school enrollment (Hansen 1997).

School is costly for most people and many graduate students rely on loans. One issue is whether school loans and the size of debt deters some people from graduate studies. Millet (2003) found that students who have undergraduate debt of \$5,000 or more are less likely to apply and subsequently attend graduate school. In addition, students who have debt are more likely to have parents who do not have higher education, as opposed to students who do not have debt and whose parents are significantly more likely to have a bachelor's degree (Millett 2003).

Although graduate students may have little to no income, they are in the process of achieving the education and occupational prestige categories that correlate with higher class perceptions (Spilerman 2000). Perception of class status is based not on physical appearances, but the continual struggle to differentiate one's class as higher than others' (Yodanis 2006). Whether graduate students start out in a higher class or a lower class as pre-defined by their parents, they are striving to achieve the same or higher class status for themselves through educational achievement.

While the undergraduate experience delays the emergence into adulthood, graduate school is a unique step between a bachelor's degree and "real life." College also brings about the increased opportunity for networking and advanced options for the job-hunt and higher potential incomes (Holmstrom, Karp, and Gray 2002). Graduate school prolongs and perhaps increases these potentials. Because advanced education generally is a factor in determining social class, these students may stand a better chance at being perceived as belonging to a higher class with their master's or doctoral degree than those with a bachelor's or below (College Board 2005; Holmstrom et al. 2002).

Graduate school poses an interesting stage in the transition into adulthood. Most likely, graduate students have already moved at least once, have more responsibilities than a high school student or a traditional undergraduate student, and have learned how to perform basic life skills as opposed to traditional undergraduates (Holstrom et al. 2002). Still, they are students, and likely to be dependent on financial sources such as parents or the government for some sort of support. Graduate students fresh out of college may still be making a transition into adulthood. This is not the case, though, for returning students who have taken time off to earn income between their undergraduate degrees and their current graduate work.

Transitioning to adulthood can be a long (some would say life-long) and arduous task. Graduate school is, for some, a stepping stone on that long journey. Americans mark specific ages as important life transitions: when you're 16 you can drive, when you're 18 you can move out and vote (Hogan and Astone 1986; Marini 1984). Of course, these ages are not set in stone for everyone in this society, but these ages are used as guidelines for understanding at what time society expects you to have achieved a measure of growing up. People who do not fall into these categories can be stigmatized as "late bloomers" or in some way as less adult than their peers (Hogan and Astone 1986). For example, people may be stigmatized in graduate school if their parents are paying for their tuition or if they are still living at home with their parents.

While studies have been conducted examining the interplay of social class with emotions and social interactions (Lovaglia and Houser 1996), the relationship between money and emotions has largely been ignored. Finances have been studied over time, including how people spend their money and how they deal with financial issues. This is especially pertinent to those who attend school; students have special financial concerns since their school status curtails their ability to work. Johannis (1954) studied 108 married college students to see how they

appropriated their income, who controlled the resources, and how satisfied they were with their current financial situation. Obviously, because they were in school, most participants were not particularly satisfied with their financial situation and exhibited some behaviors that are common of students in order to save money. Couples were more likely to eat at home, shop at discount grocery stores, and not spend a lot of money on going out or recreational “extras.”

Johannis (1954) found that graduate school may be less stressful for married students as did Falk, who compared 40 married students and 40 unmarried students and found that married students were less likely to be concerned with their finances, perhaps depending on the support of a spouse, had less trouble finding suitable study environments, and were more satisfied with their general outlook on life than single students (Falk 1964). While being married does not positively correlate with high grades, it has been related to a less-stressful student experience. It is an open question whether marriage is still related to lower stress for graduate students, given the much higher cost of living today, compared to over 40 years ago when Falk’s study was published.

Environmental stressors may be more intense for graduate students as opposed to undergraduate students because the graduate degree is typically more intellectually strenuous and time-consuming (Falk 1964). Information from previous studies is limited by the time-frame in which it was gathered and heralds the need for more current research, especially among graduate students. Given the current surge in the cost of tuition (Fairfield 2007) whether students have scholarships, loans, or are paying for school themselves, most will feel some sort of strain, which could be relieved by someone helping them pay tuition or acquire loans.

One way that many people are able to go to graduate school is through obtaining student loans, or, going into debt for school (Christie and Munro 2003). While taking out student loans is

a familiar course of action when financing higher education, some people do not calculate the potential risk of the cost of student debt. Another social dimension of debt is how it may pose a threat to students' social status. When people talk about their debt to someone other than a close friend, spouse, significant other or family member, they may frame it or talk about it in such a way as to lessen its social stigma (Scott and Lyman 1968). They may also discuss other students who are in worse financial shape.

When talking about their debt or another self-threatening topic, people may also use “disclaimers” in order to preserve their sense of self in advance when talking to others (Hewitt and Stokes 1975). If debt, or a particular type of debt, such as credit card debt, is seen as a negative thing in American society, people are more likely to excuse their debt in some way verbally to another person or re-frame the thing they are talking about which may be a threat to the other person's sense of their “self.”

Consequently, the social psychological effects of debt are worthy of study among graduate students. In the same way that people excuse or accuse others of “bad” debt for anything other than school loans, people may hide or be ashamed of their amount of debt. Very little research has been done exploring the emotions associated with any kind of debt in Americans, much less among graduate students. Perhaps this is a “no-brainer” topic to researchers—that embarrassment over debt is so obvious that it needs no study. Some people in our society assume that there is shame associated with not having money, and none associated with having it. Shame and pride have a lot to do with our social interactions; something as stigmatized in our society as debt could be an embarrassing topic in social interactions and lead to many negative emotions (Scheff 2000). By paying attention to how debt and savings are

discussed by graduate students, we can learn what emotions are engendered by students and how they experience their finances socially.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed in order to gain valuable insight into the lives of graduate students and their finances. A lack of previous research on graduate students dictated an open-ended approach that permitted a range of questions as seeming most appropriate. As is appropriate in qualitative studies, I did not state specific hypotheses so that I would not be biased toward my research in hopes of finding a specific answer. This enabled themes to emerge from data collection in the form of common patterns. To the best of my ability, all the data were collected and considered equally.

In the interest of gaining as much in-depth information as possible, personal interviews with graduate students seemed a practical choice. While other methods may gather more data with less effort in a relatively short time, face-to-face interviews seemed most beneficial to this study, particularly because the questions were personal in nature. The question format I selected emphasized open-ended questions in order to gather information from participants in their own words. The open-ended format also allowed participants to emphasize what was most important to them rather than pursue only those topics that I chose in advance. Personal interviews, as opposed to a questionnaire or survey, allowed me to quickly clarify any points of confusion for interviewees or to ask them to give me more details, such as to rephrase a question.

To identify potential respondents, I obtained permission to draw a sample from a database of names, emails (school email and personal email if provided), addresses, and programs of study of all graduate students enrolled at East Tennessee State University in Spring 2007. The database was provided by the Office of Institutional Research at ETSU. In the interest of generalizability, I drew a random sample of the population, 150 students out of a total of 2500,

and sent a mass email stating my purpose and how students could get in contact with me if they were interested in participating. Those who had personal email addresses received a copy of the email sent to their school account. Only three students responded. One potential respondent declined to participate after finding out that it was an in-depth, personal interview, so only two interviews came out of the initial email solicitation. Due to the lack of response to the initial email, I then took a more pragmatic approach: because it was, by this time, summer, and I wanted to contact as many graduate students as possible, not just those who were attending summer school, I emailed all graduate students who had provided a second personal email. This list was compiled from the database provided by the Office of Institutional Research and contained 347 emails. From the 347 emails, 30 responded, and 17 resulted in actual interviews. Thirteen students declined to be interviewed when they found out that the interview required them to meet the interviewer in person rather than fill out a survey on the computer or over the phone. Two participants asked to be interviewed after hearing of friends' experiences. A total of 21 respondents completed an in-depth interview.

The interview consisted of 10 demographic questions and 24 open-ended questions that were designed to elicit thorough answers. This interview guide was based on what the researcher thought would be pertinent questions and questions that could explore holes in previous research. These questions were merely a guide for interviewees to express their thoughts and emotions on their current and past experiences with finances. See interview guide below:

1. Your year of birth_____

If mother is deceased, questions 2-4 will be disregarded

2. What is your mother's highest level of education?

3. Is your mother currently working? If she is, can you describe her job?

4. Counting all sources of income your mother receives, what do you estimate her yearly income to be for 2006?

If father is deceased, questions 5-7 will be disregarded

5. What is your father's highest level of education?
6. Is your father currently working? If he is, can you describe his job?
7. Counting all sources of income your father receives, what do you estimate his yearly income to be for 2006?
8. Are you currently receiving a GA, a TS, or any other type of financial support from the University?
 - a. If so, what?
9. Beyond your duties as a graduate student do you have a job for which you are paid?
 - a. If so, how much would you estimate you made in 2006?
10. What is your marital status?

Open-ended section:

1. What kinds of financial responsibilities do you currently have?
2. Is the amount of money you have coming in adequate to meet your needs?
 - a. If yes, what does adequate mean to you? Do you ever have money to spare?
 - b. If no, what would having an adequate amount mean to you? How does that make you feel?
3. As a graduate student, tell me about the emotions you experience when you have money.
(will probe for examples)
4. On the other hand, tell me about the emotions you experience when you do not have money.
(will probe for examples)

5. Who do you talk to about your money issues? (probe for who, and what kinds of things)
6. What kinds of money related issues are you completely comfortable sharing with other people?
7. Do you ever find yourself complaining about money? If so, to whom?
8. *question may be worded slightly differently based on answers to question 2* Do you find yourself getting excited about money? If so, do you share that excitement with others?
9. *question may be worded slightly differently based on answers to question 2* Tell me about how it feels when you have enough money to cover your expenses, like bills?
10. *question may be worded slightly differently based on answers to question 2* Have you ever experienced a time when you did not have enough money to cover your expenses? What was that time like?
11. Do you find that there are things about your finances that you would like to hide from people? How does this make you feel?
12. If you ever were at a great financial loss, where or to whom would you turn for help?
13. How has your financial situation changed since you were studying for your undergraduate degree?
14. Do you think your friends are in a similar financial situation as you?
15. Do you have a sense of how your friends cope with financial strains?
16. How are you paying for school?
17. When do you plan on graduating?
18. What kind of job do you plan on pursuing?
19. What do you think the starting salary will be?

20. Consider what you'll be doing 5 years from now. How much do you think you'll be making?

How does this make you feel?

21. How did your parents or guardians talk about money with you as a child?

22. How do you think your parents or guardians feel or felt about money? Compare for me their feelings with yours (will probe for having and not having money)

23. Do you feel that your money issues ever intrude in your daily life? (will probe for examples and emotions)

24. I've come to the end of my questions. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Because participation in this study was completely voluntary, participants were made aware of the study's goals, and any potential risks or harmful effects from participating in the research, though none were anticipated. The informed consent document reminded participants that their participation was completely voluntary and could be terminated at any time with no penalty (Once an interview was set up, no participants refused to participate or ended the interview early.). The informed consent document specifically told participants of their rights as interviewees, such as their guarantee of confidentiality. It also noted that the study and research had been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of East Tennessee State University. Participants read the informed consent document, asked questions, and then verbally agreed to participate in the research. Confidentiality was a key concern and participants were assured their privacy would be protected, therefore all participants' names were given an alphabetically corresponding name with the number in which their interview took place. For example, participant number one was coded as Amber, and participant two was coded as Bert.

Graduate students who participated were asked to meet me at their convenience in a private location. Of the 21 interviews, 18 were conducted in the Graduate Student Office (Rogers-Stout 218) on the East Tennessee State University campus, two were conducted in participants' private offices, and one was conducted at a participant's home. Participants were given the informed consent document and were asked if they had any questions, they were answered, and then the interview proceeded. I asked each participant each question on the interview guide while tape-recording and taking notes, after obtaining participants' permission to tape record and take notes. During the interviews I carefully noted slight gestures, nods, laughs, and any other accentuating gesture or sound. After the interview was complete, I thanked each participant for his or her time and willingness to participate before leaving. Interviews lasted from 23 minutes to an hour and a half.

When I finished interviewing participants, I transcribed each taped interview and filed them on a password-protected zip-drive so that I could not store any data in an insecure location. Some of the data I collected in interviews were demographic in nature such as parental incomes and levels of education. (see Appendix A). The majority of the data I collected in interviews were qualitative in nature. I read and re-read each interview transcript and coded the data for the particular meanings that participants attached to money, savings, debt, emotions, socialization, relationships to others, and so forth. I analyzed the coded information from each interview, paying attention to commonalities and differences in each of the interviewees' experiences. I then constructed more general categories of meaning, which became the main themes that emerged from the interviews as a whole.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS

The participants in this sample represented the wide age-range of graduate students at ETSU; the youngest participant was 21 and the oldest was 55. There were 4 males and 17 females and 10 were married, 10 were single, and 1 was divorced. Six students were enrolled in professional degree programs, such as nursing, medicine, physical therapy, and social work, and 15 were enrolled in more academic programs, or programs that did not have the specific promise of a job after graduation.

People have many reasons for trying to attain a graduate degree. While those reasons vary, graduate students have some interesting traits in common. From this small sample of students at East Tennessee State University, we may gain some valuable insight into the common experiences of graduate students: what being a student means to them, how they feel about their finances, and how being a student directly affects their non-school existence.

Why People Attend Graduate School

In focusing on their financial experiences, I did not ask graduate students to discuss why they were attending graduate school in the first place. During the course of our interviews, however, each of them touched on their reasons for enrolling in graduate school. Their reasons fell into two main themes: some attended graduate school for promotions, prestige or some sort of financial gain, while others attended graduate school for personal enrichment or job satisfaction. Out of 21 participants, 9 indicated that they attended graduate school for the financial gain, and 8 indicated that the benefit they hoped to gain was more intangible. Four respondents expressed both goals.

Some students felt that graduate school was a financial investment, using the logic that if you put in some time or take out some loans now for graduate school that it will pay back in the long run. Steve, talking about the financial benefits he'd gain from his master's degree, had this to say:

Well, mathematically speaking at 3%, 4% of over the next 5 years, I'm looking at about \$50,000 per year, and my boss is getting ready to retire, which is also why I'm taking this master's, so I could be in the \$60,000-\$70,000 range if it all works out.

Those who were in school for greater job satisfaction or life enrichment typically said, "Making lots of money is not something that I'm really concerned about...I just want to be happy in whatever I do" (Jenny, white female). Bert (white male) said, when talking about his salary when he graduates being \$30,000, said, "I'm okay with it [little financial gain]; I've never been motivated towards high paying jobs, just towards trying to find a career that fits me. I want to be able to make a living, but...I want to be happy." Queen, a white female, noted the fact that she would not make large sums of money in her field but mentioned the benefit of some social capital in her chosen profession of social work:

That's the first thing they tell you in Social Work, no one's in this for the money, there's no money in this business, there is a certain amount of pride or fulfillment knowing, and everyone else in the general public knows, that you're not doing it for the money...With that being out there there's a certain amount of respect, sort of like there is for school teachers or policemen or something like that, that (stutters) no-nobody really does that for the money...the level of acceptance in the general public and in the field. See, and I don't really need to keep up with the next person, if I can continue the lifestyle that I love,

travel, build a little cabin in the woods and do the things I love...I don't really care. I want just the small means that I need.

For four graduate students, both extrinsic and intrinsic reasons were important to them. For example, Irene (white female) showed a blend of both these attitudes when she said:

I'm very devoted to my field and I really feel passionately about staying in it, so I went through this, about 2 year period of, "how do I stay in this field and kind of stay true to what I know my life's course is supposed to be and make it financially viable for myself," so it was--it's going back to school...

Percy (white female) another student in social work compared the salary one could expect with a Bachelor's in Social Work to the higher income a Master's in social Work degree will provide. Her comment reflects how she anticipated deriving both financial and personal benefits from a graduate degree.

It's an awful lot of work and it's so much time in school, and you think about all this debt for 20,000 more dollars (laughs) I think it really boils down to what you really want to do and why you're there and the people that you're helping. I think that if you have a...personally, I want a job that I enjoy going to every single day, that you don't dread...so fortunately, I've had that...I love that and it brings extra devotion, and having that extra 20,000 dollars, I think it'll be okay, with the kind of work that I do and the satisfaction that I get is worth not making that much money.

Graduate School as a Life Transition

Being a graduate student signifies a stage in life that is symbolically distinct from adulthood (Marini 1984). For many of the participants I interviewed, graduate school represented a liminal stage between adolescence and adulthood. Younger interviewees tended to talk about

graduate school as a time when they were expected to become adults with increased financial independence, in contrast to their college years, when financial dependence on parents or other family members is viewed as normative. These younger students, whose ages ranged from 21 to 24, seemed to view graduate school as a stage in life approaching adulthood. Graduate students in their thirties, however, seemed to view attending graduate school as a temporary challenge to the adult status they had previously established. For them, graduate school meant experiencing financial constraints that limited their financial independence.

Dependent Adults

For five interviewees, graduate school appeared to function as a place-holder that allowed them to prolong their adolescence. Some students revealed that they did not feel ready for the full responsibilities of adulthood, such as starting a career and getting a full-time job. For example, Amber (white female) noted her state of limbo between “dependent child” and “independent adult” after being asked if she was excited about the prospect of earning more money when she took a full-time job after graduating: “I’m kind of scared about getting more money because that means more responsibilities and growing up.” Ulma (white female) felt similarly when she said, “I attended graduate school in the first place because I didn’t want to get a real job...I just thought it would be, like, an extension of undergrad.”

These participants and others seemed to use graduate school as a way to buffer themselves from the responsibilities of adulthood. Consequently, I assigned the term “dependent adults” to capture their experience of prolonging adolescence. For example, even though many students in this study identified parents and significant others as major sources of social support, “dependent adult” students gave evidence of depending on these social supports more than the other students. Yet, at the same time, they hastened to describe themselves as more capable than

their peers. In their interviews, dependent adults would describe their grown-up capabilities, but then share discrepant information about their financial dependence on others (such as parents). For example, Percy still lived with her parents and was quick to inform me that she would be moving shortly. Ulma received checks from her grandparents from time to time and knew that at any time she could ask for more but was hesitant to let friends or co-workers know.

The five “dependent adult” graduate students, whose ages ranged from 21 to 24 and were Amber, Christine, Percy, Tammy, and Ulma, talked about the freedom that parents’ financial support brought them while studying for their undergraduate degrees. Following this dependence on parents in undergraduate years came a transition from “dependent child” to “independent adult” in learning how to take care of themselves. For example, Amber said:

[Money is] a more stressful experience, sometimes, like, frightening as well, 'cause you want to make sure, you don't have that-that safety net of your parents like you do in college, so you have to, really, like it's do or die, and you have to be very strategic about where you spend your money.

Percy (white female), who lived with her parents, described the difficulty in learning to use her money as an adult when she said, “I’m constantly thinking...how should I use it? How can I use it responsibly, should I go ahead and put it in my savings account? Should...are there things that I really do need to buy?”

Dependent adults viewed graduate school as not just a life transition in terms of gaining education and getting a job afterward but also as a transition to becoming financially responsible adults. Some of their remarks indicated feelings of resentment over the benefits that other graduate students might be receiving (that they are not). So, at the same time they asserted that they were becoming financially independent from their parents and distanced themselves from

“children” supported by their parents and under their control, some of them seemed envious of the financial edge that those other “coddled” graduate students enjoyed. Some even talked bitterly of people they knew who still received generous family support. For example, Harry (white male) said:

And I have friends who are, you know, buying cars...with extra money...so I get pissed off, 'cause I'm busting my ass trying to-trying to make ends meet and trying to get everything paid, and they have more than enough money, I mean, they can spend it on trips and vacations and cars...

Ginny (white female) agreed, “by far, most of the people in my department [physical therapy] are from families that can support them,” when talking about the costs of school and books.

Interrupted Adults

Four out of the 21 participants noted that graduate school was nothing more than a means to an end and would not work if it were a permanent situation. When asked if his finances were adequate to meet his needs, Bert said, “Just barely (laughs) I think it's sort of a temporary situation...if it weren't temporary, it wouldn't work.” Francis noted the stress and pressure her children put on her. In this time of their lives, the children feel the stress of the tight finances and transition from school to a job and would say things like,

“You're failing me. If you were married, if you had a husband, if you had stayed with my dad, we'd have more money. If you would quit school and go get a real job”...I get that a lot-that I don't have a real job...you know? They don't understand, they're like, “you need to go get a real job,” so...so, yes, they are...harsh critics.

Irene talked about the daily stress of living as a graduate student, even though she has a Tuition Scholarship, job, and loans to compensate for income she would have if she were not in school.

[money issues intrude in my daily life] because I can't do what I want to do all the time, just like I was saying earlier, you know, being back in college [after working for 10 years] just is a totally different ballgame, and what you want to do is not necessarily what you need to do, and sometimes you need an oil change in your car and you have to put it off until 5000 miles instead of 3000, and it's just like it feels like I'm sloughing through...I'm tired of living like this, this is not fun for me. It's [money] just a nagging itch in the back of your head, like when you go to the grocery store, you know, how are you going to buy groceries for the week...

This transitional status is important to how participants defined themselves, noting that they could fully participate in society when they were finally out of graduate school. The experience of liminality as a graduate student was indicated by almost every person in the sample by talking about future plans or talking about graduate school as merely a stepping stone or an investment in a better future. Graduate school, for some students, is a period of time in which they are compelled to set aside "adult" agendas for the confines of an educational atmosphere, which can be taxing physically and emotionally.

Socially established adults tended to see graduate school as a transitional status, like a speed bump on a highway. Older students expressed greater concern in the fact that they weren't working or saving while in graduate school they implied that after they got their degrees, they could be "real" adults again. While these students no longer depended on their parents for financial or emotional support, they generally saw graduate school as a means to an end, rather than another step on the academic path. For Bert, a master's degree meant the beginning of his

counseling career and the end of his role as a minister. Randi saw graduate school as a means to get off her feet every day and into a desk job; her degree is one more step on the path to retirement. This was also true for Katie, already had a nursing career, but wanted to retire that career and become a teacher or take an administrative job that would be less demanding on her physically. Randi and Katie were both over 40.

Saving Money as an Adult Virtue

Many students expressed during interviews that that they defined adulthood as being able to demonstrate financial independence and knowing how to allocate money responsibly, including paying bills on time and having a savings account. Participants discussed saving money and the importance of it throughout the interview process. Though the ages of participants varied, saving money, knowing how to save, and what to save all came up frequently as common themes, even though the interview guide lacked a specific question about savings. As examples of their responses will suggest, they defined the activity of saving money as a personal virtue and as a marker of adulthood. The practical value of savings is that they are available to cover financial emergencies. Savings can ward off sudden dependence and a loss of face for adults who are expected to demonstrate financial independence.

One common way that saving money came up was when interviewees revealed that they were unable to do so, almost as if it were a personal failing. Thirteen interviewees said they wished they were saving money while in graduate school and berated themselves for not doing so. Some noted how important it was, others expressed shame or embarrassment in not saving, and others did not know how to save money but stressed the fact that they knew they needed to save. An older respondent said that she wished she had saved more money but had chosen to allocate those resources instead to renovating her house and to pet care.

This experience of *not saving* made participants feel that they weren't participating in "normal" adult society, such as to put money into savings, pay off houses and cars, or save for retirement. Two older students expressed the need to save for the retirement and care of their elderly parents, while five participants noted the need to save for their own retirement. One participant expressed pride in saving money, even while in graduate school, and noted that he was willing to live as tightly as possible to save "even a little bit" of money. In these cases, saving money shows financial responsibility. Savings for Bert, Ginny, Harry, Irene, Percy, Queen, Randi, and Steve seemed equivalent to the goal of financial responsibility. As Queen said, in describing her feelings about when she can cover her expenses:

It feels really good, and again [I feel] relief and I feel, um...confidence, adequate, like I'm participating correctly in society by being able to make my monthly payments or even pay a little bit more, so I definitely feel good, when I get money, when I can pay for everything...I mean, others know, I can't ask for money, so I have to make it work, so it's a huge relief when I can pay off everything each month, when I'm like, good, I've paid everything for the month, now anything I make I can start saving.

For the interviewees in this study, being a responsible and mature adult in American society means owning things. Queen, Jenny, Burt, and Steve all mentioned being home-owners. Also, many participants mentioned responsibilities such as caring for pets (Irene, Katie, Noah, Debbie, Ernie) or children (Francis, Ginny, Katie). Being an adult to them meant having financial or familial obligations, being independent of parents, or having a savings account.

Older returning students tended to be more likely to mention things that made them less vulnerable to being identified with younger, "dependent" graduate students. Several smugly

mentioned other students who were still dependent on “mommies” and “daddies” for allowances and tuition. These students in my sample were more likely to separate themselves from the younger dependent adults by proudly mentioning mortgages, paid off credit cards and cars, supporting children and pets, and were more bashful to mention amounts of debt or help they’d received from older family members. When she was talking about financial matters that she might hide from other people in conversation, Opal said:

I-I was so embarrassed to have to ask my parents to co-sign on a car loan for me, I ran up a lot of debt in undergrad...and, well, my credit was ruined, even after working for a few years, it just sounds so-so...I’m really ashamed if that ever comes out. I’m a big kid now; I shouldn’t be running back to mom and dad for any thing.

Several older students took pride in the fact that they saw themselves as adults, detached from their parents, and expressed shame in having to revert back to a state that they associate with their non-adult selves. People indicated their greater willingness to discuss savings with me and others than they were about their debt, as I will discuss shortly.

Avoiding Talk About Money

In many of the interviews, participants indicated that they saw money as a socially taboo topic. While some divulged minute financial details, other participants seemed reluctant to freely discuss their personal finances. Steve, in particular, danced around any question pertaining to his personal finances and diverted his answers to address his financial knowledge or others’ financial difficulties. Six participants noted that they did not talk about financial issues with other people because they grew up in a certain area. Debbie, when asked what financial issues she would share with others, said, “Pretty much nothing. I don’t know...I’m from the South, and everyone’s of the mentality that you just don’t talk about it...you know, I just never really talked

about money with anyone else.” Money, in this case, is seen as a culturally taboo topic. Even discussing financial success would be viewed as divulging too much financial information in Debbie’s perception of her culture.

Many participants noted that they were taught by their parents that it was not polite or not socially acceptable to talk about money to other people. Queen said:

We were also taught not to talk about money ever...we were not allowed to talk about how much my parents made with other kids in the community, no...um, what we spent for certain things or on certain things, no...you never asked someone how much something cost, that was very embarrassing...so, we were not allowed to talk about it all.

Some participants noted that they didn’t talk about money in their families because they didn’t have any money, as if people who did have money would talk about it openly. Debbie said:

They never talked about money...I mean we didn’t have money...just because I dressed different from the other kids, I didn’t have as much as they did...but I-they tried not to make the kids aware that we didn’t have money, but we knew we didn’t have money.

Along the same vein, Ernie said, “we didn’t talk about it...because we didn’t have it (laughs) I mean they had it, but, you know...it was pretty tight.” Ginny noted the family stress caused by lack of money: “I knew that it was stressful because I heard them talking about, how are we going to make it this month, or maybe our TV would get cut off...er...but it was never really specifically talked about.”

Lisa said the same:

They never spoke with me about money, except, no, you can’t have that, we can’t afford that...but it was always an issue in our home, and I always knew that there wasn’t any, 'cause my mother was always depressed; went through lots of depression, she was

hospitalized for a few weeks one time...lots of fighting, you could always hear them arguing in the bedroom or the kitchen or...you know, it was always--it was always an issue growing up, we knew it wasn't there, nobody ever sat down with us and said, look, it was just one of those things that all of us kids just knew.

Mary said, when asked about how her parents talked to her about money:

Different era. Um, they...they didn't talk about money...so, I don't remember...there was a lot of subjects you didn't talk about. My parents didn't talk about a lot of issues, even as grown children, there's still things we don't talk about. That was just the era, though...it's a different time.

Christine, whose father was a high-ranking officer in the military, had this to say about money as a child:

It was never mentioned. Ever. Never, ever. We got an allowance, my sister and I did...and they were very generous. They were really generous. We weren't taught how to budget, which we should have been, we weren't made to work, which we should have been. I think teaching a child the value of the dollar is very important.

Irene shared her family experience and summed up all the themes relating to money:

We talk--we were pretty open about everything, sex, drugs, but money was a little less-- I think because we didn't have it and since it was a different time, we didn't talk, you know, we didn't talk about money, it was a different generation. My parents didn't talk about how to manage money, how do you learn that? I wish they would have taught me how to use money to my advantage, because using money properly isn't an intuitive thing, probably that's why we have title loan places, you know? (laughs) I think money is a more taboo topic than sex and drugs in our culture right now.

Families seemed unwilling in many cases to even teach children how to budget or use money wisely, yet, people in my sample agreed that saving was a good thing. Although many participants indicated that their families avoided talk about money, they were far more willing to discuss savings than debt, which played a central role in their lives as students. Families across income levels were unwilling to discuss money as a family matter and taught respondents that it is an unacceptable subject to broach with other people.

Debt

Savings and debt in our society bring forth distinctly different meanings. Some participants learned from parents only the importance of saving money and experience great shame and distress from incurring any amount of “unproductive” debt such as student loans. While no questions in the interview guide specifically asked about the burden of graduate school debt, the topic of student loans and lacking funds came up in every interview. The students who did not take out loans to fund their education expressed feelings of security, pride, and superiority toward those who were in debt. Several participants talked about graduate school as a life investment for either monetary or personal growth; sometimes this “investment” was treated as a synonym for accumulating debt. As shown in Table 2 in Appendix A, 14 participants out of 21 are currently or have previously taken out student loans to fund their graduate education. Though some feelings of shame arose in interviews revolving around some debt amounts or having debt at all, most students excused or made their debt seem less intimidating by talking about and framing graduate school as an investment. By framing it as an investment, they could justify having debt (Scott and Lyman 1968). Some also tried not to obsess about debt. As Harry said, “I don’t fixate over it, I try not to--I know in the back of my mind that I’m going to be in debt, but I don’t let that get in the way of you know living my life now. I don’t fixate over

money.” Graduate students may treat graduate school as a long-term investment and avoid treating debt as an immediate problem, which provides comfort and justification for any borrowed money.

Some graduate programs such as those in the health care field have specific monetary payoffs, so taking out loans is a beneficial and normalized life investment. Ginny, who is in the physical therapy program, said, “For me, [money is] is security, with this job now [while in graduate school], if I get hurt, I’m done. My job’s over. When I graduate, I’ll get a good job with benefits, so that I can have security.” Tammy, another professional graduate student, said:

I’m taking out loans, but it’s not like everyone else in my department isn’t taking out loans. I know when I get out of school, I’m going to be making minimum \$45,000 a year, that’s enough to start to pay them off. I’m not worried about it [her amount of debt] at all because I know that I’m going to have enough to pay them off.

Students in this sample had several ways of framing their debt that helped normalize and justify it. Not only did they justify it to me, the interviewer, but some even told stories of telling other students to take more money out or offering them encouragement to not strain financially in graduate school. Some students justified or rationalized their debt by talking about it not just as an investment but also as something that “everybody else” in graduate school does. When asked if her friends are in a similar financial situation as she is, Irene said, “yeah. My friends at school, definitely...my friends who are working full-time, maybe not, but all of us in the graduate realm, we’re all in the same boat...maxing out our loans.” Irene rationalized her amount of debt by assuming that all people in graduate school get loans and “max out” their debt. Ernie echoed her sentiments, “I’m in debt...but I’m a college student.” Christine summed the situation well when she said:

I think most grad students run on loans--If we have 20 grad students, I would say 15 are running on borrowed money and, um, 5 have not borrowed money, but, include G.A.s...but they're getting money from somewhere.

Some graduate students spoke of encouraging others or being encouraged by others to take out loans. This kind of encouragement signaled their growing acceptance of debt as a necessary evil. For example, Queen said:

I'm not so forthcoming about how much debt [I have], but when I hear them stressed about having 20,000 dollars in debt, or they're worried about how they're going to make their rent this month and they haven't taken anything out in student loans, I'll say, look, take it out, even if you take \$30,000 out, that's only 300 dollars a month, take it out, get through your education without turning grey, just go ahead and do it, it's not a big deal."

So, even though she noted shame in the amount of her own debt, she encouraged graduate students in her department and friends not to stress over money in order to devote their whole attention to their studies. Ginny also talked about the encouragement she experienced from peers to relieve her money anxieties by borrowing more.

[I would like to hide] the amount of debt. Part of it is like, just...in the last 6 months, probably, I talked to one guy in my class, and he said, 'you know what? It's just not worth the stress, we're going to pay it back anyway' so I decided it's not worth the stress to worry about making bills, I was trying not to take out loans, and it was just--it was just too much stress...I couldn't handle it.

As some of the preceding comments indicate, people may ease their financial discomfort by social comparison and finding ways to feel more comfortable with their debt. Mary said, "I have a friend whose husband just got laid off, so to hear them talking about money after he got

laid off, because he had a good job, it's kind of comforting to know that there are people doing worse than us..." Queen echoed this statement by saying, "there's always someone worse off than you..."

If people feel like having a savings account is a marker of being a "good" or responsible adult, then debt can be seen as the opposite. Debt, even more than a lack of savings, was talked about as something that must be explained and justified in order to reduce its stigmatizing power. Consequently, students in this study normalized and rationalized debt so that they could avoid having their adult identities discredited. Ginny and Tammy were initially hesitant to take out loans in graduate school but were encouraged by colleagues to not worry or stress over the amount taken out as if it were normal. The "we're all in the same boat" mentality or the idea that everyone in graduate school is taking out loans brings comfort to some participants, even though it is inaccurate.

Of all the students in this study, 18 out of 21 were receiving some sort of support, meaning that they have some help with their tuition whether from work, a GA or a TS. Five of the students interviewed had their tuition paid by their places of employment, 10 were receiving Graduate Assistantships, and 3 had Tuition Scholarships. Only 3 students were paying for school solely with loans, although 14 of 21 were taking out some amount of loans. People seemed to feel differently about the amounts of money being borrowed. Students earning professional degrees, such as Ginny, Noah, Queen, and Tammy, who were guaranteed a prospect of a job that would pay their bills when they graduated, showed less concern for the amount of money they were taking out in loans.

Do Financial Pressures Affect the Ability to be a “Good” Student?

Almost all the participants in my sample could not exclude thoughts of money and finances from their daily thoughts. Most participants mentioned the fact that their thoughts of money intruded on their daily lives. For some participants, worrying about money is a central concern and diverts time and mental energy from their desire to focus on studying. Students who felt compelled by necessity to take second jobs noted extreme pressure from balancing work and school duties, and thus thoughts of money intruded even further. Fifteen of the 20 participants noted that anxiety about money, or thinking about debt or finances in some way intruded on their studying or performance in school. Those students who had to work in addition to going to graduate school noted that getting the most out of their education was being interrupted by the stress and worry of finances and work.

For example, when asked if thoughts about money ever intrude on his daily life, Ernie noted:

[thoughts of money intrude] only if there's a lack of money and it's causing me stress...it's annoying because then I have to spend time working as opposed to doing something that I'd rather be doing like studying...and I'm focusing on getting money instead of school, and I have to work at a job that is not going to have any kind of future.

Irene said:

You do have to worry [about money] and you can't have fun, money takes a lot more of your time and your focus, and I do think it becomes a lot harder being the person you can be or becoming the person you can be, because some of that energy gets siphoned off into worrying about bills that are coming due.

As an interesting contrast, Harry, who reported that he had adequate finances and financial aid, stated that money and school were perfectly balanced for him, and thoughts of money never intruded. When asked the same question as Ernie, he responded:

No, no...not really, not so much...um...I don't really balance my checkbook, I always just know how much is in there, I don't bounce checks, I don't think I really have money issues. When I was younger everything was surrounded by money...you can't do anything if you didn't have money, I was more aware and more conscious of it, but now, not so much.

The relief experienced when someone has enough money is expressed by Mary when she said:

[Money] gives me the security that I need to focus on my school and work. I'm not too crazy about the pursuit of money, it doesn't get me too crazy, but when it comes to making payments and having enough money, I love the security of knowing that all my bills can be paid and that my kids' needs are met.

Money concerns were unavoidable distractions for many students, such as Katie, who said "I can't quit work to go to school full-time because I carry my husband on my insurance...but that would make it easier to just go to school...." Ginny said, when asked what having an adequate amount of money would mean to her:

It would be a big stress relief...I would be able to focus a lot more on school...and it would be more of a stress-free environment if I didn't have to work or didn't have the pressure of the work, and the worry about the debt, because we're racking up a lot of money in debt and it's just scary to think about.

Ginny shows us that even the promise of a secure income after school is sometimes not enough to reassure students as they are going to school and accumulating debt.

Role Conflict for Mothers

Parents of school-aged children in this study appeared to experience heightened role conflict while attending graduate school by worrying about finances, school, and children. Three female participants experienced a variety of negative emotions in association with their graduate school tenure while juggling family and financial responsibilities. While one was a single mother who provided for her children all by herself and two were dual-parent providers, all experienced guilt because they felt unable to supply children with financial and emotional needs. Ginny said when talking about the stress of managing a family and money issues:

I'm really good at managing stress with so much going on, but it really brings my emotions to the surface. I'll have meltdowns about once a semester. It's-it's usually about halfway through the semester, I'll usually have a major meltdown. I get kind of depressed and just...really cranky, "what am I doing? I'm never going to make it...and then crash for like a day or two and then I recover. It's just kind of scary, I guess.

When asked about how she feels about not having enough money to cover bills Francis noted:

Well, um, you feel horrible, you feel stressed out about it even before it happens and then after it happens, you're just like, okay, so there's not cable for two weeks, um...but I have kids...so then you're being a bad provider and you're not feeling very...and you're not living up to their expectations, so then you have the whole, shameful, bad momma thing...

Along these lines, Mary said:

Just the stress of not knowing what's going on at home while I'm at school and thinking about, well, if I wasn't in school, maybe I wouldn't miss this game or that event, or if I

could make more money with a job instead of school...it's a general insecurity, um...things feel pretty topsy-turvy right now.

All mothers noted significant outward expression of their stress in relation to their finances, such as crying, depressive moods, and “acting out,” meaning yelling or snapping at children or other family members. As an important contrast, Bert, who was also a parent and the only father in my sample, did not seem to experience this role conflict. There was no mention of graduate school somehow interfering with his ability to feel like a good parent.

Emotions and Money

As has been shown throughout this research, money represented an important topic in the lives of graduate students, affecting them emotionally, not just materially. For 20 of the 21 participants, financial concerns caused stress regularly, and many expressed joy and happiness when telling stories of when they got paid, received a monetary prize or gift, or simply got loans from the school. Some graduate students experienced tension from juggling monetary agendas with school commitments. When asked how they felt, or what emotions they experienced when they had money, 15 out of 21 participants laughed before answering as if the idea of having money was in some way a joke. People tended to feel safe, comfortable, and secure when they had money to cover their expenses and felt upset, angry, stressed, uneasy, and depressed when they did not have as much money as they thought they needed. These feelings may have an effect on students' interactions with family members, friends, colleagues, or co-workers. While most students expressed not having enough money as an important issue, some felt that their monthly income was adequate to meet their needs. In these situations, four participants noted exercising caution in interactions with others or trying to be sensitive to the feelings of others who did not have as much money as they. Noah said, “I don't bring attention to it [his money] and I don't

purposefully express any kinds of emotions toward, or whatever, so maybe they won't feel bad, or so there's not any kind of animosity between us." By avoiding the topic of money, Noah and others hoped to keep social situations easy and comfortable for others. Queen felt ashamed of telling people how she spent her summer earnings on trips for herself for fear that people in her department would judge her actions as frivolous.

Conclusion

Graduate school poses an interesting phase in many peoples' lives. For some younger students, it may be a time to postpone the inevitable: adulthood. These students may use graduate school as a time to prolong the school experience and extend financial and/or emotional dependence on parents or close relatives. While younger students may bask in the delay of adulthood, older students tend to see graduate school as a period of time where they must shed their adult status, by relinquishing their job, and some financial security, to further develop their careers by obtaining a master's degree.

While graduate school is a different experience for all students, one must agree that most students have finances on their mind. Graduate school can be costly, and on top of that, students must meet all the expenses that we expect of "normal" adults. Taking out student loans is one way people secure their financial situation. Students may be socialized by peers to think that taking out loans is not going to be harmful in the long-run, even though they may be skeptical of it at first. Students in this sample were hesitant to talk about their loans in amounts, and generally expressed concern in how they were going to pay those loans back.

People, in general, seem to be hesitant to talk about their finances, as they have been taught by their families and through our culture that money is not an acceptable topic for public, or in some cases, private conversation. Money means many things to people of all classes, creeds

and positions in life, and graduate students are no exception. It is on the forefront of many graduate students' minds to the extent that sometimes it keeps them from their primary duty: studying.

From these few students, we can learn that graduate students are an important population to study because they experience a largely ignored period in a growing number of people's lives. As enrollment in graduate school increases, more people will experience what these students are going through and would benefit by any future research. This research may also help graduate schools counsel students at small universities on how to take out loans, teaching them how much is necessary and how to use their money wisely.

This study was limited by the time-frame in which it was conducted and by the relatively small sample. Because it was started in March 2007 and was completed by June 2007, the researcher was pressed to collect data in a short amount of time. With a population of 2500, the sample size could have been bigger. A way to reach these other students would be to write a meaningful survey from the data gathered in this study and administer it online, so as to make it convenient and easy for graduate students to participate. It is also limited in its usefulness to other campuses because it did not encompass students from other universities. Future research should look at a broader spectrum of graduate students, as this research is limited by a small sample. A beneficial offshoot of this study would be to look at the amount of loans people take out and how they are able to pay them back in the long run. Future researchers could also study whether people five years after graduating still consider their schooling a worthwhile investment.

REFERENCES

- College Board. 2007. "Trends in College Pricing." Retrieved November 1, 2007.
(http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/trends/trends_pricing_07.pdf)
- College Board. 2005. "The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society." Retrieved October 10, 2007
(http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/press/cost04/educationpays2004.pdf).
- Christie, Hazel and Munro, Moira. (2003). "The Logic of Loans: Students' Perceptions of the Costs and Benefits of the Student Loan." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24, 621-636.
- Crane, Diana. 1969. "Social Class Origin and Academic Success: The Influence of Two Stratification Systems on Academic Careers." *Sociology of Education* 42(1): 1-17.
- Day, Jennifer C., and Eric C. Newburger. 2002. "The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-life Earnings." US Census Bureau. Retrieved October 11, 2007 (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p23-210.pdf>).
- Fairfield, Hannah. September 12, 2007. Master's degrees abound as universities and students see a windfall. *New York Times*, New York.
- Falk, Laurence L. 1964. "A Comparative Study of Problems of Married and Single Students." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 26(2): 207-208.
- Hansen, Marianne N. 1997. "Social and Economic Inequality in the Educational Career: Do the Effects of Social Background Characteristics Decline?" *European Sociological Review* 13(3): 305-321.

- Hewitt, John P., and Randall Stokes. 1975. "Disclaimers." *American Sociological Review* 40(1): 1-11.
- Hogan, Dennis P., and Nan M. Astone. 1986. "The Transition to Adulthood." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12: 109-130.
- Holmstrom, Lynda L., David A. Karp, and Paul S. Gray. 2002. "Why Laundry, not Hegel? Social Class, Transition to College, and Pathways to Adulthood." *Symbolic Interaction*, 25(4): 437-462.
- Johannis, Theodore B., Jr. 1954. "A Sample of Married College Students and Their Income." *The Coordinator* 3(3): 1-9.
- Karp, David A., Lynda L. Holmstrom, and Paul S. Gray. 1998. "Leaving Home for College: Expectations for Selective Reconstruction of Self." *Symbolic Interaction*, 21(3): 253-276.
- Kaufman, Peter. 2003. "Learning to *not* Labor: How Working-class Individuals Construct Middle-class Identities". *The Sociological Quarterly* 44(3): 481-504.
- Lovaglia, Michael J., and Jeffrey A. Houser. 1996. "Emotional Reactions and Status in Groups." *American Sociological Review* 61(5): 867-883.
- Marini, Margaret M. 1984. "Age Sequencing Norms in the Transition to Adulthood." *Social Forces* 63(1): 229-244.
- Millett, Catherine M., 2003. "How Undergraduate Loan Debt Affects Application and Enrollment in Graduate or First Professional School." *Journal of Higher Education* 74(4): 386-427.
- Mullen, Ann L., Kimberly A. Goyette, and Joseph A. Soares. 2003. "Who Goes to Graduate School? Social and Academic Correlates of Educational Continuation After College." *Sociology of Education* 76(2): 143-169.

- Scheff, Thomas J. 2000. "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory." *Sociological Theory* 18(1): 84-99.
- Scott, Marvin B. and Stanford Lyman. 1968. "Accounts." *American Sociological Review*, 33(1): 46-62.
- Schwalbe, Michael, Sandra Godwin, Daphne Holden, Douglas Schrock, Shealy Thompson, and Michele Wolkomir. 2000. "Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis." *Social Forces* 79(2): 419-452.
- Spilerman, Seymour 2000. "Wealth and Stratification Processes." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 497-534.
- Williams, Jeffrey J. 2006. "Debt education: bad for the young, bad for America." *Dissent* 53(3): 53-59.
- Yodanis, Carrie. 2006. "A Place in Town: Doing class in a Coffee Shop." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35(3): 341-366.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Parental income* and education

Participant Pseudonym	Highest Maternal Education	Highest Paternal Education	Maternal Income/year	Paternal Income/year
Amber	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	80k	100k
Bert	Master's Degree	P.H.D.	0	55k
Christine	High School Diploma/GED	4-year college degree	0	Retired
Debbie	High School Diploma/GED	9 th grade	14k	8k
Ernie	8 th grade	3 rd grade	19k	Don't know
Francis	High School Diploma/GED	n/a	15-18k	0
Ginny	Master's Degree	High School Diploma/GED	25k	30k
Harry	Master's Degree	P.H.D.	0	100k
Irene	4-year college degree	2-year college degree	25k	50k
Jenny	2-year college degree	High School Diploma/GED	50-60k	
Katie	8 th grade	9 th grade		250k
Lisa	High School Diploma/GED	8 th grade	30k	50k
Mary	High School Diploma/GED	4-year college degree	0	Retired
Noah	High School Diploma/GED	High School Diploma/GED	26k	35k
Opal	High School Diploma/GED	High School Diploma/GED	25k	30k
Percy	4-year college degree	4-year college degree	23k	20k
Queen	4-year college degree	4-year college degree	Retired	200k
Randi	Deceased	Deceased	0	0
Steve	4-year college degree	4-year college degree	Retired	Retired
Tammy	P.H.D.	P.H.D.	35k	50k
Ulma	High School Diploma/GED	2-year college degree	0	65k

*Note: Parental incomes are estimates from participants, not actual figures

Table 2. Participant income and type of financial support

Participant Pseudonym	Employment	Financial Aid/Type	Loans	Current Income/year
Amber	No	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	None
Bert	No	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	No	None
Christine	Yes	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	150k
Debbie	No	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	None
Ernie	No	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	None
Francis	No	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	None
Ginny	Yes	Tuition Scholarship	Yes	8k
Harry	Yes	Yes	Yes	8.2k
Irene	Yes	Tuition Scholarship	Yes	22k
Jenny	Yes	Work Pays	No	26k
Katie	Yes	Work pays	No	60-70k
Lisa	Yes	Yes	Yes	42k
Mary	Yes	Tuition Scholarship	Yes	20k
Noah	Yes	Work pays	No	35k
Opal	Yes	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	No	15k
Percy	Yes	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	8k
Queen	Yes	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	12k
Randi	Yes	Work pays	No	50k
Steve	Yes	Work pays	No	45k
Tammy	No	Yes	Yes	None
Ulma	Yes	Yes/Graduate Assistantship	Yes	8k

VITA

LAURA S. NELSON

Personal Data: Date of Birth: September 7, 1985
 Place of Birth: Spokane, Washington
 Marital Status: Single

Education: Public Schools: Cheney, Washington
 B.A. Psychology, King College, Bristol, Tennessee, 2005
 M.A. Sociology, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City,
 Tennessee, 2007

Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, Department
 of Sociology and Anthropology, 2005-2007
 Manager, Hollister Co. Johnson City, Tennessee, 2007